THE AMERICAN NOVEL

剑桥美国小说新论·27

（英文影印版）

New Essays on

Go Down, Moses

《去吧，摩西》新论

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著作权合同登记　图字：01-2006-7204 号
图书在版编目(CIP)数据

《去吧，摩西》新论 = New Essays on *Go Down*, *Moses* / 瓦格纳-马丁(Wagner-Martin, L.)编. —北京：北京大学出版社，2007.1
(剑桥美国小说新论·27)
ISBN 978-7-301-11409-4

Ⅰ. 去… Ⅱ. 瓦… Ⅲ. 长篇小说-文学研究-美国-现代-英文
Ⅳ. I712.074

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(2006)第 154958 号

书　　名：New Essays on *Go Down*, *Moses*
《去吧，摩西》新论
著作责任者：Linda Wagner-Martin 编
组稿编辑：张　冰
责任编辑：黄瑞明
标准书号：ISBN 978-7-301-11409-4/I·0861
出版发行：北京大学出版社
地　　址：北京市海淀区成府路 205 号　100871
网　　址：http://www.pup.cn
电　　话：邮购部 62752015　发行部 62750672
编辑部 62767347　出版部 62754962
电子邮箱：zbing@pup.pku.edu.cn
印　刷　者：北京汇林印务有限公司
经　销　者：新华书店
650 毫米×980 毫米　16 开本　10.75 印张　176 千字
2007 年 1 月第 1 版　2007 年 1 月第 1 次印刷
定　　价：22.00 元

导　读

北京大学英语系教授　陶洁

近年来，美国文学在我国很受欢迎。大专院校英语系纷纷开设美国文学选读和专题课，学生从中学到的大部分内容是美国小说。不仅如此，在本科毕业论文、硕士论文或博士论文方面，学生所选题材也大多为关于某部美国小说或某个美国小说家。然而，我们的学生往往热衷理论而对作品或作家缺乏深入细致的了解和分析。他们往往先大谈理论规则，然后罗列一些例证，不能很好地把理论和文本融会贯通，恰如其分地结合在一起。在这种情况下，我们需要一些好的参考资料来帮助学生更好地认识和理解他们在阅读或研究的作品和作家。《剑桥美国小说新论》正是这样一套优秀的参考书。

这套丛书的负责人是曾经主编过《哥伦比亚美国文学史》的艾默里·埃利奥特教授，并且由英国剑桥大学出版社在上世纪80年代中期开始陆续出书，至今仍在发行并出版新书，目前已有五十多种，不仅出平装本还有精装本。一套书发行二十多年还有生命力，估计还会继续发行，主要因为它确实从学生的需要出发，深受他们和教师的喜爱。

《剑桥美国小说新论》的编排方式比较统一。根据主编制定的原则，每本书针对一部美国文学历史上有名望的大作家的一本经典小说，论述者都是研究这位作家的知名学者。开篇是一位权威专家的论述，主要论及作品的创作过程、出版历史、当年的评价以及小说发表以来不同时期的主要评论和阅读倾向。随后是四到五篇论述，从不同角度用不同的批评方法对作品进行分析和阐

释。这些文章并非信手拈来，而是专门为这套丛书撰写的，运用的理论都比较新，其中不乏颇有新意的真知灼见。书的最后是为学生进一步学习和研究而提供的参考书目。由此可见，编书的学者们为了帮助学生确实煞费苦心，努力做到尽善尽美。

这五十多种书有早期美国文学家库珀的《最后的莫希干人》，也有当代试验小说大师品钦的《拍卖第49号》和厄普代克那曾被《时代》杂志评为1923年以来100部最佳小说之一的《兔子，跑吧!》；有我们比较熟悉的麦尔维尔的《白鲸》，也有我们还不太了解的他的《漂亮水手》；有中国学生很喜欢的海明威的长篇小说《永别了，武器》，令人想不到的是还有一本论述他所有的短篇小说的集子。有些大作家如亨利·詹姆斯、威廉·福克纳等都有两三本作品入选，但它们都分别有专门的集子。丛书当然涉及已有定论的大作家，包括黑人和白人作家（可惜还没有华裔作家的作品），但也包括20世纪70年代妇女运动中发掘出来的如凯特·肖邦的《觉醒》和佐拉·尼尔·赫斯顿的《他们眼望上苍》，甚至还有我国读者很熟悉的斯托夫人的《汤姆叔叔的小屋》。当年这部小说曾经风靡美国，在全世界都有一定的影响，后来被贬为“政治宣传”作品，从此在美国文学史上销声匿迹。70年代后随着要求扩大文学经典中女性和少数族裔作家的呼声日益高涨，人们才开始重新评价这部作品，分析它对日后妇女作家的影响、对黑人形象的塑造，甚至它在美国文学的哥特式传统中的地位等等。

