

Swarthmore College

## Works

---

English Literature Faculty Works

English Literature

---

1992

### "He Come And Spoke For Me": Scripting Lucas Beauchamp's Three Lives

Philip M. Weinstein

*Swarthmore College*, [pweinst1@swarthmore.edu](mailto:pweinst1@swarthmore.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-english-lit>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Let us know how access to these works benefits you

---

#### Recommended Citation

Philip M. Weinstein. (1992). "'He Come And Spoke For Me": Scripting Lucas Beauchamp's Three Lives". *Faulkner And The Short Story*. Volume 1990, 229-252.

<https://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-english-lit/219>

This work is brought to you for free by Swarthmore College Libraries' Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in English Literature Faculty Works by an authorized administrator of Works. For more information, please contact [myworks@swarthmore.edu](mailto:myworks@swarthmore.edu).

# “He Come and Spoke for Me”: Scripting Lucas Beauchamp’s Three Lives

PHILIP M. WEINSTEIN

Who is Lucas Beauchamp? What does it mean to ask that question? In the remarks that follow I want to explore the subjective identity of Lucas Beauchamp not as an unchanging essence but rather as a conflictual space. Conflictual, theoretically, because subjectivity itself is not an essence but a stance shaped by one’s position within a signifying economy: as the economy alters, so does the subjectivity. Conflictual, practically, as well, because Faulkner produces Lucas Beauchamp three different times, within three different signifying economies: first, in a cluster of short stories that appeared in 1940 in *Collier’s* and the *Atlantic Monthly*; then a second time in the sifted and revised versions of those stories that, two years later, make up *Go Down, Moses*; then a third time, six years later, in *Intruder in the Dust*.<sup>1</sup>

To pursue the subjectivity of Lucas Beauchamp, to ask who he is, is to analyze the language games Faulkner activated in producing this character. Yes, a question not of essence but of language: a discursive strategy, not a brute event. Yet this discursive strategy, while language, is never only language. It is rather the medium through which Faulkner predicts and solicits the response of middle-brow and high-brow audiences (the readers of the popular magazines, the more select novel readership) as he articulates racial difference in the mid-South in the 1940s. To say who Lucas Beauchamp is is to map the career of his creator, William

Faulkner, within a ten-year history of trying in different ways to say black, and always failing. To say who Lucas Beauchamp is involves, irreducibly, charting the racial identity of William Faulkner.

Subjectivity: for at least 200 years we have wanted to see in this word the arena of human freedom, that uncoerced interiority from which voluntary thoughts, feelings, and actions emanate. "A conscious and coherent originator of meanings and actions," the human subject maintains a saving autonomy, a fragile sanctuary, an interiority within which—however turbulent the external conditions that affect him—he remains recognizably himself.<sup>2</sup> Subjectivity is thus the Imaginary answer to objectification, it is that deep unmappable space of the essentially human within an otherwise charted world of Newtonian necessity. Within his own subjectivity, if nowhere else, the self remains an individual: literally, an undivided entity.

It is by now a well-known story how Marx, Darwin, and Freud—among others—have challenged this liberal notion of the autonomous subject by proposing a variety of networks—of class, of biology, of the unconscious—upon which subjecthood is constructed as a fissured entity but which subjecthood refuses to acknowledge. To recognize its constituent dependency upon such transpersonal structures is to see that the subject is not self-generative but rather produced: and (according to recent claims of French critical theory) it is produced in and by *language*. The subject, in other words, is subjected, thrown beneath, "something at the behest of forces greater than it."<sup>3</sup> This embattled subject—one precisely not undivided, not master of his own house but beleaguered from within by "greater forces"—is of course the myriad focal figure of William Faulkner's greatest novels. It is as though Faulkner knew himself most intimately and powerfully as a figure of tragic discord—a subjectivity irreparably fissured—and his memorable characters share this divisive and ennobling trait. Lucas Beauchamp, we shall see, attains such disturbing resonance in only one of his three avatars.

To say who Lucas Beauchamp is, I shall be looking at the language Faulkner provides for indicating how he looks, thinks, talks, and acts. What representational schema governs Faulkner's deployment of Lucas's body, what discursive practice accounts for his speech, what kinds of access do we have to his unspoken and unacted subjectivity? Michel Foucault alerts us to the ways in which the human body moves incessantly through channels of social inscription: the body, Foucault proposes, is "an inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas), the locus of a dissociated Self (adopting the illusion of a substantial unity), and a volume in perpetual disintegration."<sup>4</sup>

If the body is everywhere tracked by social coding, branded by discursive rituals, the voice is equally a register of a lifetime of social training. How we speak announces who we have and haven't listened to, what "internally persuasive" accents of others we've made our own, what vocal communities we belong to as well as the ones we define ourselves against. As Mikhail Bakhtin writes, "the ideological becoming of a human being . . . is the process of selectively assimilating the words of others."<sup>5</sup> Utterance is inseparable from ideology, and thus the key to selfhood—the language we use to articulate our inner selves—is simultaneously the trap of subjecthood: our often involuntary affiliation within larger groups whose language has become our own. "He come and spoke for me," Lucas says to Zack at a climactic moment in "The Fire and the Hearth." He is referring to old Carothers McCaslin, but we may overhear a larger dynamic: that subjectivity is generated by the assimilation of the words of others, that Lucas becomes Lucas by speaking Carothers. More resonant yet, we may hear in these words Faulkner's own capacity to articulate Lucas—to speak for him—only in the ideologically laden accents of the white progenitor.

