

## Faulkner's Black and White Oedipal Drama in "The Fire and the Hearth"

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### I.

*Go Down, Moses*, which concludes William Faulkner's "major period," is arguably the Southern novelist's most mature work in that it develops the racial theme more directly and fully than do his other masterpieces written at the zenith of his writing career. The novel's seven interconnected stories demonstrate how deeply Lucius Quintus (old) Carothers McCaslin's sinful treatment of his black slaves—his sexual exploitation of Eunice and their daughter Tomasina—in the Old South have affected his descendants, both black and white. Critics have agreed that *Go Down, Moses* is one of the most important works in Faulkner's opus. And they have examined in detail the book's central character Isaac (Ike) McCaslin's "heroic" decision to give up his inheritance as a patriarch of the McCaslin clan in "The Bear." Relatively less attention has been paid to the serious effects of Ike's apparently sincere decision on his black and white relatives. In this essay I focus on Lucas (Quintus Carothers McCaslin) Beauchamp and Carothers (Roth) Edmonds in "The Fire and the Hearth" to suggest that Faulkner succeeds in fully relativizing the "tragedy" of the white hero of romantic irony (Ike) and creating an African American character (Lucas) with his own positive voice

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and story rather than only appearing as the negative mirror of racist ideology.

Whereas Rider's tragedy in "Pantaloon in Black" illuminates the world from which Ike has averted his eyes, in that he obviously does not know what has happened to the black McCaslin offspring, "The Fire and the Hearth" presents the same world in more direct relation to Ike's renunciation of his patrimony. In other words, whereas the significance of Rider's story lies at least partly in his namelessness, which indicates his unrecorded McCaslin identity, the importance of the story of Lucas and Carothers (Roth) Edmonds is inseparable from their acute consciousness that they, a Beauchamp and an Edmonds, are both descendants of old Carothers.

Although Ike only briefly appears in the flashback that presents Lucas's demand for his McCaslin legacy on his twenty-first birthday, the story of Lucas and Roth is inextricably interwoven with Ike's "heroic" decision in "The Bear," because "without him," as Thomas C. Foster points out, "the conflict between Lucas and Roth would not exist" (64). The constant friction between Lucas and Roth stems largely from the fact that Lucas is a "man-made" black McCaslin, whereas Roth is a "woman-made" white McCaslin. If Ike, as the last "man-made" white McCaslin, had assumed the "right" position as a patriarch or "father" of the family, both Lucas and Roth might have found themselves comfortable as Ike's "sons" in their "ordered places," to use a Faulknerian expression. The legitimate king, however, mysteriously abdicated and annihilated this stable oedipal order. Although John Carlos Rowe states that "of course, [Roth] knows the history of miscegenation in the ledgers" (90), I doubt that Roth learns about the sins of old Carothers in the same way as Ike does. Ike has probably never told anyone the reason for his renunciation since his dialogue with Carothers McCaslin (Cass) Edmonds on his twenty-first birthday (and perhaps even Cass does not know the reason for Eunice's suicide). The result is that "Lucas's interpretation that Cass somehow beat Isaac out of the patrimony is not atypical of the community's sentiments" (Brinkmeyer 217). Ike, like Colonel John Sartoris in *The Unvanquished*, declares that he is the "dead father" in the modern world, and "The Fire and the Hearth" presents the confusion and struggle of the "sons" in the chaotic world after the death of the strong father.

## II.

Between Lucas and Roth, apparently Lucas deals better with the death of the "father," for he can simply hate Ike, whose "suicide" is an unforgivable insult to his pride as a "man-made" McCaslin. From his viewpoint, this dead father "had turned apostate to his name and lineage by weakly relinquishing the land which was rightfully his to live in town on the charity of his grandnephew" (Faulkner 39). "Not only is Lucas conscious of his being a McCaslin," James Early observes, "he is extremely aware of his role as the last of an older generation" (82). Given that Ike is the only important male character who belongs to Lucas's generation in the present of the story, it is small wonder that critics have regarded Lucas as "Ike's counterpart" (Hochberg 59) and contrasted him with Ike (Brooks 253-54). Lucas is an old-fashioned man who loves "the old days, the old time, and better men than these" (Faulkner 43-44). He, however, is not a man of romantic irony like Ike, who is not only disillusioned with the modern world but also transcends the disillusionment. Unlike Bayard Sartoris in *The Unvanquished*, Lucas is not a person who doubts the righteousness of the past way of life. It is important that Lucas, as Thadious M. Davis observes, "does not seem at all aware of the circumstances surrounding the birth of his mixed-race, nearly white father, Turl" (156). Thanks to Ike's repression of the history of the McCaslins, Lucas, unlike Ike and Bayard, does not have to know the "father's sin."

