

**“JUST GIT THE WOMENFOLKS TO WORKING AT IT”:
THE CONSTRUCTION OF BLACK MASCULINITY IN
*GO DOWN, MOSES***

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G*o Down, Moses* (1940) is a novel about men. From the enigmatic Isaac McCaslin to the unnamed mulatto son of “Delta Autumn,” the novel concerns itself with the way masculine subjects encounter the Southern world from the time of slavery to Jim Crow. In many ways, the men in the novel are not born, but made. Isaac’s complicated understanding of his relationship to nature, history, and property is undeniably connected to his conception of what it is to be a man (Davis). As gender theorists such as Judith Butler have argued, gender identity is largely performative, with the characteristics of masculinity or femininity changing according to arbitrary, but communally agreed upon, definitions. Faulknerian scholars have investigated masculinity in *Go Down, Moses* by analyzing the particular characteristics that “make a man” in the world of the novel (Brooks, Martin). However, as much as white masculinity is a societal construct, black masculinity is even more predicated on outside influences. As Thadious Davis argues in *Games of Property*, the laws of the South during the novel’s time frame were designed to deny black slaves, and later black citizens, status as persons. Largely, this negation took the form of categorizing black people as either animals or children, incapable of mature human emotion (Davis 16). A way for black people to challenge this contemptuous assumption was to assert themselves as heterosexual beings. This pattern explains Tomey’s Turl’s radical courtship of Tennie and Lucas Beauchamp’s refusal to accept a divorce from Molly. In order for black men to create an identity independent from racist assumptions, they must conform to a gendered identity that establishes them as mature sexual beings or married men under white law. Black masculinity therefore depends upon black femininity to define itself through and against. The major black male figures in the novel, from Tomey’s Turl to Samuel Beauchamp, follow this paradigm. However, Davis does not explore the

consequences that this definition of masculinity exacts on the stability of identity for both black men and women.

Any conception of gender that relies upon outside forces is inherently unstable. This is especially the case with black masculinity in the novel. In his chapter discussing *Go Down, Moses*, Cleanth Brooks focuses on the different male characters' attempts to prove their honor. For Isaac, the struggle involves repudiating his exploitative ancestry, and for Lucas, asserting himself against Zack even in the face of possible lynching. Though Brooks realizes that "the virtues of the two men are rather different and even stand in contradiction" (253), he does not connect this contradiction to the way the two construct their masculinity. Women, black or white, are largely missing from Brooks's discussion, aside from brief treatments of Molly and Isaac's wife. Whereas for the white men in *Go Down, Moses* marriage is a secondary consideration for masculinity formation behind property ownership and hunting, black men for the most part are excluded from legally owning property or participating fully in the homosocial world of the hunt. Sam Fathers is an exception to this generalization, but his brand of primal masculinity is not feasible in the modern world. Therefore, black men must rely upon sexual, and to a lesser degree, maternal, relationships to black women as the sole entry into societal legitimacy; their entire sense of personal and communal identity is reduced to familial relationships, and later marriage. The construction of black masculinity relies upon the presence of a black female body, unavailable to white appropriation. Because this domestic placement of the black female body is so crucial, gender roles in the novel become hierarchical. Black masculinity asserts itself through the reification of traditional gender roles. The consequences of this construction are twofold. First, black women in the novel become subsumed by their responsibilities to provide identity to black men. They are defined solely by their bodies, and their worth is only measured by their ability to legitimate black men within a hostile community. Second, black male identity is under constant threat of dissolution because a man's entire self-conception depends upon a single human body. The repercussions of the instability of black identity formation allow a continuity between sections of the novel that otherwise seem disparate.

