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The Primacy of Generational Experience in *Go Down, Moses*

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Arthur F. Kinney, who has written extensively on *Go Down, Moses* (1942), admits, in his *Go Down, Moses: The Miscegenation of Time*, that, for him, “it remains [...] Faulkner’s most recalcitrant novel” (xii). Indeed, *Go Down, Moses* is characterized by its thematic, structural, and stylistic complexity. It is no wonder that we encounter an astounding number of strange assertions in studies on the novel. Some of these are caused by misreading.¹ For example, Judith Bryant Wittenberg asserts:

Even Lucas Beauchamp, consigned to the economic margins by his part-African ancestry, appears in “[The] Fire and the Hearth” as a greedy would-be landowner who regards the field he cultivates as “his own” [(35)] and believes he “would own the land if his just rights were only known,” if Cass had not “beat him out of his patrimony” (36) [...]. (62)

It is obvious that Wittenberg mistakenly assumes that “the land” in line 5 is the field which Lucas cultivated. She has even removed the phrase “and all on it,” which immediately follows “the land,”

almost certainly because it does not conform with her assumption. Actually, "the land and all on it" means "the Edmonds plantation" (36) itself.² Let me quote a relevant passage from the novel, which is written from Lucas's viewpoint:

[He was] almost as old as old Isaac McCaslin who lived in town, supported by what Roth Edmonds chose to give him, who would own the land and all on it if his just rights were only known, if people just knew how old Cass Edmonds, [Roth's] grandfather, had beat him out of his patrimony [...]. (36)

Clearly, the antecedent of the second relative pronoun "who" is Isaac McCaslin, as is that of the first. Therefore, the subsequent "his" and "him" all refer to Isaac, not Lucas. Lucas believed—incorrectly, of course—that Cass Edmonds had deprived Isaac of the plantation.³

Some of the strange assertions about the novel are mere conjectures presented without any ground. Thadious M. Davis, for example, calls Eunice "a mixed-race woman bought in New Orleans to be a concubine" (107) without giving any reason for doing so. In my reading, there is nothing whatsoever in the novel which suggests that Eunice was mix-blooded.

Some of the difficulty in reading *Go Down, Moses* results from the intricate network of biracial and multigenerational kinship and blood relation presented in it. It is obviously nothing but a clerical mistake, but Kinney misidentifies Eunice as the daughter of Roscius/Roskus and Phoebe/Fibby in his genealogical chart (157). Actually, Thucydides/Thucydus, Eunice's husband, was their child, and we know nothing about Eunice's parents. According to Kinney's chart, Theophilus McCaslin/Uncle Buck and Amodeus

McCaslin/Uncle Buddy had an unnamed sister who married an Edmonds and had a son, the father of Cass Edmonds. It is possible but we cannot conclusively determine that their sister married an Edmonds. According to "The Fire and the Hearth," the second chapter of the novel, Cass was "a McCaslin only on his mother's side and so [bore] his father's name" (44). It is, then, possible to assume that Uncle Buck and Uncle Buddy's sister had a daughter who married an Edmonds and who gave birth to Cass. Actually, this assumption better accords with the emphasis in the novel placed on the fact that Cass was of "a female line" (285).

Go Down, Moses is indeed a difficult novel and some of the difficulty in properly grasping what exactly happens in the novel is due to a number of discrepancies that Faulkner has left unresolved, inadvertently or otherwise. To give one example, we are told in "Was" that Isaac was living with "his wife's sister and her children" (4) in 1941, while in "Delta Autumn," the penultimate chapter of the novel, the narrator says that Isaac was living with "his dead wife's widowed niece and her children" (335). On top of that, the narrator tells us in "The Bear" that Isaac's wife was "an only child" (297).⁴

There is another factor which contributes to the novel's difficulty. In a somewhat irritating manner, Faulkner has left the dates of some significant events unspecified.⁵ We do not know, for instance, in which year Isaac's mother died, although we can conclude with certainty that she died in or before 1877, because, according to "The Bear," when his uncle, Hubert Beauchamp, died in 1877, she was already dead (292). This conclusion creates another problem, though. If she died in or before 1877, it is hard for us to accept the narrator's claim in "The Fire and the Hearth" that she taught Lucas, who was born in 1874, how to write (106).

In this essay, I will attempt to dispel some of the problematic misconceptions resulting from misreading, unfounded conjectures, and discrepancies and gaps in the text. At the same time, I will argue that the novel is a critique of Isaac McCaslin's rejection of generational experience. It is not an easy task to define the term "generational experience" precisely, but as I have stated elsewhere, I mean by it the experience of all matters that are related to generational continuity based on the natural cycle of birth, procreation, and death.⁶

It is commonly understood that Isaac McCaslin learned about his grandfather's miscegenation with Tomey/Tomasina when he read the family ledgers in the plantation commissary at the age of 16. Kinney says:

It is understandable that Ike McCaslin [...] did not know of the miscegenation in his family's past and, when he learned it, had no clear tradition to follow in responding to it. There is an extraordinary courage in his act, at the age of 16, of opening those family ledgers [...]. (127)