Lucas's ignorance of the dark history of the McCaslins makes it possible for him not only to be proud of his McCaslin blood, but also to be obedient to the (anachronistic) oedipal pattern. As John N. Duvall argues, for instance, Lucas's attempt to eliminate George Wilkins might be "a version, albeit an inversion, of Oedipal desire" (80), especially given that Lucas thinks: "*It will be a lesson to him about whose daughter to fool with next time*" (Faulkner 61; Faulkner's italics here and throughout in quoted sentences). Furthermore, as Davis writes, "there may be a conscious repression of Turl at work" when "on his twenty-first birthday Lucas asks for the money old Carothers left for his father in his will" (156-57), which reminds us of the young Faulkner's own repression of his father by admiring his great-grandfather. Interestingly enough, Lucas changes his name from "Lucius" to "Lucas," again in the manner reminiscent of the young Faulkner who added "u" to his family name. Lucas's similarities to Faulkner put aside, this name-changing episode suggests that in order to be a "man" Lucas eventually has to deal with his

grandfather even if he uses his white ancestor at first to beat his black father—his confrontation with Zachary (“Zack”) Edmonds provides the opportunity.

As some critics have demonstrated, Lucas’s confrontation with Zack is significant in various respects. For example, this confrontation reveals itself as a racial problem for Lucas because, “by taking Molly into his house to nurse his motherless son, Zack exhibits his assumption that Lucas and Molly are primarily his servants rather than primarily husband and wife” (Zender 79): “‘I’m a nigger,’ Lucas said [to Zack]. ‘But I’m a man too’” (Faulkner 46). In the wider context of the novel, moreover, this episode is closely linked to old Carothers’s “systematic rape of African-American women” (Rowe 82), because Lucas, if unknowingly, “has transformed his own wife into Eunice, suspecting Zack of behavior that their shared ancestor, old Carothers, had inflicted first on Lucas’s great-grandmother” (Kinney, *Go Down, Moses* 91). Realizing Lucas’s suspicion, Zack says: “So that’s what you think. What kind of a man do you think I am?” (Faulkner 46). As Dirk Kuyk Jr. assumes, Lucas’s inferred answer would be “a man like Carothers” (45). While ignorant of old Carothers’s inhuman treatment of Eunice, Lucas knows what his white ancestor did to Tomasina (in which sense his suspicion is not totally groundless). This is how the Zack-Lucas-Molly triangle puts Lucas in the place where he “got to beat old Carothers” (Faulkner 53) as well as Zack, who, as if to help the Negro “son” fully understand the (double—or triple) oedipal situation,<sup>1</sup> challenges Lucas as the strong “father”: “Come on then. Do you think I’m any less a McCaslin just because I was what you call woman-made to it? Or maybe you aint even a woman-made McCaslin but just a nigger that’s got out of hand?” (54).

Before analyzing the consequence of Lucas’s confrontation with Zack, I have more to say as to what the “father” Zack’s jeopardizing of his marriage with Molly means to this “son.” Lucas has two (or more) “fathers,” as do Ike and Sam Fathers. Unlike Sam, however, Lucas is not an epic character. He has to live and struggle in the actual modern world from which Ike has “freed” himself to secure his transcendental position. Unlike Ike, he has to establish himself as a “man” in the racist community that treats him like a “boy.” It cannot be a coincidence that Faulkner contrasts Lucas’s blazing marriage with Ike’s barren one with Lucas’s emblematic “fire on the hearth”: Ike’s “‘fireless rented room’ . . . contrasts detrimentally with the fire in the house of Lucas Beauchamp’s house” (Creighton 134). Whereas Ike has to turn down his femme fatale

wife's temptation so as not to be a "man" like his grandfather, Lucas needs his wife so that he can be a "man" like his grandfather. "Lucas's marriage with Molly," as Davis points out, "is one of the visible signs of his freedom and manhood" (139). In other words, for this oedipal "son," his wife assumes the position of a femme fatale who promises him masculinity. Lucas's "identity as a man is dependent on Molly's presence in his home" (Bealer 120). Although Lucas behaves like a "master" in that he treats Molly like his property or trophy wife (Lucas gets her in town, as Anse Bundren gets his wife in *As I Lay Dying*), he is in fact a "slave" to her in that he cannot lose her at any cost.

For Lucas, to "kill" the "father" Zack and keep the "femme fatale" Molly are two sides of the same coin. This "romantic" coin is perhaps everywhere in modernist fiction: we have only to remind ourselves of the stubborn romantics such as Robert Cohn in *The Sun Also Rises* or Jay Gatsby in *The Great Gatsby*. The author of *Go Down, Moses*, however, is conscious that this coin is an anachronism, as the ambiguous result of Lucas's "patricide" suggests: Lucas throws away his razor as if to throw away the stereotyped image of a Negro and pulls the gun's trigger, but it turns out to be a "miss-fire" (Faulkner 56).