"The Fire and the Hearth" presents the central definition of black masculinity through marriage, as experienced by Lucas Beauchamp. His reverence for history extends to the world and time of "Was," when his father, Tomey's Turl, also enacted identity formation through courtship. After establishing the terms of black masculinity, Faulkner shows the possible result of dependence on black women to establish mas-

culinity by detailing the complete dismantlement of identity in both “Pantaloons in Black” and “Go Down, Moses.” Whereas Rider’s story describes the disintegration of one man who cannot define himself without his wife, Samuel’s communal identity is reconstructed after his death by his grandmother, still doing the work of black masculinity formation. Dirk Kuyk, in *Threads Cable-strong*, identifies the “stability of family” (45), particularly black matriarchal families, as the common thread among the three sections. I also plan to discuss the recurring black female figure, but will problematize the idyllic portrait of black family life Kuyk presents. Though he is right in figuring black women as “satellites” that either stabilize black men by their presence, or disorient black men by their absence, he does not include the other side of the dichotomy. Black women are crucial to black men, but their role is inevitably submissive in the gendered hierarchy. All of these sections also foreground the paradoxical presence and absence of the black female body, crucial for establishing the gendered hierarchy that makes black masculinity possible, but not valued for anything beyond the presence of their bodies in the home.

The opening paragraphs of “The Fire and the Hearth” establish that black masculinity is constructed differently than white masculinity in the novel. For white men, money, property, and hunting are the markers of participation in the masculine community. Lucas has satisfied these three qualifications: “He already had more money in the bank now than he would ever spend” (34) due to his inheritance from his white grandfather, old Carothers McCaslin. The land he works “was his own field, though he neither owned it nor wanted to nor even needed to” (35). Lucas enjoys a stewardship of the land reminiscent of the primal masculinity embodied by Sam Fathers. He no longer hunts “not because he could no longer walk a day’s or a night’s hunt, but because he felt that the pursuit of rabbits and ‘possums for meat was no longer commensurate with his status as not only the oldest man but the oldest living person on the Edmonds plantation” (36). Lucas has already proven himself as a hunter, and now defines his refusal to hunt as part of his maturity and status. However, his manhood is still under threat from a social system that refuses to acknowledge his place in society because of his race. Though Lucas is technically a mulatto, Bernard Bell argues that he “moves beyond the stereotypical fate of the tragic mulatto and succeeds realistically in asserting his individuality as a black McCaslin” (226). Lucas betrays his continuing preoccupation with establishing his black manhood by placing himself firmly in the patrilineal line extending back to the patriarch of the white and black McCaslins: old Carothers.

Lucas consistently defines himself against the Edmonds branch

of the McCaslin family that descends matrilineally, terming Roth, and his father Zack before him, as "woman-made" (51) as opposed to his "man-made" (52) connection to the pater familias. Lucas's insistence that he is "the man McCaslin" (45) betrays a deep psychic need to affirm his manhood in the face of a society whose laws refute that reality. Lucas constantly establishes his connection to "the old days, the old time" when "better men than these" (43-44) were markers of masculinity. He is nostalgic for the past when "men black and white were men" (37). Of course, this reminiscence is actually a fiction. Lucas's nostalgic construction of the time of old Carothers ignores the reality of enslavement. What he does imagine is a space where masculinity was firmly ensconced in a superior hierarchical position to femininity regardless of race, and he attempts to enact a similar power dyad in his own marriage to Molly Worsham. According to Davis, "*Go Down, Moses* is predicated on the hierarchical location of men as owners" (89), and Lucas emphasizes the gendered, rather than the racial, implications of that dynamic.

