

GO DOWN, MOSES

Annotated by
Nancy Dew Taylor

Garland Publishing, Inc.
New York & London
1994

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Taylor, Nancy Dew.

Go down, Moses : annotations / by Nancy Dew Taylor.

p. cm. — (William Faulkner, annotations to the novels ;)

Includes bibliographical references (p.).

ISBN 0-8153-1714-X (alk. paper)

1. Faulkner, William, 1897-1962. Go down, Moses. I. Title.

II. Series.

PS3511.A86G638 1994

813'.52—dc20

93-41178

CIP

Printed on acid-free, 250-year-life paper
Manufactured in the United States of America

Preface by Series Editor

The annotations in the volumes of this series are intended to assist the reader of Faulkner's novels to understand obscure or difficult words and passages, including literary allusions, dialect, and historical events that Faulkner uses or alludes to in the twenty works included. The scope of these annotations varies, necessarily, from volume to volume. But throughout the series the goal has been to provide useful, brief explanations or definitions for what may be puzzling in Faulkner's text.

Obviously what is puzzling to one reader may be clear to another, and these annotations are provided for a varied and changing audience. For many readers today, especially those from the American South, explanations of dialect words and spellings may be unnecessary. The same may be true of many of the historical and geographical annotations. But with the passage of time, a steadily increasing percentage of Faulkner's readers will need help with such points, and what may be foreign today only to Faulkner's readers from other countries, will be increasingly foreign to American readers in the years to come.

Though the annotations have usually been kept brief, each volume is intended to be inclusive, and useful independently of the others. As a rule words that can be found in standard unabridged dictionaries are not annotated, but this rule has not been followed consistently. Usefulness and clarity rather than consistency have been the criteria for this series.

The pioneering work in this field was Calvin Brown's *A Glossary of Faulkner's South* (Yale University Press, 1976). Though our volumes obviously can go into very much greater detail than could Professor Brown's book, almost every volume in this series is indebted to his more substantially than the acknowledgments for individual annotations can show. Even when we have expanded, corrected, or disagreed with him, we have always been conscious of how much this series owes to his knowledge and his labors.

All those involved in this project are fully aware that no such endeavor can ever be complete or definitive. Further close reading of Faulkner's texts and further study of his sources and influences will reveal new allusions. Further linguistic research will provide additional information about his use of dialect. Such progress in the study of Faulkner will be never-ending, with obvious consequences for such reference works as these. Accordingly, in order to correct and update the information provided in these volumes, there will be a regular department in the *Mississippi Quarterly* devoted to notes and queries, addenda and corrigenda, concerning these annotations.

J.B.M.

For my parents

Marian Bethea Dew
and
Josiah Hartwell Dew

whose love and support have been unfailing

and

in memory of

Mabelle Hanna McCray
1917 - 1975

who also blessed and shaped my life

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Dianne C. Luce has served as an unfailingly steady source of both inspiration and information as I prepared this book. The debt all Faulkner scholars owe her, especially for her years of work with the annual survey of Faulkner research and criticism, published for many years in *The Mississippi Quarterly*, has never been adequately acknowledged; I wish to thank her for all that hard, good work and for all the help she has given me. Her knowledge of Faulkner and his work is prodigious, and she shares it happily.

Margaret L. Marks, another friend and colleague, Faulkner lover, and master teacher, has contributed hugely to this volume. Her knowledge of Faulkner's novels has been of invaluable help as I tried to note similarities between incidents and phraseology in *Go Down, Moses* and those in other Faulkner works. Her reading of John Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" informs my annotation of that passage, and her Biblical knowledge is also much in evidence. She has brought to this work a synthesis it would not have had without her participation at every step of revision. She also helped proofread, and she encouraged me when I flagged.

My colleague and friend Gina Peterman read an earlier version of this manuscript with an editorial eye and pen, as Linda McDaniel and Willard Pate have done for this version. Their knowledge of Faulkner's work led to queries and suggestions which have strengthened these annotations. James B. Meriwether allowed me to read and quote from his unpublished reading of *Go Down, Moses*, and G. William Bates, MD, an innovative and creative person for whom to work, encouraged this project.

All my families have helped in various ways. My daughter Marian did dirty work--cross-referencing 1942 page numbers with those in the 1990 Vintage edition--without complaint. Although others in the family *did* complain about how difficult

Faulkner's work is to read, some of them made the attempt in order to offer support of my work; special thanks to Mike and Charles.

All these and Nancy Booth, Louie Eargle, Sally and Russ Plowden, Charles Taylor, and Sue Tully have shared their love of and enthusiasm for Faulkner with me, augmenting and enriching my study with their many voices.

