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ISAAC'S CHOICE: THE ROMANTIC DIMENSION OF ISAAC McCASLIN'S FREEDOM

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1. FRENEAU'S CHOICE

No one will ever accuse Philip Freneau of being a great poet. He is, however, an *interesting* one. The also-rans of history hold a morbid fascination for those of us who have to learn to live with our own mediocrity. But even more than that, their work, untroubled by so many of the complexities of brilliance, often provides us with an accessible insight into the political and cultural circumstances of the time in which they lived. Take the following poem, for example. Freneau's «Lines occasioned by A Visit to an old Indian Burying Ground», published in 1788, can tell us a lot about the gathering powers of Romanticism at the end of the 18th century, and about the particular form that Romantic thinking was later to take in the United States.

In spite of all the learn'd have said
I still my old opinion keep;
The *posture* that *we* give the dead
Points out the soul's eternal sleep.

Not so the ancients of these lands;–
The Indian, when from life releas'd,
Again is *seated* with his friends,
And shares again the joyous feast.

His imag'd birds, and painted bowl,

And ven'son, for a journey drest,
Bespeak the *nature* of the soul,
Activity, that wants no rest.

His bow for action ready bent,
And arrows, with a head of bone,
Can only mean that life is spent,
And not the finer essence gone.

Thou, stranger, that shall come this way,
No fraud upon the dead commit,
Yet, mark the swelling turf, and say,
They do not *lie*, but here they *sit*.

Here, still a lofty rock remains,
On which the curious eye may trace
(Now wasted half by wearing rains)
The fancies of a ruder race.

Here, still an aged elm aspires,
Beneath whose far projecting shade
(And which the shepherd still admires)
The children of the forest play'd.

There oft a restless Indian queen,
(Pale Marian with her braided hair)
And many a barbarous form is seen
To chide the man that lingers there.

And long shall timorous Fancy see
The painted chief, and painted spear,
And *reason's self* shall bow the knee
To shadows and delusions here.

Notice, in the first place, how neatly this poem falls into two symmetrical, opposed, yet interpenetrating sections, almost like a verbal yin and yang. The first five stanzas constitute a reasoned speculation, announced by the adjective «learn'd» in line 1 and the noun «opinion» in line 2. The second five, though, are an emotional flight of the imagination, a flight that is inspired by the spirits of the dead that haunt the place, and is announced by the «fancies» of line 24. In other words, the structure itself denotes a confrontation between learning or reason, on the one hand, and fancy, or the

imagination, on the other. Thus, the ordonnance of the poem reflects the historical transition from Enlightenment to Romanticism that marked, in one way or another, so much of Freneau's poetry.

But there is much more here than a simple juxtaposition of Reason and Fancy. As in most Romantic art, these two general terms contain a wealth of deeper associations. And in this context, these associations assume a particular significance for the American experience. The dominant mode of thought of the European culture is rational. This is a way of using the mind that has led to modern urban society– what we have traditionally tended to think of from our particular perspective as «civilization». Rationality therefore characterizes the white interloper, and his essential opposition to nature, on the American scene. Perhaps inevitably, fancy is associated with the indigenous race, which lived in intimate harmony with nature and never developed an urban society nor suffered an Industrial Revolution.

As the poet contemplates the Indian burying ground, in this place where another race has flourished and disappeared, these associations move him to a feeling of pastoral nostalgia for an earlier and presumably more innocent world, one that his own race, following the dictates of progress, is now in the process of eradicating. Does he, in his reflections on this contrast, somehow sense an implicit nihilism in Occidental culture?

The vague suggestion of this possibility is an important element in the poem, and it links the poem to what is, undoubtedly, the deepest issue of the Romantic revolution in thought: the question of how our thinking itself, the strategies we employ to understand and interact with the world, can be either destructive or creative-whether our intellectual orientations, in the long run, favor life or death.

This explains why the first half of the poem, the part dominated by Reason, focuses on the two cultures' differing attitudes toward death. For us, in spite of what theology may preach, death signifies «eternal sleep». For the Indians, however, death is a transformation. It does not mark the end of life, but an entrance into another dimension of experience. In other words, our philosophy leaves no room for the soul, while the Indians' burial customs clearly indicate that for them, that «finer essence» continues active after the life of the body has been spent.

