

1999

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Christine Reiss  
*Western Kentucky University*

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## Recommended Citation

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CAROTHERS McCASLIN'S PROGENY: TRACING THE THEME OF REDEMPTION  
CHRONOLOGICALLY THROUGH THE MULTIRACIAL McCASLINS

By: Christine Reiss — Honors Thesis directed by Walker Rutledge

Abstract

William Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses* (1942) is a novel that depicts the complicated family history of the McCaslins. There are primarily three branches of the family: the white, male-descended McCaslins, the white, female-descended Edmondses, and the multiracial, male-descended Beauchamps. The multiracial line of the family, the Beauchamps, are the progeny of the original McCaslin patriarch, old Carothers McCaslin. His act of miscegenation with one of his slaves produces a daughter, on whom he then fathers a son. This act of miscegenation and incest sets in motion a family line that struggles with the weight of its father's sin. The individuals seek to live the most liberated lives that they can, given the various social constraints with which they come into contact, and by the end of the novel, they accomplish a fair measure of freedom, perhaps even redemption, from their father's sin.

Preface

*Go Down, Moses*, first published in 1942 midway through William Faulkner's career, recounts the long and sordid history of the McCaslin family. While the McCaslin family is one unifying presence in the novel, the theme of race can be said to be another, particularly since the two themes are inextricably linked through multiple instances of multiracial relationships within the McCaslin family. The white McCaslins become entangled in a web of branching relationships that extend into the multiracial side of the family, all of which is originally set in motion by the patriarch, Carothers McCaslin, when he seduces his own multiracial daughter and impregnates her. Eric Sundquist describes the convoluted family parallels in *Faulkner: The House Divided*: "Indeed, 'tragedy' hardly seems to describe the sins of the father or the tormentingly complex relationships among his descendants in this case; . . . *Go Down, Moses* is nearly suffocating in its crossing and recrossing of plots and symbolic action" (132). Of course, each critic has his or her own angle on the novel, and not all choose to focus on the relationships within the McCaslin family. Dorothy Denniston, in "Faulkner's Image of Blacks in *Go Down, Moses*," interprets the McCaslin family with a slightly different spin: "...we see the McCaslin family as a microcosmic

representative of the guilt-ridden heritage of white Southerners and the tormented endurance of the blacks" (33). This interpretation, though meaningful in a broad, scoping way, does little to elucidate the actual relationships of the characters on an individual level. Denniston also writes in the same article about the McCaslin quest for freedom, be it freedom from Carothers' sins or freedom from the oppression inherent in being black in the South: "He wishes to illustrate the tensions and conflicts which all his characters undergo as they struggle to rid themselves of 'the curse of the fathers'" (33). This statement seems more accurate than her first because, in truth, all McCaslins are trying to reconcile their McCaslin-ness with old Carothers' original sin, thereby escaping the retribution of the sin that is visited upon them. The present study focuses upon the act of escaping the sin, but particularly upon the guise which retribution takes when visited upon each specific multiracial McCaslin.

Before launching into an analysis of the novel, however, it is important to explore the novel's peculiar structure. In the past, critics have scoffed at the idea that *Go Down, Moses* might be more than a collection of short stories. Written in chapters – or sections – each individual chapter/story is organized around an episode; the sections progress roughly chronologically as a whole novel, but not as individual stories. The titles of the sections are "Was," "The Fire and the Hearth," "Pantaloone in Black," "The Old People," "The Bear," "Delta Autumn," and "Go Down, Moses." "Was," the story that, according to Dorys Grover in "Isaac McCaslin and Roth's Mistress," describes the way things were in the Old South before the Civil War (23), recounts the tale of Turl – a multiracial McCaslin – running away and being fetched back by the men who are his owners and half-brothers. "The Fire and the Hearth" is primarily the story of Lucas Beauchamp – another multiracial McCaslin; it portrays his mad quest for gold that nearly divides his family irrevocably, until he decides that his family is worth more than his folly. "Pantaloone in Black" describes a black character's intense grief over his wife's death. "The Old People" depicts Ike McCaslin's coming of age in the Big Woods, as well as the life of his teacher, Sam Fathers. "The Bear," the longest section in the novel, tells the story of the

preparation and the hunt in which Old Ben, the legendary and seemingly immortal bear, is finally killed. It is also in "The Bear," that Ike reveals his plan for repudiating the birthright left him as descendant of Carothers McCaslin, which he thinks will absolve him of Carothers' sin. "Delta Autumn" is the story of a time in Ike's old age in which his distant multiracial relative comes to the hunting camp in search of his white McCaslin cousin. "Go Down, Moses," the title story, tells of another distant multiracial McCaslin, one who is executed for killing a police officer. This thesis explores all of the stories except "Pantaloone in Black" and "Go Down, Moses," because both stories are only very indirectly concerned with the topic of redemption.

Even though these synopses of the *Go Down, Moses* stories might seem quite at variance with one another, it is necessary to read the stories as a novel in order to extract any profound meaning or impact from them. Taken individually, the stories omit information provided in other stories, thereby rendering them incomplete. The overall meaning of *Go Down, Moses* – with its themes of race, family, and redemption – cannot be perceived fully by isolating the sections into autonomous stories. Eric Sundquist in *Faulkner: The House Divided* cites that one reason for confusion about the form of *Go Down, Moses* as novel is that even scholars observe that "the links between its stories are often perilous and at times seemingly invisible" (133). But the tenuous links that bind the story can also be perceived as paralleling the tenuous links that bind the members of the McCaslin family, or that bind the members of one race to another; the links may at times be difficult to discern, but they are there nonetheless. In *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country*, Cleanth Brooks remarks on the confusion about the structure of the novel:

*Go Down, Moses* has a great deal more overall unity than a superficial glance might suggest. A more useful, though more prosaic, title would be *The McCaslins*, for the book has to do with the varying fortunes of that family, and only one story, "Pantaloone in Black," does not deal with it directly. (244)

*The McCaslins* might not be altogether an inappropriate title for this novel, but to call it exclusively by one family name banishes the Beauchamp line of McCaslins – or even the Edmondses – to a more shadowy realm than that which they already occupy. But Brooks explains that