INTRODUCTION

These annotations are presented in the hope they will enrich readers', scholars', and translators' understanding and enjoyment of William Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses*. The work of annotating inevitably leads to an even greater amazement at the richness of Faulkner's imagination, memory, imagery, and language. All his writings contain copious indications of his diverse reading and his close observation of both nature and people. C. B. Webb describes Faulkner walking, usually alone, in Oxford: "Often he would stop and for quite a while watch a squirrel or a bird. Trees also seemed to fascinate him. Although he had passed the same trees every day, he would stop and look as though studying each leaf" (125-126). This careful scrutiny resulted in the astonishing number and variety of trees, plants, flowers, animals, and human beings named and described in *Go Down, Moses*.

Faulkner's talent for observation was complemented by his reading. Since the publication of *Go Down, Moses*, scholars have identified many of the works which influenced Faulkner in the writing of this novel. His use of Keatsian imagery and his direct references to "Ode on a Grecian Urn" have, for example, been examined and commented upon, as have his borrowings from the writings of Southwest humorists. However, several other probable sources have not been so closely studied.

In the summer of 1940—as Faulkner was writing and revising some of the stories which would appear in *Go Down, Moses* (see Thomas L. McHaney "Introduction")—he was visited by Dan Brennan. When the young would-be writer asked Faulkner what he was reading, Faulkner replied that he was reading *Moby Dick* to his daughter Jill (LG 48-49). Melville's novel, which had been a favorite of Faulkner's as early as 1927 (a brilliant one-paragraph appreciation of the novel appeared in *The Chicago Tribune*; see ESPL 197), influenced his work in progress more than critics have indicated (Adams, Millgate [*Achievement*], and Brogunier have all noted Faulkner's use of elements from *Moby Dick*).

Faulkner clearly saw the white whale--"bedraggled with trailing ropes, and harpoons, and lances" (*Moby Dick* 559)--as an ancestor of his bullet-ridden bear. Both animals are described as "indomitable" (*Go Down, Moses* 193; *Moby Dick* 348) and immortal (194; *Moby Dick* 181). Both have earned a name, and *Moby Dick* has a "deformed lower jaw" (182) which counterbalances Ben's crooked paw (202). Both animals have left behind them a trail of destruction: Ben destroys the crops and livestock of the swamper and farmers on the edge of the wilderness (223; noted by Brogunier 204-205) just as *Moby Dick* leaves behind struck boats, maimed sailors, and several fatalities. Both narrators wonder whether whale and bear "must not at last be exterminated" (335; *Moby Dick* 457).

This brief comparison suggests several ways in which reading Melville might actually have influenced the creation of, in particular, "The Bear" and "Delta Autumn." First, the metaphorical implications of a great, hunted animal are transferred from whale to bear. The "wilderness of waters" becomes the Big Woods, forming an epic backdrop for the grand drama played out in it. The central characters, engulfed in monomania, are set apart from their peers, yet they remain a part of a tightly-knit community. Each fails to accept his responsibility as leader in that community. The tragedies end in Ahab's actual death and in Ike's metaphorical death in "Delta Autumn," where three times the narrator describes Ike lying down with his hands crossed on his breast (350, 353, 365).

Like Melville's great novel, "The Big Bear of Arkansas" by Thomas Bangs Thorpe has long been recognized as a possible influence on Faulkner's "The Bear." However, Thorpe's "Bob Herring, The Arkansas Bear Hunter" is seldom mentioned as a source. The story is set in a dense canebrake called The Devil's Summer Retreat at the heart of a dark Arkansas forest, and the two authors' descriptions of the cane are similar. In the climactic scene, Bob Herring's gun fails to fire; since the bear is mauling the dogs, especially Herring's favorite dog, Bose, Herring attacks the bear with his knife (which the bear knocks aside) and then with someone else's dull knife. Finally, another rifle is handed him, with which he kills the bear. Faulkner's scene is clearly reminiscent of Thorpe's, combining many of the same elements

and achieving its sense of immediacy, always in Faulkner's own way.

Setting in *Go Down, Moses* may have been influenced in a different way by Joseph Conrad's work. Descriptions of the Mississippi wilderness as "brooding, secret, tremendous, almost inattentive" (177), of mankind's "puny gnawing at the immemorial flank" and of its being "dwarfed by that perspective into an almost ridiculous diminishment" (195) recall Conrad's descriptions of the African wilderness and its effect on Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*. Both Faulkner and Conrad dramatize the evil which pervades human actions, and Conrad's philosophical musings about the end of time find an echo in the discussion between Cass and Ike in Part 4 of "The Bear."

