GO DOWN, MOSES AND
FAULKNER'S MORAL VISION

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to discuss the importance of *Go Down, Moses* in the working out of Faulkner's moral vision. By and large, critics have considered this book to be a central or pivotal work in this process, seeing Ike McCaslin's renunciation as a meaningful response to the curses of slavery and miscegenation which have beset the South for so many generations. Furthermore, some of them point out that Ike's initiation into the primitive simplicity of the wilderness world of Sam Fathers represents a solution for modern man in his own troubled world: somehow to effect a reversion to a simpler world with its concomitant virtues of innocence, humility, and self-sufficiency.

On the whole, these critics have concentrated mainly on "The Bear" section of *Go Down, Moses*, and to a lesser extent on "Delta Autumn" and "The Old People," the three stories in which Ike directly appears. Consequently, their conclusions about Faulkner's moral vision stem almost entirely from their interpretation of Ike's responses to his two legacies, the wilderness world and the plantation world, with relatively little attention being paid to the responses of the other inheritors of the McCaslin curse. Thus, *Go Down, Moses* as a thematically
unified work has been largely neglected, and the experiences of Ike McCaslin have been emphasized at the expense of those of the other inhabitants of the plantation world.

This thesis will pursue the argument that the above interpretation is misleading on several counts, and hence that it is necessary to see the centrality of *Go Down, Moses* in a different perspective. First of all, by examining the nature of the plantation world, we will see that what Ike really repudiated was not just a legal inheritance, but a very real world in which the constituents of a full and meaningful life were everywhere evident. Secondly, it becomes evident in the analysis of Ike's renunciation that his decision meant in effect that he was abdicating his responsibility for developing sound moral and ethical relationships within the world he was born into, and that his obsession with the values of the wilderness world represented living in terms of ritual rather than of reality. In the third place, the responses of the other inhabitants of the plantation world reflect a far more meaningful grasp of both the past and the present than does Ike's, and in the perspective of these people, he suffers a significantly reduced stature. It becomes clear, then, that Faulkner uses Ike's responses to illustrate the futility
of the static idealist rather than the sacrifice of a dedicated and determined reformer. And finally, the evidence in such later novels as *Intruder in the Dust*, *A Fable*, and *The Reivers*, as well as in Faulkner's own public utterances in the Nobel Prize Speech, at the University of Virginia, and at Nagano, indicates clearly how far man must progress beyond the idealism of the Ike McCaslins of the world in order to make an effective contribution to the moral and ethical status of his society.

This thesis does not dispute the fact that "The Bear" is the key work in *Go Down, Moses*, nor that Ike is a central figure, but it does maintain that their significance can be determined only by a close examination of the work as a whole. Such an examination will clearly reveal Faulkner's larger concern: that man must respond to his world as he finds it, whether that world is the wilderness, the plantation, or the modern world, and that the decisions he makes must be based on the realities of the world he has inherited. Within this perspective, it is evident that the responses of the Edmondses, the Beauchamps, and the miscellaneous inhabitants of the McCaslin plantation world must be carefully analyzed, for only against the tangible exigencies of the day-to-day lives of these people can the actions of Ike be properly assessed.
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INTRODUCTION

Go Down, Moses was first published in 1942 under the title Go Down, Moses and Other Stories, but the second and third printings of this edition, and the 1955 Modern Library edition, all appeared under the shorter title form. This change in title, as James B. Meriwether points out, indicates that Faulkner was concerned with emphasizing the unity of the seven stories contained in the work, a unity which, as will be shown, is of prime significance in the discussion of this book as a key work in the expression of Faulkner's moral vision. From the outset, critics have expressed differing opinions on the question of this unity, but Faulkner himself, in his University of Virginia lectures, stressed that it was a novel which "happened to be composed of more or less complete stories, but... held together by one family, the Negro and the white phase of the same family." On the whole, recent critics have tended to discuss it in terms of some unifying element, such as the Negro-white relationship, the plantation world, or primitivism, as opposed to the earlier critics, who appeared to be somewhat baffled by the more obscure sections of the book.
Of the seven stories contained in this work, only the opening selection, "Was," had never before been published. The second story, "The Fire and the Hearth," incorporated the extensive revisions of two earlier stories, "Gold is Not Always" from the Atlantic Monthly of November, 1940, and "A Point of Law" from the June 22, 1940 issue of Colliers. The third story, "Pantaloone in Black," is a slightly revised version of the original published in Harper's in October, 1940, while the fourth selection, "The Old People," similarly represents a slight revision of the version published in the September, 1940 issue of Harper's. The fifth and central story, "The Bear," incorporates substantial revisions of two earlier stories, "Lion" from Harper's of December, 1935, and "The Bear" from Saturday Evening Post of May 9, 1942. The last two stories in the book, "Delta Autumn" and "Go Down, Moses," were originally published in Story (May-June, 1942) and Colliers (January 25, 1941) respectively, and were slightly revised for inclusion in this work.

From this brief summary, it can be seen that Go Down, Moses represents some seven years of writing and revision on the part of Faulkner. It is important to remember, too, that this seven-year period saw the publication of three other major Yoknapatawpha novels, Absalom, Absalom! in 1936, The Unvanquished in 1938, and The Hamlet in 1940, as well as one
minor novel, *The Wild Palms*, in 1939. It seems, therefore, that Faulkner's arrival at a moral turning point was not the product of a deliberately conceived process or of any sudden revelation, but rather that it evolved from a protracted and often torturous experimentation with the facts of his experience.

What this thesis will attempt to show is that *Go Down, Moses* represents a critical point in the formulation of Faulkner's moral vision, but it will pursue this theme from a different perspective from that generally held by critics. It will develop the premise that the work as a unified whole, rather than just "The Bear," marks this turning point in Faulkner's position, and that it dramatizes this shift not, as is widely accepted, through the life of Isaac McCaslin, but rather by the juxtaposition of his renunciation and its effects against the actions and achievements of some of the other plantation inhabitants. This thesis does not dispute the fact that Ike is a major character, nor that "The Bear" is a central episode of *Go Down, Moses*, but it will attempt to demonstrate that Faulkner uses Ike in a sort of inverse manner to illustrate how a moral stasis can develop from a failure to understand the real significance of one's heritage, and how the assumption of an ostensibly pure moral pose represented in effect Ike's abdication of his responsibility for the human condition. Central to the burden of this thesis,
therefore, is a discussion of Ike's renunciation, not in terms of its being a morally positive act, but in terms of how it measures up against the realities of the plantation world as they are faced up to by a variety of individuals, major or minor, Negro or white. For the response of each of these characters to his own particular reality defines in a very real way his own moral stature, and the sum of these responses becomes a key factor in determining the true nature of Faulkner's moral vision. In this thesis, therefore, the moral unity of *Go Down, Moses* will be an important assumption, and the bases of such unity can be understood by an examination of the major related strands which run through the seven episodes of this work.

Underlying all the other unifying elements is a tension which exists between the various inhabitants of the McCaslin plantation world, and which manifests itself with varying degrees of intensity in the different episodes. This tension is most clearly and most significantly formulated in the relationships between the whites and the Negroes, but of considerable importance, too, is that existing between certain individuals of the same race or even of the same family. Sometimes this tension is superficial in nature and by and large is resolved in a somewhat comic fashion, such as that existing between the McCaslin twins and the two
Beauchamps, or between Lucas Beauchamp and his "jimber-jawed" son-in-law, George Wilkins. At other times, it lies more firmly embedded in the situation, even though it manifests itself in an essentially comical light, like that which exists between Tennie and Turl on the one hand, and their respective owners on the other, or between Boon Hogganbeck and the various representatives of the mechanized civilization he encounters on his whiskey-buying trip to Memphis. Most frequently, perhaps, it reflects what amounts to a virtual inability to communicate with one another because of some character flaw, such as pride, insensitivity, or the unwillingness to face reality. It is such a tension which separates Rider from his community, both white and black, Ike from his wife and to a lesser extent from Cass, and Roth Edmonds from almost everybody. But whatever the nature of this tension, it underlies all the relationships within the plantation world, and it had its origins ultimately in the order established by old Carothers McCaslin.

Specifically, this tension manifests itself in a number of recurring experiences—marriage, initiation, death, hunting, renunciation, and reconciliation—and in the various rituals which attend some of these experiences. The structure of _Go Down, Moses_ resolves this complexity of strands into two basic patterns which are juxtaposed against one another in two groups of three stories each, with the final story
providing a synthesizing effect. Though a certain amount of overlapping occurs, the first three stories—"Was," "The Fire and the Hearth," and "Pantaloons in Black"—are concerned generally with Negro marriage and a pursuit of some sort, while the next three—"The Old People," "The Bear," and "Delta Autumn"—deal mainly with bachelorhood and the hunt. In the seventh story—"Go Down, Moses"—there is a final reconciliation or acceptance of the consequences of all the previous experiences, in the form of the community—both Negro and white—banding together to pay its special type of homage to one of the least of the McCaslin descendants, thereby not only bringing peace to the victim's grandmother, Molly Beauchamp, but in a sense bestowing a sort of ultimate justification upon the order established by old Carothers.

Throughout these stories, the various experiences and rituals are presented in such a manner that the comic view of life is set off against the serious or the tragic, so that we get a number of points of view from which to judge the plantation world. For example, the pursuit in "Was" represents a farcical reversal of a number of situations; depending on what is at stake, the pursuer becomes the pursued, the pursued becomes the pursuer, and at all times, the runaway slave is in complete control of his pursuers,
whether man or hound. In other words, this story provides a comic perspective of the plantation world in which slavery, freedom, and marriage are all mixed up, with the distinction between them being determined mainly by the way one manipulates the circumstances. The perspective provided by the pursuit in "Pantaloon in Black," on the other hand, is grim and tragic, for it represents an antagonism which lies deeper than the racial issue. It stems, it seems to me, from a hostility engendered whenever a community fails to understand unusual or erratic behaviour, or whenever it experiences an uneasiness in the face of a human grief it does not comprehend. So Rider was pursued on the one hand because he was a Negro who had murdered a white man; but the real exasperation of the community arose from his irrational behaviour—he failed to act the way a Negro should act. In the scope provided by Go Down, Moses, then, Rider's dilemma represents the basic insensitivity and inhumanity separating man from man, regardless of race or social order, and his pursuit is a grim dramatization of this condition.

The marriage relationships in these stories, too, provide a significant comment on the various responses to the realities of the plantation world. The attempted repudiation of marriage in "Was" is effectively counter-poised by the fine and dignified relationship between Lucas and Molly Beauchamp in "The Fire and the Hearth," and by the incredible
purity and intensity of Rider's and Mannie's tragically brief marriage in "Pantaloon in Black." All these relationships establish a basis against which we can measure the consequences of Ike's only partially-consummated marriage, and of bachelorhood in general, as revealed in the three succeeding stories. In "The Old People," Faulkner speaks of these consequences in terms of extinction of a race, "now drawing toward the end of its alien and irrevocable course, barren, since Sam Fathers had no children." Bachelorhood is in effect, then, an abdication of one's responsibility for the human race, though I feel that Sam Fathers can be exonerated from this charge on the basis that he chose to live outside of society and to die when he saw the inevitable passing of his wilderness order. But Roth Edmonds, for his failure to assume responsibility for his illegitimate child, and Ike McCaslin, for failing to accept reality in such a way that he could have children, both stand guilty of this betrayal. As we will see in Chapter IV, it is this attitude towards marriage and other human relationships which defines an individual's moral stature, and it is by examining the different responses of the plantation inhabitants towards these questions that we can in large measure determine the nature of Faulkner's moral vision.
Interwoven into these two basic patterns in Go Down, Moses is the ritual of initiation, a ritual which takes on a great deal of importance as the story of Ike's renunciation unfolds. In "Was" it is Cass who is initiated into the intricacies of the plantation world, and in "The Old People" Ike is received into the ways of the wilderness world. These separate backgrounds, as we shall see, take on a decisive significance in the fourth section of "The Bear," where Ike and Cass dispute over the relinquishment of the plantation, for in effect, Ike continues to live in the realm of wilderness ritual even after the disappearance of the order which gave rise to it in the first place.

Finally, the elements of renunciation and reconciliation link these episodes together, and provide yet another means of assessing the individual's responses to his world. By and large, it appears that Faulkner regards renunciation in Go Down, Moses as a negative response, except where it effects a meaningful reconciliation with the forces of reality. Lucas Beauchamp's relinquishment of his quest for sudden wealth, for example, is a positive act because it strengthens the existence of a more enduring reality--his relationship with his wife. The attempted repudiation of both the Negro and marriage in the story "Was" also illustrates a negative response to the world, for it is motivated by a force which is basically inhuman and which cannot endure
in the face of the unfettered spirit directing Turl in his cause. Thus it is too with those who directly inherit the plantation world, either as a legal inheritance, as in the case of Ike, or simply as an environment for life, as with Lucas, Tennie's Jim, and Fonsiba. Of these four, only Lucas refuses to relinquish, and it seems to me that he is the only one who ultimately finds some sort of freedom and reconciliation with his world. These strains will be developed fully in Chapter IV of this thesis, where Ike's renunciation will be examined closely in contrast to all these other responses.

In this thesis, then, we shall be able to see that the nature of Faulkner's moral vision can be determined by studying closely his presentation of the various characters who inhabit the plantation world. The emphasis throughout will be on Ike's relationships within human society, and it will be evident therefore that there is a relative neglect of the wilderness episodes in his life. My intention is not to minimize the importance of these experiences in the development of Ike's skills and character, but simply to emphasize what I consider to be Faulkner's major premise in *Go Down, Moses*—that a meaningful moral stature must evolve from one's relationships within the world of man, and that a moral position which denies the human bond is essentially unrealistic and vulnerable. This is why section
four of "The Bear" takes on a special significance in this work, for in it the various worlds of Ike McCaslin all come together—the pure wilderness world which lies outside of man, the tainted plantation world, which really represents the accumulation of man's transgressions and achievements and which is therefore every man's inheritance, and the real world of Ike's day-to-day existence. But if we judge Ike's renunciation only against the hunting sections of "The Bear," we receive, I feel, a distorted impression of his action, for we are undoubtedly influenced by the strong discrepancy which exists between the taints of the McCaslin order and the purity of the wilderness order. For certainly in the hunting sections there are episodes of unforgettable intensity and humor—Ike's first glimpse of Old Ben, Sam's training of the mongrel, Lion, or Ike's and Boon's trip to Memphis to buy whiskey—and on the whole, Ike's capitulation to the wilderness is presented with great skill and sensitivity. But what we might overlook if we limit ourselves to "The Bear" is that neither of these worlds—the tainted one of old Carothers or the innocent one of Old Ben—really exists any more, except in Ike's mind. The only world that does exist for him is the one that he had already inherited by being born into it, and which he was to inherit in a legal sense simply to emphasize his responsibility for the human condition within that world. The importance of the other sections
of *Go Down, Moses* lies in their presentation of the various facets of this world, and therefore in their providing of a genuine and realistic order against which to measure Ike's renunciation. Indeed, it is only against the decisive actions of such characters as Rider, the girl in "Delta Autumn," or Lucas and Molly Beauchamp, that Ike's actions can properly be judged. It is one of my main contentions in this thesis, therefore, that while "The Bear" is a key episode, it cannot stand by itself in a working out of Faulkner's moral vision, for it takes on a significantly different interpretation when studied in relation to the other stories.

It was long ago pointed out by Malcolm Cowley—and Faulkner himself has emphasized this point—that one version of "The Bear" can be read as a superb hunting story by omitting the long and complex section four. But for an understanding of Faulkner's moral vision, this section is of central importance, for it synthesizes all the thematic variations which recur throughout *Go Down, Moses*, and specifically it provides, in its juxtaposition of fragments from both the wilderness and the plantation world, a basis for understanding Ike's dilemma, and also, through the arguments of Cass, a means of recognizing the essential weaknesses of his position. This section reveals clearly, I think, that if Faulkner does have a moral spokesman, it is Cass rather than Ike, though I am aware of the problems of
assigning any Faulkner character this role, and it is not my intention to pursue this point very far. It is necessary, however, to clear up the ambiguity which surrounds Ike as a major Faulkner figure, for he seems to represent a division within Faulkner himself as to what values are of lasting significance. This dichotomy is most apparent in "The Bear," and the real value of the fourth section in this regard is that it reveals a side of Ike not brought out in the other four parts. The resolution of this dichotomy, as we shall see in Chapter IV, is in line with what Faulkner has consistently upheld as the basis for a meaningful moral vision—the ability and willingness to act in light of existing conditions. I think he shows us in "The Bear" that Ike had this talent in the wilderness world, but, unlike Cass and others, he did not have it in the plantation world—the world of man, and in that respect, he ceased to represent Faulkner's position.