"Faulkner himself regarded *Go Down, Moses* not as a collection of stories but as a novel. Whether or not the reader thinks it deserves that name, there is no question that the connections between the various narratives are important" (244). In "The Failure of Love in *Go Down, Moses*," John Muste describes that the variance between the individual stories contained within the novel "have provided the basis for what seems to be the general critical judgment that Faulkner, if he intended to make this a unified and coherent work, failed, and that it is better to forget the book as an entity and concentrate on its masterpiece," (367) "The Bear." Yet Muste points out that many critics have unwittingly betrayed their own argument against the concept of the book as a novel by using material from the other stories in the book to analyze "The Bear" (367). It is clear that Muste appreciates *Go Down, Moses* in form as a unified novel, and not merely a collection of short stories. Muste quotes Faulkner on the subject: "*The Bear* was a part of a novel. That novel was – happened to be composed of more or less complete stories, but it was held together by one family, the Negro and the white phase of the same family, same people. *The Bear* was just a part of that – of a novel" (366). It seems that in the 56 years since its publication, *Go Down, Moses* is now generally accepted as a novel, despite its original reception by the public.

The title of the novel, as stated before, is taken from the last story, "Go Down, Moses." Both the title of the novel and of the chapter refer to the spiritual, partially reprinted in Dorothy Denniston's article "Faulkner's Image of Blacks in *Go Down, Moses*": "*Go Down, Moses*, way down in Egypt land / Tell old [Pharaoh] to let my people go" (33). In the chapter "Go Down, Moses," Mollie Beauchamp, Lucas' wife, is mourning for her grandson, who she instinctively knows is in peril. Mollie and the women she mourns with sing lines from the spiritual to express their grief. Mollie equates Roth Edmonds with Pharaoh, because it is Roth who banishes Benjamin from the farm where he was raised, in effect selling him into Egypt by distancing him from his loving family (362). The title then contains both the idea of bondage and the idea of freedom; while the black inhabitants on the Edmonds plantation may still be subject to being dealt with like slaves – subject to Pharaoh – they still seek redemption in the figure of a character like Moses.

*Go Down, Moses* is treated here as a novel, and its events are recounted chronologically, character by

character. The story in which an action occurs is usually indicated, but that is incidental. The focus is on an account of the evolution of the multiracial side of the McCaslin family, from its sinful beginning to its ambiguous end, elucidating a side of the family that is often overlooked.

### Carothers McCaslin's Progeny: Tracing the Theme of Redemption Chronologically Through the Multiracial McCaslins

Sometimes subtly and sometimes quite obviously, the sense of the self-destruction of certain rash individuals pervades many of William Faulkner's novels. These characters shape their own destinies by exercising their free will, yet the most bullheadedly strong-willed often make choices that determine the fate of their progeny. One such choice is miscegenation without love, and one such character is Carothers McCaslin.

Ethnicity plays a significant role in characters' lives in Faulkner's color-obsessed South, and the racial confusion resultant of parentally unacknowledged miscegenation can be traced in exploring the identities of Faulkner's multiracial McCaslin characters in the novel *Go Down, Moses*. The outcome of such an internalized racial confusion effectively wreaks its own doom, eternally transmitting the sin of procreation-without-love onto the children. This paradigm of retribution is not without hope, however. In a chronological examination of Carothers McCaslin's bloodline, it is revealed in the last multiracial descendant that although the cycle of retribution is not yet complete, hope is possible in the multiracial children when they are conceived in loving free will.

The multiracial McCaslins in *Go Down, Moses* are surrounded by choices that affect their identities, choices which are independent of an acknowledged parentage or grandsire. Primarily, they must choose between accepting slavery and black oppression or stealing freedom from the white society of which they are not quite members. They must decide whether to think of themselves as African American or Caucasian – or they must choose not to decide, thereby either embracing or shunning all of their racial identities. They also must choose how best to implement their choices and in what manner they will live while trying to reconcile their white heritage with their black. Of the multiracial McCaslins in *Go Down, Moses*, there are five worthy of in-depth analysis: Tomey and her son Turl, Lucas Beauchamp, and Roth Edmonds' unnamed mistress and her son. There are also several

minor McCaslins who merit somewhat less scrutiny. **Tomey and Turl**

Tomey, born Tomasina, is not the daughter of the man to whom her mother is married. In the section titled "The Bear," much of the McCaslin history of Tomey and Turl's origins is revealed. Tomey's mother, Eunice, was bought by Carothers McCaslin when he went to New Orleans, seemingly for the sole purpose of getting a slave mistress (259). It is here that Carothers McCaslin begins the cycle of incest and loveless miscegenation that will take several generations to resolve. By purchasing a woman with whom he will have a child, he commits her to a loveless relationship devoid of free will, and the product of that relationship will serve to compound that sin. After Eunice has been brought back to Mississippi, Carothers McCaslin's home, he marries her to another of his slaves, Thucydus. It is thoroughly implied in "The Bear" that Tomey is in actuality the daughter of Carothers McCaslin (257-259). Her paternity is revealed when the paternity of her son is uncovered.

Unmarried and only twenty-three, Tomey gives birth to a son. When Ike McCaslin reads the plantation ledger, he thinks to himself, "*His own daughter His own daughter. No No Not even him*" (259), as he discovers that his grandfather not only married off a slave woman to another man to hide his adultery, but he compounded his sins by committing incest with his own daughter. Tomey's son, Turl, is also Carothers McCaslin's son. In retrospect, Ike recalls as a child seeing Turl on the plantation and observing that "there had already been some white in Terrell's blood before his father gave him the rest of it" (259), not yet knowing that Tomey's father gave him the white heritage not once but twice. Ike realizes the sin of procreation-without-love when he wonders, "*But there must have been love . . . . Some sort of love. Even what he would have called love: not just an afternoon's or a night's spittoon*" (258). But there could not have been love. It is inconceivable that a woman would truly love the man who owns her body and soul, and it is difficult to imagine that a man would love a woman but continue to possess her like chattel. In *The Tragic Mask*, John Longley describes Carothers McCaslin's behavior toward his mistress' daughter:

There is more than simple depravity in such actions; a deeper philosophy is implied. To summon his own daughter to the house and

get a child on her and dismiss them both with cynical indifference indicates that Carothers did not regard them as human at all. The black men, women, and children in his care do not have souls infinitely precious to God but are chattels like mules or cotton, to be used or sold as the owner sees fit. (96)

It is because she is still chattel that Tomey cannot exercise the freedom of her paternity. At this time before the Civil War, Tomey is still her father's property and enslaved. However, Tomey does have a slightly elevated status because her "parents," Eunice and Thucydus, hold themselves above other slaves; they do not consider themselves in the abject position of the field hands or newly acquired slaves. They feel themselves distinguished not only because Thucydus is a blacksmith and not a field hand,

but because the husband [Thucydus] and his father and mother too had been inherited by the white man [Carothers McCaslin] from his father, and the white man himself had traveled three hundred miles and better to New Orleans in a day when men traveled by horseback or steamboat, and bought the girl's mother as a wife for (259)

But it is for himself that Carothers brings back Eunice; marrying Eunice to an innocent is one more aspect of Carothers' outrage against humanity. It is clear in the novel that Tomey is afforded certain privileges, not only as the "daughter" of well-to-do slaves, but also as the daughter and lover of Carothers. Ike speculates about her seduction: "perhaps he had sent for her at first out of loneliness, to have a young voice and movement in the house, summoned her, bade her mother send her each morning to sweep the floors and make the beds" (258). Presumably, Carothers McCaslin already has house servants, so her work would be of a nominal nature and not the work of a slave toiling for her master. Tomey is not permitted to enter the world of whites, but neither is she excommunicated to solely inhabit the world of blacks.

Tomey's son, Turl, on the other hand, coming of age before the end of slavery, begins taking the liberties of his white freedom long before emancipation. Maybe as the result of his double inheritance of his father's spirit, Turl frequently runs away to court his future wife at nearby Hubert Beauchamp's plantation; the section "Was" hinges on Turl's flight to the Beauchamp plantation. When Buck, Turl's half-brother, discovers that he is gone, he

says to his twin brother, Buddy, "'Tomey's Turl has broke out again'" (5), speaking of him as one of their slaves even though both men know their true relationship to him. They also know that Turl has gone to the Beauchamp plantation to visit Tennie, but they cannot manage to keep him from slipping away about twice a year (5); in this way Turl contrives to defiantly express a degree of physical freedom – attributable to his white paternity – yet still remain a slave because of his black heritage. However, one can safely assume that most runaway slaves are dealt with much more harshly than to be collected by the masters in a wagon, but as their mostly white, more than half-brother, Turl finds that his actions are unchallenged by Buck and Buddy as an acknowledgment of his paternity. The only way in which the Beauchamps and McCaslins try to manage the situation – by one buying the other's slave so that Turl will have no reason to run – meets with objection on both sides.

They couldn't keep him at home by buying Tennie from Mr. Hubert because Uncle Buck said he and Uncle Buddy had so many niggers already that they could hardly walk around on their own land for them, and they couldn't sell Tomey's Turl to Mr. Hubert because Mr. Hubert said he not only wouldn't buy Tomey's Turl, he wouldn't have that damn white half-McCaslin on his place even as a free gift, not even if Uncle Buck and Uncle Buddy were to pay board and keep for him. (5-6)

It is clear by Beauchamp's remark that not only is Turl's lineage generally known, but it makes him a less than desirable slave for his exceptionality. He is both more than half white and more than half McCaslin in fact, but his black ancestry also determines his fate. As Gene Bluestein explains in "Faulkner and Miscegenation," "for Faulkner the black heritage determines everything" (160). Although it is clear that Turl's white blood affords him some modicum of preferential treatment, his black will keep him enslaved.

In Faulkner's world of Old Testament-like vengeful wrath, children suffer for their fathers' sins. Poor Tomey's tragedy is that she dies when bearing her master and father's child, a pitiful ending at best, if not somewhat disgusting. Although it is impossible to say whether Tomey ever learned that her own father is also the father of her child, the perversity of the situation is striking to readers, and to bear the child of the man who holds her enslaved is akin to the shame



of bearing the child of her rapist. After all, Carothers McCaslin does not marry Tomey to another of his slaves, denying her the option of pretending that her child is the product of a more holy and self-chosen union.

Turl's fate is to live on in his racially ambiguous no-man's land, passing on his racially confused heritage to his children. He is the ghost of the white man that he could have been, as is revealed by his choice to determine his own destiny more successfully than a slave would be able. In the most clearly elucidated example of Turl's staunchly insubmissive independence, he explains to McCaslin Edmonds the schemes he has brewing to finally marry Tennie, "I gonter tell you something to remember: anytime you wants to git something done, from hoeing out a crop to getting married, just get the womenfolks to working at it. Then all you needs to do is set down and wait. You member that?" (13). Turl seems to be implying that he has somehow—maybe through Tennie as medium—recruited Sophonsiba Beauchamp's aid to get him married, as the situation proves beneficial to her also. In support of the idea that Sophonsiba helps bring about Turl's marriage, one of his daughters is named Sophonsiba, maybe in thankful acknowledgment of the elder Sophonsiba's helpful role. It is difficult to imagine most slaves acquiring the assistance of unrelated white women to achieve a devious plot, but Turl's strain of white blood seems to enable him to live much more freely than any other slave would. Despite Turl's paternally inspired insubordinations, however, he remains a slave. In his only acknowledgment of his son, not recounted until the fifth section of "The Bear," Carothers McCaslin leaves \$1000 in his will to be remanded to Turl upon his request of it (257). Ike McCaslin thinks, "So I reckon that was cheaper than saying My son to a nigger. . . . Even if My son wasn't but just two words" (258); despite this, Turl never takes the money, as if denying his father in response to his father's denial of himself. In spite of his known parentage, Turl remains technically a bastard orphan—his children take his wife's name, and he is always referred to matronymically as "Tomey's Turl." Presumably, Turl lives happily ever after, but the cycle of retribution that Carothers initiated is carried on through his progeny.