In a sense, this "miss-fire" does not change the fact that Lucas has accomplished his aim, winning the "virility contest" (Gray 187-88). He successfully "kills" his "father," and this "gesture forever establishes Lucas's dominance over Zack" (Klotz 739), as Roth later painfully suspects (Faulkner 112). When Lucas, after his confrontation with Zack, thinks, "*I reckon I aint got old Carothers' blood for nothing, after all. Old Carothers. . . I needed him and he come and spoke for me*" (57; my ellipses), he seems to have not merely established himself as the new "father" but also to have even achieved a reconciliation with his white ancestor. As Philip M. Weinstein notes, "Defiantly risking his own life and Zack's, Lucas answers—as no one else in *Go Down, Moses* does answer—the old man's original challenge" (97). It is understandable in this light that Nancy Dew Taylor calls Lucas a "man who successfully deals with his mixed racial heritage" (59).

Lucas's "success," however, is possible and secure only so long as he remains in the oedipal or ahistorical world of the Zack-Lucas-Molly triangle, just as Ike's renunciation is successful and secure only so long as he remains in the mythic, ahistorical world of the lost wilderness. As soon as he resumes his life in the actual world, or in the Symbolic, to employ a Lacanian term, Lucas cannot but say to himself: "How to God . . . can

a black man ask a white man to please not lay down with his black wife? And even if he could ask it, how to God can the white man promise he wont?" (Faulkner 58; my ellipses). "This question," Charles H. Nilon notices, "poses the paradox of the ideal and the real" (19). Lucas can be a hero in the ahistorical world, the ideology of which enables him to refer to Zack "as Mr Edmonds, never as Mister Zack, as the other negroes did" (Faulkner 101) and makes him believe that "the sheriff was a redneck without any reason for pride in his forbears nor hope for it in his descendants." In the actual racist community, however, Lucas has to be aware that "to the sheriff Lucas was just another nigger" (43).

Lucas "kills" the "father" and wins the femme fatale in the closed oedipal world; however, once placed in the wider social context, "the pistol's miss-fire," as Richard Godden puts it, at best "represents an honorable draw," because "to kill Zack is suicide" (51). It is not just that Lucas would be lynched if he killed Zack (Joiner 57), for this result would satisfy his heroism as the rebellious "son": "*I would have paid. I would have waited for the rope, even the coal oil. I would have paid*" (Faulkner 57). It is rather that the "miss-fire" indicates that Lucas cannot be such a "hero" in the actual world, or even that the romantic world that enables him to be such a "man" is dependent on the real world, just as Ike's heroism is dependent on the loss of the wilderness or on the actual world outside the mythologized wilderness.<sup>2</sup> The Imaginary is retroactively "discovered" when the subject enters the Symbolic—this Lacanian logic neatly applies to Lucas's heroic act as a Negro. What makes his confrontation with Zack heroic is always already interwoven with the social fact that he is a "nigger" who defies the law of the Symbolic, just as Ike refuses to submit to the communal law that tells him to inherit the patrimony.

From the moment Lucas establishes himself as a "man," he finds himself in a world where he cannot be a "man." The gun's "miss-fire" by no means represents his defeat. Even so, it still represents his "figurative castration" (Clark 71). This is the kind of paradox Ike aprioristically transcends through his romantic irony, which makes him "wise" enough not to yield to the emasculating femme fatale's temptation or fake promise of manhood. Lucas, however, is not a man of romantic irony. He is a Faulknerian romantic who stubbornly denies his castration, clinging to the romantic, anachronistic code, and struggling to maintain or repeat the moment of his establishment as a "man." This romantic struggle puts him in an impasse and even makes him look pathetic. Because the ahis-

torical world he vainly struggles to recover is the utopia where his establishment as a "man" would have nothing to do with his race, however, his pathetic struggle serves as social criticism precisely because it is pathetic. For instance, Lucas's pride as a "man-made" McCaslin deconstructs itself as a dramatic irony on him, but the source (and object) of this irony is the social context, namely, the racist community. Furthermore, and more important, Lucas's struggle for utopia functions as a radical criticism of Ike's transcendence of the struggle, because Lucas's romantic dream is exactly what Ike has personally achieved (by "freeing" the "Negro" Sam) on the communal presupposition that the "enduring" Negroes would have to wait for a long time until racism disappears: "*Maybe in a thousand or two thousand years in America*" (Faulkner 344).