Is it true, though, that Isaac learned for the first time at 16 about his grandfather's miscegenetic relationship with Tomey? In order to answer this question, we first need to scrutinize "Was," the first chapter of the novel, with great care. Parts 2-4 of "Was" are a retold version of Cass's account to Isaac of Tomey's Turl/Terrel's escape and its ramifications.⁷ Most critics, however, do not ask themselves the question: When did Cass tell the story to Isaac? Kinney is one of the few critics who comment on the matter. He says:

[T]he story is told by the elderly bachelor Cass many years after the event (nearly a half-century later) to his cousin, now known as Uncle Ike—an old widower who is “uncle to half a county and father to no one” (3). That is, the story is given importance, but it is told to a strange audience—a man who has no family and no slaves and who is subjected to a partial account based on Cass’s distant childhood memory. (55)

Kinney’s comment contains a major self-contradiction. The event narrated in Parts 2-4 of “Was” took place in 1859. Cass, who was born in 1850 (4), was nine (10) at the time of Tomey’s Turl’s escape.⁸ Therefore, according to Kinney’s reading, we must conclude that Cass told the story to Isaac close to the year 1909. This conclusion does not square with the rest of the novel. We are told in “The Fire and the Hearth” that Cass died after Lucas got married and before his son, Zack, got married (106). Therefore, we can reasonably conclude that Cass died in either 1896 or 1897.⁹ In the passage quoted above, Kinney calls Cass “the elder bachelor” at the time of his narration of the event to Isaac. However, Cass was never an elderly bachelor. The narrator tells us in “The Bear” that Alice, Cass’s wife, taught Fonsiba/Sophonsiba Beauchamp to read and write (264), who got married in 1886 at the age of 17 (262-64). This implies that Cass got married in or before the year 1886; that is, Cass got married before he reached 38. Kinney seems to believe that Isaac was “an old widower” at the time when Cass told the story to him. This could never be so. Isaac was born in 1867 (261, 288). Even if Cass told the story to Isaac in 1897, the latest possible year in which Cass could have died, Isaac was still 30 years old.

Kinney’s confusion about the sequence of events appears to

stem from a misreading of Part 1 of "Was," which consists of three fragments, each resembling in its shape a regular paragraph. The first fragment reads:

Isaac McCaslin, 'Uncle Ike', past seventy and nearer eighty than he ever corroborated any more, a widower now and uncle to half a county and father to no one (3)

The second fragment begins: "this was not something participated in or even seen by [Isaac] himself" (3), "this" being what is related in Parts 2-4 of "Was." The third fragment begins: "not something he had participated in or even remembered except from the hearing, the listening, come to him through and from his cousin [Cass] McCaslin [...]" (3). Faulkner probably chose not to repeat "this was" at the beginning of the third fragment for a stylistic reason, but it is clear that the beginnings of the second and the third fragments are in essence identical. Deceived by the stylistic variation which Faulkner employed at the beginnings of these fragments, Cleanth Brooks makes the following observation:

The word "this" [at the beginning of the second fragment] does refer to the happenings to be narrated in "Was," but the rest of this brief [part] reverts to further talk about old Ike and looks ahead to what will be told about him later in the book. (The Yoknapatawpha Country 246)

Contrary to Brook's assertion, however, the second and the third fragments are, just as the first fragment is, formally tied to Parts 2-4 of "Was."

Kinney seems to gather from the first fragment that Cass

told the story about Tomey's Turl's escape to Isaac when Isaac was quite old despite the fact that it is chronologically impossible, as I indicated earlier. Let me quote the first fragment again:

Isaac McCaslin, 'Uncle Ike', past seventy and nearer eighty than he ever corroborated any more, a widower now and uncle to half a county and father to no one (3)

This fragment merely presents the central character of the novel, Isaac McCaslin, at the present time of "Was," which, as we later learn that we can reasonably assume, coincides with the present time of the entire novel. It does not give any clue as to when Cass told the story to Isaac. What time, then, does "now" in the first fragment refer to? Faulkner does not specify the year, but in all likelihood, it is the year 1941. Faulkner sent Part 4 of "The Bear," the final portion of the manuscripts of *Go Down, Moses*, to the publisher in December, 1941.¹⁰ The latest major event in the novel, Molly/Mollie Beauchamp's attempt to divorce her husband, Lucas, followed by her final reconciliation with him, occurs in October of the same year.¹¹ Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that the "now" in the first fragment refers to the year 1941.

The gist of Part 1 of "Was" is prefatory not to Parts 2-4 but to the entire novel. One could very well argue that Faulkner should have devised a separate introduction to the novel, utilizing the core information about the central character in the three fragments. I believe, however, that it is a stroke of genius on the part of Faulkner that he skillfully embedded the information in Part 1, which is formally linked to Parts 2-4, a retold version of the story of Tomey's Turl's escape originally told to the principal character of the entire novel.

