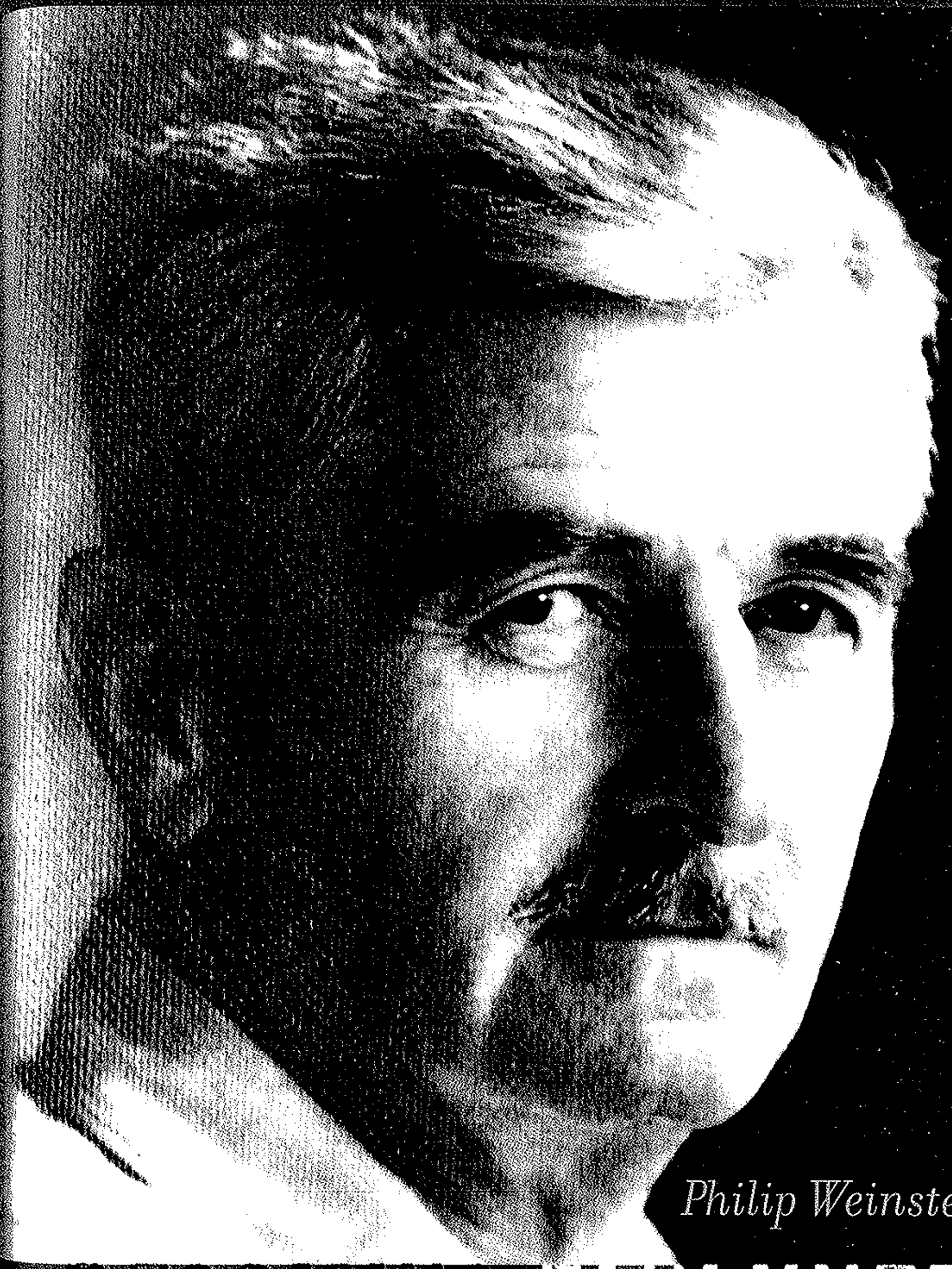
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BECOMING FAULKNER
THE ART AND LIFE OF WILLIAM FAULKNER
2010 Oxford U.P.

remains howling somewhere in the woods. No one is left who could claim him—unless it be Quentin Compson. Paralyzed by his own race-tormented inheritance, how could Quentin either recognize or fail to recognize—in the mirror of this unassuageably howling idiot—his own dark twin?