#### Lucas Beauchamp

Lucas Beauchamp, Tennie and Turl's youngest son, carries on the McCaslin legacy with a certain hauteur. He is elevated by his McCaslin blood in a

way that no ordinary white ancestry could have raised him. As Judith Berzon corroborates in *Neither Black Nor White*, "What makes Lucas 'more than just a man' is his McCaslin spirit. The mere existence of white skin carries no honor so far as Lucas is concerned" (89). Within *Go Down, Moses*, Lucas' life is recounted mainly in "The Fire and the Hearth," one of the longest sections of the novel. In Lucas' dealings with white men, readers learn his true feelings about race and dignity; "to the sheriff Lucas was just another nigger and both the sheriff and Lucas knew it, although only one of them knew that to Lucas the sheriff was a redneck without any reason for pride in his forbears nor any hope for it in his descendants" [Faulkner's spelling] (43). Lucas seems to think of himself as both black and white. He does not refute that he is black and the son of slaves, nor does he refute that he is white and the grandson of the master. Faulkner describes Lucas' racial identity:

Yet it was not that Lucas made capital of his white or even his McCaslin blood, but the contrary. It was as if he were not only impervious to that blood, he was indifferent to it. He didn't even need to strive with it. He didn't even have to bother to defy it. He resisted it simply by being the composite of the two races which made him, simply by possessing it. Instead of being at once the battleground and victim of the two strains, he was a vessel, durable, ancestryless, nonconductive, in which the toxin and its anti stalemated one another, seethless, unrumored in the outside air. (101)

By taking pride in himself independent of his ancestry—an individual consequently of worth—he denies internal racial conflict, as can be seen in his name, which is described in "The Bear":

*Lucas Quintus Carothers McCaslin Beauchamp. Last surviving son and child of Tomey's Terrel and Tennie Beauchamp. . . . not Lucius Quintus @c @c @c, but Lucas Quintus, not refusing to be called Lucius, because he simply eliminated that word from the name: not denying, declining the name itself, because he used three quarters of it; but simply taking the name and changing, altering it, making it no longer the white man's but his own, by himself composed, himself self-progenitive and nominate, by himself ancestored, as for all the old ledgers recorded*

to the contrary, old Carothers himself was (269)

By incorporating the elements of Carothers McCaslin's name, the element of his mother's name, and his own added name, Lucas achieves a racial synthesis and simultaneously ekes out his own identity not independent from race, but somehow above, beyond the scope of race, more etched by inherited personality than inherited race. Lee Jenkins explains in "Lucas McCaslin," "Lucas shares attributes with Carothers that are the basis . . . of their psychological identification . . . Lucas is like Carothers because he imitates him; yet at the same time, he imitates him—or he acts like him—because he possesses the same inner substance that was expressed in Carothers" (219). Or, in Roth Edmonds' words in "The Fire and the Hearth," "He's more like old Carothers than all the rest of us put together, including old Carothers. He is both heir and prototype simultaneously of all the geography and climate and biology which sired old Carothers" (114). Lucas' choice is to avoid choosing one racial identity at the exclusion of another, and being born free, he is not fettered by the slavery which would prevent him from living in his openly—almost confrontationally—defiant manner.

Lucas chooses to express his liberated personality in many ways. He farms a patch of land on his younger cousin Roth Edmonds' plantation—the plantation that previously belonged to Lucas' grandfather—but even the class distinction between landholder and renter, let alone the racial distinction, does not deter Lucas from behaving with pride and dignity in himself. Roth Edmonds recalls that Lucas always spoke to his father as man-to-man, and not as the subordinate Negro that Roth expects; "Lucas always referred to his father as Mr. Edmonds, never as Mr. Zack, as the other Negroes did, and how with a cold and deliberate calculation he evaded having to address the white man by any name whatever when speaking to him" (101). Zack Edmonds tries to explain the unique relationship between himself and Lucas in which he defers to Lucas' comportment by describing the complex nature of their relations:

You think because Lucas is older than I am, old enough even to remember Uncle Buck and Uncle Buddy a little, and is a descendant of the people who lived on this place where we Edmonds are usurpers, yesterday's mushrooms, is not reason enough for him not to want to say mister to me? . . . We grew up

together, we ate and slept together and hunted and fished together, like you and Henry. We did it until we were grown men. (111)

Lucas refuses to think of himself as just the renter on his cousin's property; instead, he prefers to consider himself the last rightful though dispossessed heir still living on the McCaslin plantation. He sees himself as "the oldest living person on the Edmonds plantation, the oldest McCaslin descendant even though in the world's eye he descended not from McCaslins but from McCaslin slaves, almost as old as old Isaac McCaslin [the true rightful heir]" (36). Old Carothers' blood runs true in Lucas, enabling him to behave with an audacity worthy of his namesake. His empowered spirit is even acknowledged by the incredulous Roth Edmonds when he realizes, "Even a nigger McCaslin is a better man, better than all of us" (112). Lucas' complex self-image can be summarized by what it is not; "in no way, then, does Lucas fit the old stereotype of the mulatto torn by his warring bloods" (Berzon 91). He instead achieves an internal racial synthesis that allows him to be freely himself, not just a black, white, or mulatto man.

Lucas establishes himself as his own man, but he still has no legal tie to his grandfather except through the inheritance left his father by Carothers, tended by Carothers' legitimate sons Buck and Buddy, and championed by Isaac. Lucas is only acknowledged by his grandfather in the will's provision for his father, but the emotional complexity of the situation is much more convoluted than it seems. John Longley explains in *The Tragic Mask*, "Carothers knew he would never live until Turl became twenty-one; he cynically left the bequest to be paid by his sons" (96). In this way, Carothers deviously sets up the situation so that his sons will be required to do his dirty work. Carothers will never have to confront and thereby acknowledge his son himself, never have to say, "My son," but puts his legitimate heirs into the position of saying "My brother" to Turl. When Turl refuses to claim his inheritance, in effect denying his paternity, he gives Lucas the opportunity to claim all of the psychological and monetary inheritance of Carothers that he chooses. Berzon writes that "mixed-blood children yearn for the love of their white fathers. Some attain this love, but it is never the unmixed affection and pride of the white father for his white children" (83). In a sense, Turl denies the mockery of this love that Carothers provides in the willed money, but Lucas acts as Carothers himself probably would have—with