Lucas voices his connection to the hierarchical masculinity of old Carothers when he feels his claim on Molly, and therefore his manhood, to be most tenuous. His identity as a man is dependent on Molly's presence in his home. The title of the section references the fire on the cabin's hearth that symbolizes Molly and Lucas's marriage. Though the fire is enduring, it must be tended, or it, and the stability of Lucas's identity, will be extinguished. Lucas's marriage and manhood is tested by Molly's relocation to Zack Edmonds's house to tend Roth as an infant. Though there is no confirmation that sexual activity occurred between the white man and the black woman, Lucas knows it is a distinct possibility, and therefore a threat to the viability of his marriage in the eyes of the community. The placement of Molly's body is of utmost importance because he will not be taken seriously as a man if he cannot keep his wife from other men. He is first troubled when he finds "his own wife already established in the white man's house" (45). Neither Molly nor Zack are named, and the repetition of possessive words ("his own") highlights the threat for Lucas. The one thing society has sanctioned him to own, a black woman's body, has been appropriated by a white man, therefore challenging the legitimacy of the marriage itself. His later demand of Zack echoes this emphasis on the location of Molly's body: "I wants my wife. I needs her at home" (46). It is clear that any emotional investment Lucas might have in Molly as an individual is not relevant to him in this episode. Diane Roberts realizes that "Molly in this context is a sexual commodity; possessing her implies power" (56). What is at stake is Lucas's self-conception as a man, and its dependency on

his publically-acknowledged ownership of a black woman: “Maybe when he got old he would become resigned to it. But he knew he would never, not even if he got to be a hundred and forgot her face and name and the white man’s and his too. *I will have to kill him*, he thought, *or I will have to take her and go away*” (48). Even after the individuals have been forgotten, Lucas realizes that the damage to his identity will be lasting unless he asserts his rightful possession of his wife by fighting Zack man to man, or reclaims his wife’s body and relocates it to a community unaware that his masculinity has been contested.

Lucas answers this challenge by invoking his connection to old Carothers. He believes his participation in the gender hierarchy renders the racial hierarchy fluid. Since he is a “man McCaslin,” he believes himself able to transcend the racist assumptions that create the question “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?” (58). Lucas answers this dilemma through affirming to Zack his connection to an indubitably masculine heritage: “‘I’m a nigger,’ Lucas said. ‘But I’m a man too. I’m more than just a man. The same thing made my pappy that made your grandma. I’m going to take her back’” (46-47). Bell reads Lucas’s persistent allusions to old Carothers as indicative of his status as a marginal man, who must choose “white patriarchs, not black” (228) to establish himself as a man. Though Lucas nominally affirms his masculinity through his familial connection to the patriarch, ultimately his racial identity problematizes his connection to a stable masculine identity. In truth, he relies on Molly, not old Carothers, to establish his personhood.

Lucas’s physical attack on Zack stems from the white man’s refusal to acknowledge his black kinsman as a man capable of threatening his own family line. Once Molly is back in Lucas’s cabin, he is enraged that she has brought the infant Roth, heir to the Edmonds line. He is not angered because Molly’s maternity has been appropriated by the white infant, but rather because Zack was unconcerned about the child being in Lucas’s house. He cries in disbelief, “Don’t tell me Zack Edmonds know where he is” (49). Lucas insists that the racial hierarchy be erased in his dealings with Zack, “I went to Zack Edmonds’ house and asked him for my wife. Let him come to my house and ask me for his son!” (50). When Zack does not come, Lucas is forced to acknowledge that he is not involved in a stand-off between equals; he realizes that the white man does not consider Lucas’s possession of his son a threat to his white manhood: “Then he knew that the other was not even waiting,” and it is only then that

he imagines standing above "the undefended and oblivious throat, the naked razor already in his hand" (50). White society, represented by Zack, does not share Lucas's conviction that manhood is derived directly from his connection to old Carothers. Zack admits as much when he challenges Lucas, "maybe you aint even a woman-made McCaslin but just a nigger that's got out of hand" (54). Lucas is forced to realize that he cannot "beat old Carothers" (53) by killing Zack with a razor or a pistol, by committing suicide or being lynched. His inferior status as a black person is unavoidable, and his manhood depends upon maintaining his household with Molly.