Cognition can take forever to become more than cognition. Quentin pores over this story, seeking the detail, the clue, that will unravel its mystery. I have already quoted the innocent detail that later ignites into illumination: "I [Rosa] was not there to see the two Sutpen faces this time—once on Judith and once on the negro girl beside her—looking down through the square entrance to the loft." So casually said by Rosa: Sutpen's face on the negro girl Clytie as well as his own daughter. Quentin's climactic trip to Sutpen's Hundred (occurring in narrative time at the beginning of the novel, but opened up and passed on to the reader only at the novel's end) lets him figure out the portent of that white-engendered dark face. "And she didn't tell you in the actual words," Shreve says about Quentin's seeing Clytie there, "nevertheless she told you, or at least you knew" (AA 289). At least you knew: if Sutpen could beget one black child, he could beget others. He could and did beget Charles Bon.

The murder finally takes on its meaning. The morganatic marriage only goes so far, not very far at all. The incest motive goes further, tormenting Henry for the four years of the war. Finally, though, there is miscegenation, and this barrier is nonnegotiable—Henry "thinking not what he would do but what he would have to do. Because he knew what he would do" (AA 292). Perhaps the book's brilliance is most at work here. *Absalom* must manage to *think through* something that its actors—once they know that the obstacle to marriage is miscegenation—are incapable of thinking about at all. *Absalom*'s strenuous withholding of information—the reasons for its circuitous movement through time—reveals its purpose. We are all but finished with the book when we learn that Bon is not just brother but black brother. Faulkner has suspended that discovery over the entire narrative, releasing it only in the penultimate pages. All previous interpretations of Bon's murder remain intact. But the racial motive is both the most decisive (the one that can command life-altering behavior) and the last Faulkner can supply. He must withhold it from Bon himself, from most of the other characters, and from the reader as well.

It must come last because he, we, and the others in the novel must experience Bon otherwise until the end. We internalize (as Henry does) the developing emotional value of his becoming a brother. We live inside his subjectivity as a man who does not know he is black. He figures it out,

finally, because the refusal of acknowledgment he receives at the hands of his father tells him eventually, by process of elimination, who he has to be. He must be suffering from the one condition no white Southern patriarch *can* acknowledge: black blood. Finally it clicks into coherence. Sutpen himself long ago suffered the same searing illumination that Faulkner's tortured narrative technique springs upon Bon. Brutally refused entrance into the plantation's front door, the young Sutpen

> seemed to kind of dissolve and a part of him turn and rush back through two years they had lived there like when you pass through a room fast and look at all the objects in it and you turn and go back through the room again and look at all the objects from the other side and you find out you had never seen them before, rushing back through those two years and seeing a dozen things that had happened and he hadn't even seen them before. (AA 190)

Still the same, yet wholly different now. Likewise, the reader of *Absalom* stumblingly reads on, believing that the objects and others encountered are themselves—until later revealed as dark inversions when seen from "the other side." To read *Absalom* is to undergo a racial education that moves—over time—from cognition into tragic recognition.

"BUT THERE MUST HAVE BEEN LOVE": *GO DOWN, MOSES*

Blacks had hardly been the catapult for tragic recognition when he began writing fiction. Either absent from his earlier fiction or "unimpatient" decor within them, they had commanded no special attention. In *Light in August*, however, Faulkner had found his way into a realm where race mattered imperiously. It is as though he suddenly sat up in bed after a nightmare and asked himself: what would it feel like—to me—if I suddenly found myself to be one of them? To me: there was no question of what *they* might feel like. The novel didn't ask who (as a community living in segregated "freedman's" districts of every town in the South) they might be. No empathic entry into Southern blackness, virtually no blacks in the novel at all. This absence is ultimately telling, for it reveals what conditions Faulkner required to turn—for the first time seriously—to race relations in the South. Those conditions mandated that the one suffering from such relations be white—a man trapped in a weave of racial rumor about his identity at its core genetic level. The man had to be unable to know what blood ran in his veins. If this narrow optic radically limited Faulkner's vision of race, it simultaneously brought to focus an extraordinary insight. Beneath the surface confidence

of Southern whites ran a racial insecurity bordering on hysteria. If a drop of black blood was thought to make a white person black, who might not unknowingly carry this toxic drop? No one could see the internal wreckage that drop would have wrought. Invisibly infected carriers might be anywhere, and they might not even know the illness they were bringing into the white community. Such anxiety might be enough to make many a white man in the segregated South have trouble going back to sleep, once he had sat bolt upright at three o'clock in the morning and wondered: what if I were black and didn't know it?