Now we come back to the question: When did Cass tell the story to Isaac? Unfortunately, we simply do not know the answer. We can only speculate, and I venture to suggest that Cass told the story to Isaac after Isaac as an orphan began to live with Cass subsequent to his mother's death and before Isaac's first hunting trip to the Big Bottom at the age of ten in November, 1877. I concede that Cass could have told the story after Isaac's first hunting trip, but I would argue that it is highly unlikely that Cass's storytelling took place after Isaac read the crucial ledger entries in 1883.

In Part 2 of "Was," Hubert Beauchamp is reported to have called Tomey's Turl as "that damn white half-McCaslin" (6). It is evident that Hubert knew that Tomey's Turl was Tomey and Lucius Quintus Carothers McCaslin's son. As we learn from Part 4 of "The Bear," Tomey was old Carothers's own daughter (259). Tomey's Turl, therefore, was actually three-fourths white and one-fourth black. Hubert's phrase, "that damn white half-McCaslin," suggests that he was not aware that Tomey's Turl was born of father-daughter incest. Since it appears that Cass did not find it necessary to comment on the phrase, we can safely conclude that he did not know Tomey's Turl's exact racial make-up, either. As Cass told the story, he obviously found it an incontrovertible fact that Tomey's Turl was "a half-McCaslin." About Isaac, the listener of the story, there is nothing that suggests that he was not aware who Tomey's Turl's father was. As a matter of fact, there is a passage in "The Bear" which corroborates this point:

And Tomey's Terrel was still alive when [Isaac] was ten years old and he knew from his own observation and memory that

there had already been some white in Tomey's Terrel's blood before his father gave him the rest of it [...]. (259)

This passage placed immediately after the one describing Isaac's intuitive discovery at 16 that his grandfather's sexual relationship with Tomey constituted incest clearly indicates that Isaac had been aware that Tomey's Turl was his grandfather's son. We are also told that, prior to his reading of the ledgers at the age of 16, Isaac had seen old Carothers's will stipulating a thousand-dollar legacy to Tomey's Turl and had understood that his grandfather meant to leave the legacy to his mix-blooded son (257).

Isaac's first-hand knowledge about Tomey's Turl substantiated his conclusion at the age of 16 that Tomey's Turl was not only old Carothers's son but also his grandson.¹² I cannot imagine that Faulkner meant to have us infer that Cass told his story of Tomey's Turl's escape to Isaac in such an innocent manner after Isaac's discovery of Tomey's Turl's being a product of his grandfather's incestuous relationship with his daughter. This is why, as I stated earlier, I would argue that it is highly unlikely that Cass's storytelling took place after Isaac read the crucial ledger entries in 1883.

There is another factor which leads us to conclude that Isaac was well aware of who Tomey's Turl's father was, years before he read the ledger entries in the commissary. Isaac was in close association with Tennie's Jim/James Beauchamp, Tomey's Turl's son, as James was regularly with the hunting party in the Big Bottom. We are told in "The Old People," the fourth chapter of the novel, that, as early as in 1874, Isaac longingly watched the wagon leave for Jefferson carrying Cass, Sam Fathers, and James to join Major de Spain, General Compson, Boon Hogganbeck, and

Walter Ewell for their hunting trip to the Big Bottom (163). After Isaac himself became a member of the hunting group, James played several important roles. It was James, for instance, who went to Hoke's to bring back a doctor for Sam Fathers, Boon Hogganbeck, and Lion in 1883 (233). It was James who remained with Boon and Isaac to tend to Sam Fathers (239) and who rode back to the commissary of the McCaslin plantation to report Sam Father's death to Cass (241). It is unthinkable that Isaac, in all his dealings with James, was unaware of James's racial hybridity. And yet, Isaac seems never to have wondered about the source of the hybridity. It must be because Isaac knew that James's father, Tomey's Turl, was old Carothers's son.

All in all, there is no doubt that Isaac knew about Tomey's Turl's being the product of old Carothers's miscegenetic sexual relation with Tomey long before Isaac read the ledger entries in 1883. Thus, we must conclude that Kinney's assumption that Isaac first learned about his grandfather's miscegenetic relationship with Tomey when he was 16 is untenable. It is my belief that Isaac grew up viewing miscegenation as a natural element of the world in which he found himself, without questioning it.

While we are concerned with the extent of Cass's and Isaac's knowledge of old Carothers's sexual relationship with Eunice, Tomey's mother, it is worthwhile to consider Kinney's following assertion about Lucas, Eunice's great-grandson:

[The gold coin] is unusually precious to Lucas—not simply because it is gold but also because he thinks it is part of his monetary legacy from old Carothers McCaslin, the man who had enslaved and impregnated his grandmother and great-grandmother on this very land [...]. (115)

In my reading, there is nothing in the text which suggests that Lucas regarded the gold coin part of his legacy from old Carothers, but it is no matter here. What I want to take issue with is that Kinney bases his argument on Lucas's alleged knowledge of old Carothers's sexual relationship with Eunice.¹³ Who could have told him about it? Lucas's father, Tomey's Turl, could not have told him, because he apparently did not know about it himself. Eunice died in 1832 (255) before his birth and Tomey died in 1833 in giving birth to him (257). Old Carothers died shortly before or shortly after he became four. Eunice's husband, Thucydus, who lived until 1854 (255), was the only person who could have told Tomey's Turl about Eunice's sexual relationship with his master, old Carothers, but Thucydus's pride and hurt would have prevented him from sharing the knowledge with Tomey's Turl. In 1898, Lucas said in an angry confrontation with Zack Edmonds, "[...] old Carothers never seemed to miss much what he give to Tomey that night that made my father" (56). The fact that Lucas at this time referred only to old Carothers's impregnation of his grandmother also suggests that he had no knowledge of old Carothers's impregnation of his great-grandmother. Because of all of this, I find Kinney's assumption of Lucas's knowledge of old Carothers's sexual relationship with Eunice insupportable.