这样的例子还有很多，例如威廉·迪恩·豪威尔斯和他的《赛拉斯·拉帕姆的发迹》。以前人们只肯定他在发展现实主义文学和理论方面的贡献，对他的作品除了《赛拉斯·拉帕姆的发迹》评价都不太高。但在这本新论文集子里编者对已有定论进行挑战，强调豪威尔斯的小说、他的现实主义跟当时的社会经济文化现状有很大的关系。他的小说既有其文学形式，又是一种社会力量。另外一位19世纪新英格兰作家萨拉·奥尼·裘威特过去一向被看成是乡土作家，现在学者们用女性主义观点强调她的《尖枞树之乡》对美国文学的贡献，分析当年的种族、民族主义和文学市场

对她写作的影响。用封底宣传语言来说，这本集子对美国文学研究、女性主义批评理论和美国研究等方面都会引起很大的兴趣。

还有一本书似乎在我们国家很少有人提起过——亨利·罗思的《就说是睡着了》。此书在20世纪30年代曾经风靡一时，此后长期销声匿迹，60年代又再度受到推崇。现在这部小说则是上面提到的《时代》杂志100部优秀小说中的一部，被认为是上个世纪头50年里最为出色的美国犹太小说、最优秀的现代主义小说之一。评论家认为集子里的文章采用心理分析、社会历史主义等批评方法探讨了有关移民、族裔和文化归属等多方面的问题。

这套集子里还出现了令人信服的新论点。很长时间内海明威一直被认为是讨厌女人的大男子主义者。但在关于他的短篇小说的论述里，作者通过分析《在密执安北部》，令人信服地证明海明威其实对妇女充满同情。不仅如此，这一论断还瓦解了海明威在《太阳照样升起》中充分暴露他的厌女症的定论。

然而，作者们并不侈谈理论或玩弄理论名词，所有的论断都是既以一定的理论为基础，又对文本进行深入的分析；既把理论阐述得深入浅出，又把作品分析得丝丝入扣，让人不由得不信服。他们能够做到这一点完全是因为他们了解学生的水平和需要。

我认为《剑桥美国小说新论》是一套很好的参考书。北京大学出版社购买版权，出版这套书是个有益于外国文学研究教学的决定。

Series Editor's Preface

In literary criticism the last twenty-five years have been particularly fruitful. Since the rise of the New Criticism in the 1950s, which focused attention of critics and readers upon the text itself – apart from history, biography, and society – there has emerged a wide variety of critical methods which have brought to literary works a rich diversity of perspectives: social, historical, political, psychological, economic, ideological, and philosophical. While attention to the text itself, as taught by the New Critics, remains at the core of contemporary interpretation, the widely shared assumption that works of art generate many different kinds of interpretations has opened up possibilities for new readings and new meanings.

Before this critical revolution, many works of American literature had come to be taken for granted by earlier generations of readers as having an established set of recognized interpretations. There was a sense among many students that the canon was established and that the larger thematic and interpretative issues had been decided. The task of the new reader was to examine the ways in which elements such as structure, style, and imagery contributed to each novel's acknowledged purpose. But recent criticism has brought these old assumptions into question and has thereby generated a wide variety of original, and often quite surprising, interpretations of the classics, as well as of rediscovered works such as Kate Chopin's *The Awakening,* which has only recently entered the canon of works that scholars and critics study and that teachers assign their students.

The aim of The American Novel Series is to provide students of American literature and culture with introductory critical

guides to American novels and other important texts now widely read and studied. Usually devoted to a single work, each volume begins with an introduction by the volume editor, a distinguished authority on the text. The introduction presents details of the work's composition, publication history, and contemporary reception, as well as a survey of the major critical trends and readings from first publication to the present. This overview is followed by four or five original essays, specifically commissioned from senior scholars of established reputation and from outstanding younger critics. Each essay presents a distinct point of view, and together they constitute a forum of interpretative methods and of the best contemporary ideas on each text.