Many years later when Lucas becomes obsessed with discovering gold on the plantation, Molly threatens to dissolve their union and obtain a divorce. This threat again throws Lucas's hold on a stable identity into crisis. On the one hand, his definition of masculinity demands that he not let Molly assert her will over his own. Therefore, his initial response when Roth attempts to broker a truce between the two is again to invoke his connection to old Carothers: "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" (116). However, if Molly obtains the divorce, though Lucas would be able to have his way and continue to hunt gold, he would no longer be legitimized in the white community through his marriage. A suggestion of the racial hierarchy he would be forced to acknowledge comes at the courthouse, when the clerk insultingly establishes his authority over Lucas by demanding, "You, nigger! Take off your hat!" (123). It is no coincidence that Lucas immediately retracts his divorce petition, and appeases Molly with a bag of candy for the drive back to their cabin and still-burning hearth (125). Kuyk's reading of this episode figures the marriage as a "treasure" (40) that Lucas values above all others, and "to obey Molly has become . . . homage" (59) for him. What this reading ignores is the fierce resistance Lucas demonstrates against Molly's wishes. His swift change of heart seems more complicated than a sentimental realization of the importance of romantic love. Davis realizes that "Lucas's marriage to Molly is one of the viable signs of his freedom and manhood" (139). Ultimately, it is not old Carothers but Molly who makes Lucas's manhood operative in the community, and that is why he ultimately is unable to abandon her.

Though Lucas does not acknowledge it in his nostalgia for times "when men black and white were men," his father reenacts the same dependency on a black woman for identity formation. Old Carothers fathered Tomey's Turl by Tomasina, a slave on the McCaslin plantation. Tomey's Turl's story is told in "Was," a section that initially seems to foreground the construction of white masculinity. The gendered

negotiations of Buck, Buddy, and Sophonsiba (Isaac's lineage) are no doubt an important element of this chapter. However, as Thadious Davis points out, the companion narrative detailing Tomey's Turl's exploits is equally important for characterizing black masculinity. Tomey's Turl's name immediately indicates that his identity is predicated on his relationship to a black woman, his mother Tomasina, rather than on old Carothers. Dependency on black women persists in Tomey's Turl's relationship with Tennie, a slave on a neighboring plantation. The resulting familial line, which includes Lucas, replicates this pattern by taking Tennie's surname, Beauchamp, rather than McCaslin. Tomey's Turl claims his "right to sexual expression" (Davis 47) by escaping from the McCaslin plantation to court Tennie. As a slave, he could not legally marry, but he does assert individual agency and defy his subordinate status by "breaking out" (5) to foster a mature heterosexual relationship. As Davis states, "By means of his creation and play of the game, Turl defines a black masculinity within a space that otherwise, given the cultural conditions of enslavement, would deny not only his manhood but also his very personhood" (47). Again, the presence of a female body is crucial for Tomey's Turl to assert this manhood. His comment that "anytime you wants to git something done, from hoeing out a crop to getting married, just git the women folks to working at it" (13) is eerily applicable to the formation of his identity as a black man. However, Tennie's conspicuous absence from "Was" indicates another commonality in Tomey's Turl's and Lucas's stories: the insignificance of black women outside their role as constructors of black masculinity.

Molly's characterization in "The Fire and the Hearth" echoes Tennie's absent presence in "Was." Tennie never appears in the section, but her existence is crucial to further both the plot and Tomey's Turl's affirmation of masculinity. Unlike Tennie, Molly is an embodied, speaking character in the section, though her individuality is minimized. Initially, Lucas does not even name her, referring to her only by her relevant role: "his wife." When he is conceptualizing her relocation to the Edmonds house, he only conceives of her as "his own wife, the black woman" (46). Lucas reduces Molly to the two essential qualifications providing him with a stable masculinity: a possessed object, and a nameless black female body. Molly's physical presence in the text replicates Lucas's reductive conception of her body into merely a signifier of femininity. She is "a small woman, almost tiny, who in the succeeding forty years seemed to have grown even smaller" (97). Diane Roberts, analyzing Molly in her chapter on the "mammy figure" in Faulkner's fiction, is puzzled by her physical: "her body is nearly insignificant, a conscious reversal of the copious

body of the conventional Mammy" (55). This reversal is explained when Molly is read in terms of her relationship to black men rather than white men.