In this poem, Freneau was responding –whether consciously or not– to the inherent dangers of the materialistic philosophy of the Enlightenment. Only a few years later, Wordsworth and Coleridge would formulate much more elegantly the notions that the Enlightenment world-view threatened both humankind and nature with at least a spiritual, if not a literal death, and that the function of poetry should be to restore consciousness, unity, soul, to the world. One student of Romanticism who has very clearly expressed this concern is M.H. Abrams, who points out that

> The persistent objective of Coleridge's formal philosophy was to substitute «life and intelligence… for the philosophy of mechanism, which, in everything that is most worthy of the human intellect, strikes *Death*». And the life transfused into

> the mechanical motion of the universe is one with the life in man: in nature [Coleridge] wrote in 1802, «everything has a life of its own, and... we are all *One Life*». A similar idea constitutes the leitmotif or Wordsworth's *Prelude.*[1]

This would almost seem to be Freneau's objective, as well. From his reasoned contemplation of death in the first half of the poem, he is, if I may use the term, teased out of thought, to reflect upon a timeless –or ahistorical– spiritual realm where all of life continues and flourishes. The paradox, of course, is that for the European mentality, this realm of eternal life can only exist as a second– or third-hand fantasy, as the imaginative reconstruction of the «fancies of a ruder race». And this is so because in developing the intellectual tools that enabled us to analyze, or dismantle, nature, and thus to extract power from it, we also had to eliminate from our repertory of serious concepts the idea of soul-of soul as an impersonal and all pervasive dimension that transcends and unifies all physical phenomena.

Perhaps the most important thing for us to realize, in our time, about Romanticism is that it puts into relief the conflict between two competing intellectual orientations, one that depends on the power of logical thought to explain and manipulate the world, and one that searches for other means of conceiving and dealing with the real. What we think of as the great Romantic heroes are, more precisely, romantic visions of the Enlightenment hero. Faust, Frankenstein, Ahab, even Poe's obsessively rational and completely unbalanced narrators, are all extreme representatives of the Enlightenment faith in the ability of the human mind to comprehend, and eventually master, all of the secrets of nature. Significantly, however, all of their enterprises lead to failure, destruction or death. By dwelling on this failure, Romanticism indicates the need to establish an alternative approach to experience.

Now, at the end of the 20th century, we are still trying to come to terms with the Romantic split between two very different ways of understanding how the mind should be employed. We only need to alter, in Emerson's term, our «axis of vision» to realize that we are literally, and very precariously, cohabiting with many of the insidious monsters of destruction that are the result of our possibly inevitable misuse of science and technology. Considering what we have done to our world in the last two or three centuries, maybe it is time for us to begin to take the lessons of Romanticism more seriously.

The special terms of the American experience, compounded of a mystical desire to lose ourselves (and thus to be «reborn») in nature and a political/economic will to follow the laws of reason, make us particularly prone to the tensions of the Romantic split. The real effectiveness of Freneau's poem lies in his nearly recapturing that lost sense of an all-pervasive spiritual dimension that vivifies (rather than destroys) the

1. M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York: Oxford UP, 1977 [1953]), p. 65.

world. He is able to wander into the sacred ground of the Indian dead and to commune with the powerful spirits that still inhabit the place. The enchantments of this mystical realm-which is, after all, only «uncivilized» nature-are considerable, as Robert Frost also realized when he said so memorably, under the influence of those same enchantments, that «The woods are lovely, dark and deep». We sense that Freneau is confused, that he would like to join «Pale Marian with her braided hair» and linger in timeless peace among these pastoral shades. But, in spite of the chiding of the «barbarous forms» in stanza 8, Freneau, like Frost after him, resists their call. He cannot finally forego his tacit belief in the deeper validity of the rational mind. He knows that he must return to his own race, his own culture, and his culture's commitment to reason.

The last stanza is a half-regretful backward glance at a world that Freneau both yearns for and fears at the same time:

> And long shall timorous Fancy see
> The painted chief, and painted spear,
> And *reason's self* shall bow the knee
> To shadows and delusions here.