Racial hysteria, the insanity that overtakes white men in the South confronting their dark twin, served as Faulkner's entry point in *Light in August*. In *Absalom*, he would go further. Less violent than *Light in August*, *Absalom* extensively explored the prehistory of that putative drop. Suppose our nineteenth-century "white" brothers and sisters were already, ever since the genesis of the plantation design itself, infected carrriers of that drop of black blood? Suppose the foundation of the South's abiding dream—its plantation paradigm of wealth, civility, and achievement—were invisibly steeped in impure blood? Such blood would not only be pressing from outside to get inside that plantation's front door but also simmering inside and threatening to get outside. In a culture founded for over two centuries on racial relations at once intimate and barbaric, how could that drop of black blood *not* be already at work, subverting the meaning of the planterly dream? *Absalom* took Faulkner more time to write than *Light in August* not least because its reverberations went further: a racial malaise that had been gathering for over two hundred years, endemic to the slaveholding South. And not just a malaise. Because that drop was invisible—and, as Faulkner sometimes recognized as well, genetically meaningless—whites might embrace blacks (unidentified as such) as beloved siblings and offspring. They would be loved inside the family so long as they were thought to be white, though passionately repudiated from it once marked as black. The malaise manifested at the same time as a foredoomed love story.[9]

In 1938, flush (briefly) with money from MGM's purchase of film rights to *The Unvanquished* ($25,000), Faulkner purchased a 320-acre lot in the countryside named Greenfield Farm. He would later, in the post-Nobel years, insistently self-identify as a farmer. This was not just an identity he recurrently drew on to beg out of pressing engagements (as he would try in 1950 to beg out of the Stockholm trip to receive his Nobel Prize). It was also an abiding component of the person he had long imagined himself to be, perhaps ever since his childhood exposure to woods and wilderness.

Greenfield Farm demanded more agricultural expertise and managerial energy than he possessed or could afford to provide, so he put his brother Johncy in charge of running it. Against professional advice, he insisted on raising mules—and lost money doing so. Though Johncy ran the farm, Faulkner footed the bills and spent a good deal of time there as well. He came to know his black workers—including the familiar Uncle Ned—in more sustained and intractable ways. His role toward them was approaching that of the master of the plantation, and they were looking more like tenant farmers. Such would become, in *Go Down Moses* (1942), the fundamental roles played by the forty-three-year-old Roth Edmonds, frustrated landowner, and his wily black tenant farmer Lucas Beauchamp.

A vignette recounted by Faulkner's authorized biographer conveys something of the tenor of race relations on the farm and in the novel as well. It seems that Faulkner had unwisely bought a scrawny little bull called Black Buster. This bull soon became Uncle Ned's favorite, but was not much good at impregnating cows. So at considerable further expense, Faulkner bought a large pedigreed bull that answered better to these needs. As the Fourth of July (1938) approached, Faulkner told Ned to slaughter Black Buster so that they could at least (and for once) get something profitable out of him, in the form of tasty ribs. The master had proposed a noon barbecue to his friends and family; Black Buster would be the plat de résistance. Ned agreed to take care of the details. By noon the guests had arrived, the ribs and other dishes had been set out on the table, and the lunch was under way. In the midst of the delectable meal, Faulkner happened to glance toward the field where he saw—Black Buster. Startled, he looked at Ned and asked, "Who's that?" Ned responded, "that's Black Buster." "Then," looking at the meat roasting on the spit, Faulkner asked, "who's this? I thought I told you to kill Black Buster and I thought you told me you did." As Faulkner began to realize that he hadn't seen his pedigree bull for the past couple of days, Ned rose swiftly, answering in retreat, "Master, I calls them all Black Buster" (F 398). Such a story would have no place in either the brutal *Light in August* or the tragic *Absalom, Absalom!* but would fit perfectly into the wryly comic white master–black tenant shenanigans of *Go Down, Moses*.