The shrinkage of Molly's body corresponds to the appropriation of her individual identity by the demands of Lucas's masculinity formation. Her physical body seems to disappear within the clothing that marks her as female: "[Roth] took her by the arm which, beneath the two or three layers of clothing beneath the faded, perfectly clean dress, felt no larger than the reed stem of the pipe she smoked" (98). The dress, a visible indicator of her femininity to an outside observer, completely subsumes the distinctiveness of her individual body, which itself is compared to an inanimate object. The text suggests that beneath "the voluminous layer on layer of her skirts and under-skirts" (98) Molly's individual personhood has literally disappeared. In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler suggests that gender is entirely constructed by costuming the body; that femininity is more so the clothes an individual body wears than a biological certainty (179). Following this argument, the description of Molly in this passage implies that she has been reduced to a marker of femininity with no inner individuality separate from her gender.

Lucas is highly invested in maintaining this traditional conception of gender, both for himself and others. His relationship with his daughter indicates that he conceives of her in the same possessive terms that he does his wife. Nat's first appearance is not as a speaking character, but a footprint which her father identifies, "knowing that print as he would have known those of his mare or his dog" (40-41). Lucas's conventional conceptions of women suggest that there is not much difference between the three in his mind. Once Nat marries George, against her father's wishes, he is forced to respect the marriage, telling his son-in-law "I don't give no man advice about his wife" (75). Though Nat and George have defied Lucas by marrying, he is more invested in accepting the union than saving face, because he realizes that the cultural viability of black marriage is the only way to render black masculinity meaningful.

"Pantaloons in Black" reveals the possible fate of black men, like Lucas, who must center their masculine identity on their wives. Rider is able to distance himself from the immature and racially-degraded community of dice, whiskey, and promiscuity through his marriage to Mannie (134). With her, he creates a routine of domesticity and familiarity that acquires a great deal of meaning in the six months of their marriage before her death. He plays the role of the traditional provider, working at a sawmill, building the home they live in, and delivering his wages into a kitchen that Mannie has cleaned to eat a

dinner she has prepared (134). Rider's distinctively masculine physical presence, "he was better than six feet and weighed better than two hundred pounds" (131), makes his descent into confusion and disarray even more striking. Though the text implies that the emotional relationship between Mannie and Rider was a heartfelt and genuine one, the same gender politics that guide Lucas and Molly's marriage are also at play in "Pantaloons in Black."

Mannie's name itself is suggestive of her function in Rider's life: she has made a man of him. Even after death, she is remembered entirely in terms of her domestic function. Rider is wearing "the worn, faded clean overalls which Mannie herself had washed only a week ago" (131) to the funeral. Even when Mannie's ghost appears to Rider, she is in the kitchen (136). Mannie and Rider's marriage is a conscious textual echo of the relationship between Lucas and Molly. Rider builds "a fire on the hearth on their wedding night as the tale told how uncle Lucas Beauchamp . . . had done on his forty-five years ago and which had burned ever since" (134). However, the fire in Rider's cabin has been extinguished with the death of his wife, and the consequences on his self-conception and identity within the community are swift and devastating.

Though Molly and Tennie represent the paradoxical necessity of a black woman's absent presence, Mannie's body is entirely absent for the whole of the section. Her appearance to Rider only further emphasizes to him that she is no longer available to stabilize his masculinity. "That very strength which could handle alone a log which would have taken any two other men to handle," physical strength which should be the marker of his masculinity, is instead the "insuperable barrier" that keeps him from his wife (136-137). Rider futilely tries to define his place in the world through Mannie, even after her death. He envisions that "somewhere beneath [the wheel marks] vanished but not gone, fixed and held in the annealing dust, the narrow, splay-toed prints of his wife's bare feet" are decipherable, as he walks, "his body breasting the air her body had vacated" (133). Rider urgently tries to imaginatively construct a physical body for his wife, but the attempts are useless. He no longer has a female body to which to anchor his identity, and he immediately begins to regress from stable masculinity to unhinged desperation.