In the same interview with Dan Brennan in which he discussed reading *Moby Dick* to Jill, Faulkner referred to another book which might have influenced his work in progress. Asked by Brennan what he considered the greatest novel of the century, Faulkner "answered without a pause: 'Buddenbrooks by Thomas Mann'" (LG 49). Alan Perlis has shown how he believes *Buddenbrooks* influenced *The Sound and the Fury*; I believe it influenced *Go Down, Moses* as well. Both novels cover several generations in the life of a single family; both families enter important events such as births, deaths, and marriages in a family ledger. In both novels the decay of a society is described with and through the decay of a family; each novel depicts the decline of an old way of life due to inevitable changes which the evolution of a new society, a new way of life, brings with it. Both authors comment on the transitoriness of fame; both assign a large role to Fate. Thomas Buddenbrooks is an example of a Conradian empty shell of a man; his brother Christian is another variation of this type character; Ike represents a third variation. And surely old Gosch's long attempt to produce a translation of Lope de Vega's collected dramas may be one source for Gavin Stevens's "serious vocation" of translating the Old Testament back into classic Greek.

Faulkner's reading was both broad and deep, not at all limited to novels and poetry. *Go Down, Moses* is rich with his knowledge of American and Southern history; his use of materials about Civil War battles, the Puritan vision of America,

and historical figures such as Columbus and John Brown reveal that broad knowledge. The hunting and natural history essays of Theodore Roosevelt may also have affected his writing of this novel. Certainly his knowledge of Biblical themes and motifs, particularly those from the Old Testament, enriched both the subject matter and tone of the novel.

Faulkner's reading, then, contributed significantly to the language and thematic content of *Go Down, Moses*. With Melville and Conrad, he shares a dark, tragic story in a brooding, epic setting. With Keats, he meditates on the human longing for perfection and the impossibility of permanence in the world of action, change, and death. With Mann, he contemplates the shortcomings of both family and society. To the themes of these great writers and many others he brings his own unique comic, tragic, and always ironic vision of the racially torn South and a deep understanding of the failures of the American dream of equality in a new Promised Land ordained by God.

Faulkner's echoing of other writings is matched in *Go Down, Moses* by an echoing of elements from his own writings. Samuel Taylor Coleridge once stated that "...this bodily frame is an imitative thing, and touched by the imagination gives the hour which is past as faithfully as a repeating watch" (*Letters* I:282). Just as faithfully, Faulkner's imagination has, largely unconsciously perhaps, made connections with phrases and ideas from his earlier works.

I have annotated some of these connections and have also tried to cross-reference repetitions and patterns that occur within the novel itself. There are a surprising number of both kinds, and, as Marion Tatum suggests, these "seemingly coincidental occurrences of the same key words, spoken with different accents, call into question any final interpretation of them" (15). James B. Meriwether ("A Reading," "Delta Autumn" 20, 21) describes these "ballad-refrain-like verbal repetitions" of phrases and scenes as a kind of variation--"a change of key, or of tempo, which assists rather than diminishes the steady, cumulative build-up of narrative." Warren Beck refers to Faulkner's "extensions and deepenings by repetition" (481).

Many of these repetitions draw on Faulkner's knowledge of his own locale, particularly its language and dialect and its

customs. Despite its mystical passages, *Go Down, Moses* is grounded in the reality of the north Mississippi hill country in which Faulkner chose to live his life. At the time he was writing and revising *Go Down, Moses*, he was actively involved in the everyday running of a farm, Greenfield, which he owned. That interest is reflected in the novel's description and discussion of subjects as varied as farm implements, tenancy problems, and the price of cotton. Particularly in this area, Calvin Brown's *A Glossary of Faulkner's South* is enormously helpful; I repeatedly note my reliance upon his work.

In addition to annotating references to both small town and rural Mississippi language, customs, and history, the notes which follow attempt to deal with the three things in *Go Down, Moses* with which most readers have problems: family relationships, chronology, and narrative voice. The tangled family relationships probably can never be "solved" with any certainty since the text remains cryptic at the places where many readers most want facts, but I have offered some conclusions, particularly about Fibby, Thucydus, and Eunice, which I believe the annotations indicate the text will allow. Meredith Smith's fine article solved the most serious chronology problems in the novel; my additions in this area are minor in comparison. Narrative voice in Faulkner always challenges the reader, particularly when the same incident is told by different voices with varying amounts of information. I hope I have offered acceptable suggestions about several such incidents. Some entries may seem to be more interpretation than annotation. In such cases, I felt that earlier readings did not particularly complement my annotations, so I have written interpretation to go with the annotation.