A comic undertone runs through much of this novel, and its prehistory explains to some extent why. As often, Faulkner was out of money in 1940. He wrote Bob Haas at Random House that he desperately needed $10,000—$1,000 immediately and the rest in monthly installments. Haas helped as he could, but Faulkner's financial urgency seemed to outpace Haas's (or anyone else's) ability to pacify it for long. In this context,

Faulkner started to conceptualize *Go Down, Moses*. The new book must first of all be profitable. His working model for making it profitable was *The Unvanquished,* also composed (four years earlier) by his revising a cluster of previously published stories. Here he would do the same, trying to place the stories in the same high-paying popular magazine market. Thus he began, so to speak, with defective materials—stories written as potboilers and published (eight of them) in magazines as varied as *Harper's, Collier's,* the *Atlantic Monthly,* and the *Saturday Evening Post.* The problem before him—as he was the first to realize—was to make the novel itself greater than the sum of its parts ("stories about niggers," as he had characterized them to Haas [SL 124]). Almost miraculously, he succeeded in this, though an ineradicable residue of the stories' prehistory still lives in their racially insouciant tone. That tone—sometimes flawless but recurrently facile when not condescending—penetrates "Was" and "The Fire and the Hearth" (which together account for over a third of the book). Blacks on a working twentieth-century white-owned farm are portrayed as wily, lazy, and clev-erer than their white master ever anticipates. Whenever they are not kept under strict supervision, they start to make trouble. As Roth (the frustrated, landowner) puts it to Lucas, "As soon as you niggers are laid by trouble starts" (67). The premise is clear. Black workers get away with murder, and all the burden is on the white landowners trying to keep them in line. Since there was no way Faulkner could remove this premise, he thought of something better. He would make it pay. And he would begin by using the perspective of an uncomprehending nine-year-old boy, Cass, to tell a story that took place years before his younger cousin, Ike, was even born.

Go Down, Moses opens in 1859 (a racially portentous year) with a merry chase. "Was" begins with two white bachelors—Cass's uncles Buck and Buddy McCaslin—rushing to recapture their runaway slave, Tomey's Turl. Turl is hotfooting it toward another plantation where his mate, Tennie, who is owned by Hubert Beauchamp, is forced to live apart from him. Casually operative already are two of slavery's disturbing features: runaway slaves and slaveholders' right to divide their slaves' families as they see fit. The most disturbing feature soon enters the narrative with equal casual-ness. Hubert, not about to make matters easier for the separated couple, refuses to have "that damn white half-McCaslin on his place even as a free gift" (GDM 7). This slave hunt is about two white McCaslins chasing their white "half-McCaslin" brother. But Buck and Buddy hardly think of either whiteness or fraternity when they regard Turl. When Buck hunts Turl incorrectly (there are rules for this sort of thing) and gets run over by

him, he realizes his error: "Afterwards, Uncle Buck admitted that it was his own mistake, that he had forgotten when even a little child should have known: not to ever stand right in front of or right behind a nigger when you scare him; but always to stand to one side of him" (16). The story ends with the runaway slave recaptured and Tennie now set to join him by way of a tortuously complicated set of gambling wagers. Everyone in the story knows what a "nigger" is and how to hunt him. No reflections, no conces-sion that anything strange is going on.

The next chapter, "The Fire and the Hearth," focuses on Lucas Beauchamp—of all the black men in Faulkner' work, the most intricately represented. Almost obsessively, Faulkner returns to Lucas's independent bearing: his "face which...was a composite of a whole generation of fierce and undefeated young Confederate soldiers" (GDM 91). Usually that face is haughtily inexpressive, and at all times its owner proudly dates himself back to his white grandfather, Lucius Quintus Carothers McCaslin. Moreover, Lucas's most riveting memories—focused on an encounter with Caroth-ers's white descendant Zack—circulate around the enabling resources bequeathed by his grandfather. When Zack's wife was dying in childbirth, Lucas's wife, Molly, went to her bedside, to nurse the newborn baby (Roth). Molly remained at the big house for six months; Lucas would never know what roles she played there. Finally he could take it no longer. In a ballet-like ritual of challenge and counter-challenge—suffused with enmity and intimacy—Lucas confronts Zack in the bedroom, coming within an inch of taking Zack's life. At the ultimate moment, his gun misfires, the crisis ends, and Lucas returns home: "*Old Carothers,* he thought. *I needed him and he come and spoke for me*" (45, emphasis in the original). In calling Zack to account, Lucas drew precisely on what he had inherited from the imperious and unyielding progenitor. Does one hear a precursor of Faulkner's later claim that the black man "is competent for equality only in the ratio of his white blood"?

In dramatizing Lucas's remembered struggle—his standing up like a man, let the consequence be what it will—Faulkner compellingly represented a black man in distress. No longer picturesque racial décor, Lucas was granted a significant past. In that recalled scene, his chest heaved, his mind lurched, as he sought to confront the assault on his manhood. It comes as no surprise to learn that Faulkner added this scene when he revised the magazine version of these materials (*Collier's* would have had little interest in this flashback). More broadly, Faulkner wrote a black capacity for memory itself into *Go Down, Moses*—by way of revisions and with considerable consequences. The

novel exits the brittle cleverness of current-day games, rising into a brooding sense of what has been cumulatively endured over time.