Faulkner and the Short Story: I have probably already said enough to indicate that I am approaching this conference topic tangentially. My focus is not Faulkner's deployment of specific genres—short story and novel—but rather his (and my) pursuit of

Lucas Beauchamp across three different forms: magazine stories, revised stories turned into a novel, and finally a novel "proper." I hope to shed light on the literary forms, but my deeper interest is in the produced figure moving across them: Lucas Beauchamp, the crucial character through whom, for almost a decade, Faulkner wrestled with his culture's discursive resources for representing racial difference. How he came and spoke for Lucas is my topic, for his speaking Lucas becomes his way of speaking his own racial identity, and our responses to these speakings—submissive or resistant—emerge as so many figurations of our own fluctuating racial identity.

The Lucas Beauchamp of "A Point of Law" has not yet come into the patrimony of his own name.<sup>6</sup> "Beauchamp" is as yet an inert patronymic—there is no Hubert Beauchamp/Uncle Buck/Tennie's Jim/Tomey's Terrel nucleus for his name to refer to; these figures won't be invented for at least another year—and Lucas is regularly shortened in conversation to "Luke." It could be any name; it is not yet talismanic, speaking of and summoning to the mind the absent old one. This story moves briskly and remains within the spatial and temporal confines of its plot: the comic trouble-making of "niggers" who run illegal stills on Roth Edmonds's land. There are no resonant memories here that escape the exigencies of plot.

Lucas is clearly a sharecropper in this early version, and Roth is unproblematically identified on the first page as his "landlord." When Lucas speaks, his dialect is thick: To his wife's (here, still unnamed) demand: "Whar you gwine dis time er night?" he responds, "Gwine down the road." He may be "gwine down the road" but we never see it; rather, the text tends to limit Lucas's appearance to three main spaces: his own house, the veranda of Edmonds's house, and offices within the courthouse in Jefferson. All three of these spaces are constructed by whites; each constrains Lucas in such a way that we are watching him perform under pressure. The proportion of dialect utterance to narrated

plot is high. And while Lucas is clever, he is also seen around; even the deputies can chart his machinations: "So we set down and thought about just where would we hide a still if we was one of Mr. Roth's niggers . . . and sure enough . . ." (217). "Niggers" are figures of fun here, and their behavior finally confirms rather than disturbs this cultural epithet. Lucas Beauchamp emerges as wily in the way that "niggers" are wily: we read him in silhouette against George Wilkins but even more, perhaps, with George Wilkins: two black men negotiating domestic and nondomestic interests, one of them just foxier than the other.

Foxier in Faulkner's text, perhaps, but the *Collier's* readership would have been encouraged visually to remain within comfortable racial stereotypes while encountering this material. William Meade Prince's illustrations to "A Point of Law" (two huge drawings, each taking up a half-page of magazine space) stress not Lucas's agility but the play of bumbling black shenanigans. Prince's first illustration shows a tiptoeing Nat and a bottle-burdened George Wilkins trying to keep their illegal booze hidden from the authoritative gaze of white officers. The caption to the drawing—"About daylight, we see George and that gal legging it up the hill with a gallon jug in each hand"—neatly sabotages their aim, inasmuch as "we see" (we as white deputies, we as white readers: the positioning is identical) exactly what they are clumsily trying to keep from our gaze. The second illustration foregrounds the bottles and worm and jug of a homemade still, with Lucas and Molly stationed above this paraphenalia, their eyes and mouths wide open in astonishment. The caption reads: "'Git the ax!' Luke said. 'Bust it! We ain't got time to git it away.'" Once again the magazine version emphasizes the moment of comic ineptitude, in which the deputies, illustrator, writer, and reader join in a single, cliché-enforcing gaze: black as befuddlement, black as harmless antics, charted by a bemused and superior white intelligence.

"Gold Is Not Always" was written and published at about the same time as "A Point of Law." The same dynamics—prankish black men maneuvering within the confines of judgmental white

men—activate this narrative.<sup>7</sup> As Roth says, “As soon as you niggers are laid by trouble starts” (231), and the story delights in providing the trouble. Roth is still identified on the first page as Lucas’s landlord, and Lucas’s language remains heavily marked by dialect: “He done fotch the machine with him; I seed hit work” (227), Lucas says as the plot gets under way. Part of the comedy here resides in the racially pertinent move of Lucas’s pretending to *own* Roth’s mule. A certain measure of the ideological work of this tale consists in getting Roth’s valuable mule back to Roth—restoring thus the racial norms of ownership—while it transfers the worthless treasure-finder from the foreign salesman to the clever black man. Lucas’s admiration for this toy makes him childish; at the same time the salesman who trafficks in such useless fantasy-objects receives his well-earned duping.

At stake here seem to be two options for the right management of the land itself: either a juvenile fantasy of discovering buried treasure that is figured in the machinations of a local black man outsmarting a foreign white one; or, in opposition to this scenario (with its comic but potentially disturbing image of a white man enslaved by a black one), the proper relation to the land—hard work, no miracles. The trouble starts, as Roth says, once the “niggers” are “laid by” and the land does not properly occupy their energies. The implicit fantasy enacted by both these tales is that the blacks are idle and have plenty of time on their hands for such games; indeed, Lucas is envisaged as better off than Edwards “since he owned nothing he had to pay taxes on and keep repaired and fenced and ditched and fertilized” (214). A hoary cliché speaks here—one that at his most astute Faulkner puts in the mouth of a Jason Compson: namely, that the responsible handling of property and goods is a burden borne only by mature white men.