Although the search for information sometimes opens unexpected vistas--as with Cass's reference to "an accidental egg" and a narrator's reference to a "flinching knife"--other searches continue to stymie. Why, for instance, did Faulkner, in the typescript setting copy of "Pantaloons in Black," several times scratch out the word *peas* and over it write by hand *pease*? Did the nursery rhyme "Pease porridge hot,/Pease porridge cold,/Pease porridge in the pot,/Nine days old" come to his mind as he thought of the cold pot of peas Mannie had cooked before she died? Was *pease* simply one of his favorite archaisms?

The same kind of frustration results from other seemingly futile searches: what really happened in Josephine's stall? What was the white powder with which Doom killed Mocketubbe's son and the puppies? Faulkner's writings respond to the hand of the researcher, but they often will not be controlled by it.

The annotations which follow attempt to identify real places, characters, and events; define slang and idiomatic expressions; point out the almost incremental repetition between Faulkner's other works and this one and the use of such repetition within *Go Down, Moses* itself; and note, where possible, the echoes in this novel of other writers' work. The notes also attempt to explain references to the various aspects of plantation life from the time of slavery through the 1940s and to identify the varied flowers, plants, and trees that form the natural backdrop of the action.

A NOTE ON TEXTS

Attempting to address both reliability and availability, I decided to key the annotations in this volume to two versions of *Go Down, Moses*. For example, in the entry 6.10-15/6.11-15, the first page number refers to that in the 1942 edition (and all editions prior to the 1990 Vintage International text, since all editions of the novel between 1942 and 1990 were reproduced from the original plates). The second page number in the annotation refers to that in the 1990 Vintage International text, which, according to an editor at Vintage, will replace all other Vintage versions as stock of the older copies runs out.

Since one assumes the same will hold true for other Vintage International texts, references for Faulkner texts are first to those which Meriwether contends are the better ("The Books of William Faulkner: A Revised Guide for Students and Scholars") and secondly to new Vintage International texts when they are available. For example, in a reference to "*Unv* (52-53/47)," pages 52-53 refer to the 1938 edition of *The Unvanquished*; page 47 is in the 1991 Vintage International text of *The Unvanquished*. If only one number is provided, the location is the same in both texts.

Prefatory pages in the 1990 Vintage International text of *Go Down, Moses* state nothing about corrections to or changes from the 1942 edition, yet the new edition is clearly different in many passages. The annotations which follow include references to corrections, continuations of earlier errors and discrepancies, and passages which, though following Faulkner's typescript setting copy, seem to me to warrant emendation.

ABBREVIATIONS and SHORTENED TITLES

Works by William Faulkner

AA	<i>Absalom, Absalom!</i>
AILD	<i>As I Lay Dying</i>
CS	<i>Collected Stories</i>
ESPL	<i>Essays, Speeches, & Public Letters</i>
FD	<i>Flags in the Dust</i>
FiU	<i>Faulkner in the University</i>
Ham	<i>The Hamlet</i>
ID	<i>Intruder in the Dust</i>
KG	<i>Knight's Gambit</i>
LiA	<i>Light in August</i>
LG	<i>Lion in the Garden</i>
Mans	<i>The Mansion</i>
Reiv	<i>The Reivers</i>
Req	<i>Requiem for a Nun</i>
Sanct	<i>Sanctuary</i>
SL	<i>Selected Letters</i>
SP	<i>Soldiers' Pay</i>
S&F	<i>The Sound and the Fury</i>
Twn	<i>The Town</i>
Unv	<i>The Unvanquished</i>
US	<i>Uncollected Stories</i>
WFMSS	<i>William Faulkner Manuscripts 16:</i> <i>Go Down, Moses</i>
WP	<i>The Wild Palms</i>
1990 Vintage edition	<i>Go Down, Moses.</i> New York: Vintage International, 1990.

Other Works

<i>ADD</i>	Wentworth, <i>American Dialect Dictionary</i>
"Chronology"	Smith, "A Chronology of <i>Go Down, Moses</i> "
Cullen	Cullen, with Watkins, <i>Old Times in the Faulkner Country</i>
<i>DNB</i>	<i>Dictionary of National Biography</i>
<i>Ency. Americana</i>	<i>Encyclopedia Americana International Edition</i>
<i>Ency. Britannica</i>	<i>The New Encyclopedia Britannica</i>
<i>Glossary</i>	Brown, <i>A Glossary of Faulkner's South</i>
<i>OED</i>	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>

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