As the next chapter will indicate, just how Faulkner's moral position can be interpreted has been the subject of a great deal of critical speculation. Most of the pronouncements on this question have relied chiefly on "The Bear" for support, even when the critic ostensibly was concerned with Go Down, Moses, and, indeed, very little has been said about the moral unity of the work as a whole.
My purpose in this thesis is not to put a label on Faulkner's moral vision, as many of these critics have done, nor is it to discredit the interpretations which have been offered. But it will be necessary to examine these pronouncements in considerable detail in order to appreciate their limitations when they are applied to the work as a unified whole.
Footnotes to Chapter I


2 Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner, eds., Faulkner in the University: Class Conferences at the University of Virginia 1957-58. (Charlottesville, 1959), p. 4. (Hereafter cited as Faulkner in the University).


5 Faulkner in the University, p. 273.
II

SUMMARY OF CRITICAL OPINION

As indicated earlier, most critics, in discussing this novel in terms of Faulkner's moral vision, have been concerned mainly with "The Bear" and with Ike McCaslin's responses to his various experiences. On the whole, their analyses of Go Down, Moses as a novel have been limited to discussing the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of various structurally unifying elements, with relatively little attention being paid to the thematic unity as manifested in an underlying moral vision. This neglect stems in part, I think, from the early tendency to read the work as a collection of short stories rather than as a novel; but I feel that it is also due in some measure to the propensity to interpret Ike McCaslin as a spokesman for Faulkner, and therefore to concentrate on those portions of the book devoted to him. This second tendency became most marked, it appears, after Faulkner's Nobel Prize speech in 1950, which had the effect of setting critics off in a flurry to find fictional pronouncements to match his public utterances. And Ike illustrated, in his actions and words, enough of the virtues of endurance and self-sacrifice to
make the relationship between himself and the public Faulkner for many critics a fairly obvious one. At any rate, discussions of Go Down, Moses in terms of moral vision have been rare. For example, of the twenty-three essays included in William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism, none is devoted to this consideration, although one of them specifically deals with "The Bear," while another refers briefly to the same story in its discussion of the wilderness and civilization theme.

It is true, of course, that Go Down, Moses has been viewed as a turning point in the development of Faulkner's moral vision, but almost always the support for such assertions has come from "The Bear" rather than from the work as a whole. For example, R.W.B. Lewis, in his essay, "The Hero in the Modern World," states:

If... the novels and stories preceding Go Down, Moses possess an atmosphere like that of the Old Testament, then "The Bear" may be regarded as Faulkner's first sustained venture towards the more hopeful and liberated world after the Incarnation...

And in much the same vein, William Van O'Connor states that "Go Down, Moses marks a profound shift in his work," although he goes on to discuss the novel in terms of conflicting themes, with the role of "The Bear" as a synthesizing force:
The theme implicit in the sections devoted to Lucas Beauchamp is white injustice to the Negro, and the theme implicit in those devoted to Isaac is the nobility of character to be learned from life in the wilderness. In "The Bear" Faulkner attempts to bring the two subject matters and therefore the two themes together, with the wilderness theme dominating.  

Lawrence Thompson agrees with O'Connor on the synthesizing effect of "The Bear," although he narrows it down even further than this. "It would seem clear," he states, "that the commissary episode [section IV] was designed to make 'The Bear' thematically integrated with other parts of Go Down, Moses." And finally, Irving Howe sees the moral vision of Go Down, Moses in terms mainly of "The Bear," but also of the other stories about Isaac:

Isaac McCaslin's recognition of the wrong and shame that corrupt his inheritance is the central moral action of Go Down, Moses, primarily in the superb story, "The Bear," and then, by way of confirming postscript, in the fine story "Delta Autumn."

It is evident, therefore, that the novel as a whole has been neglected, and it is my contention that many of the critical judgments passed on "The Bear" and other McCaslin stories must be modified considerably when they are applied to Go Down, Moses as a thematically unified work. Before going into these considerations, however, it is necessary to examine in more detail the criticism which has been pronounced upon this work.
Though there is a certain amount of overlapping, such criticism falls fairly conveniently into three categories. First, there is that which analyzes the work in terms of a conflict between primitivism and modernism; secondly, there is the interpretation of it as a Christian vision of life; and lastly, there is the interpretation which sees it in humanistic terms. These categories are not mutually exclusive, of course, nor are they exhaustive, but they cover the general nature of the chief criticism arising from this book.

Chief among the proponents of the primitive approach are Harry M. Campbell and Ruel E. Foster, who feel that the main pattern in *Go Down, Moses* is one of regression to a culture dominated by the Indian and the Negro. They first propound a statement of their main thesis:

> It becomes increasingly evident in his later books that Faulkner is implicitly setting up a scale of values in which people who follow the simple, primal drive of primitive societal life are more likely to survive than those people who have been corrupted by the false and debilitating stimuli of modern society.

and they then apply this generalization to the book:

> In *Go Down, Moses*, it is first Sam Fathers and then Ike McCaslin who oppose a simple, nomadic, primitive life to the encroaching forces of civilization and emerge, if not completely victorious, at least undefeated and "enduring"...9

But it is "The Bear" rather than the whole work that they
see most clearly in primitivistic terms:

In terms of allegory, this story might be interpreted thus. It would seem that there are two worlds: the primitive world of the old free fathers... the wilderness and the animals... and the men who live by and in and through the wilderness; and the civilized world of contemporary man who has insulated himself against the primitive world.10

Campbell and Foster contend that the primitivistic approach enables Faulkner to create a broader fictional world, and thus to bring the reader into contact with a cultural and psychological type that the modern world has rendered virtually extinct. It is in these terms that they see Ike, for they argue that his whole development, from his initial responses to his world to his mature and prolonged life of self-sacrifice, has been along primitivistic lines:

It is to the enduring and noble aspects of nature and of men close to nature like Sam Fathers, not to the ante-bellum aristocracy or their descendants, that Isaac turns for inspiration... Nor is there any indication that Faulkner finds in religion any satisfactory solution of the problem of evil. Even Ike's "redemption" through a life of "atonement" for the sins of his ancestors is apparently a stoical, humanistic, and primitivistic accomplishment, to which these religious metaphors can be applied only because his moral principles and those of Christianity are both on a high plane of sacrificial goodness.11

While Campbell and Foster have been the most consistent exponents of the primitivistic approach, both William Van O'Connor and John Lewis Longley also read the novel, at least in part, in these same terms. O'Connor interprets "The Bear" in much the same way as Campbell and Foster:
This in general is the meaning of the story—Old Ben is the wilderness, the mystery of man's nature and origins beneath the forms of civilization; and man's proper relationship with the wilderness teaches him liberty, courage, pride and humility. But, unlike them, he does not see the benefits of the wilderness as having a particularly marked effect upon Ike:

Ike never seems a particularly good representative of the virtues to be learned from the wilderness because he is ineffectual or inactive in contexts where the virtues he has learned in the wilderness, particularly the respect for liberty, might motivate him to some positive action.

This point I intend to discuss at much length in Chapter IV, for it represents an observation which is central to my reading of the whole book; but at this point I simply wish to summarize the main critical judgments passed on this book. For the moment, therefore, O'Connor's statement serves simply to indicate that critics who agree, on the one hand, that Faulkner reveals a primitivistic outlook in "The Bear," are nevertheless far from agreement as to the exact values he is expounding through this philosophy.

Longley's reading of "The Bear" is that primitivism is "one of the most persistent" of the many themes inherent in this story. He describes it in terms of "the pristine innocence being destroyed by the march of progress and the disappearance of the frontier." Like Campbell and Foster, he stresses the psychological basis of a primitivistic vision of morality:
The Wilderness life—no matter how primitive or open or free—is in essence a life or morality based on an interior and private awareness and belonging....

Longley sees Ike, in effect, in a constant state of adjustment, "attempting to live this code of the Wilderness... in the world... of materialism and mendacity."

In my opinion, the most erroneous of the criticisms which have interpreted "The Bear" as an expression of a primitivist vision of life is that of Kenneth LaBudde, as expressed in an article written in 1950. The concluding paragraph of this article reads in part as follows:

In Part IV we realize "The Bear" is an affirmation of primitivism. Civilization is evil. ("This whole land, the whole South is cursed, and all of us who derive from it.") The only means of salvation is to sweep all this man-made structure away so that man will hold "the earth mutual and intact in the communal anonymity of brotherhood.".... Sam is a noble savage, and it is from him that Ike learned wisdom. Ike learned about God in the wilderness.... Wisdom is achieved by intuition schooled by nature rather than by reason fashioned according to the ways of men.

Mr. LaBudde is guilty of many fallacies here, but the most serious error is his vast over-simplification of the highly complex issues contained in "The Bear," which appears to me to be based on a misreading of some of the other parts of Go Down, Moses. For example, it is difficult to see how a careful reading of "Delta Autumn" could produce the interpretation of "wisdom" which is contained in the last sentence of the above quotation. These and other fallacies of this sort will receive further consideration in the chapter.
devoted to a close analysis of *Go Down, Moses*, where it will be shown that attempts to read this story—or the work as a whole—in rigidly exclusive terms distort or abort the many legitimate ideas inherent in it.

The second main category of criticism of *Go Down, Moses* or its separate parts is that which views the work as a Christian or religious vision of life. Critics who have persistently read Faulkner in Christian terms have never been in short supply, and, by and large, *Go Down, Moses* has received a fair share of their pronouncements. But again, as with the exponents of primitivism, these critics concern themselves mainly with "The Bear," and tend to see Ike, if not as an actual Christ figure, at least as a saintly person with a great number of Christ-like attributes. Equally popular is the tendency to treat the primitive wilderness in religious terms, in which scheme Sam Fathers becomes the high priest, Boon Hogganbeck the acolyte, and Ike the novitiate, who is "formally consecrated" into the wilderness reigned over by the godhead, Old Ben.

The keynote of this religious interpretation is struck by H.H. Waggoner, who states that "the meanings of Faulkner's fiction are for the most part basically consistent with the broad outlines of the classic Christian view of man and the world." In more specific terms, he goes on:
Beginning with "The Bear" Faulkner's work is characterized by its repeated attempts to restate for modern man what Faulkner takes to be the essential meaning of the Christian myth.... The fundamental assumption that shapes many of Faulkner's works of the forties and fifties is that the dogmas of the Christian creeds are at once figurative and profoundly true.

In the "Preface" to his book, Waggoner speaks of Faulkner's "uneasy relation to his Christian background," and later elaborates on this statement by observing that there seems to be a certain inconsistency between Faulkner's public and fictional statements. "The main drift of Faulkner's [public] statements," he explains, "has been essentially humanistic,... but the finest works of his imagination have presented the issues of life in traditional religious terms." This putative dichotomy has troubled other critics besides Waggoner, who in many cases have revealed a rather patronizing attitude towards the public Faulkner, suggesting that somehow his formal pronouncements do not really represent his true ideas. Howe, for example, pronounces as follows upon this question:

Too complacent in their weariness, Faulkner's stoical pronouncements often seem unearned, statements drawn from other books and voices rather than authentic to his own.

Of this whole question, more will be said in Chapter V, where Faulkner's Nobel Prize speech and other public statements will be examined in relation to his moral vision. But I think it is essential to stress the point that there is
not such a discrepancy between the substance of his public utterances and the themes implicit in his novels as many of these critics have maintained. As we will see, the voice in both these media is authentically Faulkner's own; he has simply chosen two different ways of expressing a truth of the human condition as he sees it.

Another critic who sees *Go Down, Moses* in religious terms is R.W.B. Lewis who, in the essay referred to earlier in this chapter, describes "The Bear" thus:

"The Bear" is a canticle or chant relating the birth, the baptism and the early trials of Isaac McCaslin; it is ceremonious in style, and it is not lacking in dimly seen miraculous events. We get moreover an incarnation, if not the Incarnation: or at least we get a reincarnation; and we witness an act of atonement which may conceivably flower into a redemption.23

More specifically, he sees the first half of the story as "the ritual by participation in which... McCaslin becomes reborn and baptized, receives the sacramental blessing and accomplishes his moral liberation...., [while] the rest of the book tells us how a properly baptized and educated hero may act when confronted with evil."24 It is not clear whether Lewis is referring only to "The Bear" when he speaks of "the rest of the book"; if he is, then his interpretation of Ike, it seems to me, is based on incomplete evidence. If, on the other hand, he includes the rest of *Go Down, Moses*, then it is difficult to accept the latter part of his statement in light of Ike's reactions to the reality he
faces in "Delta Autumn." Lewis speaks of the religious element involved in the vision Ike receives as his two experiences come into conjunction—his initiation into the wilderness (i.e., his birth), and his awareness of the evil in the world. "Only a person adequately baptized," he maintains, "is capable of having the vision at all; and only the grace bestowed at the baptism enables the initiate to withstand the evil when it is encountered."  

There remain for brief discussion two other critics who, while they see Faulkner's vision partially in religious terms, nevertheless are not so rigidly committed to this interpretation as is Lewis. Cleanth Brooks in his recent book on Faulkner states, "There is in the account of the McCaslins a deeply religious element in Isaac's attempt at expiation for the family's guilt and his vow of renunciation...," and Irving Howe contends that "at least intermittently Faulkner seems to believe very deeply in the intrinsic value and ultimate efficacy of passive suffering." However, neither Brooks nor Howe interprets Faulkner as a traditional or a consistent Christian; Brooks, for example, feels that while Ike's acknowledgement of evil is a Christian manifestation, his subsequent attempts to atone for it represent Stoicism, not Christianity. And Howe concedes only that one of the sources of Faulkner's moral vision is "an imperiled version of Christianity," imperiled because, like other forces or institutions of the
South, it has gone through a process of decay. The tendency
to qualify one’s assertion of Faulkner as a Christian
moralist is perhaps best illustrated in a quotation from
H.H. Waggoner, a critic already quoted earlier:

Clearly, Faulkner’s definition of Christianity as
simply a moral code is not an adequate statement of
his position. He takes credal Christianity, appar­
etly, as unhistorical myth containing profound and
redemptive moral and psychological truth which he
has undertaken to reinterpret in modern terms. 30

The third general interpretation of Go Down, Moses--
the humanistic approach--is perhaps an attempt to arrive
at such an "adequate statement of his position," an
approach that is clearly represented by Neal Woodruff, Jr.,
in an essay entitled, "'The Bear' and Faulkner's Moral
Vision." Here he challenges the often expressed view that
"The Bear" represents a transition from the "Old Testament
gloom" of the early works to the "New Testament light" of
his later novels, by his positively stated assertion that
"Faulkner's moral vision... clearly invites formulation
in humanistic, not religious terms...." 31 He elaborates
with reference to "The Bear":

"The Bear" expresses more plainly than any other
work the humanistic values consistent throughout
his work--values clearly implicit in the best
short stories and the great novels of 1929 to
1940, and more explicit, though often less clear,
in the novels published since 1948. 32

What change is apparent in novels subsequent to Go Down,
Moses, he contends, is not so much a shift in values as it
is in aesthetic technique, "a change from the dramatic and
implicit to the rhetorical and explicit." Woodruff readily concedes that there is a strong parallel between the Christian and humanistic values in Faulkner's fiction, and he attempts to indicate why he adopts the humanist approach:

His fiction, it must be granted, is often ambiguous in the values it expresses; no perversity is required to decide that they are Christian values, for it is at least plain that they are consistent with Christian values. The Christian motifs and Biblical analogies, however—both covert and overt, early and late—seem to me to parallel a humanistic vision, to illuminate and reinforce it, but not to transform it into a Christian account of man. They are a part of the structure of the individual works, but they do not determine the essential burden of the work as a whole.

He proceeds to show that many of the ceremonies that Ike undergoes in the wilderness are like religious rituals, but they represent in fact a literal apprenticeship and not some allegorical experience. What Woodruff is implying here, I think, is that Faulkner builds his moral vision in the first instance on a literal reality, and not on some religious or cultural abstraction. It was the reality of Old Ben and the wilderness, for example, and not some myth about them, which evoked in Faulkner whatever ideas he may later have worked into his moral vision.