After Mannie's death, Rider's identity is destabilized textually by his persistent disassociation from a mature masculine body. Davis points out Rider's assumption of a "toy shovel" and the reappearance of his childhood nickname "Spot" (Davis 75). I agree with Davis's argument that Rider's powerlessness to prevent Mannie's death results in a regression to a childlike persona. However, even more disturbing

than the images of childhood are the suggestions that Rider has no stable identity whatsoever after Mannie's death. After he refuses the help of his aunt, and presumably a resumption of that pre-adolescent family dynamic, Rider's identity becomes progressively more incoherent. He tells his uncle that "Ah'm awready home" (144) when he is found in the wilderness, and in many ways his psyche has indeed become utterly chaotic and unfamiliar. Rider demonstrates a growing disconnect from his physical body. He seems to have lost the ability to connect volition with physical results, "feeling the muscles of his jaw beginning to drag his mouth open" (137) as if his body were unconnected to his mind. By the end of his night of drinking, the boundary between his body and the outside world seems to have dissolved completely: "he could not tell if it were going down inside or outside" (147). Chillingly, in the moments before Rider murders Birdsong, he becomes completely divorced from his former self: "one who was called Rider and was Rider" (147) approaches the circle of gamblers and cuts Birdsong's throat.

Mannie's death also results in Rider's inability to remain understandable to the black or white community. Rider's eyes "which had been strained and urgent . . . now seemed to be without vision too" (142). He has closed himself off from sensory contact with the world. He refuses the assistance of his aunt and uncle, insisting "Ah doan needs no help" (145). His frantic enactment of grief alienates him from his fellow workers at the sawmill. Though they watch Rider endanger himself by moving an enormous log by hand, "none of them moved" (141) to assist him. Even his dog abandons him, after Rider throws an empty moonshine jug at it. Eventually, Rider even exempts himself from participation in linear time. His binge after Mannie's death is only nominally marked by the rising and setting of the sun, and the eventual inability of his body to consume alcohol. Rider sets himself against time, calling it a "trepan" (147); a trickster figure that has robbed him of his wife and identity. His answer to escaping earthly time and join Mannie is to "cross[ing] the junctureless backloop of time's trepan" (147) and murder a white man.

Unsurprisingly, the white community misreads Rider's final actions. The second chapter of "Pantaloon in Black" features a retelling of Rider's story from the perspective of a white deputy who was involved in his arrest. Interestingly, the last moment the deputy is able to understand is the marriage: "His wife dies on him. All right" (150). Immediately following, the white man misinterprets Rider's actions as a descent into debauchery. His estimation of the events reinscribes Rider into the very racist assumptions that marriage and masculinity are designed to battle against. The deputy pronounces,

“they aint human. They look like a man and they walk on their hind legs like a man, and they can talk and you understand them. . . . But when it comes to the normal human feelings and sentiments of human beings, they might just as well be a damn herd of wild buffaloes” (149-150). The deputy later compares Rider to a “little child” (151). As Lucas realized through temporarily losing Molly, black female bodies are essential to both maintaining a coherent identity as a black man, and to achieving at least a modicum of participation in the dominant white society. The reason Faulkner only narrates Rider and Mannie’s marriage in retrospect is to foreground the centrality of her physical body to Rider’s identity.

On one level, “Pantaloon in Black” is a story of Rider’s mourning and its illegibility to the white judgmental gaze. In another reading, the section vividly demonstrates the tenuousness of black masculinity. Kuyk analyzes Rider’s behavior in a way that accounts both for his grief and the loss of his coherent identity: “Rider has lost Mannie, the fire on their hearth has died . . . Rider’s universe has fallen apart. As planets exert gravitational force on one another, so black men and women are joined by the power of love” (68). Again, Kuyk’s sentimental reading must be complicated by consideration of the social power of marriage to constitute black male identity. Without Mannie, Rider must negotiate the world “like someone engaged without arms in prolonged single combat” (Faulkner 138). Rider’s identity collapses entirely without the weapon of a black female body to combat racism and isolation.