Ike McCaslin—Old Carothers's white grandson—functions as the central bearer of memories. But Lucas (the other grandson, Ike's "dark twin") is likewise bathed in the flow of time past—territory that had heretofore been reserved for Faulkner's privileged white figures. Like their author, these figures (and these alone) are granted the searing consciousness of their missteps and blunderings over time. Lucas's appeal for Faulkner lodges essentially in the temporal shadow he casts. Seen over decades of past time, he luminously harbors dignity, endurance, survival. Seen in the present alone, he appears at best as a wily black tenant farmer. At worst, he appears—so the chancellor's clerk angrily addresses him—as an "uppity nigger."

The next story, "Pantaloon in Black" speaks black distress more starkly—more starkly than Faulkner ever managed again. This story attends to the agony of one of Roth Edmonds's black tenants, Rider, whose wife has suddenly died. All but inarticulate, he says little; Faulkner writes his distress in bodily fashion. A powerful man, bristling with life-energies, Rider's very strength keeps him from bridging the distance between his pulsating anguish and his wife's unbreathing state. Dead and buried, she nevertheless suffuses the space of the cabin she tended during their two years of married life. Entering the cabin, he sees her there and tries to approach:

> "Mannie," he said. "Hit's awright. Ah aint afraid." Then he took another step. But this time as soon as he moved she began to fade. He stopped at once, not breathing again, motionless, willing his eyes to see that she had stopped too. But...she was fading, going. "Wait," he said, talking as sweet as he had ever heard his voice speak to a woman: "Den lemme go wid you, honey." But she was going. (GDM 106)

Faulkner focuses hypnotically on Rider's foredoomed moves: his attempt to drink himself into not-feeling, his running all night through the woods (as though he could bodily exorcise his grief), and finally his suicidal provocation of a white night watchman in a late-night poker game. Rider has long known of this man's cheating, but now he calls him on it. When the watchman goes for his gun, Rider swoops from behind his back the razor he always carries there. With the rhythmic power that has characterized all his bodily moves during the past twenty-four hours of distress, he slits the man's throat a second before the gun goes off. We next see him lynched on a black schoolhouse bell rope, murdered by the watchman's family and strung up for view.

The story then shifts focus to a bewildered white deputy talking to his wife, trying to explain what his work has been like for the last two days. Responsible for keeping Rider in jail, he has misread every sign of his prisoner's grief—perceiving only the unfeeling animal barbarity of niggers. The reader knows otherwise. "Lemme go wid you, honey," Rider had pleaded with the spirit of his dead wife. Finally he has succeeded in provoking whites to "help" him find his way there. "Hit look lack Ah just cant quit thinking," the deputy quotes Rider saying at the end—unable to get his breath in prison, unable to bear his widowed life. The deputy's inattentive wife hardly hears these words, and the deputy doesn't understand them as he recites them. But few words ever uttered in a Faulkner novel carry deeper resonance. In heavy black vernacular, they voice the distress the writer himself endured throughout his life, and was no more able than Rider to put to sleep with booze or other strategies. That distress—the anguish caused by *is*'s incapacity to restore, or forget, *was*—gave Faulkner his most compelling material; out of it he made his greatest art. The same distress he bestows on Rider.

Perhaps no single work of Faulkner is more widely reprinted than "The Bear," the centerpiece of *Go Down, Moses*. It is the finest hunting story Faulkner ever wrote—perhaps the finest in American literature. Centered on Ike McCaslin's quest for the legendary bear Old Ben, this story shows why—thanks to his experience of the wilderness—Ike chooses to relinquish his race-tarnished inheritance. Part 4 of "The Bear" goes inside Ike's memories so as to show what is at stake in his choice. It rehearses a debate in the plantation commissary between Ike and his older cousin Cass. Ike has turned twenty-one and is trying to explain to Cass why he must refuse his inheritance. Even more resonant, part 4 rehearses—through Ike and Cass—Faulkner's largest meditation on slavery and the Civil War that followed it. Finally, part 4 narrates Ike's attempt to repair some of the earlier wrong committed by his grandfather. As grandson, Ike comes to recognize himself in the mirror of race posed by the spectral history of his own family, and he cannot live with what he sees there.