The Lucas Beauchamp of these stories is subordinated to a swiftly moving plot, and that plot cannot afford to dilate upon Lucas’s subjectivity. Faulkner provides minimal interiorizing that might counteract the simplifications of Lucas’s spoken dialect. His astuteness is never in question, in both senses: it is assured

throughout the stories (the reader knows that Lucas's aplomb is not going to be disturbingly contested), and its lineaments hardly escape the containing outline of the trope of the wily black man. To put it more directly, the language that generates Lucas Beauchamp is not itself in question in these two stories. As a corollary, the stories are not likely to foment questions of racial identification in their readers. Complacent ideological alignments remain securely in place; the stories are, in their chosen and narrow way, extremely skillful.<sup>8</sup>

As Faulkner's commentators have noticed, we encounter a sea-change when we move from these stories into the revisionary world of *Go Down, Moses*.<sup>9</sup> Virtually the same passages take on a new aura of implication and value, as in the following pair of quotes:

Edmonds stared at him [Lucas Beauchamp] as he leaned against the counter with only the slight shrinkage of the jaws to show that he was an old man, in his clean, faded overalls and shirt and the open vest looped across by a heavy gold watch chain, and the thirty-dollar handmade beaver hat which Edmonds' father had given him forty years ago about the face which was not sober and not grave but wore no expression whatever. ("Gold Is Not Always" 237)

He [Edmonds] sat perfectly still, leaning forward a little, staring at the negro [Lucas Beauchamp] leaning against the counter, in whom only the slight shrinkage of the jaws revealed the old man, in threadbare mohair trousers such as Grover Cleveland or President Taft might have worn in the summertime, a white stiff-bosomed collarless shirt beneath a pique vest yellow with age and looped across by a heavy gold watchchain, and the sixty-dollar handmade beaver hat which Edmonds' grandfather had given him fifty years ago above the face which was not sober and not grave but wore no expression at all. ("The Fire and the Hearth" 97)

The difference between these two passages tells us much about the genesis, procedure, and aims of *Go Down, Moses*. In revising the earlier stories so as to make them cohere as parts of a larger



narrative, a transformation takes place. Lucas Beauchamp's clothes take on a new register. What they register is the value-charged patina of time itself. Grover Cleveland and President Taft enter the "aura" of Lucas, his clothes become more luminously fine as they emerge from their long journey into the motley present moment, and the beaver hat undergoes a kindred rewriting. Its original value doubles, its age increases ten years, its source retreats another generation into the past.

"Lucas Beauchamp" is a new signified here. He has become a prism upon time itself, a departed time of heroes, of honorably crafted materials, of valuable bequests given in recognition of sustained service and worn talismanically. The first Lucas Beauchamp, as we saw, was a shrewd black man maneuvering on a largely contemporary stage, the second Lucas Beauchamp—time-immersed—is constructed as an extension into the 1940s of a set of nineteenth-century practices signifying honor, integrity, and determination. Time's mark on him has become his glory, not his scar. The representation of Lucas signals the degree to which *Go Down, Moses* has invested its energies in the survival—often critical but more deeply celebratory—of older modes of being and doing within a diminished present. The telos of *Go Down, Moses* is arche.

"The Fire and the Hearth" dilates upon Lucas's face—the face "which had heired and now reproduced with absolute shocking fidelity the old ancestor's entire generation and thought—the face which . . . was a composite of a whole generation of fierce and undefeated young Confederate soldiers" (118). As Myra Jehlen remarks, "it is a tortuous process by which a black man comes to look most like a Confederate soldier."<sup>10</sup> This throw-back face—incredibly old yet perfectly intact—is antebellum in its undefeat: what, we may ask, is Faulkner doing here? Perhaps an answer emerges when we notice that Lucas's face is twice described as "Syriac," with this gloss added: "not in a racial sense but as the heir to ten centuries of desert horsemen" (108). Systematically exoticised, Lucas's face is being rewritten. The rewriting proposes

an identity to be understood "not in a racial sense." Lucas's heroic status is conditional upon his being figuratively removed from his own black heritage.

If a suspect logic governs this rewriting of Lucas's face, an odder one governs the writing of his blood:

Yet it was not that Lucas made capital of his white or even his McCaslin blood, but the contrary. It was as if he were not only impervious to that blood, he was indifferent to it. . . . He resisted it simply by being the composite of the two races which made him, simply by possessing it. Instead of being at once the battleground and victim of the two strains, he was a vessel, durable, ancestryless, non-conductive, in which the toxin and its anti stalemated one another, seetheless, unrumored in the outside air. (104)

It seems to me that this passage proposes a desperate resolution. The two races are said to stem from incompatible bloods—a toxin and its anti—yet Lucas is imagined as overcoming this racist opposition by some sort of sublime indifference. "Ancestryless," Faulkner calls him here—intransitive, self-sealed—but "The Fire and the Hearth" tirelessly draws upon—what else?—Lucas's ancestry in order to establish his stature. For reasons that lie deep within the culture's racist ideology, Faulkner simply will not imagine the two bloods as merging in time—Lucas must be seen as nonconductive, raceless—yet this figure's clothes, gestures, and habits of thought are soaked in the passage of time and have now become a source of irreplaceable value. One might speculate that the text wants all of Lucas's history, on condition that it be cleansed of its racial coloration. I shall return later to the mystified scripting of Lucas Beauchamp in *Go Down, Moses* and *Intruder in the Dust*, but now I want to move from the problematics of his face and blood to the elaboration of his body and mind; here Faulkner goes beyond cultural givens and generates perhaps the most compelling black portrait in his entire oeuvre.<sup>11</sup>

This new Lucas of *Go Down, Moses* is a figure in intimate relation to the land itself. "He knew exactly where he intended to

go, even in the darkness" (36), and when he hears the almost inaudible sound of Nat following him, he whirls not toward her sound but parallel with it, "leaping with incredible agility and speed among the trees and undergrowth" (40–41). Like Sam Fathers, like Rider, like the elaborately trained Ike McCaslin, Lucas Beauchamp reveals a bodily agility beautifully attuned to natural setting and obstacle. Rather than "performing" on a white-constructed stage, as in the stories, he lives in *Go Down, Moses* as a woodsman as well, incandescent in the body whatever shackles have been placed upon his mind. Indeed, the land itself knows him here, striking him a blow as the earth about him suddenly heaves, "a sort of final admonitory pat from the spirit of darkness and solitude, the old earth, perhaps the old ancestors themselves" (38).<sup>12</sup> Finally, this Lucas's intimacy with the land is beyond any white deputy's mapping. When they find his concealed still this time, it is because he has chosen to have them find it so as to keep them ignorant of the buried treasure.