Nancy Dew Taylor suggests that James Beauchamp, Lucas's elder brother, was aware that the sexual relationship between old Carothers and Tomey was an incestuous one in her comment on the following passage in the text about James's running away from the plantation:¹⁴

It was as though he had [...] put running water between

himself and the land of his grandmother's betrayal and his father's nameless birth [...]. (102)

Taylor's comment on the passage is:

The grandmother was Tomey; her "betrayal" is [...] a result of old Carothers's having a child by his own daughter. Turl's "nameless birth" is a result of his illegitimacy. (61)

I believe, however, that the narrator is not implying that James knew about Tomey's being old Carothers's daughter. I do not believe that James knew about it for the same reason I do not believe that Lucas did. I would argue, instead, that James was simply reacting to his grandmother's giving birth to her master's child as a result of her supposedly consensual miscegenetic sex with him. Taylor's explanation that "Turl's 'nameless birth' is a result of his illegitimacy" would still apply.¹⁵

As I have already suggested, it appears that Cass did not know about old Carothers's impregnation of Eunice.¹⁶ If both Isaac and Cass had known about it, it would most certainly have cropped up in their long, involved discussion in Part 4 of "The Bear." As I have also suggested, it is most likely that neither Lucas nor James Beauchamp knew about it. Their knowledge would have diluted the impact of Isaac's discovery at 16 of Carothers's impregnation of Eunice. I contend, therefore, that, Isaac alone, among the later generations, discovered it.

I have dealt with Part 1 of "Was" in some depth, because Faulkner included in it what he obviously felt to be key data about Isaac. We learn from the first fragment that Isaac was childless and that he would never have children of his own because

he was already past 70. He was quite likely 74.¹⁷ In this context, I find Taylor's following comment preposterous: "By the end of the novel, we know [...] that Ike has no children" (99). We know it from the very first three lines of the novel. We learn from Part 1 of "Was" that Isaac was not only childless but also at the very end of the male McCaslin bloodline, as the third fragment reveals that he was "an only child" (4). In my reading, this is the most important aspect of Isaac. The second fragment tells us, among other things, that Isaac somehow did not inherit the land of which he was regarded by some as the rightful owner and that he loved the woods. My contention is that the rest of the novel is concerned both with explicating how his love of woods, his rejection of the land, and his present childlessness are interconnected, and with criticizing his ultimate rejection of generational experience.

Actually, Faulkner plunges right into his endeavor in Parts 2-4 of "Was." Brooks asserts that "[Parts 2-4] are the story of a manhunt after a runaway slave" (*First Encounters* 130) and Kinney similarly argues that "[they are] the story of a runaway slave and the attempt to recapture him" (54). It is misleading, however, to call Tomey's Turl "a runaway slave," because, as Davis cogently asserts, "in 'Was,' a slave [escaped and ran] *not* for the purpose of attaining his freedom, not with the intention of being and remaining bodily free [...]" (70). Tomey's Turl escaped to court Tennie on the Beauchamp plantation. Uncle Buck chased after Tomey's Turl because Tomey's Turl's visit to the Beauchamp plantation might give Sophonsiba an excuse to come and stay with Uncle Buck in her effort to court him. The axis of the episode is the contrast between Tomey's Turl's eagerness to have Tennie as his mate and Uncle Buck's misogynous reluctance to have Sophonsiba, or any other woman for that matter, as his

spouse. At the conclusion of his successful courtship of Tennie, Tomey's Turl returned to the McCaslin plantation accompanied by her as his future wife. As "The Fire and the Hearth," "Delta Autumn," and "Go Down, Moses" all centrally or partially revolve around the descendants of the couple, we realize that a great deal of *Go Down, Moses* hinges on Tomey's Turl's successful courtship in "Was." On our first reading of "Was," most of us would feel humorously relieved at Uncle Buck's ultimate rescue from the dreaded matrimony with Sophonsiba, because we know nothing about their being Isaac's parents at this stage. We learn that Uncle Buck was the father of Isaac no earlier than Part 3 of "The Fire and the Hearth" (103)¹⁸ and we learn that Sophonsiba was Isaac's mother only after reading almost four-fifths of the novel (287). Quite a few critics erroneously believe that Tomey's Turl's escape in the summer of 1859 led to Uncle Buck's marriage with Sophonsiba.¹⁹ For example, Margaret M. Dunn asserts:

[...] Buck inadvertently lies down in Sophonsiba's bed and sets off a series of shrieks which resoundingly determine the end of his long-maintained bachelorhood. (420)