Inept as it may be in some respects, this poem, like most Romantic art, draws on the tensión between two conflicting ways of conceiving the mind's relationship with the world. And while it practically maintains its ambiguity till the end, the fact is that Freneau's imagination finally fails him. «Fancy» is still too timorous to overthrow Reason in the poet's mind. So, although *«reason's self»* may bow in apparent submission to the spiritual realm, that submission is only temporary. The last line says it all: No matter how pleasing they may be, these shadows can never be more, for a mind like Freneau's, than tempting and enchanting delusions.

2. ISAAC'S CHOICE

Freneau obviously recognizes in his poem that the irruption of European culture into the New World, and the clash between the white interlopers and the indigenous populations, constituted something like a historical case study for the deeper issues of Romanticism. And that, in itself, is a valuable contribution. We shouldn't really blame him if he didn't completely understand the issues involved. After all, we are still, two centuries later, squirming on the horns of the same dilemma.

One of the many 20th century authors who have perceived this fact was William Faulkner. And, very interestingly, he addressed the issues raised by the Romantic split in much the same terms as Freneau.

Many critics have spent a considerable amount of ink in the attempt to comprehend Isaac McCaslin's renunciation of his inheritance in the central stories of *Go Down,*

Moses. The two general tendencies have been either to apologize for Ike's perceived failure or, more bluntly, to discredit him.[2] It seems to me, however, that we have yet to provide a satisfactory account of the forces that contribute to forming his personality or of the deeper value of his sacrifice. By considering the course of Isaac's life in the larger context I am evoking here, we may be able to understand his choices better and possibly, by the end, even to sympathize with him.

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2. In general, the earlier critics who focused on Ike's relation to nature are those who see him more positively. For example, John Lydenberg, «Nature Myth in Faulkner's "The Bear"», *American Literature* 24 (1952-3), describes Ike as «the new priest who will keep himself pure to observe, always from the outside, the impious destruction of the remaining Nature by men who can no longer be taught the saving virtues of pride and humility» (p. 69). Similary, Otis D. Wheeler, «Faulkner's Wilderness», *American Literature*, 31 (1959-60), 127-36, calls Ike «the last priest of a dying cult» (p. 134). More ambiguously, William Van O'Connor, in «The Wilderness Theme in Faulkner's 'The Bear'», originally published in 1953 and reprinted in *William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism*, eds. Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1960), 322-30, speaks of Isaac in relation to «the nobility of character to be learned from life in the wilderness» (p. 323), but later says that «Ike never seems a particularly good representative of the virtues to be learned from the wilderness because he is ineffectual or inactive in contexts where [those virtues] might motivate him to some positive action» (p. 329).

A somewhat more negative attitude is reflected by later critics such as Nancy B. Sederberg, «'A Momentary Anesthesia of the Heart': A Study of the Comic Elements in Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses* », in Doreen Fowler and Ann J. Abadie, eds., *Faulkner and Humor. Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 1984*. (Jackson: UP of Mississipi, 1986), 79-96, who claims that «The failure of Ike's humanity becomes the central theme of 'Delta Autumn'» (p. 89), and Daniel Hoffman, *Faulkner's Country Matters: Folklore and Fable in Yoknapatawpha* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1989), who says that «Ike's imitation of Christ is incomplete» and describes him as a «failed culture hero [...] who seemed chosen to redeem his country but fails to do so because of a human failing, a lack, ultimately, of compassion» (p. 169).

Many of the articles contained in Arthur F. Kinney, ed., *Critical Essays on William Faulkner: The McCaslin Family*, (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1990) present an even more discouraging view of Ike's character. It would seem that the recent trend is to judge him almost exclusively in materialistic and utilitarian terms. But doesn't this kind of reaction really tell us more about the critics' personal biases than about the complexities of the literary work? One of the most scathing opinions, in this respect, must certainly be that of Kinney's Introduction to this collection. In a nakedly materialistic argument, Kinney derides Ike for his failure to promote industry and commerce, claiming, what's more, that Ike's «narrow and jealous desire to maintain the big woods as his own private refuge is, in its pride and arrogance, strikingly analogous to Lucas's narrow and jealous desire to desecrate the sacred Indian mounds in his corrupt and corrupting search for fool's gold [...] » (p. 9). What Kinner fails to perceive in this unfortunate reading of the novel is that Lucas's «corrupt and corrupting» greed, and its deleterious effects on sacred ground, is precisely the kind of approach to life that Isaac renounces-as does Lucas himself. In fact, the short conversation between Isaac and Cass in «The Bear». Roth tempts Lucas and Roth in Part 3 of «The Fire and the Hearth» is an echo of the debate between Isaac and Cass in «The Bear». Roth temps Lucas to keep the divining machine and continue the search for gold behind Aunt Molly's back. But Lucas, in spite of his firm belief that the money is there, finally renounces the temptation to extract wealth and power from the earth.