Jay S. Winston writes: "Lucas has, in a fashion, stepped outside the racial divide" (137). The world "outside the racial divide" is Lucas's utopia, the world where only the law of the jungle or the law of old Carothers prevails, the world where he can beat Zack, "who was not the man his father had been but whom Lucas, the man McCaslin, had accepted as his peer to the extent of intending to kill him" (Faulkner 44), just as Cass, from Lucas's viewpoint, can beat Ike because he is "a McCaslin only by the distaff yet having enough of old Carothers McCaslin in his veins to take the land from the true heir simply because he wanted it and knew he could use it better and was strong enough, ruthless enough, old Carothers McCaslin enough" (44). Believing in such a law, Lucas throws himself into the endless struggle with the actual racist world where the color of his skin is more important than his metaphysical pride in his paternal ancestor.

It is no wonder that Lucas tries to differentiate himself from the other Negroes. (His "standardized" English, for instance, suggests his recognition of himself as superior to other Negroes [Ross 242].) It is not that he despises his own "black blood" or even that "Lucas's role models are white patriarchs, not black" (Bell 228), but rather that he despises anyone who is not a "man-made" McCaslin or who cannot behave like a "man-made" McCaslin in order to prove that he is a "man" in the racist world. To perform as a "man" in such a world, Lucas fights against, or at least distances himself from, the "Negro" community. "While he maintains physical ties to Molly, Nat, and George," Keith Clark observes, "we do not see him as an integral part of this black configuration on a deeper, psychological level" (70). Even though Rider takes Lucas

as his model, “Lucas does not share [the] type of intimacy [we see in ‘Pantaloons in Black’] with either Molly or the black community. Nor does Lucas value bonding with the black community over his own personal authority and autonomy” (Bell 231). As a result, Lucas cannot be but a lonely man whose “actions are grounded less in love, whether familial or communal, than in pride and contempt” (Latimer 4). The emotional bond with others is what Lucas has to sacrifice in order to be a “man.”

Lucas’s pathetic struggle makes him resemble another Faulknerian romantic who despises everyone, takes pride in his paternal lineage, misses the lost old days, regards women as commodities, and has an obsession with being a “man”—Jason Compson in *The Sound and the Fury*. Viewed in this light, Lucas’s interest in or rather obsession with money is not surprising. Lucas’s vain efforts in the gold hunt remind us of Jason’s speculation in the cotton market, especially because of its futility: Lucas fools the salesperson with his salted mine trick, but the fact remains that he wastes money and energy on nothing. Furthermore, as is the case with Jason, money is not simply money to Lucas. Money is, first of all, “for Lucas one of the primary signifiers of manhood” (Davis 137), as it is for Jason (and for many other male characters in Faulkner’s works). As some critics have observed, moreover, “when Lucas finds the gold piece, he may attach excessive symbolic importance to it” (Matthews 236): “He thinks it is part of his monetary legacy from old Carothers McCaslin” (Kinney, *Go Down, Moses* 115). Ironically enough, Lucas violates the sacred place called the “Indian mound” to find the McCaslin legacy Ike repudiated by imitating his Indian “father.”

The (probably nonexistent) buried money represents for Lucas what Quentin’s college tuition, Caddy’s first car in town, or the promised bank job represents for Jason: (the dispossession of) what Lucas, as a Negro McCaslin, never had. Lucas has to “steal” it by his own hands to be a “man” (as Jason steals money from his mother, sister, and niece), which is why he tries to get from Roth three hundred dollars at first and, when Roth rejects his request for a loan, steals Roth’s mule to pay for the divining machine, even though he still has “them three thousand dollars old Carothers left [him]” (Faulkner 122). “You’ve got over three thousand dollars in the bank,” Roth reasonably says to Lucas. “Advance yourself the money” (77). Lucas, however, cannot touch the money (just as Jason can only either lose or hoard the money he has stolen) for the same reason that his elder black Beauchamps have refused to receive the McCaslin

legacy. Lucas's unusable money, as well as the misfired gun, embodies how difficult it is for him to be a "man" in this racist community. He succeeds in getting the metal detector with the salted mine trick, but the machine, which should tell him how to be a "man," "dont seem to know how to say nothing but No" (90) to this black man.