Similarly, Davis says:

Sixteen years older than Ike, Cass had witnessed as a boy the events in 1859 that led not only to the marriage of Ike's parents, Theophilus "Buck" McCaslin and Sophonsiba "Sibby" Beauchamp, but also to the marriage of the enslaved couple [...]. (43-44)

The marriage of Tomey's Turl and Tennie in 1859 is not

mentioned in "Was," but we can ascertain it from the ledger entry given in Part 4 of "The Bear" (259). We never learn, however, what led Uncle Buck to marry Sophonsiba. Actually, we do not even know in what year he married Sophonsiba. Meredith Smith suggests that Uncle Buck and Sophonsiba married either in 1865 or 1866 (321). As I have already observed, their first and only child, Isaac, was born in October, 1867. Since it is most likely that Uncle Buck married Sophonsiba after his return from his service in the Civil War, I find Smith's calculation quite convincing. If Smith is correct, there was a gap of more than five years between Tomey's Turl's escape in 1859 and the marriage of Isaac's parents. Since there is utterly no description of whatever happened between these two events, it is hard to believe that they were causally related as Dunn and Davis do. Dunn and Davis appear to be unaware of it, but a truly intriguing situation would have resulted if indeed the two events had been causally related. Uncle Buck and Sophonsiba's marriage and hence the birth of Isaac would have been construed to hinge crucially on an act of Tomey's Turl, the product of old Carothers's heinous incest with his daughter, Tomey. Anyway, Faulkner chose not to tie those events directly. Brooks reports Faulkner's comment on what led Buck to marry Sophonsiba:

I asked Mr. Faulkner once how it came about that Uncle Buck and Miss Sophonsiba subsequently did get married and produce a child, Isaac McCaslin, in view of Uncle Buck's having been rescued from Miss Sophonsiba's clutches. Surely after this narrow escape Uncle Buck would have become even more wary, more gun-shy. Faulkner explained that he never got around to writing about how Uncle Buck was finally run to

earth.

(First Encounters 133)

I do not believe that Faulkner actually failed to get around to writing about the manner in which Uncle Buck finally agreed to marry Sophonsiba. It is my belief that he deliberately downplayed Uncle Buck's marriage with Sophonsiba, because no matter what circumstances Faulkner would have devised, the marriage would have been in direct conflict with what is presented in "Was" as Uncle Buck's aversion to women, sexuality, and emotional entanglements. In any case, when we learn who Isaac's parents were, we realize retrospectively that the final release of Uncle Buck from the expected marriage with Sophonsiba in "Was" had a very ironic implication, because we come to be aware that Isaac would not have been born if Uncle Buck and Sophonsiba had not married. In fact, the McCaslin line would have been terminated with Uncle Buck and Uncle Buddy. As we recall, uncle Buddy was even more misogynous than Uncle Buck. As we have repeatedly seen, Isaac was born in October, 1867. Uncle Buck, who was 60 at the time of Tomey's Turl's courtship of Tennie in 1859 (7), was 67 when Sophonsiba conceived Isaac. It is not too much to say, therefore, that it is a miracle that Isaac was ever born.

"The Old People" and Parts 1-3 of "The Bear" essentially concern themselves with Isaac's love of the woods first suggested in Part 1 of "Was." They deal with Isaac's hunting experience in the wilderness from 1877 to 1883. One of the highest points during this period was Isaac's killing of his first buck and the subsequent baptism with the buck's blood at the hands of Sam Fathers in 1879 when he was 12 (157-158, 171, 201, 334). Isaac was unable to formulate his thought in words at the time, but in his old age, he verbalized it in his mind: *"I slew you; my bearing must not*

shame your quitting life. My conduct forever onward must become your death [...]" (334). After his 6-year spiritual education in the wilderness climaxing with the deaths of Old Ben, Lion, and Sam Fathers, Isaac found that his grandfather's sexual relation with Tomey was an incestuous one. Thus, at his coming of age in 1888, Isaac formally refused to inherit the McCaslin plantation originally established by his grandfather. His love of the woods and his rejection of the land, both mentioned in Part 1 of "Was," were thus interconnected.

Although Isaac never told Cass about it in their long dialogue in Part 4 of "The Bear," his knowledge of old Carothers's miscegenetic incest with Tomey was the ultimate factor in his renunciation of patrimony.

During his talk about his renunciation with Cass, Isaac said:

I'm trying to explain to the head of my family something which I have got to do which I don't quite understand myself, not in justification of it but to explain it if I can. (275)

In my opinion, Isaac was evasive partly because he could not discuss his grandfather's evil deed with Cass and partly because he was unable to come to terms with his own racist sentiments. Most critics call old Carothers's deed "incestuous miscegenation." I believe that it should be called "miscegenetic incest," because, as I have made clear, the emphasis should be placed on its being incest. Isaac grew up, taking the miscegenetic relationship between his grandfather and Tomey for granted. Nevertheless, when Isaac found that what he had thought was miscegenation was also incest, he was doubly shocked. For the sake of the argument, let us suppose that old Carothers had incest with his unnamed white

daughter, Isaac's aunt. Would Isaac have reacted in the same way to it as he did to the incestuous relationship between old Carothers and Tomey? Judging from his racist attitude toward miscegenation in his old age revealed in "Delta Autumn," I would argue that he would not have. Although Faulkner chose not to reveal it, I believe that some fundamental change occurred in Isaac's attitude towards miscegenation during his adolescence. Thus, as I stated, Isaac's knowledge of old Carothers's miscegenetic incest, not just incest, with Tomey was the ultimate factor in his renunciation of patrimony.