a take-it-where-you-can-get-it attitude. This is not to completely divorce the emotional significance involving the transfer of money from guardian to recipient, but simply to elucidate one aspect of it. For, while Lucas becomes the official guardian of the Carothers McCaslin inheritance, he also becomes the master of the Carothers McCaslin spirit. As mentioned before, Ike McCaslin, the oldest and last white McCaslin, has taken the responsibility of ministering the money bequeathed to the black McCaslins. Ike attempts to deliver one share of the money to Lucas' older brother Jim. When this plan fails, Ike traces Lucas' older sister Fonsiba's path, but in the end he is forced to set up an allowance system of the money to provide for her. When Lucas turns twenty-one, he shows up on Ike's doorstep to demand that the money be remanded to him. Ike tells him that half of the money is his brother Jim's, to which Lucas replies, "I can keep it for him same as you been doing" (105). Lucas and Ike both know that by Lucas' taking responsibility of both halves of the McCaslin inheritance, Lucas is taking the last part of Old Carothers' legacy onto his own shoulders, thereby embracing the full extent of his heritage that he possibly can. As the transfer of McCaslin guardianship ensues, Ike thinks to himself, "*Fifty dollars a month. He knows that's all. That I reneged, cried calf-ropes, sold my birthright, betrayed my blood, for what he too calls not peace but obliteration, and a little food*" (105). Lucas believes that to sell out heritage for a chance to escape what Ike can never escape—his spiritual legacy—is contemptible. Lucas collects the money from Ike, completing Ike's separation from the McCaslin inheritance, because "for Lucas, Isaac's giving up the land would be the equivalent of his giving up the mythic mandates of his possession of McCaslin blood" (Jenkins 221), and Lucas will never surrender his McCaslin blood.

Lucas can also be interpreted as a transitional character in the chronological progression of the multiracial McCaslin genealogy. From the beginning with Tomey, the multiracial McCaslins struggle to incorporate some aspect of their white lineage, while still remaining slaves. With Lucas, the independent spirit of the multiracial McCaslin begins to emerge in a synthesis of white and black that transcends internal racial tension. In "William Faulkner's 'Shining Star': Lucas Beauchamp as a Marginal Man," Bernard Bell writes that "Lucas bears the sociopsychological

burden of a marginal man, a person of mixed blood who struggles to reconcile the double consciousness of his dual identity" (228). As demonstrated before, Lucas is able to reconcile his mixed heritage by incorporating the duality without internal conflict; Faulkner remarks on his ability to become "the composite of the two races which made him" (101). By achieving the union of the two races and using his McCaslin spirit to guide him, "Lucas moves beyond the stereotypical fate of the tragic mulatto and succeeds realistically in asserting his individuality as a black McCaslin. More importantly, he also triumphs . . . as the archetypal marginal man, the person of mixed blood who straddles two cultures" and simultaneously incorporates the "modern paradoxical sense of human bondage and freedom" (Bell 226). Lucas may be free to be as McCaslin as he can when he is dealing with the society of the Edmonds plantation, but he is still oppressed by the open racism of overall Southern society. Richard King suggests in "Lucas Beauchamp and William Faulkner: Blood Brothers" that Lucas is prevented from fully developing his self-expression;

Lucas' gestures of defiance remain only gestures since they are acknowledged by no community of solidarity in which they can strike a chord and suggest group support or even action. For a black man to choose his name is potentially of profound political importance, but Lucas' gesture has no political resonance and thus remains confined to the personal and private sphere. (237)

Whereas Lucas has considerable clout on the Edmonds plantation, in the state of Mississippi in the 1840's he holds no more authority than any other black man. This situation is demonstrated in his encounter with the sheriff described before, and in his visit to the courtroom where he is berated for not removing his hat as a sign of deference to his white superiors and his addressing the judge in a manner inappropriate for a black man to speak to a white (124).

#### James and Sophonsiba Beauchamp

Lucas' siblings do not have experiences parallel to his own. Jim and Fonsiba, Lucas' older brother and sister, receive their grandfather's legacy in vastly different ways from Lucas. When Turl dies without having asked for the money, Ike continues his trusteeship in order to see that Turl's three children receive their portions of the legacy. Jim elects to carry

on his father's disavowal of the patrimony. In "The Fire and the Hearth," after Turl dies, "his first son, James, [flees], [quits] the cabin he had been born in, the plantation, Mississippi itself, by night and with nothing save the clothes he [walks] in" (103). When Ike learns of Jim's departure, he withdraws Jim's third of the money and sets out to find him and deliver the money to him, but he returns unsuccessful within a week's time (103). There is so little description of Jim in *Go Down, Moses* that it is impossible to speculate with any certainty what it is that causes him to leave. However, one speculation might be that Jim finds the past too oppressively weighted against his future in Mississippi. Wherever in Mississippi Jim might walk, his shadow will be colored with the pasts of his father and grandfather and all that those histories imply, and like Isaac McCaslin, maybe Jim wants to get from under these potentially distorting shadows. The only thing certain about Jim is that he is gone, and "nobody knew where" (280). It seems that the McCaslin love for independence of action exhibits itself in Jim when he chooses not to stoop to a legacy that he does not want to inherit; by balking at the collar, Jim, in a sense, takes on the reins of the McCaslin tradition of fierce independence.