However, black identity formation does not necessarily end with the death of a black man. The concluding section of the novel, “Go Down, Moses,” can be read as a response piece to “Pantaloon in Black,” with two black male protagonists who have become disassociated from their identities as black men, and whose identities are reconstructed after their deaths. Whereas the deputy in “Pantaloon” creates a racist portrait of Rider that repositions him in a subordinate position within the racial hierarchy, Molly Beauchamp (now “Mollie”) creates a narrative of her own that reclaims her dead grandson and reestablishes him in the black and white community.

The opening paragraphs of “Go Down, Moses” characterize Molly and Lucas’s grandson Samuel Beauchamp as a black man who has lost his identity completely. Unlike Rider, whose crisis of identity manifests itself through a violent fragmentation of self, Samuel has constructed a new personality that is a direct denial of his black southern heritage. His voice “was anything under the sun but a southern voice or even a negro voice” (351). He has treated his hair so it “covered the skull like a cap. . . . He wore one of those sports

costumes called ensembles in the men's shop advertisements" (351). Much as Molly's body became subsumed by the outside markers of femininity in "The Fire and the Hearth," Samuel's appearance lacks all humanity, and is similarly defined only by masculine clothing; even his hair is described as part of his wardrobe. Samuel tells the census taker his real name, and thereby reveals that he has killed a policeman under a different name. As Rider eventually loses touch with his name and murders someone, Samuel also becomes disassociated with his true identity and becomes a killer. He first experiments with new names as a troubled youth in Jefferson, going by the moniker "Butch Beauchamp" (354). Once his identity transformation is complete, he goes so far as to comment "it was another guy killed the cop" (352). Samuel has lost all subjectivity, and is described as an object, "black, smooth, impenetrable" with a head that "resembled a bronze head" (351). Samuel's self is all performance and costume, meant to distance himself from southern black masculinity.

Whereas Lucas excludes himself from the court system by refusing a divorce, and Rider bypasses the same authoritative body by succumbing to a lynching, Samuel is completely subsumed by the white courts. He is confined and guarded by symbols of white justice, and those same symbols strip him of his constructed identity prior to his execution: "after a while they came and slit the expensive trousers and shaved the expensive coiffure" (352). The opening chapter of the section suggests that Samuel's fate will resemble Rider's in that a white man will tell his story after his death. The figure of the northern white census taker is considerably more sympathetic than the deputy of "Pantaloons in Black," but similarly ill-equipped to reconstitute Samuel's identity as a black man. His grandmother Mollie will assume that role.

Lucas's wife Molly reappears in this section, with her name now spelled "Mollie." The unexplained shift in spelling is curious, but perhaps again indicative of the unimportance of Mollie as an individual. For Lucas she is Molly, for Samuel, Mollie, but her function is the same. Mollie goes to the local white attorney, Gavin Stevens, to help her find Samuel. She is already doing the work of reimagining Samuel's story. Instead of accepting a version that terms Samuel as "some seed not only violent but dangerous and bad" (355), she recasts his exile to the north in epic biblical terms. She tells Gavin, "Roth Edmonds sold my Benjamin. Sold him in Egypt. Pharaoh got him" (353). Mollie manipulates the biblical story to reestablish Samuel in the southern community he abandoned.

In the narrative found in Genesis, Benjamin's older brother Joseph is exiled to Egypt. He was sold by his brothers to Ishmaelite

traders for twenty pieces of silver (Gen 37:25-28). After Joseph is established as governor over the land, some of his brothers come to him, not recognizing him, to ask for food during a time of famine. Joseph insists that Benjamin, the youngest, be brought with them. Benjamin was Joseph's full brother, sharing Rachel as a mother (Genesis 43:29). Joseph later accuses Benjamin of stealing from the royal palace, and uses the ruse as an opportunity to reveal himself to his brothers (Genesis 44-45). Her appropriation of this story in particular is significant in several ways for her project of recovering Samuel as a member of the Jefferson community.