It is our hope that these volumes will convey the vitality of current critical work in American literature, generate new insights and excitement for students of American literature, and inspire new respect for and new perspectives upon these major literary texts.

Emory Elliott
University of California, Riverside

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Introduction

LINDA WAGNER-MARTIN

Go Down, Moses was published May 11, 1942. Over a year before, in January of 1941, William Faulkner – the author of more than a dozen novels and story collections – had written Harold Ober, his agent, "Thank you for the money. I did not intend the wire to ask for a loan, but I have used the money and I thank you for it. . . . When I wired you I did not have $15.00 to pay electricity bill with, keep my lights burning."[1] Scarcely eight years after that letter, Faulkner was honored with the most prestigious literary award in the world – the 1949 Nobel Prize for Literature and with it, a check for more than thirty thousand dollars.[2] (He had also been elected to membership in both the National Institute of Arts and Letters and the American Academy of Arts and Letters. From the latter, in 1950, he received the Howells Medal for Fiction, and for his *Collected Stories* in 1951 he received the National Book Award.)[3] The juxtaposition of these events suggests the vicissitudes that marked Faulkner's career as America's foremost twentieth-century novelist. During the middle period of Faulkner's life, nothing was secure – not literary reputation, or finances, or marriage, or family standing. Yet from the agonized, and agonizing, decade of the author's forties came one of his greatest works – *Go Down, Moses*.

The novel may have originated from Faulkner's desperate financial straits. Trying to support his wife and child, and Estelle's two children from her first marriage, Faulkner also considered himself responsible for his dead brother's family (Dean had been killed while flying in 1935), and for his mother's well-being.[4] He had learned to earn money from writing and marketing short stories (which paid better individually than did many of his

novels) and had written film scripts in Hollywood for part of each year from 1932 through 1937. In 1938, comparatively prosperous from the sale of film rights to *The Unvanquished,* he had purchased Greenfield Farm. That property, combined with Rowan Oak, the house and grounds he had bought in 1932, added to his already heavy financial burden. His economic worries contributed to his personal instability, evident in his recurring – and increasing – bouts with alcoholism.

Rather than return to Hollywood, which he disliked, Faulkner tried to publish a novel each year: after 1936, when *Absalom, Absalom!* appeared, in early 1938 he brought out *The Unvanquished;* 1939 saw *The Wild Palms;* 1940, *The Hamlet.* The last three works were comprised, at least partly, of his previously published short stories; *The Unvanquished* was a collage of narratives, retitled and organized to shape a novel. It was not surprising, then, that in 1940 Faulkner asked his editor Robert Haas about the possibility of Random House's giving him a large advance on a novel manuscript built around what he called "the negro stories."[5] He needed a book for the 1941 season.

After much discussion, with Faulkner even considering a move to another publishing house, Haas came through with a thousand dollar advance (which Faulkner divided among his creditors), and Faulkner eventually sent in the much revised manuscript for his new novel. Imagine his surprise, then, when he opened the mailing packet months later, to see on the novel's cover the words, *Go Down, Moses and Other Stories.*[6]

* * * * *

Given the title, reviewers had little choice other than to assume the work was a story collection,[7] and much of its reputation even into the present has been as a group of seven stories. Of the group, "The Bear" has received an immense amount of attention, as it did from the start. Milton Rugoff, reviewing the book for the influential *New York Herald-Tribune,* compared "The Bear" to Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick,* saying that each illustrated "the mysterious teleology of nature."[8] Emphasizing the importance of

the primordial, of man's relationship to nature, led to the tendency to see Ike McCaslin (the young Isaac of "The Bear" and "The Old People") as the novel's central consciousness. As Lionel Trilling put it, Ike seems heroic because he values the "dignity of freedom" in the midst of more grasping McCaslins.[9] For another reviewer, the Ike McCaslin story was a bildungsroman, following the growth of the young man into adulthood – a familiar, and usually optimistic, narrative.[10]

In early reviews, however, "The Bear" received somewhat less attention than did the disjuncture between "Pantaloon in Black" and the Lucas (McCaslin) Beauchamp stories (the title story and the novella, "The Fire and the Hearth"). A common complaint was that Rider (from "Pantaloon") seemed not to *be* a "McCaslin": therefore, how was the reader to relate that story to the rest of the book? Although the *Times Literary Supplement* found "Pantaloon in Black" the most impressive section of the book, Trilling thought it inferior.