Like Jim, Fonsiba uses her McCaslin independence to set up a life for herself away from the plantation, but unlike Jim, she benefits from Carothers' bequeathment. Fonsiba's flight from the plantation is described in "The Bear." On the eve of Fonsiba's embarkment into a new life, an African-American from the North walks onto the plantation one day and informs McCaslin Edmonds and Isaac that he intends to marry Fonsiba. McCaslin's reaction is a line of interrogation whereby he ascertains in brief the man's origins and his intentions regarding Fonsiba. McCaslin learns that the man has land in Arkansas that was awarded to his father for fighting in the United States Army during the Civil War; the gentleman intends to farm there to provide for himself and Fonsiba (262-63). Five months after Fonsiba's departure, Ike, executor of the provision in his grandfather's will and determined to live with a free conscience, travels to Arkansas after tracking down her whereabouts. He takes with him the money which is legally hers, but is only partly successful in accomplishing its delivery. The farm that Ike traces Fonsiba to is a "single log edifice with a clay chimney which seemed in process of being flattened by the rain to a nameless and valueless rubble of dissolution in that

roadless and even pathless waste of unfenced fallow and wilderness jungle—no barn, no stable, not so much as a hen-coop" (265). The man who collects Fonsiba never gives any indication that this is the state of the land he is taking her to; his comportment, described repeatedly by Faulkner as resembling the behavior of a white man (262), implies a success and comfort that is in the end obviously lacking. In this winter-drear and ramshackle dwelling, Ike surprises Fonsiba, "crouched into the wall's angle behind a crude table, the coffee-colored face which he had known all his life but knew no more, the body which had been born within a hundred yards of the room he was born in and in which some of his own blood ran" (265). She mistakes Ike for a white patroller with a weapon, and it is implied by Faulkner that Fonsiba fears harm at the hand of such a patroller (265). Investigating the situation further, Ike finds her husband

sitting there in the only chair in the house, before that miserable fire for which there was not wood sufficient to last twenty-four hours, in the same ministerial clothing in which he had entered the commissary five months ago and a pair of gold-framed spectacles which, when he looked up and then rose to his feet, the boy saw did not even contain lenses, reading a book in the midst of that desolation . . . and over all, permeant, clinging to the man's very clothing and exuding from his skin itself, that rank stink of baseless and imbecile delusion, that boundless rapacity and folly, of the carpetbagger followers of victorious armies. (266)

Fonsiba's flashy husband who initially makes quite an impression with his Northern mannerisms turns out to be more of a deluded actor than an actually prosperous landholder. All that he implies when he tells Ike and McCaslin "I will be good to her" (264) is false when Ike finds her living in a squalid and crudely made log cabin, hunching into a kitchen corner with no fire for warmth or cooking, and hiding in fear of marauding white men from whom he has not offered her any protection—all while he sits relaxedly reading.

On his way out after confronting her husband, Ike asks Fonsiba if she is all right, but she still does not recognize him and says merely "I'm free" in response to his question (268). Fonsiba may have gained freedom when she left the Edmonds plantation with her husband, but her freedom is so abstract as to be

devoid of the trappings of success that her husband implies he is taking her to. Her freedom, then, is very ambiguous, and one wonders whether she has gained anything at all by leaving her family home.

Ike puts her money into a local bank, arranging that three dollars be delivered to her on the 15th of every month—a point in the month after her husband's pension money will have run out (268). Ike thinks that "at least she will not starve" (268). Fonsiba's independence has helped her to make a clean break from the life which she chooses to leave behind on the plantation, but she has not been able to establish herself as independently successful when on her own. As another transitional character in the line of multiracial McCaslins, Fonsiba fails in achieving the free-willed accomplishment that Lucas comes closer to, and that later generations will enjoy. Her attempt at the McCaslin spirit of independence lands her in a liberated but debased position, in abject poverty and fear. Fonsiba has progressed farther than her forebears in that, like Jim, she has at least had the freedom to leave the plantation; but she does not succeed in the end at freeing herself from all of the oppression of her grandfather's legacy of sin.

It is Lucas' pride and dignity that will be the saving grace of Carothers McCaslin's descendants. The addition of Tennie and Turl's obvious love for one another, demonstrated by their determined courtship, tempers Carothers McCaslin's lustful, loveless procreation, and allows the positive aspects of Carothers' willfulness to begin to come to fruition in Lucas; as said before, "instead of being at once the battleground and victim of the two strains, he was a vessel . . . in which the toxin and its anti stalemated one another" (101). Lucas is in possession of the sin of Carothers' actions, the toxin, and he simultaneously possesses the antidote in his parents' loving parentage. The continuation of loving childbearing in conjunction with the continuation of the McCaslin heritage leads to a multiracial McCaslin who is accomplished in the world at large, self-possessed, proud, dignified, and most importantly, confident of herself in any situation.

#### Roth Edmonds' Mistress

The unnamed mistress of Roth Edmonds is the woman in whom Carothers McCaslin's sin brings about its own salvation. She is introduced at almost the end of the novel in the second to last section, "Delta Autumn," when Ike, now in his 70's, is resting in the tent at camp. She enters, looking for Roth, but finds

only Ike. He looks at her, seeing in her "something else, something intangible, an effluvium which he knew he would recognise in a moment" (340), but he cannot place what it is that is different. He gazes at the features of her face, which is "indistinct . . . and with dark eyes, queerly colorless but not ill and not that of a country woman despite the garments she wore" (340). Ike is correct in observing that this mysterious woman is not a backwoods country woman; she is far more sophisticated than that.

After listening to the woman speak for some time, Ike tells her the observations he has made of her: "You sound like you have been to college even. You sound almost like a Northerner even, not like the draggle-tailed women of these Delta peckerwoods" (343). She then explains that her family "lived in Indianapolis then. But I got a job, teaching school here in Aluschaskuna" (343). Ike is correct in all of his observations; Indianapolis is, of course, north of the Mason-Dixon, and, in order to teach, one must have some sort of college education. But this college-educated, Northern-raised career woman has more to reveal than just her academic and work history. The woman describes much of Ike's family history in her conversation with him, but he does not think to question where she came by this information. He assumes that she has knowledge of his family through Roth. The woman describes not only Ike's history, but the history that she shares with him:

His [Roth's] great great . . . great grandfather was your grandfather. McCaslin. Only it got to be Edmonds. Only it got to be more than that. Your cousin McCaslin was there when your father and Uncle Buddy won Tennie from Mr. Beauchamp for the one that had no name but Terrel so you called him Tomey's Terrel, to marry. But after that it got to be Edmonds. (342-43)