Like Jason, Lucas in his quest for masculinity is destined to be a failure. As the repressed Miss Quentin (or Caddy) completely emasculates Jason in the end, Molly emasculates Lucas with her request for a "voce" (divorce). Whereas some critics have favorably evaluated Molly's action because "Mollie's threat to divorce herself from the man in her family unifies both her family and 'The Fire and the Hearth'" (Robinson and Town 197), others have expressed their ambivalence toward or even disappointment at Molly's frustration with Lucas's gold hunt for the same reason, and especially for their appreciation of Faulkner's characterization of Lucas as a hero who struggles to achieve his independence in a racist world. Davis remarks that "Molly becomes the instrument that will tie Lucas to a reality he longs to subvert. . . . Molly is . . . a tool of white society" (138). Walter Taylor practically makes the same point when he states that "Molly never appealed to other blacks when she was in trouble; she turned to whites like Edmonds and Stevens" (142). It seems to me, however, that these evaluations of Molly ignore the polyphonic quality of this novel and reduce her subjectivity to being part of Lucas's story (or Roth's), even though she struggles to get her own "voce/voice." It might be that Molly, as a character whose "portrayal was drawn directly from Mammy Callie" (Blotner 414), "herself is sentimentalized and stereotyped throughout this section" (Sensibar 116). She, however, is a novelistic or typically Faulknerian female character, who not only exists in relation to other characters but also subverts the other characters' romantic, patronizing expectations. The full analysis of Molly, which requires a detailed study of the final story, "Go Down, Moses," would be beyond the scope of this essay; here I would like to stress that the failure of Lucas's romantic quest for utopia is inevitable even without her interference, and that her involvement with it is the result of Lucas's own exploitation of her in his quest for masculinity.

When Molly asks Roth to help her to get a "voce," Lucas says: "I'm a man. . . . I'm the man here. I'm the one to say in my house, like you and your paw and his paw were the ones to say in his. . . . I'm going to be the man in this house" (Faulkner 116-17; my ellipses). This line not only indicates how seriously, desperately, and obsessively Lucas is

determined to find (or “steal”) the buried money to be a “man” because “he is willing to destroy his last remaining communal affiliation in the service of his heroic self-conception” (Zender 80), but also it exposes the limit of his gender performance. In this scene, Lucas’s routine statement that he must be the “man” does not function as a proper gender performance, for Molly denies his authority as the “man” of the house. Lucas, in fact, cannot but remark that he is himself satisfied with his marriage (Faulkner 116). His statement that he is the “man” is not a positive declaration of his masculinity but just a forced, empty negation of his emasculation, which might remind us how he thinks when he sees Molly after his confrontation with Zack: “*Women, he thought. Women. I wont never know. I dont want to. I ruther never to know than to find out later I have been fooled*” (58). Lucas, not sure whether he has been cuckolded, decides not to think about the terrible possibility, repressing his castration anxiety. One’s very fear of castration, however, symbolically equals castration (Žižek 203). Lucas can likely forget (or repress) his castration (anxiety) because Molly does not behave suspiciously. The repressed, however, returns in the form of the emasculating femme fatale who challenges and defies his authority as a “man.” It cannot be a coincidence that Faulkner makes Molly refer to Roth as “Mister Zack” (Faulkner 118) as if to remind Lucas of the ambiguous result of his confrontation with Zack.

“In the world of *Go Down, Moses*,” Elisabeth Muhlenfeld points out, “Faulkner invests his female characters with great strength . . . a life affirming strength firmly rooted in reality” (210). The female character with “strength firmly rooted in reality” is often a femme fatale to a male romantic in Faulkner’s novels, and it is little wonder that Molly, the representative of such female characters in this novel, wins the battle with Lucas by appealing to the “law,” which works against Lucas as well as against Jason. Lucas keeps negating his castration until the last moment, but he is compelled at last to admit defeat and appease Molly, telling the court that they will not get a divorce. Molly, after all, is at the center of his romantic dream, and he cannot lose her at any cost. (Rider’s story, which comes next in the book after Lucas’s, suggests what Lucas’s life might be like if he lost Molly.) That he has no other way to proceed than to call Roth “Mister Roth Edmonds” (Faulkner 124) so as not to lose his femme fatale is for him “a moment of unparalleled humiliation”: “The proud heir of Carothers has transformed himself into a humbled sambo” (Kinney, “Faulkner” 335, 336). Lucas is castrated in the Symbolic,

though he will probably continue his gender performance in his domestic sphere, as his purchase of a small sack of candy for Molly suggests (Faulkner 125).

This is how the racist community or "reality" beats Lucas in the end, and some critics, as I have mentioned, have found it problematic that Molly is the agent of the reality that represses the Negro hero's attempt to subvert the racist ideology of the South. Lucas's "defeat," however, is not Faulkner's failure but his success in creating a subversive Negro character. The very fact that Lucas cannot recover his utopia, it seems to me, powerfully testifies to the fact that the author of *Go Down, Moses* does not sentimentalize the Negro hero's struggle against the racist ideology of the actual South. "It is Lucas Beauchamp," Margaret M. Dunn puts it, "in whom the heritage of racial exploitation is most complexly reflected" (414). This complex reflection of the heritage of racial exploitation or, put more simply, Lucas's tragic fate would be obscured if Faulkner let Lucas have his utopia. *Go Down, Moses* is the first (and last) novel in Faulkner's career that presents a Negro hero (and also the first African American character who has an inner voice in Faulkner's novel) in the manner in which Faulkner presents tragic white romantics such as Jason, Quentin, Horace Benbow, and Joe Christmas (if he is in fact white). Molly's frustration with Lucas's romanticism does not represent the white Southern author's interference in a Negro hero's effort to establish himself as a "man" in the racist world, but suggests that Faulkner, for the first time in his work, presents black characters as subjects who stand in their own right.