The difficulty many readers experience in trying to resolve the apparent paradoxes in Faulkner's moral position is in part explained away by the last of the critics I wish
to consider in this survey, Lawrance Thompson. While conceding that inconsistencies do exist in Faulkner's themes and techniques, he has this to say about his moral vision:

There is no actual paradox or inconsistency in his position: His intricate rearrangements and adaptations have provided him with a firm theistic base for one foot, and a firm humanistic base for the other foot. His reason for keeping the greater part of his weight on the humanistic base should... be clear. He sees a mistake in man's tendency to reduce his own need for endeavor, and to alleviate his own responsibilities, by appealing to God for help. He also sees a mistake in man's consequent tendency to hold God responsible, sooner or later, for man's own failures.

The arguments put forth by Thompson are clearly relevant to events in *Go Down, Moses*, though he offers them as a comment on Faulkner's works in general. But, as we shall subsequently see, it is the "need for endeavor" which Ike fails to recognize, and the acceptance of responsibilities which so strongly distinguishes many of the other significant characters in the novel. Like Woodruff, Thompson argues that Faulkner's moral vision is based solidly on the reality of the world around him, that it is, in effect, synonymous with the "truth" one perceives in his world:

"Truth" is the quality of being in accordance with those facts or realities of experience which have thus far enabled man to achieve and preserve his "immortality." Thus the human perception of "truth" is the conscientious awareness of the individual, and then of the social group, concerning that which must be done to assert and thus renew the viability of valid and constructive human experience.
In this chapter, I have been concerned with providing a summary of the major categories of criticism directed against *Go Down, Moses* or its separate parts, in so far as this criticism gives an interpretation of Faulkner's moral vision as it finds expression in this work. It is possible, as we have seen, to make a fairly strong case for each of the three interpretations—primitivistic, Christian, or humanistic—but, as is true of so many cases where multiple interpretations exist, the "correct" one is likely to be a combination of all three. Though it is not my primary intention or desire in this thesis to uphold consciously any one of these interpretations, my main arguments throughout will appear to have a humanistic basis. In effect, I am generally discarding both the primitivistic and the Christian bases of interpretation, and I do this on the evidence provided by other pronouncements made by Faulkner, both fictional and public, as well as, of course, my own reading of *Go Down, Moses*. For example, my reading of his "Wilderness" stories does not uncover sufficient evidence that either the individual or the community depicted therein exemplifies a moral stature or a moral potential that Faulkner would advocate. Similarly, my general rejection of the Christian interpretation stems in part from my reading of Faulkner's public statements, which I feel are secular or humanistic and not religious utterances, and in part from my belief that his dependence in many of his fictional works on
Christian and Biblical allusion is a question of technique more than of theme. The humanistic interpretation, on the other hand, does not give rise to these inconsistencies when other statements of Faulkner's position are applied to it. And more important, in terms of this thesis, it is reinforced by all the sections of Go Down, Moses, whereas the other two interpretations lose a great deal of their applicability when they are removed from the context of the McCaslin stories.

This thesis will proceed, therefore, on the premise that Faulkner's moral vision is essentially a humanistic one, whether I explicitly use that term or not, but its main purpose will be to examine the position that Go Down, Moses occupies in the development of that vision. This process involves several important steps. In the first place, we must examine carefully the text itself to decide on such questions as the nature of the plantation world which Ike declined to inherit, the exact nature of Ike's renunciation—that is, its causes, its manifestations, and its effects—and the significance of the difference between his response and the responses of the other inheritors of the McCaslin legacy. Secondly, we must determine how the vision which emerges from all this stands in relation to the position that Faulkner has expressed subsequent to Go Down, Moses. And finally, we must
formulate some conclusions about the significance of this work in Faulkner's moral development. The remaining chapters of this thesis will be given over to these questions.
Footnotes to Chapter II


5 O'Connor, p. 323.


9 Ibid., p. 144.

10 Ibid., p. 147.

11 Ibid., p. 163.

12 O'Connor, p. 325.

13 Ibid., p. 329.


15 Ibid., p. 81.

16 Ibid.


19 Ibid., p. 246.

20 Ibid., p. vi.

21 Ibid., p. 240.

22 Howe, p. 146.

23 Lewis, pp. 332-333.

24 Ibid., pp. 334-335.


27 Howe, p. 96.

28 Brooks, p. 373.

29 Howe, p. 148.

30 Waggoner, p. 248.


32 Ibid., p. 45.

33 Ibid., p. 44.

34 Ibid.

35 Thompson, p. 175.

36 Ibid., p. 174.
Olga Vickery has correctly noted that one of the structurally unifying features of Go Down, Moses is that all the stories are "related through their connection with the plantation." On the whole, however, the plantation world in its many manifestations has received relatively little attention in the discussions of the moral significance of this work, except for the frequent observation that it was something that Ike repudiated. It will be profitable, I think, to examine the various facets of this world carefully, to see just what it was that he did relinquish, and thus to be better equipped to judge the value of his repudiation.

It is important to note at the outset that I am making a distinction between the plantation as a legal property and the plantation as a more or less self-contained world. In the first case, it was something formulated and circumscribed by old Carothers McCaslin and passed down through his sons and Ike to various members of the Edmonds family; that is, it was a legacy involving relatively few people. But as a world or a framework for
life, it was, like the earth, "no man's but all men's, as light and air and weather were," (GDM, p. 3), in that its dimensions impinged upon the lives of many: black or white, slave or master, sharecropper or millworker, with much the same consistency. In his well-known book about the South, W.J. Cash provides some illuminating comments on the nature of this plantation world, pointing out, among other things, that a strong trait of individualism characterized the inhabitants of this world, from the planter down to the poor whites. In this respect, Cash points out, the plantation system preserved and perpetuated the frontier conditions which fostered individualism in the first place.²

He comments further:

Again, the plantation system tended to find its center in itself: to be an independent social unit, a self-contained and largely self-sufficient little world of its own.... And what is true of the planter is true also... for the poorer whites under this plantation order. The farmers and crackers were in their own way self-sufficient too—as fiercely careful of their prerogatives of ownership, as jealous of their sway over their puny domains, as the grandest lord.³

In other words, the plantation system, for all its contributions to human misery and exploitation, did, it appears, provide the scope or the atmosphere for the engendering of such qualities as pride, individualism, and self-sufficiency. Thus, it would seem that Ike's repudiation of the plantation as a legal property is one thing, but that his repudiation of that world as a continuum of life is quite another.
There is sufficient evidence in the various episodes of *Go Down, Moses*, it seems to me, to indicate that this world provided a normal amount of grief and joy, of hope and despair, of fanciful illusion and stark reality; in short, of all those conflicting emotions and exigencies which go to make up the totality of life. In saying all this, I am not overlooking the fact that throughout the novel there are omnipresent reminders of the ugliness of slavery or injustice to the Negro, but these evils, one must remember, are not restricted to a plantation world, and, in Faulkner's view, not original with that world.

The opening story "Was," presents this world in a doubly significant perspective. In the first place, we see it only one generation removed from its founder and the source of its taint, Carothers McCaslin, and we thus receive a more detailed and intimate acquaintance with this world, it seems to me, than Ike would receive from Cass's recounting of it some years later. We enjoy, as it were, the limitless perspective of the omniscient author, while Ike's version, though doubtless more immediate, would nevertheless reflect the distorted and restricted perspective of a nine-year old boy. Ike was excluded from this world not only because of an accident of chronology; the remark, "This was not something participated in or even seen by himself" (*GDM*, p. 3), though doubtless relevant to his birthdate, seems, in addition, to point to a myopic quality
in his vision which, some thirty years later, was to contribute to his decision in the commissary. And secondly, we see this world already in the process of melioration under its relatively enlightened owners, Buck and Buddy McCaslin, who, if they knew of their father's evil, seemed singularly unconcerned about it. At any rate, their immediate concern was the plight of the slaves whom they had inherited from their father and whom, in their own way, they emancipated long before "the stranger in Washington" did. "They are," as Cleanth Brooks explains it, "singularly undoctrinaire abolitionists, who have worked out a kind of practical accommodation between themselves and their slaves."  

The story relates, too, many incidents of plantation life which are thoroughly and wholly comical—the opening scene of the indoor fox chase, for example, or Sophonsiba's successful plot on Buck, or Turl's brilliant manipulation of the fateful poker game. These and similar scenes point out, I think, the essentially human and comic spirit which governed the various activities and relationships existing on the plantation, thus indicating that the reality of slavery and injustice was mitigated somewhat by an underlying humanity and tolerance. This is not to suggest that Faulkner viewed slavery lightly, but only that he recognized it as a reality of that particular world, and in this story he simply illustrates one of the many possible responses to this particular evil. Cleanth Brooks sums up Faulkner's position
quite adequately in these remarks:

The judgment passed upon slavery generally in Go Down, Moses is a withering one. What Faulkner is doing is giving human depth to what is too often treated as melodramatic abstraction, and this process points two ways: if, by "humanizing" slavery, he seems to make it more tolerable, the same process makes it more terrible and anguish­ing. In general, Faulkner is providing the per­spective in which we shall have to view Uncle Ike's act of renunciation and in which perspective the complexity of his motives will be revealed. Only as viewed in such perspective can the final value of his action be made.

This perspective is achieved largely through the device of juxtaposition, for a great number of incidents in the story are echoed, in either ironic or tragic contrast, throughout the rest of the novel. Most of the action of the story, for example, is on the level of ritual, but it is a ritual which no one takes very seriously. The pursuit of Tomey's Turl is a good example of this, for twice a year this "chase" follows identical patterns: Turl dresses up in a white shirt, Buck dons his tie and has a leisurely breakfast, and by and large the pursuit turns into a social occasion at the Beauchamps, while Turl goes about his business of courting Tennie with a minimum of interruption. And Sophonsiba's designation of their plantation as "Warwick" is another meaningless ritual, with the post-horn sounding off at the gateless gate-post, Hubert drinking toddies with his feet in the spring water, and all the other pretensions towards the gentility of the landed gentry. But the point is that all these people recognize it as ritual, and quite readily
forego it when more important considerations come up. For example, in her pursuit of Buck, Sophonsiba quickly gives up her pretensions of being a high-born lady and adopts the tactics of a scullery-maid by lying in wait for him—in his bed. That is, the ceremonies of the ritual do not render them incapable of responding to the reality of their world in the most effective way.

With Ike, however, the process of ritual becomes quite another thing. He is initiated into the wilderness order in a ritualistic ceremony conducted by Sam Fathers, and for that particular order the rituals in question have a purpose and a real significance. But, it seems to me, so complete is his capitulation to this world that, in a sense, the rituals become a substitute for the reality of life, or at any rate they render him incapable of accepting the world which superseded this order. Ike, in other words, unlike his father and Sophonsiba, continued to operate on a ritualistic basis even when conditions dictated that some other approach was essential.

Throughout this novel, we recognize that the plantation world posed its own peculiar problems which demanded a variety of solutions. The minor ones, usually the comical ones, could simply be avoided by recourse to ritual; Hubert, for example, could continue to ignore the rotten floor-board in his house as long as he entertained the illusion that his
plantation was the Warwick estate. But those problems which touched deeply the human experience required other responses. Thus Lucas Beauchamp could not solve the problem of Zack Edmond's exploitation of his wife by any ritualistic rationalization; the reality on which the ritual was based operated for old Carothers, and a lesser man than Lucas might have accepted the ritual as a reduced form of reality. Lucas went through the ritual—keeping the fire burning on the hearth, but the real solution was something stronger:

... his own wife, the black woman, now living alone in the house which old Cass had built for them when they were married, keeping alive on the hearth the fire he had lit there on their wedding day and which had burned ever since though there was little enough cooking done on it now;--thus, until almost half a year had passed and one day he went to Zack Edmonds and said, "I wants my wife. I needs her at home." Then--and he hadn't intended to say this. But there had been that half-year almost and himself alone keeping alive the fire which was to burn on the hearth until neither he nor Molly were left to feed it, himself sitting before it night after night through that spring and summer until one night he caught himself standing over it, furious, bursting, blind, the cedar water bucket already poised until he caught himself and set the bucket back on the shelf, still shaking, unable to remember taking the bucket up even--then he said: "I reckon you thought I wouldn't take her back, didn't you?" (GDM, pp. 46-47)

The important thing for Lucas was not to refuse to accept the original evil--Zack's taking of Molly--but to act decisively in light of that condition. The ritual dictated that Lucas, as a Negro, should accept exploitation by a white man, but he confronts Zack and emphatically establishes his stature:
"I'm a nigger," Lucas said. "But I'm a man too. I'm more than just a man. The same thing made my pappy that made your grandmaw. I'm going to take her back." (GDM. p. 47)

Thus Lucas overcomes one of the most agonizing problems that any world—plantation or otherwise—can create, and he does so without compromising his integrity and without dishonour to his family. Far from withdrawing in horror, as Ike does, from the "thing that made my pappy," he utilizes the positive qualities of character that old Carothers transmitted along with his evil—the qualities of pride, courage, and individualism, and established his moral order on his own terms.

Many years later, an even more shattering catastrophe overtakes another inhabitant of the plantation, a young sawmill worker named Rider, in the form of the death of his wife of six months. Unlike Lucas or Ike, this man had no ties with the McCaslin plantation except in a strictly economic sense—it provided him with a place to live and work. Before his marriage, he had been a typical rootless, violent young man, given to drinking, wenching, and gambling, "until he saw Mannie, whom he had known all his life, for the first time and said to himself: 'Ah'm thu wid all dat,' and they married and he rented the cabin from Carothers Edmonds and built a fire on the hearth on their wedding night...." (GDM, p. 138) Now, six months later, he stands in front of the empty house, reminiscing about their incredibly
brief life together, and we get a picture of one of the finest relationships Faulkner has depicted anywhere:

... and he would rise and dress and eat his breakfast by lamplight to walk the four miles to the mill by sunup, and exactly one hour after sundown he would enter the house again, five days a week, until Saturday. Then the first hour would not have passed noon when he would mount the steps and knock, not on post or doorframe but on the underside of the gallery roof itself, and enter and ring the bright cascade of silver dollars onto the scrubbed table in the kitchen where his dinner simmered on the stove and the galvanized tub of hot water and the baking powder can of soft soap and the towel made of scalded flour sacks sewn together and his clean overalls and shirt waited, and Mannie would gather up the money and walk the half-mile to the commissary and buy their next week's supplies and bank the rest of the money in Edmonds' safe and return and they would eat once again without haste or hurry after five days—the sidemeat, the greens, the cornbread, the buttermilk from the well-house, the cake which she baked every Saturday now that she had a stove to bake in. (GDM, pp. 138-139)

Against such a background, the inordinate grief that Rider desperately tries to assuage becomes understandable, and his responses the only ones possible. Without detracting from the stark horror of Rider's violent end, one of the most frightening aspects of "Pantaloon in Black" is the utter lack of feeling and sensitivity on the part of the community, as illustrated in the exchange between the deputy sheriff and his wife. "His wife dies on him," the sheriff relates, in describing Rider's actions. "All right. But does he grieve? He's the biggest and busiest man at the funeral." (GDM, p. 155)
What the sheriff did not see, of course, and, to a
certain extent, what Zack did not see, was that the actions
of Rider and of Lucas were simply assertions to themselves
that they were, as Irving Howe expresses it, "in some
ultimate and indestructible way... sentient human creatures,
capable of pain and, therefore, perhaps of joy." Both
these men, through their gestures, reveal a strength and an
integrity which the white community, and in Rider's case,
even his own people, failed to recognize. Their responses
offer, too, a significant contrast to Ike's reaction to the
problems of evil, injustice, and personal calamity, a
question which will have to be explored more fully later,
for it involves, I think, an aesthetic dichotomy on the
part of Faulkner in his creation of Ike. For the present,
however, it seems evident that Faulkner offers both Lucas
and Rider as powerful illustrations of his moral vision, and
as proof that the plantation world which Ike relinquished
provided ample scope for the deepest expression of one's
humanity. Irving Howe explains clearly the essential signi-
ificance of the gestures made by Faulkner's characters:

It can be a gesture of rebellion or submission; it
can signify adherence to ritual or the need to accept
defeat in total loneliness; it can be an arbitrary
sign of self-hood or a final assertion of indifference.
But always it is the mark of distinct being, the
way a man establishes and defines himself. An
affirmation of human capacity or a paltry insistence
on human limitation, the gesture marks each man in
his singularity.
Most of the characters in the plantation stories—Buck and Buddy, Lucas Beauchamp, Rider, and the girl in "Delta Autumn"—establish their singularity, it seems to me, by affirming the necessity to live in terms of present and future conditions, rather than by "a paltry insistence on human limitations," which is essentially the stand adopted by Ike in the fourth section of "The Bear." And as effective as these plantation stories and characters are in themselves, I think they take on a special significance for understanding Faulkner's moral vision when they are studied in relation to Ike's arguments in this section. This observation will become clear in the next chapter, where the whole question of Ike's renunciation will be closely examined.
Footnotes to Chapter III


3 Ibid., pp. 45-46.

4 Brooks, p. 248.

5 Ibid.

6 Howe, p. 153.

7 Ibid.
In determining the place of *Go Down, Moses* in the development of Faulkner's moral vision, the most important step is to decide on the nature of Ike McCaslin's renunciation, and thus to assess its value in terms of the world he lived in. As my second chapter indicated, critics have long wondered just how to dispose of Ike, for on the one hand he seems to be Faulkner's moral ideal, while on the other hand he has all the characteristics of an ineffective dreamer. I think that this confusion might be the result of a division within Faulkner himself, which stems from his fondness for the wilderness on the one hand, and his realization, on the other hand, of the futility of living in terms of the past, whether that past is a sort of pristine wilderness, or an era tainted by evil and injustice. This dichotomy requires further consideration, but first I think it is essential to examine Ike's relinquishment in some detail. By understanding Ike's responses to his twin inheritances—the wilderness code and all it stands for, from Sam Fathers, and the plantation system, with its responsibilities and obligations, from his grandfather,
Carothers McCaslin, we shall be able to assess the value of his decision to refuse one of them, and at the same time perhaps see more clearly what Faulkner intended Ike to represent in his overall moral vision.