After she has called Ike "Uncle Isaac" (341), Buddy, "Uncle Buddy" (342), and Lucas and Mollie "Uncle Lucas and Aunt Mollie" (343), Ike still does not realize that she is not referring to his relatives as his aunts and uncles, but to her own. It suddenly occurs to him what she is in one rush; he looks to her appearance again and he "cried, not loud, in a voice of amazement, pity, and outrage: 'You're a nigger!'" (344). She answers as level-headedly as is expected of this calm, collected, thoughtful young woman, "Yes . . . James Beauchamp—you called him Tennie's Jim though he had a name—was my grandfather. I said you were

Uncle Isaac" (344). This woman is proud enough of her heritage to use her forebears' full and proper names and not the slave corruptions of the names. She is proud enough to insist upon including her grandfather's last name, she is proud enough to even know the whole of her family's history—even its darkest passages—that she might know exactly who she is. And like her Great-Uncle Lucas, she feels no strain between her white and black ancestry. She has made herself an accomplished woman, college educated and gainfully employed, independent enough to travel the country freely, ranging from Indiana to Louisiana to New Mexico and then on to further travels, and she willingly takes on the role of the single mother—a role that requires significant fortitude and courage.

This woman also has her own ideas about her relationships with people, and she is self-reliant enough to act upon her own convictions. She describes her relationship with Roth to Ike as at first occurring only on his hunting trip to the Delta; then, she says that "in January he sent for me and we went West, to New Mexico. We were there six weeks, where I could at least sleep in the same apartment where I cooked for him and looked after his clothes" (341). It appears by these words alone that she is playing the dutiful mulatto mistress—coming when called, acting the loving housewife by ministering to his food and clothing, then leaving when dismissed—but later she explains that she understands the position she puts herself into when she does this, and accepts it as the only way that she can show her love for him. The woman says that he didn't have to promise her marriage to get her to come away with him, that she could make the choice on her own:

I knew what I was doing. I knew that to begin with, long before honor I imagine he called it told him the time had come to tell me in so many words what his code I suppose he would call it would forbid him forever to do. And we agreed. Then we agreed again before he left New Mexico, to make sure. That that would be all of it. (342)

This passage does not describe the relationship between slave and master that Carothers had with his mistress and daughter. This is a description of a sexual relationship that both partners agree to, in which both partners approach each other as equals. The woman chooses of her own volition to become the lover of Roth Edmonds; the choice is not forced upon her.

Like Old Carothers, though, the woman tries to get what she wants and refuses to simply let life happen to her. She decides that she is not satisfied with simply letting go of her relationship with Roth, and she describes the process she goes through to reach that conclusion. While she and Roth are still in New Mexico, after they have agreed not to continue their relationship, she explains that

I wasn't even listening to him anymore by then because by that time it had been a long time since he had had anything else to tell me for me to have to hear. By then I wasn't even listening enough to ask him to please stop talking. I was listening to myself. And I believed it. I must have believed it. I don't see how I could have helped but believe it, because he was gone then as we had agreed, just the money came to the bank in Vicksburg in my name but coming from nobody as we had agreed. (342)

She is trying to talk herself into believing that she and Roth will never see one another again after their trip to New Mexico, but because of her love for him, she cannot allow herself to accept this situation. Unlike the stereotypical mulatto mistress, this woman refuses to fade into the background but instead actively seeks Roth out to draw him back toward her. She says that "I even wrote him last month to make sure again and the letter came back unopened and I was sure" (342). But in truth she still is not sure; she still cannot believe that this will be the end of her love affair with Roth. She describes her actions after the letter is returned to her unopened: "So I left the hospital and rented myself a room to live in until the deer season opened so I could make sure myself and I was waiting beside the road yesterday when your car passed and he saw me and so I was sure" (342). On that occasion, Roth saw her but kept driving on without acknowledging her, evidence of his not wanting further relations with her. But the woman still does not stop there. At the time that she is talking to Ike, she has been brought to the campsite by boat in order to track Roth down, and he has even expected her, though he avoids confrontation with her. Roth leaves her only money, and the message with Uncle Ike, "Tell her No" (339), no token that her love may be reciprocated.

It is only at this point of the third refusal that the woman surrenders. Ike fumes at her, trying to understand what she wants to accomplish at the campsite, and she says simply, "I'm going back North. Back home" (344), in effect saying that she came to try



one last time to win Roth over, but having failed, she is returning home. When James Beauchamp's granddaughter calls the North home, the woman indicates that one branch of Beauchamps has found a way to live freely and successfully in the North—away from the plantation and the legacy of Carothers McCaslin.

And like her grandfather, Jim, the woman is disdainful of McCaslin bribe money. Jim's choice to avoid accepting the monetary legacy Carothers McCaslin left him is carried on in his granddaughter when she displays her refusal of Roth Edmonds' money. When Ike hands the woman an envelope left her by Roth, she ravenously tears into it; Ike watches her

hold it in the one free hand and tear the corner off with her teeth and manage to rip it open and tilt the neat sheaf of bound notes onto the blanket without even glancing at them and look into the empty envelope and take the edge between her teeth and tear it completely open before she crumpled and dropped it. (341)

It is not the money that the young woman seeks; it is a note from Roth, some missive that might give her hope for further contact between them. The young woman refuses to take the money, barely recognizing its existence, until coming to the close of their conversation when Isaac indicates the money: "Now she looked at the money, for the first time, one brief blank glance, then away again. 'I don't need it'" (345). Only when Ike commands her to take it from his tent does she turn back to retrieve it (345). Later, when trying to free her hand to grasp General Compson's hunting horn, she treats the money "as if it were a rag, a soiled handkerchief" (346). What the young woman seeks is Roth Edmonds' love, not his money.