The body is new here; more important, so is the mind. "A Point of Law" moves within three to four lines to plot and dialogue, but chapter 1 of "The Fire and the Hearth" takes nine pages to establish Lucas Beauchamp's interiority: his views about George Wilkins, his complex plans for the two stills, his many-generational history with Cass and Zack, his sense of possession of his land ("it was his own field, though he neither owned it nor wanted to nor needed to" [35]), his dignified position as "the oldest living person on the Edmonds plantation" (36), his strenuous maneuvers with the land itself (trying to bury his still) leading to the earthslide, the glimpse of gold, and the pursuit of Nat, and finally his revision of his plans. Within these nine pages we enter a subjective drama more compelling than any plot it may release. The tensions are not centrally between white landlord and black sharecropper (Roth is never referred to as landlord in the revised version); rather, they open inwardly, subjectively, into the inexhaustible genealogical history of Lucas Beauchamp himself.<sup>13</sup>

For he has now come into his name: not only a new signified,

but literally a new signifier. No Luke here: this is the offspring of Lucius Quintus Carothers McCaslin, and the text knows him as Lucas with a near-religious scrupulousness. (That is, the "Lucas" part of the name may be undiluted McCaslin, but the limitation of this genealogical inheritance surfaces in his matrilinear surname. He is not McCaslin but Beauchamp: the matrilinear surname suggests his slave/distaff descent, inasmuch as slave mothers and children were kept together for economic purposes and the offspring of Tomey's Terrel and Tennie—at least those born before 1865—would be given the name of Tennie's owner, Hubert Beauchamp.) His voice too has altered; he speaks dialect but not (like Rider) barely articulate dialect. "He done fotch the machine with him; I seed it work" has become "He brought it with him; I saw it, I tell you" (79). The changes that matter most, of course—the ones that all commentators on *Go Down, Moses* are drawn to—involve not Lucas's enlarged setting, altered voice, or agile body. They involve his tragic memories of the battle with Zack over Molly, when Zack's wife died at childbirth and Molly replaced her.

These scenes have been richly interpreted already; my aim is less to celebrate than to problematize them. Problematize, not attack: for I too am moved more by this remembered agon than by anything else in "The Fire and the Hearth" (unless it be the mirroring agon of Roth's tragic alienation from Henry, his black alter ego). Why are we so moved? The answer lies embedded within the white male psyches of the writer, the reader, and (paradoxically) of Lucas himself as he rehearses these memories. The scenes are of enacted and failed male bonding. Females drop out of the drama once their purpose as catalyst for the encounter has been served. We never even learn the name of Zack's dead wife. Her narrative purpose is simply to produce an heir (naturally male) and then to disappear so that her widower Zack can meet his rightful mate on the other side of that matrimonial bed: Lucas. As with Roth and Henry later (also a question of beds not taken, intimacies forsworn upon entry into the culture's racist ideology), the bonding that matters is between men. Roth registers the loss

of Henry with an intensity of grief starkly absent from his tight-lipped evasion of the "doe" in "Delta Autumn."

It is a male scene; it is also a white one. On the evidence of Lucas's memories in "The Fire and the Hearth" we could take him to have only one progenitor, white and male and two generations removed. The remembered struggle is doubly articulated as an affair of males: Lucas and Zack, Lucas and old Carothers. It unfolds as a chivalric ritual of honor-bound moves, advantages offered but not accepted, the enemy cherished even as he is pursued. It is essentially a love scene—the most concretely represented and intensely narrated in the entire novel—and it dramatizes not desire (in which the boundaries of subjective identity risk being overwhelmed) but respect coupled with aggression (a coupling that exalts selfhood even as, in its intimacy, the one man draws murderously near to the other). We white male critics have been lauding this scene for decades now. Is it because it sublimates eros into principle, turns the stickiness of a self-altering exchange into the ritual of a self-affirming one, and locates in the male-male encounter and the white male grandfather the sources of Lucas's indestructible dignity?

"He come and spoke for me" (58) indeed; Lucas thinks of this accession to the progenitor's voice as the final understanding earned from this identity-enshrining encounter. He has been, as the French theorist Althusser would say, "interpellated." A bid for his identity has been made, and he has accepted it. This is the moment in which he fully assumes the ideological frame of his own subjectivity. As Althusser puts it:

I shall then suggest that ideology 'acts' . . . in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among . . . individuals . . . by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police . . . hailing: 'Hey, you there!' Assuming that the theoretical scene I have imagined takes place in the street, the hailed individual will turn round. By this mere 180 degree physical conversion, he becomes a *subject*. Why? Because he has recognized that the hail was

'really' addressed to him, and that 'it was *really* him who was hailed' and not someone else.<sup>14</sup>

Who is Lucas Beauchamp? He is who he sees in his subjective mirror, who he allows to speak for him, he becomes himself by saying himself within the signifying economy of McCaslin. Red-necks and white trash may think him a nigger, but the dearest move of "The Fire and the Hearth" is to refuse that outward appellation, to move inwardly and replace it with McCaslin. Not just any McCaslin, but the old man himself: through him Lucas accedes to an empowering identity consolidated by the passage of time. That is, he attains a genealogical memory.