First, she is reestablishing Samuel's connection to black southern manhood that he severed through jettisoning his African American hair, rural clothing, and southern accent. Her assertion that he was sold to Pharaoh connects Samuel to his black heritage. The reference to Pharaoh, a relatively benevolent character in the Joseph story, is in this case meant to refer to the Pharaoh of the Moses story, who is referenced in the section's and novel's eponymous spiritual. "Go Down, Moses" is a song about enslavement and eventual freedom that black slaves used as a mask to express their own desire for liberation. The "call and response" Mollie and her sister-in-law employ when speaking of Samuel's death further suggests this black tradition of establishing community in opposition to oppression: "Sold him in Egypt and now he dead." "Oh yes, Lord. Sold him in Egypt." "Sold him in Egypt." "And now he dead" (363).

Even more significantly, Mollie chooses a biblical narrative that is imminently concerned with the reunion of estranged brothers. Though Roth and Samuel are more distant cousins than brothers, the sentiment is the same. The novel as a whole is absorbed with the black and white branches of the McCaslin family, and by extension, black and white people as a whole "recognizing" the shared blood and history that binds them together. Though Roth had nothing to do with Samuel's flight north directly, Mollie accuses him of selling Samuel not because he is directly responsible for the escape and resulting tragedy, but because she wishes to reaffirm their blood relationship. Casting Samuel as Benjamin rather than Joseph serves a similar purpose. In the biblical narrative, it is Benjamin who is the catalyst for the reunion of the brothers. What might appear to be the confused ramblings of a biblically-obsessed old woman is actually a complicated attempt to reconstitute her grandson into his black and white families, what Minrose Gwin, discussing the function of African American women in the novel, would call her ability to create "an alternative narrative space, a space which contains both female and Africanist stories" (92).

As Molly and Mannie served to give their husbands a legitimate place in the white-dominated community, Mollie does the same for her grandson in this section. She insists that Samuel's story be placed in the Jefferson paper: "Is you gonter put hit in de paper? I wants hit all in de paper. All of hit" (365). Gavin's condescending response that she will not be able to read it demonstrates that he has missed her point. She wants the white citizens of Jefferson to read about Samuel, and to accept that he was part of their community. For the same reason, "*she doesn't care how he died. She just wanted him home, but she wanted him to come home right. She wanted that casket and those flowers and the hearse and she wanted to ride through town behind it in a car*" (365, emphasis Faulkner's). Mollie is not superficially concerned with appearances in this request, she wants all proper social rituals performed so her grandson will be legitimate within the community. By constructing a new narrative explaining his exile in the north and insisting on custom and propriety, Mollie translates the communal memory of Samuel from "A bad son of a bad father" (357) into the matrilineal tradition of identity formation.

Throughout *Go Down, Moses*, black men derive their identity from relationships to black women. This is a complicated and ambivalent relationship. Davis argues that "black women in particular, because of their removal from the active space of recognized physical agency, become the ocular, the sighted, and the seeing" (147). The empowerment Davis recovers in the role of black women in the novel is problematic. Though Mollie is the dominant maker of meaning in the final section, she is still locked in a dyad that insists she use her narrative power to recover black male identity. Davis recognizes that the return of Samuel's body indicates the reunification of the "black communal body" that has been fragmented by law, death and dispersal (235). Though Mollie accomplishes this important cultural work, she does so to recover a "communal body" that is problematically gendered male. Black femininity and masculinity are locked together in a mutually dependent dyad of identity formation in *Go Down, Moses*. The laws of white culture and society forced black masculinity to depend entirely on black women, to the detriment of both.

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