### III.

Referring to Roth, the Negro woman in "Delta Autumn" says to Ike: "He's not a man yet. You spoiled him. You, and Uncle Lucas and Aunt Mollie. But mostly you" (Faulkner 343). Perhaps it is impossible to better her succinct explanation of Roth's relation to Ike, the "dead father." "The weakness or absence of fathers," according to John T. Matthews, "challenge their sons to speak paternal strength or presence into existence, to create fathers so as to rebel strongly against them" (215). I wonder whether this observation is applicable to Roth. Ike chooses Sam as his "father" to establish himself as a man of romantic irony. Lucas finds his "father" in Zack (or old Carothers) and beats him to establish himself as a romantic "man." Roth's problem, however, is that he cannot

have a “father” to challenge in order to establish himself in the ordinary oedipal manner, in which sense Ike’s mysterious renunciation deeply influences Roth’s growth as a man in charge of the McCaslin heritage.

Critics have often pointed out Ike’s failure in performing the role of Roth’s “father.” “[Ike’s] absconding . . . allows Roth Edmonds to live the unexamined life of his forebears, with no alternative community voice to check or reprove him” (Wagner-Martin, Introduction 6), in some part because “Ike’s powerless position has prevented him from preparing a young hero [like Roth] to take over his role” (Latimer 6). As Carl E. Rollyson Jr. summarizes, “by not becoming actively involved in his heritage, Ike not only deprived Roth of a chance to see Ike’s principles in operation but left him to work out very complex problems for himself” (110). While these critics have clarified what Ike fails to do for Roth, it seems to me that they have failed to analyze what Ike does for Roth (or for the Edmondses) by the relinquishment of his patrimony.

John G. Peters, who tries to defend what numerous critics, as well as Cass, have called Ike’s escape from his responsibility, contends that “the alternative is no better. None who accepted the inheritance is admirable, certainly not Carothers McCaslin or Zack and Roth Edmonds” (42). This view, however, is unfair to the Edmondses because it obscures the fact that they cannot be “admirable” at least in part—or in large part—because of Ike’s renunciation. It is not that Ike’s ethical decision foregrounds the shortcomings of the Edmondses. It is that Ike, “freeing” himself from the curse or debt of his ancestor(s), places the Edmondses in a difficult position where they cannot but feel guilty about the status of their family, not so much because they are supposed to take care of the cultural debt instead of Ike,<sup>3</sup> as because they, as the “woman-made” McCaslins, think of themselves as “usurpers” (Faulkner 111).

This feeling of guilt is difficult for Roth to remove because Ike still lives in the community as a constant reminder of his family’s status as undeserved “usurpers.” Perhaps “[Ike’s] acceptance of a monthly stipend from the plantation he refused to run is a sad compromise with his ethical ideal” (Kern 43), but I would also point out that the payment of this stipend, however nominal in economic terms, has emotionally burdened the Edmondses. Ike has long made them redeem Hubert Beauchamp’s IOUs for him. “‘We’re not usurpers,’ the boy [Roth] said [to his father], cried almost. ‘Our grandmother McCaslin was as much kin to old Carothers as Uncle Buck and Buddy. Uncle Isaac himself gave—Uncle Isaac himself says . . .’ He ceased” (Faulkner 111; Faulkner’s ellipses).

The little Roth's halting suggests that he suffers from irredeemable guilt precisely because Ike gave the patrimony to the Edmondses rather than they "usurped" it.