"That damn white half-McCaslin," the strange but insouciant phrase in "Was," takes on in "The Bear" its delayed resonance. Hubert saying it so casually indicated that everyone knew that the runaway slave (Tomey's Turl) carried the blood of the white master, Carothers McCaslin. Faulkner does not provide specifics, but one assumes the following: Carothers McCaslin took as mistress the mulatto slave Eunice whom he had bought in 1807 in New Orleans. In 1810, Eunice bore a daughter, Tomasina—fathered

by Carothers, though married off to another slave, Thucydus (a common enough practice in antebellum times). Thus Tomasina's offspring Turl was widely recognized as the grandson of Carothers McCaslin—however "slave-like" the treatment that came his way. So Ike assumes as well, as he presses further (at age sixteen) upon ledgers kept for decades in the plantation commissary. Eventually, those yellowed pages begin to reveal their secret.

Ike's Uncle Buddy had noted there, some fifty years earlier, that Eunice *"Drownd in Crick Cristmas Day 1832."* A little later appeared Uncle Buddy's ledger entry: *"Drownd herself."* Incredulous, Buck responded two days later with another entry, *"Who in hell ever heard of a niger drownding him self."* Undaunted, Buddy repeated his claim in a later entry: *"Drowned herself."* Reading and rereading the ledger, Ike keeps thinking, *"But why? But why?"* Then a page later he comes upon this: *"Tomasina called Tomy Daughter of Thucydus @ Eunice Born 1810 dide in Child bed June 1833 and Burd."* And following that ledger entry, this one: *"Turl Son of Thucydus @ Eunice Tomy born June 1833 ... Fathers will"* (GDM 198, emphasis in the original).

Illiterate, cryptic, unexplaining, yet—on reflection—these ledger fragments intimate a devastating story. Eunice did indeed drown herself in the creek, six months before her daughter Tomasina died while birthing her baby Terrel (Turl). Piecing the shards together and taking into account the portent of "fathers will," Ike imagines his way into their unspoken meaning. In 1810 Old Carothers impregnated Eunice, begetting a daughter named Tomasina; twenty-two years later, he impregnated Tomasina, begetting a son named Terrel. When Eunice grasped that her daughter was three months pregnant, and this by the man who was both her own lover and her daughter's father, she found her life no longer worth living: "he [Ike] seemed to see her actually walking into the icy creek on that Christmas day six months before her daughter's and her lover's (*Her first lover's* he thought. *Her first*) child was born, solitary, inflexible, griefless, ceremonial, in formal and succinct repudiation of grief and despair who had already had to repudiate belief and hope" (GDM 200, emphasis in the original).

Ancestral echoes, dark twins: Carothers McCaslin eerily echoes Colonel W. C. Falkner. Both men—imperious masters in the time of slavery—seemed likely to have taken mulatto mistresses, produced offspring, and then impregnated their own offspring. Tomey's Turl suddenly rises for Ike into uncontainable significance, becoming the marker of generations of white sexual abuse. *"Fathers will"*: the phrase reverberates—a legal document, but more darkly a despotic power. Rather than acknowledge Turl

openly, Carothers bequeathed him money in his will, leaving his sons Buck and Buddy to regulate the bequest. *"So I reckon that was cheaper than saying My son to a nigger he* [Ike] *thought. Even if My son wasn't but just two words. But there must have been love* he thought" (GDM 199, emphasis in the original). There must have been love, Ike has to believe, in the face of ledgers bleakly suggesting otherwise.

Turl never collected during his lifetime the $1,000 bequeathed to him in his father/grandfather's will. Apparently feeling implicated by Old Carothers's behavior, Buck and Buddy increased the legacy to $3,000 so that they could assign $1,000 apiece to the three children of Tomey's Turl and Tennie. One of those children, James, disappeared from view in 1885. Another, Fonsiba, left her white planterly family when a black man from the North came to claim her as his bride. Ike has by then recognized his own blood-complicity in his grandfather's acts of miscegenation and incest, and he is desperate to bestow the guilt money. But he can neither locate James nor accept Fonsiba's leaving her white family. A sense of white Southern entitlement—an urge to protect one's own blacks (one's "own" as intimacy and possession both)—fuels Ike's frustration. He remembers with bitterness the black Northerner casually walking into the commissary and demanding Fonsiba as his bride. "You dont say Sir, do you," an affronted Cass had replied. "To my elders, yes," the man had responded. He had come to notify Cass as the head of the family, not to beg for favors. Furious, Cass ordered him to "Be off this place by dark" (GDM 264)—the standard white Southern male's warning to uppity blacks. Thus Fonsiba departed with husband-to-be. Ike soon afterward sets out to find her, determined to bestow the $1,000: *"I will have to find her. I will have to. We have already lost one of them. I will have to find her this time"* (205, emphasis in the original).