"Old People" and Parts 1-3 of "The Bear" contain some magnificent passages, particularly about hunting. A large number of critics seem to feel that what Isaac said he learned from the hunting experience and his later renunciation of his inheritance are both endorsed by Faulkner himself. About Faulkner's dislike of killing animals, Taylor quotes Jill Faulkner, his daughter, from A. I. Bezzerides's book:

[...] he liked to be in the woods. He didn't like killing things. I think that he killed only when he was shamed into it—that's not the word I wanted—but when it was unavoidable because we'd go bird shooting and he liked to watch the dogs work. He didn't care whether we had a good covey rise or whether he'd get something to kill or not. And he very seldom brought deer back from the deer hunts that he went on down in the Delta. (122-23)

One could argue that, in terms of the logic of the novel, what Isaac learned from the hunting experience was genuinely important. Nevertheless, I cannot help noticing a big jump from the

supposed wisdom that Isaac gained from the wilderness and his later decision to refuse to inherit the McCaslin plantation. Clearly, something else was involved. About six years after his repudiation of the plantation, confronting Lucas, who came to claim his and his brother's legacy as a matter of course, Isaac felt ashamed, thinking: "[*Lucas knows that*] *I reneged, cried calf-ropes, sold my birthright, betrayed my blood, for what he too calls not peace but obliteration [. . .]*" (105). As the hunting in the wilderness was, no matter what else it was, a retreat from the toilsome daily chores of farming for many participants, Isaac sought a retreat from the responsibility of running a plantation on whose successful management depended the lives of a large number of people. It was Cass who accepted the responsibility of the plantation management and his descendants, Zack and Roth, carried on the tradition. At the close of Part 4 of "The Bear," we learn why Isaac was childless at the present time of "Was," that is, the present time of the entire novel. Isaac's wife refused to have sex with him any more unless he would reverse his decision and reclaim the farm (298-301). In "Delta Autumn," the narrator says that "he [. . .], saving and freeing his son [from the regret and grief resulting from the wrong and shame of his family past], lost him" (335). Thus, Isaac's rejection of the land and his ultimate condition of childlessness, first mentioned in Part 1 of "Was," were interconnected.

"The Fire and the Hearth," "Pantaloon in Black," and "Go Down, Moses," the three chapters in which Isaac appear only briefly or not at all, celebrates generational experience. "The Fire and the Hearth" is essentially about conjugal love and parenting. The fire which Lucas and Molly kept alive on their hearth for 45 years since their wedding day was a sign of their enduring love.

The episode of the metal detector is preparatory to Molly's attempt to divorce Lucas and their final reconciliation. Molly's wish to divorce Lucas was born out of her concern for the welfare of their daughter Nat and her husband George Wilkins. "Pantaloons in Black" is intrinsically concerned with Rider's inconsolable sense of loss caused by his young wife's untimely death. Concerning Rider's anguish, Kinney says:

Even the supreme effort of raising and tossing, without the aid of a cant hook, a log more gigantic than any he had ever moved alone (141-42) fails to distract him from the aching of his heart and mind. (108)

Actually, when Rider tried to carry the log in question, he was not seeking distraction. Kinney seems to miss the point, but Rider was courting death. We are moved by the fact that Rider was so grieved that he was ready to commit suicide, just as we are emotionally affected by the fact that Eunice, finding out the terrible truth of old Carothers's impregnation of their daughter, Tomey, was so crushed and despairing that she drowned herself. Rider's killing of Birdsong, a white man, was also induced by his suicidal urge. Suicide is, of course, a negative reaction to problems, but "Pantaloons in Black" gives prominence to a man's love for his spouse, just as the portion of Part 4 of "The Bear" which deals with Eunice's self-drowning, points up a mother's deep love and concern for her child. "Go Down, Moses" is in its essence about Molly's unconditional love for and acceptance of her grandson.²⁰

"Delta Autumn" combines the three story strands of the McCaslins, the Edmondses, and the (black) Beauchamps. Strangely, quite a few Faulkner scholars who view miscegenation

as the source of evil criticize Isaac McCaslin's somewhat cold treatment of James Beauchamp's granddaughter for engaging in interracial sex with Roth Edmonds and having a son as a result of it. It is necessary to make a distinction between what old Carothers did to Eunice and Tomey and what Roth and James's granddaughter did. What old Carothers did was indefensible because it was presumably an act of violence and aggression, while the interracial sexual union of Roth and James's granddaughter was presented as being firmly based on love and mutually agreed on. "Delta Autumn" points to Isaac's racism and James's granddaughter's genuine love for a man and readiness to raise their son. Many critics disapprove of Roth for committing incestuous miscegenation. They should, then, also criticize James's granddaughter, for she was the one who went ahead and had sex with Roth, knowing that she was distantly related to him. My point is that Roth did not know that he was related to her even at the time when she came to visit Isaac. Furthermore, Roth and James's granddaughter were so far apart in bloodline that it is somewhat absurd to call their sexual union incest.