I would suggest, in the first place, that the recent, more negative opinions on Isaac stem from a general failure to appreciate Faulkner's essentially Romantic, and therefore subversive, attitude toward the predominant Occidental orientation. To disapprove of Isaac's freely-elected and deeply-considered choice is really only to affirm what we have already made of ourselves, as a society, by remaining, like Freneau, on this side of the Romantic split. But then, on the other hand, we cannot really expect our academics to subvert the society that grants them their prestige, and their living. Success demands conformity. All of us, in fact, have a share in the system of historical progress that has made the virtual eradication of the native American cultures and the more gradual destruction of the environment possible.

Isaac McCaslin, though, a figure of deep sensitivity and courage, manages, however immediately futile the act may be, to say «No». This is why Faulkner finds him such an interesting character. He represents in specifically American terms the Romantic conflict between Reason (with its concomitants of analysis, fragmentation and destruction) and Intuition (with its concomitants of synthesis, wholeness and the preservation and continuity of life). He allows Faulkner to examine the almost constant tension between these two forms of thinking that has marked the society of the United States from its inception. The fact that Isaac's renunciation is probably vain (at least from a commercial or materialistic point of view) in no way annuls its moral value. Quite the contrary, in fact. If we can manage to comprehend and respect him, then we may be able to begin to look for more creative and constructive ways of dealing with the cultural heritage that all of us share.

«THE OLD PEOPLE»

We all know that when John Smith tied himself to his native guide in order to survive an oddly dispirited native attack in the Virginia wilderness, something new was conceived.[3] Our constantly envolving national identity has been an ambiguous mixture of Old and New World values ever since-that same ambiguous mixture that is pulling Freneau in two opposing directions in «The Indian Burying Ground».

The significance of «The Old People» in the larger scheme of *Go Down, Moses* is to convey the seriousness of Isaac's unofficial schooling, to show how thoroughly he is inculcated into the supposedly «alien» culture of that disappearing race whose last representative is the childless Sam Fathers. This story is exactly what it purports to be: a description of a rite of initiation. But Isaac's «catechism» in this school goes back to

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3. John Smith, *The General History of Virginia*, Book III, Chapter 2, cited in Nina Baym, et. al., eds., *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (London: W..W. Norton & Company, 1985), 20.

the root meaning of the term. There are no books, not even questions and answers. Sam teaches his novice by word of mouth.

> The boy would never question him; Sam did not react to questions. The boy would just wait and then listen and Sam would begin, talking about the old days and the People whom he had not had time ever to know and so could not remember (he did not remember ever having seen his father's face), and in place of whom the other race into which his blood had run supplied him with no substitute.[4]

Like so many other American characters, Isaac, who was born too late to know his biological father, has to choose, or to create, his own identity.

His relationship with Sam Fathers may be a later version of that between Natty Bumppo and Chingachgook, but Isaac's exposure to what Cooper calls the «highest principles» of civilization «as they are exhibited in the uneducated, and all of savage life that is not incompatible with these great rules of conduct»[5] differs incisively from the Pathfinder's. Natty never loses sight of his «white gifts», nor questions his belief in the superiority of his race. The results of Isaac's dual education, though, are quite dissimilar. The gifts that he acquires from Sam Fathers in «The Old People» are all positive and life-affirming. But they contrast starkly with the other education he obtains from the ledgers in Part IV of «The Bear». These «white gifts» that form the basis of his legal patrimony (and the heritage of his race) are violence, rape and destruction.