To possess a memory is not only the essential human privilege celebrated by *Go Down, Moses*; it has also been, at least since the Enlightenment, the sign of humanity itself. Henry Lewis Gates argues persuasively that during the eighteenth century memory was certified by the presence of writing, and that a people who could not write (in European languages of course) had no memory—and therefore were not quite human. "Without writing," Gates proposes, "no *repeatable* sign of the workings of reason, of mind, could exist. Without memory or mind, no history could exist. Without history, no humanity . . . could exist."<sup>15</sup> We know with what tenacity many slaveholders resisted the notion of slaves becoming literate, and we know as well the attempts to deny that nineteenth-century slave narratives were really written by the black subject in question. For reading, writing, and remembering powerfully promote subjecthood itself. I refer to this passage of cultural/racist history in order to suggest what is at stake in Lucas Beauchamp's attainment of a genealogical memory. He becomes a full participant in humanity, a blood-brother to Faulkner's brood of resonant, memory-laden, white protagonists.

Lucas can join them, however, only as a white man. Virginia Woolf's haunting phrase—"For we think back through our mothers if we are women"—tells us how pinched and conditioned Lucas Beauchamp's liberated humanity is. He cannot think back

through his mother; he cannot think back through his blackness. He speaks himself—or he allows himself to be spoken—within a white signifying economy. His moments of supreme authority are thus deprived of their racial component. If you will, he is permitted to become human only universally, not regionally, and his incapacity to think about his black mother surely plays its role in his callous treatment of his black wife.

Finally, the Lucas Beauchamp who attains white stature in “The Fire and the Hearth” also accepts the discourse of white responsibilities, that is, the discourse of the Bible. This Lucas Beauchamp speaks scripturally of his “allotted span” (75) of life, he tells Zack that “even the Book dont ask a man to forgive them he is fixing to harm” (58), and he waxes eloquently, in the privileged last paragraph of “The Fire and the Hearth,” upon the Book’s injunctions and his obedience: “Man has got three score and ten years on this earth, the Book says. He can want a heap in that time and a heap of what he can want is due to come to him, if he just starts in soon enough. I done waited too late to start. . . . I am near to the end of my three score and ten, and I reckon to find that money aint for me” (131).<sup>16</sup>

Note the inscription here within an interpellative or signifying economy. The Book has “come and spoke for him”; he reads his interiority in the light of its commands. Accepting its script, he voluntarily chastens his wants. It is not only that he ceases to search, but—more sinister—that he inserts himself within a finished and regulatory discursive structure: “that money aint for me.” The containment is complete. He has, we are meant satisfyingly to feel, finally grown up. That he does so by relinquishing his wants, by understanding maturity as white, male, and scripturally ordained, by recognizing and accepting his place within such a system: that he does so carries out the ideological work of “The Fire and the Hearth.” Lucas can be left alone now; he will behave himself.

This sardonic note is not the right one, though, for completing my discussion of *Go Down, Moses*. Faulkner was never again to

imagine black lives so richly intertwined with white ones. If in the magazine stories we find Lucas in the present company of, mainly, George Wilkins and Roth Edmonds, in the novel he lives in the present and absent company of a rich array of reflecting lives. To name a few, we read him against Rider and Samuel Worsham Beauchamp, two blacks whose uncontrollable passion or defective training keeps them from Lucas's open-eyed prudence; we read him as well against Sam Fathers and Ike: a trio of woodsmen, of aged men of integrity, at odds with the culture they must live in. At his most compelling, Lucas rises into the sinister but sustaining force of his McCaslin ancestry. Ultimately he will rise beyond family altogether, and we will read him against Old Ben, solitary, childless, mythic, unapproachable. This will be Lucas's final avatar in *Intruder in the Dust*.<sup>17</sup>

[Lucas] . . . always in the worn brushed obviously once-expensive black broadcloth suit of the portrait-photograph on the gold easel and the raked fine hat and the boiled white shirt of his own grandfather's time and the tieless collar and the heavy watch-chain and the gold toothpick like the one his own grandfather had carried in his upper vest pocket . . . (24)

These six lines are taken from a sentence that occupies thirty more in the early pages of *Intruder in the Dust*. The perspective is Chick Mallison's, and Lucas as seen in his eyes has receded in a number of ways from the mobile figure of *Go Down, Moses*. "Portrait-photograph": the portrait we encounter here is locked into its mandatory legitimizing details—broadcloth suit, raked fine hat, boiled white shirt, tieless collar, heavy watch-chain, and gold toothpick. These details scrupulously accompany Lucas's every appearance in this latest text. Faulkner cannot seem to find him except through such fetishized objects. So powerful is this imprisonment within clothes, watch-chain, and toothpick that we read not so much of Lucas as of the enbalming accoutrements that



announce him. And they do “speak” him. They insert him within a sartorial nineteenth-century tradition of white respectability that Chick tirelessly identifies with his own grandfather.

Lucas Beauchamp has here become a congealed icon. How he looks is textually more important than how he may feel. He emerges less as an imagined subjectivity than as an object—reliably unchanging even if impenetrable—of the male gaze that frets and fusses about him for page upon page. A throwback to the past, he is imagined only once as feeling something unpredictable to Chick—grief for the death of his wife Molly—but the text uses this material with an unswervingly single purpose: to open up the mind of Chick Mallison, not to explore the moves of Lucas Beauchamp nor to enter the subjectivity of the dead Molly. Moves are, in fact, just what Lucas does not have in *Intruder in the Dust*. To put it most broadly, the ways in which Faulkner’s discourse *frames* Lucas Beauchamp undercut the ways in which Faulkner’s plot seeks to free him from a frame-up. Let me elaborate.