If the Edmondses actually "usurped" the righteous heir Ike's heritage, Roth might be even proud of his family, as Lucas respects Cass because of his wrong assumption as to what happened between Ike and Cass. Roth, however, knows better than Lucas, and Lucas's presence, as well as Ike's, constantly makes him self-conscious of his emasculating position as a "woman-made" McCaslin, which makes him deeply insecure about his own status as the head of the McCaslin/Edmonds/Beauchamp family. Although a similar psychological burden might fall on Zack (about whom the novel does not tell much), Roth's insecurity is probably much more serious than Zack's because he does not have a strong father like Cass. Zack says to his son, who is bewildered by his father's apparently unnatural relationship to the "nigger" Lucas, "I always beat [Lucas] shooting except one time. And as it turned out, I even beat him then" (Faulkner 111). Zack is in a way right: it turned out that Zack beat Lucas—because they live in a racist world, not in the ahistorical oedipal world. This (support of the) particular social context, however, whether or not the little Roth is conscious of it, does not make him proud of his father. Roth senses in adolescence "something which had happened between Lucas and his father . . . because they were themselves, men, not stemming from any difference of race nor because one blood strain ran in them both," and, in his late teens, thinks: "*It was a woman. . . . My father and a nigger, over a woman. My father and a nigger man over a nigger woman. . . . And by God Lucas beat him. . . . Edmonds. . . . Edmonds. Even a nigger McCaslin is a better man, better than all of us*" (112; my ellipses). He evaluates the relationship of the two men from a "de-historicizing" point of view and is compelled to conclude that his father is not a—or *the*—"man."

Lucas, when he represses his biological father, can find his oedipal father in Zack or in old Carothers. This "family romance," however, is dysfunctional for Roth precisely because he is supposed to be socially superior to Lucas, who otherwise could be Roth's strong "father" as the man who has beaten his biological father. Repeatedly emphasizing that Molly "had been the only mother [Roth] ever knew" (Faulkner 97; see also 106, 107, 113, 126), Faulkner indicates the existence of the oedipal issue in Roth's life. The little Roth has two houses but "actually prefer[s] the negro house, the hearth on which even in summer a little fire always

burned, centering the life in it, to his own" (107). The Beauchamp house is Roth's "home." "One day," however, "the old curse of his fathers, the old haughty ancestral pride based not on any value but on an accident of geography, stemmed not from courage and honor but from wrong and shame, descended to him" (107). Roth refuses to sleep with his foster brother Henry Beauchamp, and this social action marks his "fall" or entrance into "his heritage" (110). Roth instantly feels ashamed of himself for his rejection of his foster brother, but "it was too late then, forever and forever too late" (109) for him to admit that he is ashamed of his act: the Beauchamps do not allow him to do so when they, as Davis puts it, turn "the tables on Carothers" (206) and make him eat alone (Faulkner 110). Davis also observes: "He is denied reentry into the black family's world as an equal and the result for him is devastating. He is left to occupy the very position he forced on his excluded black brother" (206) and "cannot feel racially superior when he is denied familial bonding and left to eat alone" (204). Whereas this interpretation clarifies the subversive nature of this scene (as well as Henry's sudden, unexplained disappearance after this scene), illuminating "black retaliation in a withdrawal to a closed circle of family and intimacy inaccessible to whites" (205), I would like to emphasize that the Beauchamps' exclusion of Roth means at once that Roth can never get rid of his guilt and that he can never become the righteous "son" to Lucas—both because of his socially presupposed racial superiority.

Since he cannot redeem his guilt feelings or beat his black "father," Roth remains an emasculated boy. All he can do is try to repress his guilt and his inferiority complex as a ("woman-made") boy who can never become the "father." Probably, if Roth were an ordinary boy in a Southern community, this repression would not be too difficult, thanks to its racist ideology. "Masculinity and manhood," Davis points out, "are not unmarked by race in Carothers's culture, and therefore, in order to become an independent being within a racially explicit southern culture, he must distance himself from blacks and accept his racial identity as white" (201–02). Roth, in fact, never thinks of Henry as far as we know: his loss of his black brother "cannot be acknowledged for what it is in the South" (Bockting 208). His lack of grief at the recognition that Molly is not his real mother (Faulkner 107) probably also stems from his interiorization of the racist ideology (Sensibar 108).

If Roth really succeeds in the repression of his oedipal feelings toward the black family, however, why is he obsessed with the "nigger" Lucas?

And why does he, just like his “beaten” father, let the “nigger” behave as he does? Takaki Hiraishi suggests that “the repression of [Roth’s] own feelings [toward the Negro family] is almost complete” when Roth asks his father why he allows Lucas to behave as he does (82), but the point is that Roth’s repression of his feelings toward the Beauchamps remains just *almost* complete. Roth, for instance, probably would not have to “discover” that Lucas beat his father (just as Ike needs to “discover” the sins of old Carothers to live like Sam) if the repression were really complete. To turn this around, Roth’s failure to have a strong father makes it difficult for him to repress his ambivalent feelings toward the Negro family. Zack says to Roth: “I’ll make a trade with you. You let me and Lucas settle how he is to treat me, and I’ll let you and him settle how he is to treat you” (Faulkner 111). In short, Zack confesses that he cannot show or teach Roth how to build a relationship with Lucas or how to repress his personal feelings in order to treat Lucas simply as a “nigger.”