He does find her. She and her husband are living on a bedraggled farm in Arkansas, in squalid conditions that epitomize the novel's criticism of Reconstruction practices. Fonsiba's Northern black husband knows nothing about farming—despite the government pension he clutched in his hand when he claimed her—and the glasses he wears lack lenses. Faulkner ungenerously allows those missing lenses to signal the hollowness of the man's pretense to culture. Ike lectures him sternly. The entire scene of desolation weighs on Ike as something "permeant, clinging to the man's very clothing and exuding from his skin itself, that rank stink of baseless and imbecile delusion" (GDM 206). "Rank stink"—this revealingly familiar phrase connotes centuries of racial prejudice about black uncleanliness. Just when we think that Faulkner is engaging in the most knee-jerk of Southern

stereotypes, he turns the scene upside down. Ike pleads, "Fonsiba, Fonsiba. Are you all right?" In words that conclude the scene by making further argument irrelevant, she answers, "I'm free" (207).

An aftermath to "The Bear" remains: "Delta Autumn," a brooding narrative that somberly reconfigures the comic tone on which the novel opened. Faulkner revised an earlier version of "Delta Autumn" so that it would center on the old and fragile Ike McCaslin, attending perhaps his last hunt. The time is now the 1940s, the wilderness has receded another two hundred miles from Jefferson, a way of life is coming to an end. Yet Ike tries to remain ensconced in his innocent memories, lying on his cot unsleeping, thinking "there was just exactly enough of it [the wilderness]" (GDM 261) to last him out. And then the surprise: a woman the younger men have pointedly alluded to as the "doe" enters their campsite, approaching Ike's tent. A sullen Roth Edmonds has the night before given Ike an envelope for her, no explanations offered. He had no intention of being present himself. Uncle Ike was to hand her the envelope if she made an appearance. The woman enters his tent, carrying an infant in her arms. She has been Roth's mistress, and she is to be repudiated and paid off rather than acknowledged. As she talks to Ike, she reveals that she knows the entire history of his family. Speaking of her own family, she tells Ike that, to support themselves, they used to take in washing:

> "Took in what?" he said. "Took in washing?" He sprang, still seated even, flinging himself backward onto one arm, awry-haired, glaring. Now he understood what it was she had brought into the tent with her.... the pale lips, the skin pallid and dead-looking yet not ill, the dark and tragic and foreknowing eyes. *Maybe in a thousand or two thousand years in America,* he thought. *But not now! Not now!* He cried, not loud, in a voice of amazement, pity, and outrage: "You're a nigger!" "Yes," she said. "James Beauchamp—you called him Tennie's Jim though he had a name—was my grandfather." (GDM 266, emphasis in the original)

Maybe in a thousand or two thousand years, but not now! Go slow now! The act of miscegenation—initiated by Old Carothers 130 years earlier and once again enacted within the same family, embodied seven generations later in the form of that sleeping infant—stares out at him. Ike cannot at first acknowledge the dark twin he sees in the mirror she provides. He urges her to go North and find a black man, anyone other than his great-nephew Roth. Her difference from his white line is too great. "Took in washing": from antebellum days through the Memphis garbage strike that

cost Martin Luther King his life in 1968, black people have been cleaning up white people's dirt, and they have been treated like dirt while doing it. Except that at the same time that she cannot be him, she is undeniably his. Tennie's Jim—the offspring of the long-ago mating of Tomey's Turl and Tennie Beauchamp that was set up in "Was"—did not disappear into oblivion in 1885. Over the subsequent decades, beyond narration, he sustained a name of his own, James Beauchamp, and a life of his own, too. In 1940, he reemerged in *Go Down, Moses*—at once the grandfather of the "doe" and Ike's long-lost kin. Even as Ike backs away in recoil, his hand reaches out to touch hers: "the gnarled, bloodless, bonelight bone-dry old man's fingers touching for a second the smooth young flesh where the strong old blood ran after its long lost journey back to home. 'Tennie's Jim,' he said. 'Tennie's Jim'" (GDM 267). The story of repudiation is also—inextricably—a story of family and love.