So far as the book's overall structure was concerned, many reviewers accepted its unity – whether they considered it novel or collection. Ironically, one of the harshest judges of its format was Malcolm Cowley, the critic who would soon edit *The Portable Faulkner* anthology for Viking Press, a collection that did much to bring Faulkner's writing to the attention of serious American readers. In his 1942 review, however, Cowley described *Go Down, Moses* as a "loosely jointed" collection, which only masqueraded as a novel. In reality, Cowley said, most of the stories had either been published in magazines, or had at least been written for that market.[11]

Several negative reviewers pointedly described *Go Down, Moses* as a characteristic Faulkner text, filled as it was with "miscegenation, rot, murder, and ruin."[12] John Temple Graves denied any tone of humor to the varied narratives and Philip Toynbee said the novel was symptomatic of Faulkner's artistic exhaustion.[13] Alfred Kazin's assessment was that Faulkner was a bitter man because he had been made an outsider in the contemporary South. No longer part of a social elite, he voiced his displeasure with the world through characters so abstract they had little

identity. Faulkner's difficult style, Kazin said, was an attempt to disguise the emptiness at the heart of both his work and his vision.[14]

In his 1942 study, *Writers in Crisis,* Maxwell Geismar vented his objection to what he saw as Faulkner's success. For Geismar, Faulkner's coupling of violence with incest, rape, and miscegenation proved his personal misogyny. Calling the author a "fascist," a word which in 1942 had even stronger negative connotations than it does today, Geismar said that Faulkner laid the fall of the South to the emancipation of both blacks and women.[15] It was Faulkner's use of black characters that seemed to baffle some critics. Samuel Putnam said that Faulkner's portrayal of "the Negro" signaled "horror and human defeat," with the black "portrayed as a hopelessly forlorn and trapped creature." Putnam concludes that "Faulkner has not progressed as Erskine Caldwell has."[16] That the anonymous *TLS* reviewer was convinced, in contrast, that Faulkner held a deep "fraternal sentiment" for the "Mississippi Negro as he was and is"[17] suggests that Geismar's and Putnam's readings were at the edge of a continuum of interpretations. The disparity among such readings reflects a common problem, the sheer difficulty of reading the modernist text.

Unlikely as it was that readers would find only the horrific in *Go Down, Moses,* the by then pervasive attitudes about Faulkner's sometimes shocking and violent work influenced some of these 1942 comments. Coming to the novelist's defense were both Warren Beck and Cleanth Brooks, whose later studies would do much to build a sympathetic and informed readership for Faulkner. Beck – calling the author the most brilliant of American novelists – stated that whenever critics complained about Faulkner's style, they were admitting their own failures as good readers. Brooks defended not only Faulkner's way of expressing his ideas but the ideas themselves, claiming that his philosophy was often misread. Faulkner is a "tragedian," Brooks said, free from the cynicism and sensationalism he was sometimes charged with.[18]

* * * * *

At least partly because of the error in the original titling of the novel, criticism of *Go Down, Moses* has been slow to cohere. Much criticism of the 1960s and 1970s, and even the 1980s, still discussed the book's genre. More substantive critical problems remained beneath the surface, although attention to other of Faulkner's novels had become varied and sophisticated. Several of the more troubling critical issues arose when critics tried to fit *Go Down, Moses* into Faulkner's oeuvre.

By the late 1930s, Faulkner critics had begun to understand how great a writer the young Mississippian really was. The creator of not only the potboilers that had brought him a kind of fame – i.e., *Sanctuary* – Faulkner deserved to be read as the American Joyce or Proust (both of whom were writers he knew well). In defending Faulkner's intricately modernist work, such critics as Conrad Aiken, George Marion O'Donnell, and Delmore Schwartz[19] discussed his early novels – *The Sound and the Fury, As I Lay Dying, Light in August.* A body of substantial criticism on these works was thus early in place. When *Absalom, Absalom!* was published in 1936, with Quentin Compson, the most sympathetic character from *The Sound and the Fury* resurrected, as it were, after his suicide in the 1929 novel, critical attention to the linked books intensified. The two novels provided – and still provide – a focal point for discussion meant to illuminate all of Faulkner's writing.