Noticing that Roth is more tolerant toward Lucas than he is toward other Negroes such as Samuel Worsham (“Butch”) Beauchamp, David Paul Ragan contends that it comes from his familiarity with Lucas as well as from his feelings about Molly (306n16, 306–07). I, however, assert that Roth cannot punish Lucas because he is “not a man yet” (Faulkner 343) or is fated to remain an emasculated boy. Roth has no strong white “father” from whom he can learn how to handle a “nigger.” And he has never had a chance to “kill” his black “father,” either. Precisely because he is culturally prohibited from taking the Negro man as his equal or as his “father,” Roth is impotent in his relation to Lucas. As a result, Lucas comes to represent to him what he cannot overcome:

[Roth] thought with amazement and something very like horror: *He’s more like old Carothers than all the rest of us put together, including old Carothers. He is both heir and prototype simultaneously of all the geography and climate and biology which sired old Carothers and all the rest of us and our kind, myriad, countless, faceless, even nameless now except himself who fathered himself, intact and complete, contemptuous, as old Carothers must have been, of all blood black white yellow or red, including his own.* (114–15)

This passage testifies to Roth’s failure to repress his personal feelings toward his Negro family, redeem his guilt feelings both toward the Beauchamps and toward the McCaslins, establish himself as the head of

the Edmondses/Beauchamps/McCaslins, and become a “man” in the historical South as well as in the ahistorical oedipal world.

To conclude my argument, I would like to show a few examples of Roth’s trouble and impotence in his relation to Lucas. “The Fire and the Hearth” has three chapters, and in each of them Roth tries to avoid his confrontation with Lucas. In the first chapter Roth learns that Lucas has secretly made whiskey on his land (perhaps Roth has long, if unconsciously, tried not to know this disturbing fact), and he asks Lucas, “Was that still they found in the creek yours?” When Lucas asks Roth in return, “Do you want me to answer that?”, however, Roth “violently,” or almost hysterically, cries, “No!” (69). Then, in the second chapter, Roth learns that Lucas has stolen his mule, but he has a “second thought” instead of punishing him immediately. Reminiscent of Jason, who also lacks a good model as a patriarch, Roth procrastinates about having his confrontation with the elder Negro: “If that mule aint in her stall by sunup tomorrow, I’m going to telephone the sheriff. Do you hear me?” (85). And, in the third chapter, when Molly asks for his help with Lucas’s gold hunt, Roth orders Lucas to “get rid of that machine”: “You bring that thing up to my house the first thing in the morning. You hear me?” (118). Lucas, as usual, ignores his “master’s” words and fails to appear next morning, and “for a moment [Roth] thought of going to Lucas’ house” (119). Roth, however, drops the idea and avoids a situation in which he would have to deal with Lucas until the next morning when he learns that Molly almost killed herself following his advice. Paralyzed in his dysfunctional family romance in the racist South, Roth cannot have a stable relationship with Lucas, either as a “son” or as a “father.”

#### IV.

Lucas struggles to go back to the oedipal world (or to the Imaginary) because he cannot be a “man” in the actual South (or in the Symbolic), and Roth struggles to behave as a “man” in the actual South because he has to repress his family romance fantasy. If Ike assumed his “rightful” position, he could be the “father” both in the oedipal world and in the actual South for both of the two “sons” who struggle in vain to be “men.” Ike, however, has been the “dead father” who, as it were, embodies the futility of the two men’s romantic struggles. Since it is impossible to kill the “dead father” (as is shown in *The Unvanquished*), it is little wonder that the conflict between Lucas and Roth apparently never ends. Molly’s

intervention with Lucas's quest for his utopia, one might argue, not only makes Roth finally confront Lucas but also leads to his victory when Lucas calls him "Mister Roth Edmonds." This "happy ending," however, is not Roth's own achievement but rather an instance of Molly's "spoiling" him. As Lucas will probably continue his masculine gender performance to fight against his curse/cage as a "man-made" black McCaslin, so probably Roth will continue to suffer from his curse/cage as a "woman-made" white McCaslin—though, in "Delta Autumn," we will learn that Roth's struggle in the McCaslin cage turns out to involve Ike, the "dead father" who imprisons him in his cage.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In this essay, I use the word "Negro" to suggest the ideologically problematic implications in Faulkner's work.

<sup>2</sup> Faulkner, as Susan Willis points out, makes Ike and Boon Hogganbeck go to the city—where Boon even proposes that they go to the zoo, that is, the artificial wilderness—before the final hunt of Old Ben (93).

<sup>3</sup> With the possible exception of Cass, the Edmondses are probably ignorant of the incest sin of old Carothers; if Zack knew, probably he would not name his son after old Carothers. Note that Roth's birth comes after Cass's death.

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