In all of Faulkner's portrayals of relations between blacks and whites, there are few moments more moving than this one. Centering on a frail old white man reconnecting—in his mind and through his fingers—with his long-absent black kin, the scene is unashamedly paternal, but it is not condescending. This startling connection transforms the woman before him and her infant into beings at once beyond acknowledgment yet his own. He ends by giving her not just the envelope of money Roth has left but also General Compson's ancient hunting horn. Henceforth the wilderness hunt—so hierarchical in its arrangements of race and gender—will take on in Ike's memories blackness as well. The recognitions he has been forced to undergo in this scene are—like most genuine recognitions—unwanted and beyond accommodation. He has lived too long, his innocence painfully ending before his life does.

Something similar is true for his creator as well. In his most compelling fictions of race, Faulkner recognized himself—uncomfortably, guiltily, responsibly—in the mirror of black distress at which he gazed. Paternal, not paternalistic. He knew he was complicit—that his entire life in the South entailed ineffaceable complicities. The solution to the race dilemma in America, should one ever be put into practice, would not be proposed by him. Rather than solutions, his work—at its best—would act as an unnerving dark twin intimating to its white reader: "yes, you, too, are in this mirror, you will need to find a way to live with yourself insofar as you see yourself here." *Light in August* and *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Go Down, Moses* constitute the most capacious mirror Faulkner was able to construct. It is not a magic mirror, and nothing we see reflected in it is likely to give much cause

for satisfaction. But none of his white peers in the twentieth century even attempted to see—and say—what he saw when he gazed into it.

He would write once again about race relations. And he would seek to play his part—confusedly and at some risk to himself—in the civil rights turmoil that was already brewing. His last race-focused novel, *Intruder in the Dust,* appeared in 1948. Its keen (and easily decipherable) attention to contemporary racial agitation doubtless played a part in his being awarded the Nobel Prize two years later. But that novel's stance moved from paternal to paternalistic. Its plot was simple. Lucas Beauchamp, now an old man charged with a murder he did not commit, had to be saved from lynching. Faulkner ensured that it would take white people cooperating together to save him. Lucas's efforts in his own behalf were to be quietly stymied (he remained locked up in jail). Thus the motion and emotion in this novel belonged to the Southern whites who labored to clear him. Not that this number was large. Lucas's rescue turned on a pair of boys and an old lady who refused to sit by and see injustice done. Because Faulkner was too honest to propose that the larger adult white South wanted anything other than to lynch this "uppity nigger," the novel's strategy for liberating Lucas emerged as more than a little sentimental. On one matter, Faulkner was crystal clear. Lucas's dilemma was not one in which well-meaning Northern outsiders had any business interfering. Lucas's defense lawyer, Gavin Stevens, referred to his silent client throughout as Sambo. One wonders how much is gained by freeing a black man only on condition that he continue to answer to Sambo. Once again, looking forward and looking backward merge as incoherently fused dimensions of Faulkner's racial imagination.

Intruder, at any rate, was commercially successful (its first several weeks of sale outpaced even *Sanctuary*'s record). MGM not only paid $50,000 for screen rights but went on to produce the movie. Much of it was shot in Oxford during the spring of 1949—Faulkner helped the director, Clarence Brown, cast local acquaintances in several bit parts—and the world premiere would take place in Oxford that fall. The town appreciated the business generated by the several weeks' work required to shoot the film, whatever their private thoughts about their most celebrated citizen. As the filming hullabaloo approached its end, Estelle decided that a fitting conclusion would be a party at Rowan Oak itself. There was only one hitch. A Puerto Rican named Juano Hernandez had been signed on to play the principal role in the film—that of Lucas Beauchamp. Faulkner had even helped Hernandez work on a black accent that would sound more like Mississippi than the islands. Such professional cooperation was one thing,

but attendance at a Rowan Oak party was another. Hernandez was himself presentable, but if the Faulkners invited him, they would have to invite his Negro hosts in Oxford. After some soul-searching, they determined they could not do that. "So the whole crew, with the exception of the portrayer of Lucas Beauchamp, came out to Rowan Oak" (F 503). We recall an earlier arc of nonrecognition launched by the closing of a door in young Thomas Sutpen's face. Trash like him were to use the back door of a white plantation. A kindred arc repeats itself in 1949 at Rowan Oak. "*Maybe happen is never once,*" Faulkner had written in *Absalom.* Whatever images he saw in that mirror posed by Juano Hernandez's black hosts, they did not figure for him as dark twins deserving acknowledgment.