Lucas is framed in his immaculate clothes and visible habits; they are all he has. His wife and children have been taken from him; friends he never had anyway; and now he is not only isolated but almost mute. He barely speaks in this novel (the one time he must convey significant information to the sheriff takes place, as it were, off-stage, summarized by Gavin rather than narratively lived into). Vertically he has lost old Carothers to talk to as well as George Wilkins or Nat to scheme with; horizontally he has no peers. The text everywhere insists on his being like Chick’s grandfather but like no other black man. A taxpayer now, he proudly accepts this distinguishing difference. He tells Chick that he insisted on Molly’s taking her headrag off before the portrait-photograph could be taken because “I didn’t want no field nigger picture in the house” (15). “Field niggers” is his implicit discursive term for most other blacks: no wonder they don’t make common cause with Lucas’s plight.

He is also, in a figurative sense, castrated; only they sort of took both legs too. Lucas hardly possesses legs in *Intruder in the Dust*.

We see him mainly as in a portrait-photograph—from the shoulders up—he has none of that unpredictable physical mobility, that bodily quickness that flares up in “The Fire and the Hearth.” The motion denied him is transferred to Chick Mallison. Chick moves incessantly throughout this novel, circling Lucas, trying to come to terms with him, travelling miles upon miles to refute the evidence against him. More, Chick is moving in the figurative sense as well. His feelings are continuously tracked by this narrative; he can still *be* moved; he is meant to move us. The Bakhtinian drama of authoritative dicta being challenged and replaced by others that are more internally persuasive lives in Chick alone.<sup>18</sup> Lucas does not speak, seems hardly to feel, has no subjective discoveries to make. He is already finalized.

This congealed Lucas responds predictably (if with impeccable dignity) to racial threats. Insulted in a white store by a white man as “You goddamn biggity stiff-necked stinking burrheaded Edmonds sonofabitch,” Lucas answers: “I aint a Edmonds. I dont belong to these new folks. I belongs to the old lot. I’m a McCaslin” (19). The enraged white retorts, “Keep on walking around here with that look on your face and what you’ll be is crowbait.” Unruffled, Lucas replies: “Yes, I heard that idea before. And I notices that the folks that brings it up aint even Edmondses.” Well, this is sublime, way beyond what the Lucas Beauchamp of *Go Down, Moses* could afford; and we might ask: how can this Lucas afford it? The answer is that now there are inobtrusive whites stationed everywhere to shepherd him. Even as the white racist snatches up a plow singletree in order to smash Lucas’s skull, the son of the store-owner intervenes, grabs the racist, is aided by another white man. “Get out of here, Lucas!” the son hisses. “But still Lucas didn’t move, quite calm, not even scornful, not even contemptuous,” and when finally he deigns to depart, he goes “without haste . . . raising his right hand to his mouth so that as he went out the door they could see the steady thrust of his chewing” (20).

The deeper fantasy-logic of *Intruder in the Dust*’s narrative

emerges in such an episode. Pose is allocated to the black man; motion is reserved for the white man. Lucas's splendid demeanor is inseparable from his immobility. He can look free but not act freely. He is imagined here as saying things that no black responsible for his own safety in Jefferson in the 1940s could say because he need not be—cannot be—responsible for his own safety. Rather, he is an icon that the text proudly sports, while its central white figures almost seem to compete with each other to keep him unharmed. Consider this later moment in the text, when Chick, the sheriff, and his black helpers unexpectedly encounter Nub Gowrie at the site of his murdered son's grave. The old man raises his pistol:

But long before this he [Chick] had seen the sheriff already moving, moving with really incredible speed not toward the old man but around the end of the grave, already in motion even before the two Negroes turned to run, so that when they whirled they seemed to run full tilt into the sheriff as into a cliff, even seeming to bounce back a little before the sheriff grasped them one in each hand as if they were children and then in the next instant seemed to be holding them both in one hand like two rag dolls, turning his body so that he was between them and the little wiry old man with the pistol, saying in that mild lethargic voice . . . (160)

The passage is perhaps more revealing than it knows. Again, motion, protective power, and voice are reserved for the white man. He has anticipated the two blacks' moves, and like a cliff his superior substantiality grounds their aimless terror. Figured as "children" and as weightless "rag dolls" in this passage—offered up to us as testimony to the sheriff's adroitness and resolution—the blacks are safe enough. But they remain safe only within a discursive economy that identifies them as fetishized objects, as predictable children, ultimately as "Sambo." Their moves, in every sense of the word, are scripted in the reifying and limited terms of a white discourse.

Who are the other blacks in this text? Old Ephraim who

delights in domestic wisdom (when you want something done, get the women and children to help you do it); Aleck Sander, Chick's sidekick who is nearly voiceless, accompanying Chick into each dangerous foray, his own construing of this strange adventure largely kept out of the text's narrative. Instead, Aleck Sander is endowed with preternaturally keen senses; he can hear and smell better than whites. The contours of his mind—which might liberate him from this cliché of the hyper-sensed Negro—go almost uncharted. In their place we get vast generalizations about black workers in the fields—naturalized there, since time immemorial properly at work there—and we get Gavin Stevens's discourse of "Sambo."<sup>19</sup>

The appellation "Sambo" has been attacked by liberal critics almost since the book's publication, and there is no need to rehearse their commentary.<sup>20</sup> Yet my argument does require this observation—that Stevens's desperate attempt to corral the black man within the epithet "Sambo" weirdly repeats the culture's traditional attempt to read him as "nigger," and that this move belies the plot momentum of the text that would spring Lucas free. The *discours* recontains what the *récit* would enfranchise, just as the frantic claim of homogeneity is undermined by the alterity everywhere at work in these pages: the uncrossable barrier between a few liberated whites in the foreground and an anonymous mob of racists that surround them as background, as well as the barrier between the unflappably sartorial Lucas Beauchamp and the nameless black workers toiling in the fields (both barriers suggestive of class demarcations).