It goes without saying that what old Carothers did to Eunice and Tomey was horrible, as every critic seems to agree. I do not believe, however, that it was Faulkner's primary intention to criticize old Carothers. On the other hand, practically every critic seems to value Tomey's Turl's courtship of Tennie, the conjugal love of Lucas and Molly, and Molly's devotion to her grandson, Samuel Worsham Beauchamp. They seem to forget, though, that Lucas, for instance, was born as a result of old Carothers's incest with his daughter Tomey. To put it bluntly, unless old Carothers had incest with Tomey, none of the people who are her descendants such as Tomey's Turl, James, Sophonsiba/Fonsiba, and

Lucas Beauchamp, Henry and Nat Beauchamp, and Samuel Worsham Beauchamp and his unnamed mother, and James's unnamed granddaughter and her son would have been born. We would not have "Was," "The Fire and the Hearth," "Delta Autumn," and "Go Down, Moses." To the best of my knowledge, none of the critics see that we could not simply wish that old Carothers had not done his evil deeds. If we want to keep "Was," "The Fire and the Hearth," "Delta Autumn," and "Go Down, Moses," we must keep Carothers's sexual violence against Eunice and Tomey. Or, is it ever possible that Faulkner was such an inattentive writer that he thought that he could have it both ways: the unreserved denunciation of old Carothers and, at the same time, the preservation of stories of Tomey's Turl's courtship of Tennie and its ramifications, the marital love between Lucas and Molly, Molly's devotion to her descendants?

I believe that the crucial question we should ask is: Who committed the greater sin, old Carothers or Isaac? My answer is Isaac, because he willfully chose not to be a father, thus ending the McCaslin line. My feeling is that Isaac, at least subconsciously, desired to terminate his bloodline because he felt it to be corrupted. It constitutes the ultimate rejection of generational experience, a refusal to participate in the natural life cycle, involving, among other things, marital love, adult sexuality, and parenting. *Go Down, Moses* in its entirety is a critique of Isaac's rejection of generational experience. The willing engagement with generational experience of some of the memorable mixed-race characters and black characters is an essential ingredient of the critique. Isaac's death as an old man, alone and childless, is not narrated in the novel, but in contrast to his projected death at the end of his bloodline, the son of James's granddaughter was born

in 1940 and Nat and George's child is to be born in the spring of 1942, both continuing the same bloodline.

Notes

¹ Some of the strange assertions result from simple carelessness. To give one example, in order to explain what he calls "Sophonsiba's [...] successful plan to trap Uncle Buck" (58) in "Was," the first chapter of the novel, Kinney says:

Clearly, what Sophonsiba does on the second floor of her plantation home is to move from the front room, where the family normally sleeps, to one of the back rooms usually reserved for guests. (58)

The narrator, however, says that Uncle Buck and Cass Edmonds, in search of an empty bedroom, "felt their way along the hall toward the front of the house, until they felt a door" (19). Opening this door, they entered the room. It was in this room that they found Sophonsiba in bed. If Sophonsiba had moved to one of the back rooms, as Kinney asserts, how could they find her in a room at the front of the house?

² Critics inappropriately keep calling the plantation which Roth Edmonds managed "the McCaslin plantation." See, for example, Kinney (114, 115) and Nancy Dew Taylor (33). We cannot specify the year of the name change, but we can assume that people began to call it "the Edmonds plantation" or "the Edmonds place" (35) sometime after Cass officially took over its management in 1888.

³ See another passage also written from Lucas's point of view:

[Cass had] enough of old Carothers McCaslin in his veins to take the land from the true heir simply because he wanted it and knew he could use it better and was strong enough, ruthless enough, old

Carothers McCaslin enough [...] (44)

⁴ There are quite a few other discrepancies of some importance. For example, according to "The Fire and the Hearth," Lucas "remembered old Buck and Buddy in the living flesh" (39), but according to "The Bear," when Lucas was born in 1874, they were both dead (268). It appears proper to assume that they died in 1870, because elsewhere in "The Bear" the narrator says that they "had been dead [...] almost five years" (262) when Lucas was born.

⁵ Faulkner has left some important characters unnamed. Pointing out his elliptical treatment of some black women in the novel, Minrose Gwin says, "I want to know the 'Delta Autumn' woman's name" (96). Actually, it is not just that we do not know the name of James Beauchamp's granddaughter but that we do not know the names of some important white women such as Uncle Buck and Uncle Buddy's sister and Isaac's wife. Our lack of knowledge about their names does not exactly add to the difficulty of the novel, but we are left wondering if we should speculate why Faulkner chose to leave them unnamed or not.

⁶ Yosuke Murakami, "The Primacy of Generational Experience in *Light in August*," *Joshidai Bungaku* 46 (1994): 1.