One of the basic problems in interpreting Ike's reactions stems from a general tendency on the part of critics to believe that he is Faulkner's spokesman in some of the important sections of this novel. This proclivity might arise from the fact that in the three stories in which he directly appears—"The Old People," "The Bear," and "Delta Autumn"—he is on the whole sympathetically portrayed, especially in those sections which constitute essentially a hunting story. It is very easy, therefore, to read Ike as a noble figure whose virtues which he learned in the wilderness from Sam Fathers are progressively being rendered ineffective, if not anachronistic, by the steady encroachment of civilization. Because the hunting or wilderness sections of these stories are the most clear and explicit, it is tempting to interpret them, rather than the long and often confusing fourth section of "The Bear," as the expression of Faulkner's true feelings towards Ike. Such a reading, it seems to me, is not only a vast oversimplification, but in many ways a misreading of the book. I think it is possible to show that while Faulkner does admire Ike for his many strengths and virtues, he nevertheless uses him to illustrate the futility of static
idealism in a world that, like all worlds, needs positive action more than it does retrospective expiation or nostalgia for an old order.

In Chapter II we saw what a good number of critics have had to say about Ike and the significance of his renunciation. It will perhaps be illuminating at this point to see what Faulkner himself said about this question during one of his interviews at the University of Virginia, recorded in part as follows:

Q. Mr. Faulkner, Isaac McCaslin in "The Bear" relinquishes his heredity. Do you think he may be in the same predicament as modern man, under the same conditions that he can't find a humanity that he can fit in with?

A. Well, there are some people in any time and age that cannot face and cope with the problems. There seem to be three stages: The first says, This is rotten, I'll have no part of it, I will take death first. The second says, This is rotten, I don't like it, I can't do anything about it, but at least I will not participate in it myself, I will go off into a cave or climb a pillar to sit on. The third says, This stinks and I'm going to do something about it. McCaslin is the second. He says, This is bad, and I will withdraw from it. What we need are people who will say, This is bad and I'm going to do something about it, I'm going to change it.

Even allowing for over-simplifications and extravagances of expression which off-the-cuff interviews are likely to produce, I think it is reasonable to accept these remarks as a key to Faulkner's view of Ike's renunciation, or of such action on the part of man in general. It is not only Go Down, Moses which supports this contention, but, as we
shall see, his Nobel Prize speech and such works as A Fable and Intruder in the Dust reiterate this position, both explicitly and implicitly. Certainly, the three stages Faulkner refers to are effectively represented in his novels: if Ike stands for the second stage, then Bayard Sartoris in Sartoris or Quentin Compson in The Sound and the Fury represent the first stage, and Chick Mallison in Intruder in the Dust or the corporal in A Fable the third.

In many respects, of course—and this is part of the dichotomy referred to earlier—Ike is both like and unlike these characters. Like Quentin, he was in effect immobilized in his own world by a strong sense of the past, but unlike him, he felt he could evade the taint in his life, not by death, which Quentin chose, but by entertaining a vision of life which in a way ante-dated this evil. For Ike, this vision stemmed from a reality which was chronologically not very far removed, though of course the discrepancies which existed between his vision and the actuality of that life removed it in effect from all of time. The wilderness, though in the process of receding, was still relatively close at hand, and Ike's own experiences in this wilderness were still deeply impressed upon his consciousness. His desire to return to the past was therefore more rational and meaningful than Quentin's, which was based almost wholly on a concept of honour which, if
it did at one time exist in the South, had certainly not been a part of Quentin's own experience. But, by the same argument, of course, Ike's motivation by that other past—the tainted one of his grandfather—was also a vicarious one, and in that sense just as unrealistic as Quentin's. Perhaps all we can judge on this score is their solution of the problem: Quentin committed suicide and Ike did not. Again, like Chick Mallison, Ike was intensely aware of injustice or wrong-doing in his world, but unlike him, he lacked that urgent sense of the present which would enable him to translate his idealism into any kind of decisive action. One has only to compare the decisiveness of Chick's actions in helping Lucas Beauchamp with the futility of Ike's platitudinous offerings to the girl in "Delta Autumn" to realize the inadequacy of Ike's responses. Commenting on a passage from Intruder in the Dust, Alfred Kazin expresses a sentiment which is relevant to this distinction between Chick and Ike:

We suddenly feel in some momentary shock to our physical being that we are being played on by history, by the forces of our own character, by that tangle of rights and wrongs, of present injustice and perhaps ultimate injustice, too, that asserts itself in every human situation. And it is only such an awareness, such a willingness to live the situation with everything we are, that mollifies the ache of being alive.

In other words, we rejoice at the integrity and action displayed by Chick, and are somewhat saddened by the compromise that Ike makes with his world. At any rate, as
we shall see, Ike's tangible and positive accomplishments were all achieved in the wilderness world—a world which existed outside of society—and his potential for good in the "human situation" fell far short of fulfillment because of his refusal to accept the responsibilities and obligations of the plantation world. And it is this refusal which sets him off most markedly from people like Chick Mallison and other characters in Faulkner's later novels, as well as from the major Negro characters, for example, in Go Down, Moses.

One of the first questions to consider in assessing Ike's repudiation is what caused it to occur in the first place. It is well known that his decision, though not announced to his cousin, McCaslin Edmonds until his twenty-first birthday, had in fact been made some five years earlier, as he examined the entries of the commissary ledgers. Ever since he had learned to read, he had from time to time taken the old ledgers from their shelves and examined them in a cursory manner, but, ironically, he had felt if he ever were to examine them carefully, "it would only be on some idle day when he was old and perhaps even bored a little since what the old books contained would be after all these years fixed immutably, finished, unalterable, harmless." (GDM, p. 268) From these entries, laboriously written by Ike's father and Uncle Buddy, Ike learned certain facts about the plantation and about his grandfather, Carothers
McCaslin. The facts relevant to his decision are quite plain: his grandfather bought the slave girl, Eunice, in 1807; she was married to Thucydus in 1809; her daughter, Tomasina, was born in 1810; she drowned herself on Christmas Day, 1832; and Tomasina died in giving birth to her son in June of 1833. When Ike was sixteen, he became puzzled over the entry which indicated that Eunice had drowned herself, as his father had been when he first read Uncle Buddy's entry:

Eunice, Bought by Father in New Orleans 1807 $650 dollars. Marrid to Thucydus 1809 Drownd in Crick Christmas Day 1832 (GDM, p. 267)

and late one night he entered the commissary again to examine the ledgers:

Then he was sixteen. He knew what he was going to find before he found it. He got the commissary key from McCaslin's room after midnight while McCaslin was asleep and with the commissary door shut and locked behind him and the forgotten lantern stinking anew the rank dead icy air, he leaned above the yellowed page and thought not Why drowned herself, but thinking what he believed his father had thought when he found his brother's first comment: Why did Uncle Buddy think she had drowned herself? finding, beginning to find on the next succeeding page what he knew he would find, only this was still not it because he already knew this:

Tomasina called Tomy Daughter of Thucydus @ Eunice Born 1810 dide in Child bed June 1833 and Burd. Yr stars fell

nor the next:

Turl Son of Thucydus @ Eunice Tomy born Jun 1833 yr stars fell Fathers will

and nothing more, no tedious recording filling this page.... (GDM, pp. 268-269)
From these entries, Ike concluded that his grandfather had been guilty of both miscegenation and incest, and therefore of infecting the plantation system with a taint that could be cleansed only by an act of renunciation and by prolonged expiation.

It will be interesting, however, to determine just how Ike arrived at these conclusions. If we examine the three ledger entries carefully, we can see that in terms of literal transcription, the only one which is not completely self-explanatory is the last one, for it does not indicate who Turl's father was. The other two can be taken at face value: Tomey was the daughter of Thucydus and Eunice, and therefore no miscegenation was involved. It would have been quite legitimate for Ike to read the entries in this way, and then assume that the paternity of Turl was simply unrecorded. That slave girls were expected to produce offspring was apparently an accepted condition of the plantation system; Frederick Olmsted, discussing this question, quotes a letter he received in which the writer, a slaveholder, states: "Planters command their girls and women (married or unmarried) to have children...." Pursuing this hypothetical interpretation, Ike could then have assumed that Eunice's drowning was either accidental or, if a suicide, brought about by certain shameful circumstances of her daughter's
pregnancy. It is possible, for example, to read the last entry as: "Turl Son of Thucydus and Eunice's Tomy," thus making the incest attributable to Thucydus, a circumstance which would have provided ample cause for Eunice's despair.

The other interpretation—the one Ike took—resulted from a combination of circumstances surrounding these entries, rather than from any specific revelation. Ike must have asked himself many questions as he pondered these entries: why his grandfather bought Eunice in the first place, why she was not married to Thucydus earlier, why she drowned herself, and why Turl was provided for in Carothers' will. These questions are all crucial ones, and they provide a convincing case for Ike's suspicions, much more so, for example, than his rather unscientific speculations based on his own acquaintance with Turl: "And Tomey's Terrel was still alive when the boy was ten years old and he knew from his own observation and memory that there had already been some white in Tomey's Terrel's blood before his father gave him the rest of it...." (GDM, pp. 270-271) This hypothesis effectively illustrates the main point I wish to make with all these suppositions: that Ike's whole theory of Carothers being the bearer of a curse is based largely on conjecture and not on fact. It is true, of course, that Carothers' provision for Turl in his will is a strong argument in support of Ike's position,
for this act suggests a responsibility which goes beyond
the normal planter-slave relationship. Nevertheless, Ike
himself concedes that these entries describe an act "of
which there was still no definite incontrovertible proof
that he acknowledged...." (GDM, p. 269)

The fact that Ike "knew what he was going to find
before he found it" suggests that his knowledge of the evils
of the plantation world had other sources besides the ledgers
themselves. It was as though his vision was one page ahead
of his turning the leaves; the ledgers simply made explicit
what he had already surmised through some process of ex­
perience or intuition. One explanation of his acquiring
such knowledge could be simply that he knew what a
plantation system before 1865 represented: that it made
possible if not inevitable, miscegenation at least, and
perhaps unknowingly, incest. It was possibly something
like this that R.W.B. Lewis had in mind when he said that
"Ike McCaslin is the first of Faulkner's characters to
understand American history."4

It was, therefore, Ike's realization that he was to
inherit, not so much the plantation itself, but the human
exploitation which appeared to be its inevitable concomitant,
that horrified him and presumably haunted him for the next
five years. By the time he announced his decision to Cass,
he had formulated a complex theory about the relationship between his grandfather's evil and the curse which afflicted the South in general:

'And Grandfather did own the land nevertheless and notwithstanding because He permitted it, not impotent and not condoning and not blind because He ordered and watched it. He saw the land already accursed even as Ikkemotubbe and Ikkemotubbe's father old Issetibbeha and old Issetibbeha's fathers too held it, already tainted even before any white man owned it by what Grandfather and his kind, his fathers, had brought into the new land which He had vouchsafed them out of pity and humility and sufferance and endurance... and no hope for the land anywhere so long as Ikkemotubbe and Ikkemotubbe's descendants held it in unbroken succession. Maybe He saw that only by voiding the land for a time of Ikkemotubbe's blood and substituting for it another blood, could He accomplish His purpose. Maybe He knew already what that other blood would be... when He used the blood which had brought in the evil to destroy the evil as doctors use fever to burn up fever, poison to slay poison. Maybe He chose Grandfather out of all of them He might have picked. Maybe He knew that Grandfather himself would not serve His purpose because Grandfather was born too soon too, but that Grandfather would have descendants, the right descendants; maybe He had foreseen already the descendants Grandfather would have, maybe He saw already in Grandfather the seed progenitive of the three generations He saw it would take to set at least some of His lowly people free..." (GDM, pp. 258-259)

In this rather involved explanation, Ike has moved from his earlier position that the land had never belonged to anybody in the first place. "I can't repudiate it," he had told Cass earlier. "It was never mine to repudiate. It was never Father's and Uncle Buddy's to bequeath me to repudiate because it was never Grandfather's to bequeath them to bequeath me to repudiate...." (GDM, p. 256) There is a curious inconsistency in Ike's reasoning here,
and it is likely that he recognized this himself. For if, as he states, there never had been any plantation for him to inherit, then what, in effect, was he repudiating? His whole case rested on the premise that he stood to inherit a very tangible piece of property, and he doubtless recognized that he had to offer substantial reasons for rejecting it, rather than simply evade the issue by pretending that it never existed.

But when we examine his arguments, and contrast them with the counter-arguments of Cass, we can see that Cass's position seems to be the more realistic. Ike digresses far afield, and resorts to some rather far-fetched Biblical and historical interpretations, whereas Cass, it seems to me, proceeds on the basis of the facts of the world as they exist for Ike and as they existed for Carothers:

You, the direct male descendant of him who saw the opportunity and took it, bought the land, took the land, got the land no matter how, held it to bequeath, no matter how, out of the old grant, the first patent, when it was a wilderness of wild beasts and wilder men, and cleared it, translated it into something to bequeath to his children, worthy of bequeathment for his descendants' ease and security and pride and to perpetuate his name and accomplishments. (GDM, p. 256)

Cass was as much aware of the "tedious and shabby chronicle of His chosen" as Ike was, yet, while this might be a cause for regret, it was for him no cause for repudiation. Carothers was simply one more of the many individuals throughout history who had contributed to this human condition,
and his plantation world was in effect a microcosm which reflected the same stage in moral evolution that the Old World itself had manifested. And though McCaslin has always been aware of the inevitability of some form of injustice or imperfection in the world, he also was consistent in his recognition of the potential fulfillment of life that this same world offered. In a passage near the end of "The Old People," he explains his position to Ike, and at the same time expresses what I feel is in part a statement of Faulkner's moral vision:

Think of all that has happened here, on this earth. All the blood hot and strong for living, pleasuring, that has soaked back into it. For grieving and suffering too, of course, but still getting something out of it for all that, getting a lot out of it, because after all you don't have to continue to bear what you believe is suffering; you can always choose to stop that, put an end to that. And even suffering and grieving is better than nothing; there is only one thing worse than not being alive, and that's shame. But you can't be alive forever, and you always wear out life long before you have exhausted the possibilities of living. And all that must be somewhere; all that could not have been invented and created just to be thrown away. (GDM, p. 186)

It is interesting to note that this passage expresses in condensed form a statement of the general progress Faulkner has manifested over the years, as far as his moral vision is concerned. There is the echo of Quentin Compson here, or of Bayard Sartoris, in McCaslin's recognition of suicide as one response to suffering; and there is the later Faulkner, in the urgent insistence on living fully, even in the face of grief, a position expounded as early as The Wild Palms,
which concludes with Wilbourne's strong statement of moral responsibility: "Yes, he thought, between grief and nothing I will take grief." It seems evident that throughout the relevant sections of Go Down, Moses, Cass's pronouncements reflect Faulkner's moral position more closely than do Ike's, even though Ike receives more of Faulkner's attention. Cleanth Brooks quotes to this effect from an unpublished manuscript:

If there is a Christian hero of "The Bear" it is Cass. Like Isaac, though perhaps more reluctantly, he accepts the guilt as a burden, but unlike Isaac, he is not immobilized by it. Cass takes on responsibility, enters into the stream of life, even though he acknowledges the failure of justice to fulfill love.