For several reasons, such a focus will not work. As Michael Millgate pointed out decades ago, Faulkner's genius led him to write widely varied fictions.[20] Particularly in his later work, change occurred not only in his choices of narrative design and points of view, but also and even more dramatically in his subject matter. To ignore what are often crucial changes places the reader at risk. Put simply, Isaac McCaslin, often read as the protagonist of *Go Down, Moses,* is not another Quentin Compson. By 1942, Faulkner had stopped romanticizing his inheritance of southern history, tradition, legend, and myth. *Go Down, Moses* is, in many aspects, a representation of the way the South must relinquish its arcane values. Rather than despairing over the region's losses, as Quentin Compson and his father did, healthy Southerners have more apt choices. One of Ike McCaslin's roles

in *Go Down, Moses* is to represent the notion of choice. As he comes to see the corruption inherent in the McCaslin lineage, Ike chooses to disown his birthright. But as Faulkner shows in *Go Down, Moses,* the mess of pottage he accepts in exchange for property – living on with the crude descendants of his peers, "uncle to half a county and father to no one"[21] – comes under scrutiny, too. Faulkner's representation of the once idyllic hunting camp shows its participants, and their activities, to be as flawed as Lucius Quintus Carothers McCaslin was, at least in his rape of his black slave Eunice and, later, of their daughter Tomasina (Tomy). McCaslin's sexual depravity led both women – directly – to their early deaths.

The irresponsible father, like the absent mother, is a staple character in Faulkner's novels. But unlike Bundren in *As I Lay Dying,* or both Sutpen and Coldfield in *Absalom, Absalom!,*[22] the McCaslin story in *Go Down, Moses* gives the plot new intensity. In Faulkner's earlier novels, the narratives delighted in extending the impasse of a conundrum past the book's ending – so that the reader's strategy, in part, is to accept the impossibility of "knowing." In *Go Down, Moses,* however, Faulkner forces the reader to know. Awareness penetrates the reader as it has Ike McCaslin.

Instead of forcing the reader to a willed passivity, however, as it did Ike, Faulkner's narrative suggests other courses of action. The reader is made to realize that the horrors of the abusive family romance plot must be faced: Someone must assume responsibility. Ike at least faces the incest in his lineage. But it is likely that Faulkner intends the reader to see that McCaslin's reaction – his renunciation of his patrimony and of his role in both family and community – does not help anyone.[23] His absconding, in fact, allows Roth Edmonds to live the unexamined life of his forebears, with no alternative community voice to check or reprove him.

Faulkner's focus on Edmonds' self-gratifying affair with the unnamed mulatto, who is one of his own cousins within the McCaslin line, provides each reader a Rorschach inkblot test. Edmonds' choice of abandoning his lover and their son in order to stay within the white male community (idealized in the hunt-

ing camp), complete with that community's obvious and ribald devaluation/commodification of women, identifies one crumbling moral strand within the traditional patriarchal system.

Go Down, Moses is, then, the beginning of Faulkner's mature statement about responsibility. Difficult as its structure is, forcing the reader literally to put together glimpses of information – often as indecipherable as the cryptic writing in the commissary books – Faulkner's novel replicates the process of a mind coming to understanding. It is as if Faulkner himself needed, in writing the book,[24] to be led to the meaning of his own fictional statement. Six years previous, Quentin's narrative in *Absalom, Absalom!* marked a definite end to Faulkner's use of narrative form to interrogate, expand, and finally confound whatever ostensible "story" he is telling. What really happens in *Absalom, Absalom!* is blockage. Quentin cannot face the truth about either the South or himself, as his dramatically highlighted closing words show. Mr. Compson, blind to the implications of sterility in his recounting of the Sutpen tale and caught in fantasy as he shapes that story on the hook of Rosa Coldfield's frustrated life and death, gives in to endless repetition, to a circling interrogation of "facts" that are not in question, and to blatant falsification whenever he wants to deny Rosa's more literal tale.

Michael Millgate has seen *Go Down, Moses* as the culmination of Faulkner's greatest period of creation;[25] I would propose that this 1942 novel is, in some ways, a new start. In it, Faulkner begins to attempt expressing what it feels like to be the heir of white patriarchal power in a slave state, what it feels like to be the wellborn son, the wellborn *white* son, of a family hardly memorable for its stability or sanity. Ironically, what the Falkners – like the Sartorises of Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County – were known for was foolhardiness. Rash intemperance of both spirit and personality was their trademark; and the young writer, nicknamed "Count No 'Count" as he wore his RAF uniform during the postwar years in Oxford, had heretofore prided himself on being the great-grandson who carried on The Colonel's fascinating exploits (as well as both his fiction and his irascible moodiness).

After forty years of privileging irresponsibility in his own life,