Finally, why is *Intruder in the Dust* such a safe book on matters of racial identity? Partly because of its Tom Sawyerish aura of security—we know right away that these kids are not going to get hurt, that Lucas is not going to be lynched; but also because Lucas is only superficially connected with the murder itself. He happened to be strolling in the wrong place and to see something he shouldn't have seen. Faulkner goes on, implausibly, to have Crawford Gowrie seek to placate Lucas, as well as have Lucas easily

tricked by Crawford's wiles. (This Lucas is so ritualized—his fetish objects so well known—that Crawford has no trouble stroking his vanity and getting him to fire his 41 Colt at a stump from fifteen feet distance, thus enabling the 41 Colt to become the suspected murder weapon.) Perhaps the book's racial discourse is safe, finally, because we know too surely that Lucas *couldn't* have done the murder. Perversely, I would like to envisage a Lucas at least capable of murder, one whose embroilment within the racism of the South were reciprocal, unpredictable, threatening. Faulkner will not imagine this possibility in *Intruder in the Dust*. To glimpse what such a Lucas might have been, we must go elsewhere, go backwards in Faulkner's career, and conceive a shadowy tripartite figure composed of Joe Christmas, Rider, and Samuel Worsham Beauchamp. Such a figure is monstrously unlike Lucas Beauchamp, but what is this to say but that Faulkner's most disturbing portrayals of racial turmoil have no place in his novel most explicitly dedicated to thinking through racial turmoil?

My focus here has not been on Faulkner's practice as it activates the formal possibilities of the short story differently from those of the novel. Yet the scripting of Lucas Beauchamp seems implicitly to suggest something important about the writer's treatment of race and the givens of his form. For Faulkner's genius is juxtapositional, repercussive. He rises into power as he broods upon and revisits his materials, submits them to new perspectives, finds in them hidden resources. Outrage—his thematic hallmark—occurs in the encounter with the unexpected. In his best work procedure and theme alike overturn expectation; they do so through unpredictable juxtapositions. *The Sound and the Fury*, *As I Lay Dying*, *Light in August*, *Absalom, Absalom!*, *The Hamlet*, and *Go Down, Moses* play off facet against facet, dance from one subjective point of view to another, set into motion reading upon reading of the same (but never the same) materials.

"Maybe nothing ever happens once," Faulkner wrote in *Ab-*

*salom, Absalom!* In turning over his materials he rescripts them, sees them as rescriptable—objects with no inherent meaning but rather capable of taking on new meanings when inserted within new signifying economies. It is not a question of choosing between the short story writer or the novelist: Faulkner becomes a supreme novelist because he is a short story writer as well. It is the revisiting that makes him Argus-eyed, for the repositioning of objects leads to the rethinking of subjects, to the discovery—among others—that racial identity is a matter more of discourse than of biology.

*Intruder in the Dust*, I would speculate, is a novel that has managed to forget its story origins and has sacrificed the play of juxtapositional possibilities to the insistence of a singular demonstration.<sup>21</sup> We know too clearly how we are meant to take both Lucas Beauchamp and the plot in which he is enmeshed; they come at us with pedagogic urgency. This novel's shrillness, like that of *A Fable*, resides in its knowing too much and its being locked into a single discourse of knowledge. Lucas Beauchamp emerges within such a discourse as mythic, impenetrable, and immovable object; Chick Mallison as a vulnerable and moving subject. Lucas's journey thus comes to an end.<sup>22</sup> A wily "nigger" in the magazine stories, sprung as free as he would ever be in *Go Down, Moses* (his freedom here calibrated in a lithe body and a mind whose surface is black but whose depth is McCaslin), he settles down in this last novel as an antique, a source of his white creator's nostalgic delight.

His final words are a request—"My receipt," he asks Gavin—he has liquidated his debt and wants to depart from his white benefactors, to return to his impregnable, unknowable state. The concept of the debt bristles beyond its immediate usage here, for indebtedness—the ledger-recorded purchase of black men and women as chattel, the payment for their abuse in the form of money but not love—resonates darkly throughout *Go Down, Moses*. But *Intruder in the Dust* prefers to imagine the debt the other way, to have Lucas laboriously count out his quarters,

dimes, nickels, and pennies, get his receipt, and disappear into the unnarratable. Such a refusal to continue scripting racial culpability—a refusal wrought into this fantasy-image of debts cleared off, of ledgers audited and approved by both black and white—signals eloquently the weariness of the text. For that debt is of course still not liquidated—only it is we, not they, who owe it—but William Faulkner, for his part, had exhausted in this book his twenty-year attempt to imagine it and—in the revisionary freshness of his racial discourse—to do his part in paying it off.

## NOTES

1. The standard account of the genesis of *Go Down, Moses* remains James Early's *The Making of "Go Down, Moses"* (Dallas, Texas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1972). Since then, Myra Jehlen (*Class and Character in Faulkner's South* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1976]), John Matthews (*The Play of Faulkner's Language* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982]), James Snead (*Figures of Division: William Faulkner's Major Novels* [New York: Methuen, 1986]), and Michael Grimwood (*Heart in Conflict: Faulkner's Struggles with Vocation* [Athens: Georgia University Press, 1987]), have been especially informative about the interplay of stories making up this novel.