His schooling with Sam Fathers, in the ancient oral tradition, is almost completely passive. As he takes in Sam's stories of a dead and all-but-forgotten world, he gradually escapes from the constrictions of chronological time to commune, at least in his imagination, with a living past:

> As he [Sam] talked about those old times and those dead and vanished men of another race from either that the boy knew, gradually to the boy those old times would cease to be old times and would become a part of the boy's present, not only as if they had happened yesterday but as if they were still happening, the men who walked through them actually walking in breath and air and casting an actual shadow on the earth they had not quitted. (p. 171)

This is nearly the same force that was working on Freneau, but Isaac gives himself

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4. William Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), p. 171. (All subsequent quotations from this edition will be identified by the page numbers included in parentheses in the text.)

5. James Fenimore Cooper, «Preface» to *The Leatherstocking Tales*, in Harrison T. Meserole, et. al., *American Literature: Tradition and Innovation*, vol. 1 (Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath & Company, 1969), 808.

to it completely. He learns not only to transcend the limited individual self confined by time and space (and physical death), but also, importantly, to imagine himself beyond the Occidental culture that is based on these very concepts. As if to emphasize this point, Faulkner continues in the same paragraph:

> And more: as if some of them had not happened yet but would occur tomorrow, until it would seem to the boy that he himself had not come into existence yet, that none of his race nor the other subject race which his people had brought with them into the land had come here yet [...] (p. 171)

Sam has chosen Ike to be the last human repository of the consciousness of his race. Those numberless voices of the dead, murmuring an incomprehensible language in Isaac's mind, are a wonderfully apt expression of the intuitive knowledge of nature that is the real gift the boy inherits from Sam. This is a «revolution» in Ike's thinking; it enables him to perceive the land in a different way, much more humbly and reverently, as the source of all life rather than as a source of power and profit.

Isaac's only real *action* in the story, the ritual slaying of the deer, confirms his passage into an altered form of consciousness. As Faulkner says, the marks of the deer's blood on his face «had merely formally consecrated him to that which, under the man's tutelage, he had already accepted, humbly and joyfully, with abnegation and with pride too» (p. 165). In this altered form of consciousness, death is recognized as part of a much larger process. Sam teaches Isaac to respect and love the life that he takes, to be worthy of that life, because in taking it he assumes it into his own (much the same as he has already assumed the voices of the dead). The hunt therefore becomes a symbolic act that celebrates the mystical interpenetration of life and death. This is a very different sense of hunting –and of death– from that of our secular culture, although it is significant that remnants of it persist in the ritual of the Eucharist.

Because he has been consecrated to this enlarged perception, Isaac is able to see the enigmatic buck at the end of Part 2. This apparition, which Sam addresses as «Oleh, Chief [...] Grandfather», is a manifestation of the timeless spirit of the sacrifical deer that Isaac kills at the beginning of the story. Notice how Faulkner's description of that living, material animal already suggests the kind of vision that the boy is on the way to attaining:

> Then the buck was there. He did not come into sight; he was just there, looking not like a ghost but as if all of light were condensed in him and he were the source of it, not only moving in it but disseminating it [...]. (p. 163)

Ike is learning to perceive the spiritual (or the soul) and the physical (or the body) as *one thing* here. He is, in effect, being initiated into what, for us, is a form of mysticism; although Sam Fathers, and the native Americans he represents, would

probably simply think of it as the proper understanding of life. And this is why Faulkner describes what Isaac brings back with him from his «first brief sojourn» at the camp as «an unforgettable sense of the big woods–not a quality dangerous or particularly inimical, but profound, sentient, gigantic and brooding, amid which he had been permited to go to and fro at will, why he knew not, but dwarfed and, until he had drawn honorably blood worthy of being drawn, alien» (p. 175-6).

«The Old People» is important because it illustrates the thoroughness of Isaac's «alternative» education, the depth of his commitment to a mystical identification with the impersonal and ongoing life of nature. The much more ambiguous character is Cass, who, it is important to recall, has also been educated by Sam Fathers and has also been guaranted a vision of the mysterious buck. In spite of his later incomprehension of Ike's motives in «The Bear», it is actually Cass, on the basis of his own experience, who completes the boy's education in Part 3 of «The Old People».