Certainly, Cass's statements and actions, like those of other relatively minor characters in Go Down, Moses, have generally been overlooked or neglected in the examination of Faulkner's moral position in this work. It is one of my main contentions in this thesis that a more proportionate attention to these characters will bring about a clearer understanding of the moral statements that he does make, and will make more meaningful the relationship between his public and artistic pronouncements on this question.

As I pointed out earlier, there has been a tendency on the part of critics to commend Ike for his decision to reject his legacy, as his action was based at least in part on the virtues of unselfishness and idealism. But the value
of an action must be judged by its results as well as by its sources, and by this criterion, Ike does not come off so well. His reaction to the McCaslin taint was vastly different from that of any of its other inheritors, and in the long run his turned out to be the most unproductive and unrealistic, in terms of the benefits accruing to the inhabitants of the plantation world. If we consider the four main inheritors of the McCaslin taint—Buck and Turl in the first generation removed, and Ike and Lucas in the second—we will find some significant manifestations of the different responses. Ike has less McCaslin blood in him than any of the other three, yet none of these three is rendered inactive because of the taint as is Ike. We have already seen how Buck, acting on the conditions as he inherited them, instituted an enlightened policy towards the slaves, and how Turl, one of these slaves, decided his own destiny in a very real way by his manipulation of the fateful deck of cards. And Lucas, far from recoiling from his inheritance, exploits it punctually and decisively: "Whar's the rest of that money old Carothers left?" he demands on his twenty-first birthday. "I wants it, All of it." (GDM, p. 282) One has only to contrast Lucas's action with Ike's on his twenty-first birthday to see what coming-of-age really can mean! But the differences in response and in results go far deeper than these immediate
actions, which in a sense are only superficial manifestations of a basic difference in character, and of a vastly different outlook on the world.

Perhaps the most revealing way of viewing these different responses is to consider the effects that they had on the people of the plantation world. For if there is to be a melioration of the human condition, it must be effected in large part by the individual acting within his community in accordance with the conditions that obtain at his particular time. Both Buck and Turl act within the framework of a slave society, while Ike and Lucas are part of an emancipated world, so it is necessary to judge their actions in light of this understanding. There are two human relationships common to all these people—marriage and what, for lack of a more appropriate term, we can call the owner-worker relationship, and on both these counts, it seems to me, Ike shows up in a poor light in contrast to the others. It is true, of course, that Buck and Turl in both of these relationships are shown in an essentially comic perspective, in that both are at once the pursuer and the pursued, depending on which relationship is at stake. But beneath this comic surface, there exists a basic human relationship between Buck and his slaves, and there is no doubt that the human condition within the plantation world was significantly bettered during Buck's
tenure of ownership. The comic element is very strong also in the two marriage relationships, for Turl is running towards a potential wife, while Buck is running away from one. But even here—and Faulkner is perhaps simply making the observation that everybody's courtship is comical except one's own—we subsequently learn that these marriages do take place and operate on a very solid basis of reality and, in Turl's case at least, with an element of dignity and suffering which lifts this relationship forever beyond the farcical note on which it started.

It is difficult, I concede, to think of Buck's and Sophonsiba's marriage in terms of solemnity, for the impression created by "the earrings and beads clashing and jingling like little trace chains on a toy mule" (GDM, p. 11) is not readily forgotten. Nevertheless, this relationship, too, accomplishes one of the main purposes of marriage—the production of offspring—and in that sense illustrates a very real acceptance of one's responsibilities.

Both Buck and Turl were close enough to the actualities of the traditional planter-slave structure to know how a runaway slave should behave and what should happen to him, and the ritual they perform dramatizes this awareness:

Because, being a nigger, Tomey's Turl should have jumped down and run for it afoot as soon as he saw them. But he didn't; maybe Tomey's Turl had been running off from Uncle Buck for so long that he had even got used to running away like a white man would do it. (GDM, p. 9)
In other words, the humanity inherent in their relationship almost immediately makes a mockery of the ritual, and all that is left is a harmless vestige of the grim order represented by old Carothers. Thus, in a society born out of the very curse which Ike wanted to deny, and only one generation removed from that taint, there is ample evidence of an enlightened human relationship built upon a strong sense of moral and ethical responsibility. This condition is a direct result of Buck's acceptance of the past, or perhaps more accurately, his ignoring of it, and of Turl's acting as though neither the McCaslin curse nor the slave system it engendered concerned him in the least. In other words, it is the effort put into one's life, not the inherited circumstances which surround it, that for Faulkner provides the basis of a healthy moral and ethical outlook. That human fulfillment resulting from such effort is possible under a variety of circumstances is one of the main positions adopted by Faulkner throughout Go Down, Moses, and it is most clearly illustrated, as we shall see, in those episodes concerned with Lucas Beauchamp and his family.

As the main second generation inheritor of the McCaslin legacy on the Negro side, Lucas provides, in the two relationships referred to earlier, a strength and a dignity which give him a stature matched by few other Faulkner characters. Certainly, alongside his actions, Ike's gestures take on a feeble and ineffective quality, and in general, these two
lives offer an interesting contrast between self-fulfillment and self-denial. Lucas's whole life spelled out pride, independence, and self-sufficiency, whether his interest at the moment was looking after his illicit still or demanding his wife back from Zack Edmonds. Indeed, even when doing nothing, he somehow managed to manifest these attributes:

... maybe sitting through a whole morning on his front gallery, looking at it and thinking if that's what he felt like doing), with Edmonds riding up on his mare... and maybe once during the season stopping long enough to give him advice about it which he completely ignored, ignoring not only the advice but the very voice which gave it, as though the other had not spoken even, whereupon Edmonds would ride on and he would continue with whatever he had been doing, the incident already forgotten condoned and forgiven, the necessity and the time having been served. (GDM, pp. 35-36)

The owner-worker relationship here is a far cry from even the enlightened one which had existed between his father and Uncle Buck, for here there is no indication whatsoever that Lucas feels in any way subservient. Indeed, his pride stems in large part from the very fact that he is a McCaslin:

"The oldest McCaslin descendant even though in the world's eye he descended not from McCaslins but from McCaslin slaves...." (GDM, p. 36) In a later novel, he reasserts his proud origins very forcefully: "I aint a Edmonds. I dont belong to these new folks. I belong to the old lot. I'm a McCaslin."7 Ironically, then, the source of Ike's despair becomes the source of Lucas's strength, which in effect is the recurring pattern throughout this work.
Lucas finds strength and fulfillment in his relationships within the plantation world—in his marriage, and in his inherited position in the structure of this world; Ike finds satisfaction in neither of these, though, as we shall see, his marriage provided the potential for a close and satisfying relationship.

Lucas's marriage relationship offers one of the strongest testimonies of the positive consequences inherent in accepting one's inheritance. It will be remembered that of the three surviving Beauchamp children, only Lucas elected to remain on the plantation after he came of age. But more than that, he married a town girl, Molly Worsham, and brought her out to live in this world that his brother, his sister, and his cousin, Ike, all had forsaken in their attempts to find their freedom. Lucas found his freedom within himself, and manifested it in his relationships with Molly and with the plantation owner, Roth Edmonds. In his own world, of course, Lucas was as much the autocrat as the most traditional slave-owner, a quality he inherited from his grandfather: "He's more like old Carothers," observed Roth on one occasion, "than are the rest of us put together, including old Carothers." (GDM, p. 118) But at the same time he could demonstrate a kindness and responsibility towards Molly which invested their relationship with a warmth and dignity that contrasted
sharply with the many cases of human exploitation throughout the McCaslin history. In "The Fire and the Hearth," for example, there is a scene in the flashback concerning the Zack-Molly affair, where Lucas is preparing to go to Zack's to revenge this violation of his code:

He prised the brick up with his knife blade and scraped away the warm dirt under it and lifted out a small metal dispatch box which his white grandfather, Carothers McCaslin himself, had owned almost a hundred years ago, and took from it the knotted rag tight and solid with the coins, some of which dated back almost to Carothers McCaslin's time, which he had begun to save before he was ten years old. His wife had removed only her shoes... before lying down. He put the knotted rag into one of them and went to the walnut bureau which Isaac McCaslin had given him for a wedding present and took his razor from the drawer. (GDM, pp. 51-52)

Here, in what must have been one of the tensest crises of his life—for he knows his killing of Zack will be inevitably followed by his own lynching—he proceeds with calm and purposeful deliberation to make provision for Molly and the children (Zack's son as well as his own), by leaving for her his entire life's savings. In many smaller ways, too, he expressed his affection for his wife, such as his buying her a nickel's worth of candy to illustrate his deeply-felt joy at having her back with him after the abortive divorce case, and his forsaking of his vision—in the form of a gold-finding machine—in order to retain the tangible reality of his marriage relationship. The high regard he placed on his relationship with Molly becomes apparent when we realize that, in the two situations where
he stood a very real chance of losing her, he surrendered his pride and convictions in order to hold on to her. He did not want to find out, for example, if she had been unfaithful to him during her sojourn at Zack's; keeping her, even under the suspicion of infidelity, was more important than upholding his honor at the risk of losing her. And in the courtroom scene, he makes two concessions virtually unheard of for Lucas—he takes off his hat, and he refers to Roth as "Mister Roth Edmonds"—both on the insistence of the court. The judge held the upper hand here, and Lucas knew it, for the divorce bill was about to be pronounced upon, so Lucas readily discarded any manifestation of his independence which might antagonize the judge and hence jeopardize his chances to retrieve Molly.

What Lucas recognized throughout his life, and what his brother and sister and Ike essentially failed to recognize, was that one's fulfillment is not dependent upon what Roth called "the geography and climate and biology which sired old Carothers" (GDM, p. 118), but upon the bearing of the person facing all this. Fonsiba and Ike—and presumably Tennie's Jim—could not face this condition, and all suffered from the same delusion—that escaping from the plantation world would somehow set them free. Ike could caustically ask Fonsiba's husband, "Freedom from what?" (GDM, p. 279), but he fails to see that the question could be equally applied to himself. Essentially, Lucas was the
only one of the four main McCaslin inheritors who enjoyed genuine freedom, for he was the only one who recognized that it was a product of character, and not of circumstance. Buck and Turl, of course, share one important attribute with Lucas; like him, they are able to do something that Ike cannot do, and that is to accept the world they are born into, and act positively with humor and decision and perhaps a bit of shrewdness within their world, unfettered by any guilt from a bygone world.

Ike's problem, on the other hand, is a surplus of worlds. The one he is born into he cannot accept; the one that renders him inactive is gone; and the one that he wants to live in is inexorably disappearing as civilization encroaches upon the wilderness. It is this last one—the world of Sam Fathers and Old Ben—that has shaped Ike in such a way that he is incapable either of forgetting the world of Carothers McCaslin, or of accepting the world that his cousin Cass points out as rightfully belonging to him. His apprenticeship in the wilderness, excellent as it was for survival and achievement in that world, failed to prepare him for the dual responsibilities in the social world of man—his responsibilities towards the inhabitants of the plantation world, and his responsibilities towards his wife. For it is in these areas where the effects of Ike's renunciation take on the most significance, and where they are in strongest contrast to those already discussed.
Perhaps, too, Ike's place in Faulkner's moral vision will take on a new perspective when we examine more closely the real effects of his renunciation.

The most direct result, and the most far-reaching, was of course that it left him childless—"uncle to half a county and father to no one." (GDM, p. 3) This whole question takes us into the field of marital relationships, and no doubt it is possible to conclude that his wife must share some of the blame for this state of affairs, but the fact still remains that Ike's decision meant that the male McCaslin line died with him. It is important to remember, too, that with all her shortcomings of ambition and selfishness, his wife nevertheless recognizes an important fact about marriage that Ike failed to recognize—that it is meaningful only in terms of acceptance of the conditions which exist at the moment, which in this case is the acceptance of the plantation as Ike's legal inheritance. The other branches of the McCaslin family, the Negro and the female, both prospered prolifically, and while it is admittedly difficult to think of either Buck or Ike in terms of lusty progenitors—there was something of the ascetic in both of them—it is nevertheless reasonable to assume that some of old Carothers' reproductive capacity was lodged in this line, too. (One feels a certain admiration for old Carothers here, who in effect started three families on the way, but whose two sons and one grandson on the white side failed to keep even one going.)
That there was love and passion in Ike's relationship with his wife is indicated in the closing lines of the fourth section of "The Bear": "it was like nothing he had ever dreamed, let alone heard in mere man-talking until after a no-time he returned and lay spent on the insatiate immemorial beach...." (GDM, p. 315) This moment is recalled, too, along with a comment on the general character of their relationship, in a revealing passage in "The Fire and the Hearth":

... because in that one long-ago instant at least out of the long and shabby stretch of their human lives, even though they knew at the time it wouldn't and couldn't last, they had touched and become as God.... (GDM, p. 107)

So one can assume, it seems to me, that with the normal odds prevailing, this marriage provided a fair chance for offspring; certainly Ike's wife would want to perpetuate the plantation in the family name, and had Ike accepted his legacy, she no doubt would have withdrawn her conditional "That's all from me." (GDM, p. 315) Ike, too, wanted a son, and must have indicated as much to his wife, for she taunts him about "that son you talk about." (GDM, p. 315) It seems, then, that Ike's refusal to accept his inheritance, destroys his chances for a son, and one suspects that Ike later regrets paying so high a price for what he felt was a noble principle. On Lucas's twenty-first birthday, appropriately enough, Ike wrestles with the knowledge that
Lucas is aware of his decision:

That I reneged, cried calf-rope, sold my birthright, betrayed my blood, for what he too calls not peace but obliteration, and a little food. (GDM, p. 109)

The evidence in "Delta Autumn" and "The Fire and the Hearth" indicates clearly that his relationship with his wife was a denial of everything a marriage must be built upon—compromise, self-sacrifice, and compassion. As an old man, he knows that "he lost her because she loved him;" (GDM, p. 352); this initial love must have intensified the general bitterness which characterized their relationship almost from the start:

She was a young woman then; they had been married only a few years but he had already come to know the expression which her face wore, looking at it always as he did now: peacefully and with pity for her and regret too, for her, for both of them, knowing the tense bitter indomitable voice as well as he did the expression.... (GDM, p. 107)

In contrast, then, to the marriages of Lucas, Turl, and even Buck, Ike's must be judged as a tragic failure, for, aside from one or two brief moments of passion, it produced nothing but emptiness and despair. In light of this outcome, one has no choice but to judge Ike's decision rather harshly, and to conclude that Faulkner shares this opinion, a view that will be supported when we examine the effect of Ike's renunciation on his other relationships with the plantation world.

Ike's belief that his renunciation gave him genuine
freedom in effect served only to remove him from the necessity of taking any responsibility for the melioration of the human condition within the plantation world. His cousin Cass recognized the fallacy inherent in Ike's protestation that he was free:

and this time McCaslin did not even gesture, no inference of fading pages, no postulation of the stereoptic whole, but the frail and iron thread strong as truth and impervious as evil and longer than life itself and reaching beyond record and patrimony both to join him with the lusts and passions, the hopes and dreams and griefs, of bones whose names while still fleshed and capable even old Carothers' grandfather had never heard.... (GDM, p. 299)

In other words, Ike cannot escape the obligations contingent upon being a part of a continuous life process, for he has acquired responsibilities which in effect had arisen long before Carothers came on the scene. These responsibilities Ike abdicated by his renunciation, a fact most powerfully dramatized in the "Delta Autumn" section of this work. Here he comes face to face with a very real embodiment of "the hopes and dreams and griefs" and, for the moment at any rate, there is "no inference of fading pages," but only the stark reality of a young Negro girl and her son fathered by the plantation owner, Roth Edmonds, a man whom she strongly loves. Many years earlier, Ike had tried to elevate the affair between his grandfather and Eunice by saying to himself as he wrestled with the ledger entries, "But there must have been love." (GDM, p. 270) He recognized then, that it is love which brings warmth and humanity to a
relationship, and he wanted desperately to believe that his grandfather had felt some of these sentiments. But now, in Ike's real world, there is love, and he is as horrified as he was at its possible absence on that remote day in the commissary. In other words, what he would sanction in retrospect to cleanse a bygone world, he is incapable of advocating to bring about a measure of dignity in a sordid but very real world of the here and now. It is the girl who remarks with piercing irony on this limitation: "Old man," she said, "have you lived so long and forgotten so much that you don't remember anything you ever knew or felt or even heard about love?" (GDM, p. 363) We know that this observation is not entirely accurate, for in this same section Ike gives ample proof that he has not forgotten about the intensity of love:

I think that every man and woman, at the instant when it don't even matter whether they marry or not, I think that whether they marry then or afterward or don't never, at that instant the two of them together were God. (GDM, p. 348)

But paradoxically, what he observes to be true he is incapable of applying to a human situation which matches his observation; it seems that he cannot come to terms with the tangible reality of the plantation world. As far as his advice to the Negro girl is concerned, part of the answer may be that Ike has lived a long time in a world where the facts of segregation were very real and painful, and that he wanted to spare this girl some of the problems
of this world. But the essential answer, I think, is that Ike's purity or innocence has been untested by experience: his refusal to participate directly in the affairs of the plantation world he was to inherit caused him to shrink from the genuine problems which arose in that world, and he was reduced to offering as solutions mere gestures and platitudes.