The complication of this proud and dignified young woman is an ambiguity in her nature revealed by her relationship with Roth. When Isaac learns that the woman is a distant relative of both himself and Roth, he also discovers that Roth does not know this. Ike asks her if Roth knows, and she responds, "'What good would that have done?'" (344). Ike is appalled that she would know herself to be related to Roth, know the sordid family history, and still choose to become sexually involved with Roth (344). Ike sees the pattern emerging in his family again, feeling that "this child is the latest fruit of the tragic pattern of

miscegenation and incest" (Longley 100). In the introduction to the book *Critical Essays on William Faulkner: The McCaslin Family*, Arthur Kinney describes the cycle of McCaslin-Edmonds miscegenation and incest as having parallel situations that will converge over time; "these ironic analogies demonstrate that blood will beget blood; they draw an infinite conceptual line that, at the end of the novel, becomes its own circle, its own encircling doom" (37). Although the young woman has the dignity of being the most successfully whole and accomplished person of the multiracial McCaslin characters, she nonetheless acts as another link in the chain. Her choice to become romantically involved with Roth and to bear his child becomes the most recent episode in the McCaslin family annals. In "Repudiation, Wilderness, Birthright: Reconciling Conflicting Views of Faulkner's Ike McCaslin," John Peters describes the nature of the McCaslin family relations: "Carothers McCaslin's incest and miscegenation bring about a curse that continues, undisturbed by Ike's repudiation, through Roth Edmonds' incest and miscegenation—and presumably on into the future as well" (45). The McCaslin family seems fated to reunite eternally in the most unsanctified of unions. Even though the actual blood relationship between Roth and his mistress is quite remote, the symbolic incest of the sexual relations makes not only a parallel to Carothers McCaslin's original act of incest and miscegenation, but also a keen counterpoint. Whereas Carothers' act of consummate lust held no love, Roth's mistress is so in love with him that she will defy her better judgment so that she might be absolutely positive that there is no way to get him back; she leaves no stone unturned in trying to reclaim him for her own, an attestation to the depth of her feeling for him, a depth obviously lacking in Carothers' mercenary relations with his own daughter.

Ike further compounds the ambiguity of the situation when he forces Roth's money onto her—dehumanizing her by coercing her to be bought off by Roth—and when he suggests she return North to marry a black man. Ike rambles uncontrollably, "Go back North. Marry a man in your own race. That's the only salvation for you . . . Marry a black man" (346).

#### Roth Edmonds' Son

Amid the ambiguity of the positive or negative implications of the relationship between Roth and the woman is the young woman's child—Roth's son. The

son can be interpreted as either the hope and salvation of the McCaslin family, or the continuation of the McCaslin family legacy of sin. On the positive side, Ike determines to bestow the symbol of the greatness of the big woods and the greatness of the men who have coexisted happily with the woods—General Compson's hunting horn—upon the child. General Compson's greatness is such that the recipient of this token of himself must be worthy of its receipt, and Ike's transference of the horn to the child is symbolic of his recognition that the child—inheritor of his mother's brass and intelligence—is the most rightful heir of the hunting horn. In "Delta Autumn," Ike brusquely indicates the hunting horn, urging the young woman to take it, but she is already holding the money with her free hand while her other cradles her child. In this situation, Faulkner's juxtaposition of elements highlights the sacredness of General Compson's horn; "She went and got it, thrust the money into the slicker's side pocket as if it were a rag, a soiled handkerchief, and lifted down the horn, the one which General Compson had left him [Ike] in his will, covered with the unbroken skin of a buck's shank and bound with silver" (346). By this action, Ike is passing on the public, acknowledged McCaslin tradition of pride in rugged manhood. In this way, the woman's son becomes the synthesis of McCaslin traditions, the one of incest and miscegenation concealed (and revealed) by money, and the other of the greatness of McCaslin men. The child will not suffer the fate of other multiracial characters that live with the shadow of an unacknowledged lineage. The child inherits with the horn an acknowledgment that he is truly a McCaslin heir.

Some scholars—Eric Sundquist included—view Ike's act of transmission as an action that holds little positive connotation. In his article "The True Inheritance of Isaac McCaslin," Sundquist interprets the action with acknowledgment of its ambiguity: "Ike's gift to her of the hunting horn he has inherited from General Compson accomplishes nothing and seems patently repugnant alongside his advice that she go back North and marry a black man. And yet it is the one symbolic act, the one futile but generous gesture, of which Ike is capable" (155). When Ike tells the woman that he can do nothing for her, he is honest (344), but he can through some slight means try to enhance the life of her son. In *The Tragic Mask* John Longley describes the complexity of the relationship between Ike, the woman, and her son

quite eloquently:

Through whatever distance, the blood that flows in this poised and undaunted young woman and her child is the blood that flows in Isaac McCaslin. The child is the only male in whom the McCaslin blood is carried on. Uncle Ike makes his gesture of positive recognition; even though he angrily orders the young woman to take the money out of his tent, he tells her to take also the silver-mounted hunting horn to keep for her son . . . . Untried and uncertain in his future, the child is nevertheless given the horn, the legacy of old General Compson, the symbolic object from the old times, since he is the only deserving inheritor. (100)

Ike inherently finds a sympathetic kinship with the fatherless infant, thrown to the mercy of an unforgiving legacy of outrage. It is this kinship in conjunction with respect for the free-spoken and self-reliant young woman that leads him to acknowledge his relation to the child by passing on General Compson's hunting horn to him.

The son of Roth and the woman is the final multiracial McCaslin to inherit the McCaslin legacy in this novel. The result of a union of love on the part of the mother, this child is endowed with the potential to become as strong and as complete a human being as his mother. He will probably be as strong-willed as Lucas, as independent as his grandfather, Jim, and as accomplished as his mother. Carothers McCaslin's original sin of miscegenation-without-love is redeemed by his own descendants when they perform his own actions in the spirit of love, and not in the grips of a base lust. In his book *Doubling and Incest/Repetition and Revenge*, John Irwin describes Faulkner's own feelings about the McCaslin family: "in one of his conferences at the University of Virginia, Faulkner was asked if 'the miscegenation and incest of Roth Edmonds in Delta Autumn complete the cycle begun by old McCaslin,' and Faulkner replied, 'Yes, it came home. If that's what you mean by complete a cycle, yes, it did'" (59). Faulkner's response to the question indicates that he felt the actions of Roth and the woman were a sort of Karmic retribution. What Carothers began eventually came back to haunt his progeny, but at the same time, the implications are not quite so negative. What Carothers began, his descendants finished, and they finished it better than Carothers would have. Roth and the woman are a sort

of answer to a riddle begun by old Carothers, an answer which removes the sin from the McCaslin legacy.

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