⁷ Although Davis claims that "[Isaac] narrates the story [...]" (43), Parts 2-4 are given in a voice other than that of Isaac.

⁸ There are three specific references to the year, later on in the novel. The narrator says in "The Fire and the Hearth" and "The Bear" that the year in which Uncle Buddy won Tennie from Hubert Beauchamp was 1859. (101, 287) Then, the narrator quotes a ledger entry to the same effect in "The Bear" (259). (According to "Was," however, Uncle Buddy did not actually win Tennie. He and/or Uncle Buck had to pay three hundred dollars for her.)

⁹ By the summer of 1941, Lucas and Molly had been married for 45

years (98). We can assume, then, that they got married in 1896. Zack's son, Roth, was born in March, 1898 (45). Therefore, we can reasonably conclude that Cass died in either 1896 or 1897.

¹⁰ Joseph Blotner, *Faulkner: A Biography, Vol. 2*, 1090; Michel Gresset, *A Faulkner Chronology*, 60.

¹¹ Lucas, who was born in March of 1874 (269), was 67 years old at the time of the divorce proceedings in October of the year in question (34). For a fuller substantiation of the year, see Meredith Smith, "A Chronology of *Go Down, Moses*," 328.

¹² I have already pointed out that there is nothing in the novel which suggests that Eunice, Tomey's Turl's grandmother, was mix-blooded. In fact, if she had been mix-blooded, as Davis asserts, Isaac's conclusion about the incestuous relationship of his grandfather and Tomey would have no empirical foundation and would remain merely conjectural.

¹³ Kinney bases a number of his other observations on the unexamined knowledge of Lucas of the sexual union in question. He says, for example:

[Lucas suspects] Zack of behavior that their shared ancestor, old Carothers, had inflicted first on Lucas's great-grandmother and then on the product of their union, Lucas's grandmother [...]. (91)

¹⁴ The narrator states in the sentence preceding the quoted one that "James [...] ran away before he became of age [...]" (102). According to Isaac's ledger entry, he vanished on the night of "his twenty-first birthday" (261), that is, after he became of age. The discrepancy, however, does not affect my argument.

¹⁵ In "Delta Autumn," James's granddaughter criticizes Isaac for having called him "Tennie's Jim," not "James Beauchamp" (344). Her criticism suggests that James himself was resentful about his being called "Tennie's Jim." So, James was not only concerned with his father's "nameless birth," but also with the similar treatment that he had to

endure.

¹⁶ Although we do not know anything about the extent of knowledge of Zack, Cass's son, about old Carothers's impregnation of Eunice, it is reasonable to assume that he was not aware of it, just as his father was not. It is clear from the text that Roth, Zack's son, had no knowledge about it. Roth believed that Lucas had one-quarter black blood, that is, Lucas's father, Tomey's Turl, had one-half black blood, old Carothers being his father. See the passage written from Roth's point of view:

Lucas was not only the oldest person living on the place, older even than [Roth's] father would have been, there was that quarter strain not only of white blood and not even Edmonds blood, but of old Carothers McCaslin himself [...]. (101)

¹⁷ As we have already observed, "now" in the first fragment refers, in all likelihood, to the year 1941 and Isaac was born in 1867. He was, therefore, 74 at the present time of the novel.

¹⁸ From my standpoint, *Go Down, Moses* is a novel composed of seven chapters such as "Was" and "The Fire and the Hearth." The problem is that "The Fire and the Hearth" itself is made up of three chapters. In order to avoid ambiguity in my discussion, I choose to call these chapters "parts." My choice is defensible in view of Michael Millgate's observation:

[...] it seems that the so-called "chapters" of "The Fire and the Hearth" were also an editorial innovation: Faulkner had distinguished them by Roman numerals with sub-divisions headed by Arabic numerals, and it was an editorial hand which altered the I, II, and III to Chapter One, Chapter Two, and Chapter Three. (203)

¹⁹ As a result of misreading, Kinney says that "Tomey's Turl's escape to the Beauchamp plantation [happened] each spring" and calls the chase after him "the annual hunt" (56). The narrator, however, says, "[Tomey's

Turl] went there every time he could slip off, which was about twice a year" (5). That Tomey's Turl escaped in 1858 not in spring but in summer is clear from what the narrator says Cass did shortly after dinner: "[Cass] went to the spring-house and sat with his feet in the water as Mr Hubert had been doing, because soon now it would be cool enough for a race" (13). Kinney probably thought that the season was spring, misled by "the spring-house" (9, 13), but it is "a small storehouse built over a spring or part of a brook, for keeping such foods as meat and dairy products cool and fresh" (*Random House Webster's Unabridged Dictionary*). The narrator also refers to Sophonsiba's visit to the McCaslin plantation "last summer" (6) subsequent to Tomey's Turl's escape.

²⁰ The name of Lucas's wife is spelled "Mollie" throughout "Go Down, Moses." In general, critics claim that her name is spelled "Molly" elsewhere in the novel. In "Delta Autumn," however, James's granddaughter calls her "Aunt Mollie" (343).

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