As far as innocence or purity was concerned, Ike had not yet learned what another Faulkner character, Gavin Stevens, was to recognize as a prerequisite to any kind of meaningful life:

... that innocence is innocent not because it rejects but because it accepts; is innocent not because it is impervious and invulnerable to everything, but because it is capable of accepting anything and still remaining innocent; innocent because it foreknows all and therefore doesn't have to fear and be afraid...8

It is this kind of innocence, and not the innocence of isolation, which is at the heart of Faulkner's moral vision, and this is one of the main reasons why it is necessary to reject Ike as the central figure in this vision. Essentially he acquired his innocence in a sort of unreal world, a world which in its own way represented perfection, but also an artificial situation for everybody except Sam Fathers. It was a world outside of man, which man entered only briefly from time to time to pursue what became in effect an empty ritual. But because of the thoroughness of his apprenticeship, and because of his attachment to Fathers
and Boon Hogganbeck (both of whom were outside of human society), Ike came to regard this world as the real one, and as a result, was incapable of facing the momentous issues of his real life. There is a certain irony in Ike's attachment to the purity of the wilderness and in his repugnance to the taint of his own inheritance. Sam Fathers, Old Ben, and Lion are, as Faulkner points out, "taintless and incorruptible," but of these three, Sam and Lion are both "mongrels" and therefore tainted in a blood sense, in much the same way as many of the inhabitants of Ike's plantation world are. So it does not follow that the qualities of taintlessness and incorruptibility, or the virtues of patience, humility and courage, which Ike values so highly, are inevitable concomitants of an isolated purity; they are, rather, as Gavin Stevens discovered, products of the knowledge that one is, in any kind of world, "capable of accepting anything and still remaining innocent."

The final effect, and the most ironic, of Ike's relinquishment of the plantation was that it set the stage for the cycle of miscegenation and incest—the very things which caused him to relinquish in the first place—to begin all over again. The parallel between the Carothers-Tomey affair and the Roth-negro girl affair is obvious, the only
essential difference being in the degree of incest, as the young girl is only distantly related to Roth. Nevertheless, human exploitation is involved, and in actual fact the very injustices of the system which Ike thought to remove by his renunciation are as manifest as ever. Ironically, it is Ike, in the aftermath of both these instances of incest, who becomes the intermediary between the exploiter and the exploited. Many years earlier he had trekked over the country-side in a vain effort to find Tennie's Jim in order to give him his portion of Carothers' "conscience money;" and now, at the end of the cycle, he is at hand to transfer a similar payment to Jim's grand-daughter. The realization of his own record of ineffectiveness must have been a strong part of the intense state of bewilderment and despair he experienced on this occasion: "No wonder the ruined woods I used to know dont cry for retribution!... The people who have destroyed it will accomplish its revenge." (GDM, p. 364)

What can we surmise about the elimination of these injustices if Ike had not relinquished the plantation? It seems to me that there is convincing, though not conclusive evidence throughout Go Down, Moses that the plantation world would have fared better under Ike than it did under the three Edmondsses who superseded him, though obviously I am resorting to a good deal of conjecture here.
But that Cass was not as enlightened an overseer as Uncle Buck had been is strongly suggested early in the fourth section of "The Bear," where the commissary is described as "the square, galleried, wooden building squatting like a portent above the fields whose laborers it still held in thrall '65 or no...." (GDM, p. 255). The condition of the plantation world under the Edmondses is given further amplification in a later passage in the same section:

--that whole edifice intricate and complex and founded upon injustice and erected by ruthless rapacity and carried on even yet with at times downright savagery not only to the human beings but the valuable animals too, yet solvent and efficient and, more than that; not only still intact but enlarged, increased; brought still intact by McCaslin, himself little more than a child then, through and out of the debacle and chaos of twenty years ago where hardly one in ten survived, and enlarged and increased and would continue so, solvent and efficient and intact and still increasing so long as McCaslin and his McCaslin successors lasted, even though their surnames might not even be Edmonds then.... (GDM, p. 298)

The inference here is plainly that McCaslin's efficient running of the plantation was to a considerable extent accompanied by an attitude of despotism towards its inhabitants. As one critic puts it, "(Cass) is largely responsible for the fact that long before Ike McCaslin becomes twenty-one in 1888 the Negroes of the plantation are once more in bondage, this time as sharecroppers."
We know, too, that both Zack and Roth Edmonds, in their turn, resorted to a form of human exploitation upon at least one occasion, and there is ample evidence in the "Delta Autumn" section that Roth at any rate is in an advanced stage of moral degeneracy. The girl is aware of Roth's character, and places the blame directly upon Ike. "I would have made a man of him," she says to Ike. "He's not a man yet. You spoiled him. You, and Uncle Lucas and Aunt Mollie. But mostly you.... When you gave to his grandfather that land which didn't belong to him, not even half of it by will or even law." (GDM, p. 360) In other words, by not accepting his inheritance, Ike shifted a responsibility upon others who had neither the character nor the vision required to transform the plantation world into an order based upon tolerance and humanity. From the fact that Ike's father manifested these qualities in his treatment of the slaves, and from the presence of these virtues within Ike himself, it is reasonable to deduce that his acceptance of the plantation world would have been a far more decisive way to remove its attendant injustices than his relinquishment turned out to be.

Ironically, it is Roth, the most degenerate and bitter of the McCaslin inheritors, who pinpoints with a savage and sarcastic accuracy the real meaning of Ike's long evasion
of responsibility. Ike had just uttered another of his sound observations on the human condition to the extent that a good man can always rise above his circumstances (he seems incredibly adept at pronouncing the very prescriptions which could have transformed his own life into a very meaningful one), when Roth lashes out at him: "So you've lived almost eighty years.... And that's what you finally learned about the other animals you lived among. I suppose the question to ask you is, where have you been all the time you were dead?" (GDM, p. 345) Admittedly, this is a cruel taunt, and it effectively illustrates Roth's crudity and insensitivity towards his fellow man. Nevertheless, there is more than a little justification in his equating of Ike's relinquishment with a form of death, for Ike in effect refused to remain alive to the problems which morally and legally were his to dispose of. It is as though Roth, recognizing his own alienation from humanity and his own limitations, gives expression to his bitterness because the one person equipped by nature and by training to bring about a moral enlightenment failed to take up this responsibility.

Our last view of Ike, then is that of a dispirited old man, shocked and outraged at the moral depravity still existing, and further depressed at the destruction of the wilderness values, a final ironic manifestation of which
is Roth's killing of a doe. His fellow hunters tolerate him but no longer look up to him, as even veteran hunters like General Compson and Walter Ewell did in the old days. In short, the picture is one of a tragic failure, for Ike has failed in his marriage, failed in his responsibilities towards the plantation world, and now at the end he fails when confronted by what amounts to his final chance to accept an embodiment of love and humanity as evidence of the reality of a world he has so long evaded. The tolerance, charity, and practicality of the young girl in this final scene contrast sharply with Ike's gropings and rationalizations. She accepts the money--her legacy from the McCaslin's--not because it is a substitute for love, but because she knows it cannot taint her, for, as she says to Ike, "I knew what I was doing. I knew that to begin with...." (GDM, p. 358) In other words, she bears the responsibility herself for her own predicament, and is presumably going to shape her life on the basis of that reality. In much the same way as Ike, she too has inherited a taint from the McCaslin heritage, but this knowledge does not render her inactive, as it did Ike. Perhaps in a final revelation Ike does have a glimpse of the hope she represents, for he gives her small son a hunting horn that he himself had inherited from General Compson; if this horn can be said to symbolize the virtues he had acquired in the wilderness order, then there is at least some communion established
here between the two worlds. But it is at best a gesture, and Ike fails to take the final step of demonstrating in some tangible form an unequivocal acceptance of the girl and her son. And it is this failure that represents the ultimate limitations of Ike, and his essential inability to understand the nature of the world or of man.

It seems clear, then, that as far as Faulkner's moral vision is concerned, Ike has been carefully examined and found wanting. Perhaps he represents a necessary stage in the process of moral evolution, in that he is an idealist who deliberately chooses to make no compromise with evil and injustice. And certainly, as a young man, his many virtues stood him in good stead in the wilderness world of Sam Fathers, where patience, humility and courage were indeed required if one were to survive, let alone prosper, in that world. But in the world of man, one must add to these virtues those of tolerance, forgiveness, and a willingness to take responsibility for the human condition, and it is in these respects that Ike falls far short of being a moral ideal. Robert Penn Warren once said that in Faulkner's works, "There are no villains, except those who deny the human bond," and while it would be an exaggeration to speak of Ike as a villain, it is undoubtedly true that his abdication of a large measure of human responsibility made him a passive, if not an active, agent of wrong-doing.
It has been my main contention in this chapter that Faulkner has used Ike and his renunciation in an inverse fashion, to demonstrate the futility of an idealism founded upon a mistaken concept of past values. For Ike, these dual values—the positive one from the wilderness world, and the negative one from the plantation world—combined to intensify the rigidity of the position from which he viewed the world. I have tried to indicate, too, that the other major character of *Go Down, Moses*, Lucas Beauchamp, and such relatively minor characters as Buck, Cass, Turl, and the girl in "Delta Autumn," represent the real nature of Faulkner's moral vision in a more vivid and meaningful way than does Ike. Such a position, I am aware, demands a resolving of two significant questions: how this vision fits in with Faulkner's fiction subsequent to *Go Down, Moses* and with his public pronouncements; and why Faulkner presented Ike generally in such a powerful and sympathetic light, especially in "The Old People" and the hunting sections of "The Bear." The former question will be explored fully in the next chapter of this thesis, and while the latter will form part of my concluding chapter, it is perhaps necessary to discuss it briefly here, in the perspective of the other things we have said about Ike. Essentially, I think, this dichotomy resulted from an uncertainty within Faulkner himself as to the real values inherent in a wilderness order.
Or at any rate, as he developed his ideas in the various episodes of *Go Down, Moses*, he probably recognized that the virtues he had endowed Ike with in the story "Lion" in 1935, were not sufficient for the total perspective in which he wanted to develop him in this later work. His uncertainty, it seems to me, serves his artistic purposes well, for it draws attention to a confusion in man generally, concerning the values of a wilderness world, or of any bygone world. In a state of uncritical reflection, we tend to exaggerate the virtues of such an order and to think that the problems of humanity will disappear if we can recapture the spirit of an older or a primitive world. It is only after careful observation and reflection, such as we are forced into in the difficult fourth section of "The Bear," that we recognize the fallacies of these views. At any rate, there is nothing in the works of Faulkner to suggest that man can find his fulfillment anywhere except in the world of man, and I think that this is what Faulkner wants to stress in his presentation of Ike.
Footnotes to Chapter IV

1 Faulkner in the University, pp. 245-46.


4 Lewis, p. 344.


6 Brooks, p. 374.


V

FAULKNER'S MORAL VISION: THE LATER WORKS

We have seen in the previous chapter that the basis of Faulkner's moral vision as expressed in *Go Down, Moses* is above all the willingness and ability to live with the human condition and to act decisively in the light of all that this means. We have seen, too, that Ike fell short of fulfilling this role, and that the most positive manifestations of Faulkner's moral position were reflected in the actions of Lucas Beauchamp and of some of the relatively minor figures throughout this work. It is true, of course, that Ike had the potential, and in a sense he fell just short of greatness, but essentially he failed to recognize that the capacity for doing good involved the capacity for accepting evil. The true moral heroes in Faulkner have always been those who have demonstrated a capacity for adjustment to whatever conditions existed in their particular world, and who were neither frightened by evil nor seduced by good. Olga Vickery defines the consequences of such extremes:

> Isolating either of these two aspects of human nature leads inevitably to distortion. To see only the good is to render oneself incapable of coping with the world of men. But to see only evil is to perpetuate that evil by excluding all possibility of change.
It is the purpose of this chapter to show that this moral vision implicit in *Go Down, Moses* is constantly emphasized, both implicitly and explicitly, in Faulkner's later fiction, and that such a position is consistent with the statements he has uttered on many public occasions. Within the context of this thesis, it is neither possible nor meaningful to discuss all seven books Faulkner has written since *Go Down, Moses*, and the emphasis in this chapter will therefore be on *Intruder in the Dust*, *A Fable*, and *The Reivers*. Of the others, I exclude *Knight's Gambit* not only because it is merely a collection of six largely unrelated detective stories whose only unifying link is the presence of Gavin Stevens, but also because four of the six stories were written prior to *Go Down, Moses*² and therefore no discussion of them in terms of this work would be meaningful. *Requiem for a Nun*, too, must be excluded here, because its complex narrative-documentary-dramatic form invites discussion largely in terms of technique, a consideration which lies beyond the scope of this thesis. And finally, the two remaining novels, *The Town* and *The Mansion*, are parts of the Snopes Trilogy, and as such must be seen in relation to *The Hamlet*, which preceded *Go Down, Moses* by some two years. I do not intend to suggest that, because of these other factors, these novels do not reflect Faulkner's true moral position; in my estimation, all of them, with the possible
exception of *Knight's Gamit*, illustrate some very clear manifestations of the vision he developed in *Go Down, Moses*. But any meaningful discussion of this aspect of these novels would of necessity introduce a number of other crucial problems which lie far beyond the scope of my thesis.

The remaining three novels, on the other hand, clearly invite discussion in terms of *Go Down, Moses*. *Intruder in the Dust* and *The Reivers* are fairly direct sequels of the earlier work, for in a very real sense they are still part of the McCaslin saga, not only from the point of view of the characters involved, but also from the fact that the same kinds of tensions which characterized the earlier work also underlie the structure of these novels. Both, for example, depict the moral growth of a young boy as he moves from a state of innocence to one of knowledge, though *Intruder in the Dust*, of course, provides a far grimmer backdrop for this purpose than does *The Reivers*. Furthermore, these two novels represent significant positions chronologically among the works published subsequent to *Go Down, Moses*, the former being the first to appear after that book, while the latter, being Faulkner's last book, can be viewed as his final statement on this whole question. *A Fable* merits discussion in this perspective for two main reasons. In the first place, it was the first novel Faulkner actually began writing after *Go Down, Moses*, though it was
to take him another nine years to finish it, a situation which suggests that he wrestled for some time with the moral questions he had raised in the previous book. And secondly, it is the only novel in which Faulkner appears to be deliberately trying to achieve some kind of universality, and it is essential, I feel, to examine the moral vision reflected in a work of this scope and stature.

Within the framework of Faulkner's statement about the three stages of human involvement, both the corporal and Chick Mallison clearly represent the third stage, in that they see an injustice in their world and proceed to do something about it. With Lucius Priest, on the other hand, no such motivation exists, and indeed, none is necessary. Like Boon Hogganbeck, he was so intrigued by the prospect of their surreptitious undertaking that no higher motive was required. It is true, of course, that throughout his escapade he was frequently confronted by situations which offended his existing moral attitude, but he did not set out upon his expedition with a preconceived notion of correcting a wrong, as did Chick and, in his own much more complicated way, the corporal. But all three protagonists achieve moral stature by means of an act motivated by their own convictions, which in effect meant acting in defiance of their community or family traditions. In all three books,
the voices of traditional authority are quite strong, and for Chick and Lucius at any rate, these voices are at times attractive enough to cause them some doubts about their undertaking. But in the end it is the individual conviction which prevails, and this of course is in keeping with Faulkner's frequent public assertions that it is the individual voice and the individual act which provide the evidence of man's immortality. His remarks at Nagano, for example, clearly indicate the position he adopts in these novels:

The proof of [man's] immortality is the fact that ... in spite of all the anguishes and the griefs which he himself has invented.... he still lasts, and still there is always some voice... saying, "This is wrong, you must do better than this." And there is always somewhere someone that says: "Yes, that's right, I will do better than this," even though he himself knows that he might fail.... It's that single voice that's the important thing.5

It is *Intruder in the Dust* which most strikingly dramatizes the triumph of the individual over the forces of the community, whether black or white, and which shows how important a small, single voice can be in the bettering of the human condition. It is not only that the individuals—both Lucas and Chick—prevail over the community as a physical and social entity, but that they free themselves of a deeply entrenched prejudice they had inherited from their respective communities. For Chick, this feeling "was part of his
heritage of his inescapable past, it was a rich part of his heritage as a Southerner, " (Intruder, p. 11), and in his unfortunate attempts to be magnanimous to Lucas, he simply intensified this division; for Lucas, this feeling was manifested in a pride which caused him to take offense at Chick's well-meant gestures. A major underlying strain in this novel is the resolution of this tension which exists between these two friends. Lucas, as might be expected, has the last word: "You'll be welcome without waiting for a freeze," (Intruder, p. 183), but these words also spell out his unequivocal acceptance of Chick.