2. Paul Smith, *Discerning the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), xxviii.

3. The decentered self is a commonplace of recent theoretically informed criticism, and we are just now beginning to see a productive counterargument to such widely shared claims about the mystified subject. Paul Smith (xxxiii) usefully probes the idea of a subjectivity wholly scripted by its entry into a Symbolic field; he argues that agency—empowerment rather than paralysis—can occur through recognition of one's own subjectivity as a site of conflicting positions within more than one signifying economy.

4. Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 148.

5. Mikhail Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 341.

6. William Faulkner, "A Point of Law," *Collier's* 105 (June 1940): 20–21, 30–31; illustrations by William Meade Prince, 20, 21. Rpt. in *Uncollected Stories of William Faulkner*, ed. Joseph Blotner (New York: Random, 1981), 213–25. Citations in my essay (with page numbers entered parenthetically in the body proper of my text) refer to this edition.

7. William Faulkner, "Gold Is Not Always," *Atlantic Monthly* 166 (November 1940): 563–70. Rpt. in *Uncollected Stories of William Faulkner*, ed. Joseph Blotner (New York: Random, 1981), 226–37. Citations in my essay (with page numbers entered parenthetically in the body proper of my text) refer to this edition.

8. Among recent critics Grimwood provides the most thorough and provocative new reading of the stories as entities conceived at different times and conflicting radically in their stance towards matters of family and race—the two central concerns of *Go Down, Moses*.

9. William Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses* (New York: Random, 1942). Citations from this text (with page numbers entered parenthetically in the body proper of my text) refer to this edition.

10. Jehlen, 107.

11. The only challenge to this claim is Dilsey in *The Sound and the Fury*. I would argue, however, that the power of her portrait is suffused in racial "innocence," Faulkner's sense of her as separately blooded from his white Compsons and spared the turmoil (psychic and genealogical) that besets them.

12. As the mythic tenor of this passage suggests, *Go Down, Moses* makes the land itself numinous. The buried treasure of "Gold Is Not Always" emerges in revision within the economy of ancient Indian rituals. The "old Injun's mound" (where Lucas is now digging) marks a considerable departure from the originally unplaced shenanigans about a new-fangled treasure-finder.

13. Roth is no longer referred to as landlord because in *Go Down, Moses* he has been as it were disinherited. He is now seen as five generations removed from the original landowner, and on the distaff side as well. Faulkner repeatedly suggests that the land passes to Roth only because Ike could not rise to its responsibility.

14. Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays* (London: New Left Books, 1971), 174.

15. Henry Lewis Gates, "Writing 'Race' and the Difference It Makes," in "Race," *Writing and Difference*, ed. Henry Lewis Gates (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 11.

16. Molly's emergence in chapter 3 of "The Fire and the Hearth" drives home this moral lesson. Touching Roth's heart as the only mother he ever knew, speaking to him (and us) with Biblical authority ("Because God say, 'What's rendered to My earth, it belong to Me unto I resurrect it. And let him or her touch it, and beware'"[102]), Molly is placed by Faulkner so as to articulate decisively—as mother, wife, and religious seer—the text's rebuke of Lucas's rebellious moves.

17. William Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust* (New York: Random, 1948). Citations from this text (with page numbers entered parenthetically in the body proper of my essay) refer to this edition.

18. Bakhtin develops a major distinction between "authoritative discourse" and "internally persuasive discourse." Our journey as subjects from the former to the latter—from dicta that have been pressed upon us to those that we can internalize and make our own—is, precisely, our ideological maturation. Lucas undergoes no such linguistic trajectory. (See "Discourse in the Novel," 341–49.)

19. Jehlen comments aptly on the naturalized blacks working the fields, figures objectified and "invested with meaning only through the agency of a white observer" (132).

20. Representative commentary can be found in Edmund Wilson (*Classics and Commercials* [New York: Farrar, Strauss, 1950], 460–69), Cleanth Brooks (*William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963], 420–21), Lee Jenkins (*Faulkner and Black-White Relationships* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1981], 272–74), and Walter Taylor (*Faulkner's Search for a South* [Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983], 145–65). More recently, Wesley and Barbara Morris (*Reading Faulkner* [Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989], 222–38) have sought to resuscitate *Intruder in the Dust's* reputation, arguing for it as a morally compelling piece of work.

21. "First, in order to take care of George Wilkins once and for all . . ." (33): this baffled urge to conclude that spawns the opening sentence of "The Fire and the Hearth" is comically explored through Lucas's unavailing plots and tragically worked out in Ike's unwanted autumnal discoveries. Grimwood and Morris both attend fruitfully to *Go Down, Moses's* reverberations, its resistance to the male desire for willful closure. By the time of *Intruder in the Dust*, however, Faulkner seems unironically to take care of Lucas Beauchamp "once and for all."

22. Lucas was fated to appear one more time: a year later (1949), in another medium, Clarence Brown's film of *Intruder in the Dust*. This last representation arguably does him most credit. The film edits out the most disturbing elements of the novel—Gavin's sermonizing about Sambo and the South, the narrator's exacerbated sensorium and



consciousness—and renders a drama that is sober, surprisingly faithful to Faulkner's text, and moving. The emergent lines of action are simple, but this is one of Faulkner's novels in which the doings *are* simple. The film is quiet enough for us to hear the crickets now, and we *see* what the text itself scants: Lucas walking through the square, Lucas as a figure belonging to the community of Jefferson. Camera angles emphasize Lucas's dignity, showing him almost godlike as he looks down at Stevens and laconically demands his "receipt." In place of the feverish intensity that suffuses the narrative consciousness of the novel, we find a more "democratic" visual entry into all the principal figures in the story. Gavin (here called John) is so strenuously edited that Lucas's speeches—minimized in the verbal onslaught of the novel—take on finally their appropriate weight. It is a fitting last appearance.