Lucas's position throughout Intruder in the Dust is a rather strange one in that his role is almost completely a passive one in terms of his own actions, yet his very presence is an incitement to strong action on the part of others. We have learned what to expect of him from "The Fire and the Hearth," as far as his qualities of pride and independence are concerned, and in that respect this novel does not disappoint us, yet his importance here lies not so much in what he does as in what he represents—on the one hand, a victim of injustice, and on the other, a Negro "who does not know his place." In many ways his position is analogous to that of Rider in "Pantaloons in Black," in that the white community is as much incensed by his refusal
"to admit he's a nigger" as it is by the circumstantial evidence of his guilt of murder. So, while he represents the moral and narrative center of the novel, it is Chick Mallison who becomes the positive moral agent, and who thereby perpetuates the ethical attitudes which Lucas and others had already manifested earlier in *Go Down, Moses*.

At first, Chick is not really outside the community, for like his uncle Gavin, he does not doubt that Lucas is guilty, and it is not until Miss Habersham asserts his innocence that he senses the justification of his mission. But the importance of his action does not depend entirely on the question of Lucas's guilt or innocence; it lies mainly in the fact that it represents a direct communion between man and man, and a willingness to assert one's humanity even in the face of almost certain defeat. To all intents and purposes, Lucas is already doomed, and Chick knows this, yet he makes the gesture, and the gesture eventually assumes enough substance and motion to save him. As Faulkner stated during his conferences at Nagano, "Anyone can save anyone from injustice if he just will, if he just tries, just raises his voice." In raising his voice, Chick reveals a moral and ethical conscience which contrasts sharply with that of the community, including the black one. It is true that the fear of reprisals and lynching kept the Negroes silent on this occasion; but Aleck Sander...
expressed their general belief in Lucas's guilt when he said to Chick, "So they ain't come for Lucas yet,....
It's the ones like [him] makes trouble for everybody." (Intruder, p. 66) Gavin Stevens, though not of that segment of the community represented by Mr. Lilley and the barbershop crowd, nevertheless is cynically positive of Lucas's guilt, and he even shares the exasperation that the others feel because of his independence. "Lucas," he said, "has it ever occurred to you that if you just said mister to white people and said it like you meant it, you might not be sitting here now?" (Intruder, p. 49) The weak moral position of the community is made abundantly clear in this bit of faulty logic uttered by Gavin. Lucas is in jail because he is a murder suspect, not because he has bad manners. And Gavin has doubtless forgotten that in his "gentleman's South" a large number of "good niggers who know their place" have also been lynched. Lucas succinctly exposes this moral shabbiness: "So I'm to commence now," he said, "I can start off by saying mister to the folks that drags me out of here and builds a fire under me." (Intruder, p. 49) Only Miss Habersham had no reservations about Lucas's innocence, and her implicit faith in him is perhaps the strongest testimony we have regarding the moral stature of this man. It is perhaps significant that it took an old lady and a young boy to achieve something in this novel;
long ago, Tomey’s Turl had told Cass: “anytime you wants to git something done, from hoeing out a crop to getting married, just get the womenfolks to working at it.”

(GDM, p. 13) Certainly, both Miss Habersham’s convictions and her practical talents were invaluable for Chick in the fulfillment of his mission.

The parallel between Chick’s experience and Ike McCaslin’s is fairly clear, as is the essential difference between their responses. Both learn early that their world is tainted, and that they are forced into a position where they have to make a decision about their role in this world. Both in a sense have received a kind of training from an older man which is to weigh quite heavily in their decision, and both receive the benefit of advice from a contemporary of their own society. It is perhaps true that as a tutor Lucas lacks both the thoroughness and the mysticism possessed by Sam Fathers, and that Gavin Stevens is somewhat less convincing a counsellor than Cass Edmonds, but nevertheless, both youths face their tasks with much the same preparation. At the moment of crisis, both choose to relinquish a part of their heritage, though Ike’s relinquishment is of a far greater scope than Chick’s temporary defection from his community tradition. But Chick is able to do something that Ike was incapable of, and that is to rejoin the stream of humanity. "In doing so," Olga Vickery
observes, "he... establishes once more the identification of the individual's interest with those of his community even as he affirms the responsibility of the individual not only for his own conduct but for the conduct of all men." In other words, Chick responds to the curse of injustice within the human condition, and comes out of his experience, not untouched, but certainly uncorrupted; and what really marks his advance over Ike is that he recognizes that a continued immersion in the human situation is the only meaningful way of remaining incorruptible. He therefore manifests the same attitude towards the world as that represented by Lucas in "The Fire and the Heath," the girl in "Delta Autumn," and Molly in "Go Down, Moses," in that all four refused to be crippled by unpleasant moral realities. In this respect, then, Intruder in the Dust reflects the same moral vision that Faulkner developed in Go Down, Moses, though of course this vision in the later book is rendered much more explicit.

Something must be said about the effect of Gavin's tendentious pronouncements concerning the Negro-white relationships, though this is essentially an aesthetic problem which lies largely beyond the scope of this thesis. I feel that Faulkner's true moral position is dramatized through the actions of Chick and Miss Habersham, and that Gavin's statements are not really essential to our
appreciation of this position. In many ways, they provide an ironic comment on the whole question, for while Gavin is talking about "the privilege of setting [the Negro] free ourselves," (Intruder, p. 118), Chick and Miss Habersham are in effect getting on with this task in no uncertain way. In other words, moral awareness must be manifested in meaningful action, not in platitudes. Earlier in the story, for example, Gavin had observed "how no man can cause more grief than that one clinging blindly to the vices of his ancestors," (Intruder, p. 39), without being aware, apparently, that this same blindness was shortly to render himself incapable of helping Lucas. Perhaps all that really needs to be said about these outbursts is that they on occasion provide an elaboration of some of the ideas evoked by the action of this novel; they do not, I feel, detract either from the stature of Chick or from the essential moral position that Faulkner upholds here. For long after the substance of Gavin's pronouncements is forgotten, the image of a young boy and an old lady opening graves at midnight, and the recollection of what this signifies, are still vividly impressed on one's mind.

In searching for a restatement of this moral vision in A Fable, we are faced with certain problems which do not obtain in either Intruder in the Dust or The Reivers. For
in this novel, Faulkner develops a theme of great complexity and scope, and his purpose is therefore served better by abstract statement than by dramatic incident, though I am not suggesting that these generalities are not grounded in some very positive actions. Nevertheless, to an extent that was not true in Intruder in the Dust, our appreciation of Faulkner's moral position here is dependent upon our grasping the relationship between the abstraction and the experience. Essentially, this interrelationship is manifested through two complementary strains—the action of the corporal in initiating the mutiny, and the effects of his action on those around him. Olga Vickery explains the nature of this relationship:

It is simply as a man that the Corporal succeeds in reminding some few others of their humanity, leading them to recognize their moral nature and to accept the responsibility for ethical decisions. In the process codes and traditions lose their sacrosanct quality. The filial obligation to conform and preserve is countered with the individual's duty to judge and, where necessary, to alter.

The main result of the corporal's action then, as far as the moral consequences are concerned, is that it demonstrates that man does have a choice in the working out of his fate; and an act can be judged in moral terms only, of course, if the element of free choice is involved. A Fable in essence is a record of the various judgments passed upon the corporal's actions, and of the soul-searchings and rationalizations.
with which each of the major figures measures his own stature against this action. In this process, all the traditional Faulknerian responses occur: some commit suicide, others take refuge in a strict code or ritual, while yet others embrace the reality and the cause revealed to them by the corporal. Those who choose the latter course suffer the same fate as the corporal, but Faulkner stresses that this act is a manifestation of one's individuality, "because each carried into that mutual doom a name and an individuality, and that most complete privacy of all: the capacity for that solitude in which every man has to die..." 9

Again the emphasis is on the individual acting with a complete acceptance of the consequences of his decision, and with a realization that it is only this kind of act which can bring him freedom.

It was in part this search for freedom which motivated one of the strongest moral agents in *A Fable* to relinquish his status as officer to become a runner with the rank of private. Unlike Isaac McCaslin, he repudiated his inheritance to rejoin the ranks of mankind, not to escape it: "All right," he told his company commander, "So I must get back into the muck with [man]. Then maybe I'll be free." (*A Fable*, p. 62) Significantly, while he had been an officer, he had heard nothing of the thirteen rebel soldiers, but
after rejoining the ranks, he learns about them almost at once. In telling him about these soldiers, an old porter stresses the fact that it takes only one man to instigate a moral revolution:

"Wasn't it just one before? Wasn't one enough then to tell us the same thing all them two thousand years ago: that all we ever needed to do was just to say, Enough of this--us, not even the sergeants and corporals, but just us, all of us, Germans and Colonials and Frenchmen and all the other foreigners in the mud here, saying together: Enough. Let them that's already dead and maimed and missing be enough of this--a thing so easy and simple that every human man, as full of evil and sin and folly as he is, can understand and believe it this time. Go and look at him." (A Fable, pp. 67-8)

The parallel between the porter's prescription drawn from the example of Christ, and the corporal's action is of course very clear, but the important thing for our purposes here is his recognition of the importance of the individual raising his voice in protest. It is this step which marks the advance over Ike McCaslin of both the corporal and Chick Mallison, or rather it is the protest plus the appropriate action, for Ike, too, protested about the conditions he discovered. We are not told specifically about the exact nature of the corporal's actions, except that he had somehow infiltrated throughout the enemy lines as well as the Allied ones his message of rebellion, and that at the appointed time the mass protest effected a temporary armistice. But, like Lucas Beauchamp in
Intruder in the Dust, he remains somewhat in the background throughout the novel, and serves as the moral center against which to measure the responses of the others. The importance of his short-lived rebellion lies mainly in the fact that it demonstrated that man is not bound inescapably by the forces of tradition or of any institutionalized form of authority or tyranny. Within the framework of this realization, the morally significant act is the one which, even if it fails, makes some attempt to rid the world of injustice or evil.

Aside from the corporal and the runner, another character who gives strong expression to Faulkner's moral position is the Reverend Tobe Sutterfield who, along with the sentry, forms the connection between the horse-thief episode and the main novel. His acceptance of the totality of life shows clearly how far Faulkner progressed beyond Ike in the attempt to formulate a sound moral basis. "Evil is a part of man," he tells the runner as he recounts the episode of the three-legged horse, "evil and sin and cowardice, the same as repentance and being brave. You got to believe in all of them, or believe in none of them. Believe that man is capable of all of them, or he aint capable of none." (A Fable, p. 203) And earlier in the story he made it quite clear that man had only himself to blame if he is
destroyed: "Some day something might beat him, but it wont be Satan." (A Fable, p. 180) This position, as we shall see, finds further expression in The Reivers, and is essentially that which Faulkner developed through the relatively minor characters of Go Down, Moses. What ultimately beat Ike, of course, was not Satan or old Carothers, but his own limitations, and this is true of such characters in A Fable as the Priest, the corps commander, and the young flyer. Where Ike had been rendered helpless by a family taint, these others were incapacitated by various institutional loyalties, and all essentially failed to see the distinction between being blindly devoted to a cause and being fully aware of their responsibility for the human condition. "It is man who is our enemy," the corps commander said on one occasion, "the vast seething moiling spiritless mass of him." (A Fable, p. 30) And to a certain extent, it was this condition which troubled Ike, too, in his despair over his heritage.

In the horse-thief episode of A Fable, an illuminating contrast is implicitly drawn between the accomplishments of the three-legged horse and the moral shortcomings of persons who abdicate their responsibilities without striving towards some goal. The groom has just shot the horse to prevent its capture, and an ex-deputy, a strong moral agent in his own right, comments on why it was necessary to keep
the horse out of captivity all through its life:

  The reason was so that it could run, keep on running, keep on losing races at least, finish races at least even if it did have to run them on three legs, did run them on three legs because it was a giant and didn't need even three legs to run them on but only one with a hoof at the end to qualify as a horse. (A Fable, p. 163)

Like Isaac, and indeed, like all men, this horse was maimed, but in its obsession for freedom, it acted as though it did not know this. The fact that it had sufficient characteristics "to qualify as a horse" was adequate reason for its striving towards some ideal—in this case, freedom. The parallel with man is obvious: as long as man qualifies for the human race, he has an obligation to strive towards a human ideal, which in Faulkner's terms is a moral and ethical perfection, even if he knows that such a goal is ultimately unattainable. Within this perspective, Ike's limitations are obvious, and the accomplishments of such people as Turl, Lucas, or the runner take on an added significance.

A very strong relationship between this novel and Go Down, Moses lies in the nature of the responses made by the corporal and by Ike to the whole question of relinquishment. The corporal is skilfully tempted by his father, the old general, to relinquish his cause in exchange for the world, and the arguments the old man offers are, on the surface, quite convincing. "Take life," he
tells the corporal. "You are young... you [will] realize that nothing... not power nor glory nor wealth nor pleasure nor even freedom from pain, is as valuable as simple breathing, simply being alive...." (A Fable, p. 350) But these things that he juxtaposes against life are in themselves mere abstractions or illusions, and the corporal recognizes this; he counters all the general's temptations with his simple and consistent assertion of the reality he still possesses: "There are still ten." (A Fable, pp. 346, 347, 348, 352) In other words, the corporal is not prepared to repudiate his world of reality, nor his place in that world, in exchange for what in effect would be an illusory escape from reality. Ike, on the other hand, weighed escape against reality and chose the former, thus betraying his own world as surely as the corporal would have betrayed his ten followers had he succumbed to his father's temptations. The moral strength of the corporal does not lie in his decision to choose certain death over life, nor does Ike's moral weakness reside in his decision to live in terms of the wilderness values. After all, Sam Fathers chose the wilderness world, and he was no moral coward; and neither did Quentin Compson's choice of death make him a moral giant. What does establish these opposing categories is the grasp of reality, and the ability to apply the facts of this reality in the making of one's decision. The moral
superiority of the corporal over Ike stems largely from the fact that he possessed this capacity, and Ike did not. It is increasingly evident, it seems to me, that the moral position that Faulkner established in *Go Down, Moses* receives a consistently firmer clarification in these subsequent novels; as we will see, his last novel of all confirms this trend.

It is perhaps tempting, because *The Reivers* is a last novel, to conclude that it will reveal how Faulkner resolves a number of problems he has raised in his earlier fiction, or that it provides the true statement of Faulkner's ultimate moral vision. Even if Faulkner had known that this was to be his last novel, such suppositions would, I feel, be dangerous, for declared final statements about almost anything often turn out to be amazingly tentative. There is no evidence available to indicate that Faulkner did know that it was his last novel, so it will of course be necessary to treat this work as a simple continuation of Faulknerian themes, which happens to be, as far as this thesis is concerned, the last manifestation of his moral vision. But significantly, it is one of the clearest expressions of this vision, and the fact that it represents much the same position that Faulkner has held for some twenty years indicates that he considered this novel to be significant.
Very few critical studies of *The Reivers* have so far been published, and of those available, perhaps the soundest comments are those expressed by Cleanth Brooks in his recent study of Faulkner. He describes it as "essentially the story of a boy's invitation into manhood," and points out how this strain provides a strong thematic link with both "The Bear" and *Intruder in the Dust*. And he speaks highly of Faulkner's competent handling of the moral question, stating that "some of his basic convictions about human nature receive their happiest and most skillfully dramatic treatment here." Brooks offers some particularly illuminating comments on the moral stature of the Negro characters in this novel:

With regard to the world at large, Faulkner's Negro characters face problems unknown to the white characters. What particularly distinguishes men like Ned and Uncle Parsham—and, we might add, men like Lucas Beauchamp—is their ability to carry the special burden imposed on them by a caste society. They succeed in maintaining their dignity though they are denied the usual resources of pride and the ordinary protections that men use to guard their self-respect. To hold on to good humor and good sense and yet avoid cringing and truckling servility calls for sanity, imagination, and moral courage.

There is a strong reminder here of the three-legged horse in *A Fable*, which was also handicapped by a "special burden," and yet which, like the Negroes, attained stature in spite of it. This theme of bearing one's burden obviously is central to Faulkner's moral vision, for it recurs time
and time again in both his novels and his public statements. At the Nagano conferences, for example, Faulkner said, "I don't hold to the idea of a return.... It's got to go forward and we have got to take along with us all the rubbish of our mistakes and our errors." This position is not essentially different from that expounded by the girl in "Delta Autumn," who, it seems to me, takes on an increasingly important role within the framework of Faulkner's moral vision, nor is it distinct from that advanced in The Reivers by Grandfather Priest as he gives Lucius his definition of a gentleman:

"A gentleman can live through anything. He faces anything. A gentleman accepts the responsibility of his actions and bears the burden of their consequences, even when he did not himself instigate them but only acquiesced to them, didn't say No though he knew he should."14

The acceptance of this code marks Lucius's attainment of manhood, but it was not an easy process for him, for all through his escapade he seemed to be struggling against what he knew to be the inevitable facts of growing up. It was not that he thought he could ever go back from experience, for, as he said when they crossed the last obstacle on the way to Memphis, "the die was indeed cast now; we looked not back to remorse or regret or might-have-been;" (The Reivers, p. 93). It was when he was frightened that he had a feeling that he was losing something valuable by growing up too suddenly:
Because you should be prepared for experience, knowledge, knowing: not bludgeoned unaware in the dark as by a highwayman or footpad.... There are things, circumstances, conditions in the world which should not be there but are, and you can't escape them and indeed, you would not escape them even if you had the choice, since they too are a part of Motion, of participating in life, being alive. But they should arrive with grace, decency. I was having to learn too much too fast, unassisted; I had nowhere to put it... to accept it without pain and lacerations. (The Reivers, p. 155)

But, as we see, he shortly accepts the reality of his experiences and of their permanent effect on him. After learning about some of the more sordid facts of the world from Otis, he feels "wrenched and wrung and agonised," and wishes he could obliterate the whole experience. But, as he says to himself: "It was too late. Maybe yesterday, while I was still a child, but not now. I knew too much, had seen too much. I was a child no longer now; innocence and childhood were forever lost, forever gone from me." (The Reivers, p. 175)

Thus, in a very real sense, Lucius had maturity thrust upon him, and on the whole, he responded nobly to this challenge. It is true that he was morally outraged at times by some of the more unpleasant facts of this maturity, but naivete in an eleven-year old boy should not, even to-day, be a cause for surprise. What we get in this account of Lucius's experiences is, of course, a double perspective of their effects on him. In the first place,
we receive a sense of their immediate effects on him, and of his righteous struggles to avoid them; and secondly, we view them as they are judged through the accumulation of a half-century of wisdom—in other words, the real and lasting effects of experience. Here, indeed, "the child is father of the man," for the pronouncements of the old Lucius as he tells this story to his own grandson indicate how thoroughly he had incorporated into his own being the essence of these experiences as dramatized in his responses many years earlier. For example, the entire escapade to Memphis represented a progressive exposure of evil and sordidness to the young Lucius, but this is how he describes his version of that experience to his grandson:

...people talk about evil times or an evil generation. There are no such things. No epoch of history nor generation of human beings either ever was or is or will be big enough to hold the un-virtue of any given moment, any more than they could contain all the air of any given moment; all they can do is hope to be as little soiled as possible during their passage through it.... (The Reivers, p. 52)

Among other things, this passage reveals clearly how far beyond Ike Faulkner progressed in the development of his moral vision. The tolerant view of the human situation that Lucius upholds here stands out in sharp contrast to the despair expressed by Ike as an old man in "Delta Autumn," just as Lucius's immediate responses to experience as a young boy represent a far more meaningful understanding of reality.
than did Ike's withdrawal from the facts of his experience. Like Chick, Lucius learns early in life that good and evil are inextricably mixed up, and that one must take account of this fact in the formulation of a code with which to live by. Lucius's real moral strength lies in his ability to amend the code he had inherited from his father and grandfather; and they, too, recognize its inadequacy in light of the new experiences to which Lucius has been exposed. "It [a whipping] was wrong," Lucius reasons with himself, "and Father and I both knew it. I mean, if after all the lying and deceiving and disobeying and conniving I had done, all he could do about it was to whip me, then Father was not good enough for me. And if all that I had done was balanced by no more than that shaving strop, then both of us were debased." (The Reivers, p. 301)

There are, of course, other moral agents in The Reivers besides Lucius, though it is essentially his story, and it is his example which educes from these others their latent moral qualities. And in keeping with the pattern established in Go Down, Moses, Faulkner has invested some of the minor characters with a strong moral role, chief among whom are Mr. Poleymus and Uncle Parsham. It is not my intention to discuss these characters at great length, but it should be noted that their actions and responses
represent some of the finest and most sensitive displays of human feeling present anywhere in Faulkner, reminiscent of the relationships depicted in "The Fire and the Hearth" and "Pantaloon in Black." Lucius is particularly impressed by Mr. Poleymus: "And Mr. Poleymus may be little, and he may be old, but he's a man.... They told me how last year his wife had one of them strokes and cant even move her hand now, and all the chillen are married and gone, so he has to wash her and feed her and lift her in and outen the bed day and night both, besides cooking and keeping house too...." (The Reivers, p. 257) It is scenes like this which suggest to me that Faulkner places a great deal of significance on many of his peripheral characters; in their own quiet way, they often pose an ideal of existence which not only manifests a strong moral and ethical conscience, but which is grounded firmly in the day-to-day realities of their world.

From time to time in this chapter, I have emphasized the strong relationship which exists between Faulkner's public statements and the moral vision he has implicitly advanced in these novels. As indicated in Chapter II, some critics profess to find a discrepancy between the two Faulkners, or at any rate to see in the public Faulkner a rather pale reproduction of the artist. It is my contention that in terms of his moral vision there has always
existed a consistent relationship between what Faulkner says in public and what he says in his novels. I have already indicated the relevance of some of his Nagano remarks to his position in the three novels discussed in this chapter; there is no point in simply multiplying these examples, but perhaps it will suffice to compare a passage from "The Bear" with his public remarks on the same topic.

In the early part of this story, Ike has these thoughts about the old order:

... that doomed wilderness whose edges were being constantly and punily gnawed at by men with plows and axes who feared it because it was wilderness, men myriad and nameless even to one another in the land where the old bear had earned a name, and through which ran not even a mortal beast but an anachronism indomitable and invincible out of an old dead time, a phantom, epitome and apotheosis of the old wild life.... (GDM, p. 193)

And many years later at Nagano Faulkner made these remarks:

The wilderness to me was the past, which could be the old evils, the old forces, which were by their own standards right and correct, ruthless, but they lived and died by their own code.... The bear was a symbol of the old forces.... a natural force which represented not a deliberate evil, not a satanic evil, but the quality of evil in sample size and force which exists, which man has got to face and not be afraid of.... the bear representing not evil, but an old obsolescence that was strong....

The distinction here is surely one of technique or emphasis, and not of content; in both passages man is taken to task for failing to recognize the nature of evil and hence come to terms with it. Essentially, of course, this is the
theme which runs through the four works discussed in this thesis, and Faulkner's public expression of it is simply more explicit than his artistic one. We have seen, too, that his comments at the University of Virginia about the three stages of man's moral growth are adequately supported by the evidence in novels as widely separated as *Sartoris* and *The Reivers*, so it seems clear that this question has been of constant concern to him, whether he was speaking publicly or artistically.

Publicly, Faulkner is of course best known through his Nobel Prize speech, delivered in 1950, to which critics have frequently alluded in their attempts to resolve what they consider to be the two distinct Faulkners. Much has been said about Faulkner's use of such words as "endure," "prevail," "immortality," and so on; some critics feel that his use of these words is mere rhetoric and has nothing to do with his real convictions. Howe, for example, comments upon the effect of such expressions:

There are a good many remarks of this kind in *A Fable*, most of them spoken by positive characters and, therefore, one presumes, meant to be taken seriously. In their sum they seem little more than an example of that assuaging religiosity which has been so characteristic of our era and is finally no more than a symptom of the will to faith.... That Faulkner cares to endorse "belief" regardless of its nature and object or whether it even has a nature and object; that he puts himself on record affirming his confidence in man's capacity to endure and even prevail--such declarations may and obviously do move some of his readers. Others, like myself,
remain unmoved and unimpressed as long as Faulkner fails to tell us what, how and why man should "believe," and as long as he fails to tell us anything about the terms of man's "prevailing"—it all seems much too much of a vagueness.16

What Howe essentially fails to recognize in this analysis is that the character in *A Fable* who uses the word "prevail" is the old general who, compared to the corporal, the runner, and Tobe Sutterfield, is not a positive person. Furthermore, in this novel the general does not say that man will prevail, but rather that "man and his folly... will prevail." (*A Fable*, p. 354) In the Nobel Prize speech, on the other hand, Faulkner states that man will prevail: "I believe that man will not merely endure: he will prevail."17 It is this position, I contend, which has been consistently implicit in his novels since *Go Down, Moses*, and manifested in the actions and words of the various moral heroes as described in this thesis. Frederick Hoffman explains the significance of the Nobel Prize speech as follows:

> While the effect of the Stockholm remarks may have seemed sudden, the intent was assuredly not to strike an entirely new note, but merely to affirm the presence of an old one by reducing it to minimum essentials.18

It has been the central contention in this thesis that this "old" note was first clearly sounded in *Go Down, Moses*, and that it has been consistently re-affirmed in the novels subsequent to this work.
Footnotes to Chapter V

1 Vickery, p. 207.


3 Ibid., p. 38.

4 See p. 49 of this thesis.


6 Ibid., p. 76.

7 Vickery, p. 135.

8 Ibid., p. 196.


10 Brooks, p. 350.

11 Ibid., p. 351.

12 Ibid., p. 356.

13 Faulkner at Nagano, pp. 77-78.


15 Faulkner at Nagano, pp. 50, 58-59, 92.

16 Howe, pp. 279-280.


VI

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have attempted to analyze *Go Down, Moses* in terms of its significance in the development of Faulkner's moral vision. To see this work in its proper perspective, I have emphasized throughout the importance of treating it as a thematically unified whole, for only then is it possible to understand such major episodes as Ike McCaslin's renunciation and the hunting sections of "The Bear." As we have seen, critics have tended to discuss this work almost exclusively in terms of "The Bear," and by and large they have taken Ike's decision as the most dramatic manifestation of Faulkner's moral position. I have tried to show that if we judge Ike's decision in terms of the responses of the other characters in *Go Down, Moses* and of those in the novels written subsequent to this work, we are compelled to view his action in quite a different way. As we have seen, this interpretation gives rise to certain problems, and it is in part the purpose of this concluding chapter to try to resolve some of these issues.

First of all, it is necessary to examine briefly
how some of the major critical pronouncements discussed in Chapter II have to be modified in the light of my interpretations. The most obvious effect, it seems to me, is that Ike ceases to possess the semi-saintly characteristics with which he had often been credited, for in the total picture that this thesis presents, he assumes a significantly reduced stature. This minimizing of Ike undercuts both the primitivistic and the Christian interpretations that such critics as Campbell and Foster, Lewis, and Waggoner expound, for their view rests on the assumption that Ike possesses certain mystical qualities. Within the scope of the entire work, there is no particular reason for viewing Ike other than as an ordinary human being faced with somewhat the same exigencies as the other plantation inhabitants, and we therefore must judge him ultimately on the basis of his responses to these issues. In this sense, then, the humanistic interpretation takes on the greatest attraction; Faulkner himself lends support to this interpretation by a comment he made at Nagano: "I would say, and I hope, the only school I belong to, that I want to belong to, is the humanist school."¹

Treating Ike in strictly human terms simplifies another related problem that was briefly discussed earlier: what does Faulkner intend Ike to represent, and why does
he develop him at such great length? Part of the answer lies perhaps in the manner in which this work was composed, for Ike first appeared in the separate hunting story, "Lion," for which purpose Faulkner in all likelihood drew upon his own intimate hunting experiences for the personal qualities he deemed essential in that world. For there is no doubt that in the wilderness world Ike, both physically and morally, was admirably equipped for great and distinctive achievements. It is perhaps for this reason—Faulkner's intimate knowledge of the Delta country—that Ike receives so much attention in both "The Old People" and "The Bear." But it is clear, both from the rest of Go Down, Moses and from his own comments later on, that Faulkner never intended man to live in isolation from society, but that he must continually adjust to the changing world about him. He spoke to this effect at the University of Virginia when questioned about his feelings for Old Ben: "It's not to choose sides at all—just to be compassionate about the good splendid things which are a part of man's past too, part of man's heritage too, but they were obsolete and had to go...." Ike's problem was that he did not recognize that some of the values he clung to had been rendered obsolete because of changing conditions, and for this reason he became a failure in human terms, the measure of which becomes clear only when we consider the work as a
whole. And in light of this failure, it is difficult to see Ike as a spokesman for Faulkner, except perhaps in the hunting stories. As indicated earlier, it seems evident that Faulkner used Ike to represent the futility of basing noble motives on specious sentiments, for such motives are essentially hollow and non-generating in their effects. It seems clear, however, that Ike did pose a problem for Faulkner, and no doubt the temptation was strong to develop him into some kind of noble savage type. That Faulkner did not do this, but rather showed him in purely human terms, is evidence not only of his artistry, but of the realistic and humanistic basis of his moral vision.

A third problem which my interpretation gives rise to concerns the relative greatness of the novels written prior to Go Down, Moses in contrast with those written after. Most critics agree that novels such as The Sound and the Fury, Light in August, or Absalom, Absalom! cannot be matched by any of the later novels, and these were all written before Faulkner developed what I have described as a most significant moral vision. Does this mean, then, that the attainment of a meaningful moral vision is attended by a lessening of one's artistic powers? This is a critical question which cannot be answered fully here, for it brings in discussions of technique as well as a careful analysis of the earlier novels. But it is perhaps sufficient to
observe that Faulkner's attainment of a sound moral vision was accompanied by an attempt on his part to achieve a greater degree of universality through an increasing use of abstraction and generality. It is perhaps this approach which caused some of the later novels to be inferior in execution, though I do not think the inferiority in all cases is as great as some critics suggest. For example, in describing *A Fable* as an accumulation of "so striking an ensemble of mistakes," Howe is as guilty of misreading this novel as some of the earlier critics were in misreading "The Bear." I think that these later novels, and perhaps especially *A Fable*, need to be read with a different set of criteria than obtained with the earlier novels. Certainly it is not possible to read them in a meaningful way without understanding the moral position that Faulkner increasingly emphasized in his later years, both publicly and artistically. This point is made clear by Waggoner:

> The latter part of Faulkner's career has been marked by three parallel developments: a new stress on the moral function of art, a gradual change of emphasis from despair to affirmation, and a tendency to make his themes explicit through the use of spokesman characters.†

This thesis has attempted to show that, beginning with *Go Down, Moses*, and extending through *Intruder in the Dust*, *A Fable*, and *The Reivers*, Faulkner's moral vision has been manifested in an increasingly meaningful pattern,
though essentially its basis remains as it was formulated in the earlier work. It is not suggested that this vision is reducible to a formula, but nevertheless, it is clear that such qualities as endurance, humility, courage, flexibility and self-sacrifice are at the root of it. Or perhaps it is as simple as Cleanth Brooks sees it:

The truth of the matter is that Faulkner's world has always had room in it for a wide range of experience and that Faulkner has never offered his world as proof of any special thesis about human nature other than the marvelous capacity human beings have for goodness and evil.⁵

At any rate, Go Down, Moses occupies a crucial position in the formulation of this vision, for in the various worlds that this work reveals, and in the numerous responses to experience and reality that it dramatizes, are found the multiple and complex components of a meaningful life.
Footnotes to Chapter VI

1 Faulkner at Nagano, p. 95.
2 Faulkner in the University, p. 277.
3 Howe, p. 268.
4 Waggoner, p. 213.
5 Brooks, p. 366.
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III Articles.