Still only 12, Ike is naturally perplexed by his experience in the woods. And since he knows that «Sam did not respond to questions», he feels the need to discuss it with his older cousin, another one of his surrogate fathers. In this other catechism, Cass explicates the meaning of the buck, delicately leading the boy to see that it implies the continuity of a spiritual existence beyond the ending of physical life. After a moving description of the long history of the passion and suffering and joy of living beings on the earth, Cass goes on to say:

> And all that must be somewhere, all that could not have been invented and created just to be thrown away [...]. And the earth don't want to just keep things, hoard them; it wants to use them again. Look at the seed, the acorns, at what happens even to carrion when you try to bury it: it refuses too, seethes and struggles too until it reaches air and light again, hunting the sun still. (pp. 186)

That pronoun «it», which first refers to «carrion», then expands to refer to all of life, to the paradoxical idea of life, to the paradoxical idea of life-in-death, that refuses to abandon its home, the earth:

> Besides, what would it want itself, knocking around out there, when it never had enough time about the earth as it was, when there is plenty of room about the earth, plenty of places still unchanged from what they were when the blood used and pleasured in them while it was still blood? (pp. 186-7)

Notice the difference between this Cass, at 28, and the Cass we see nine years later in «The Bear». The ideas he is expressing here are an important contribution to Isaac's later decision to renounce his inheritance. Ownership of the land, which leads to the hoarding and eventual exhaustion of natural resources, contradicts the «wisdom» of spontaneous nature, in which all of life is reborn, or recycled, *through* death. And this

wisdom inevitably includes a spiritual dimension that transcends the individual, or, as we might put it from the perspective of the dominant orientation, the existence of ghosts.

At the end of «The Old People», Isaac and Cass are essentially in agreement. Referring to what Cass had just explicated as the spirits of the dead, Ike says, «But we want them too. There is plenty of room for us and them too». And Cass agrees: «That's right [...] Suppose they didn't have substance, cant cast a shadow–» (p. 187). As the phrasing indicates, he is talking about the same persistence of the spirits of the dead that Ike had already learned to accept through his communion with the Old People. The story ends, then, with the revelation that Cass has also been able to transcend the limits of the rational and penetrate the region of-of what? Of ghosts? Of shadows and delusions? Of the spiritual foundation of all physical phenomena?

«THE BEAR»

It is clear, however, that nine years later, in their debate in Part 4 of «The Bear», this agreement no longer holds. And the reason is, quite simply, that Cass has finally opted, like everyone else who takes part inthe power-structure of his society, for Freneau's choice. General Compson, an elder whose perceptions should be respected, sees the difference plainly. When he grants Ike permission to stay with Sam and Boon in the camp in the aftermath of the hunt for Old Ben, he anticipates Cass's objections:

> «And you shut up, Cass», he said, though McCaslin had not spoken. «You've got one foot straddled into a farm and the other foot straddled into a bank; you aint even got a good hand-hold where this boy was already an old man long before you damned Sartorises and Edmondses invented farms and banks to keep yourselves from having to find out what this boy was born knowing and fearing too maybe but without being afraid [...]». (p. 250)

There is a certain degree of irony here, since we know that Cass does–or at least once did-possess that knowledge that the General is talking about, even more, that he actually helped Ike to consolidate it. Unfortunately though, his immersion in ownership and management has caused him to lose it.

This is why Faulkner begins Part 4 by pointing out that «[Ike] could say it, himself and his cousin juxtaposed not against the wilderness but against the tamed land which was to have been his heritage [...]» (p. 254). Whereas they were earlier in agreement about the wilderness and its deeper significance, they are now opposed over the question of whether the land should be owned and controlled-i.e., converted from wilderness into parcels of property. And what Ike can say, now that he is 21, is «No» to a cultural heritage that leads to the abuse of power and the destruction of life.

Certainly, from the viewpoint of society (or of the predominant rationalistic

orientation), which Cass now represents, Isaac's refusal is an act of evasion, or irresponsibility, or cowardice. But we do not necessarily have to assume that Faulkner concurs.[6] The point is that Ike has done his homework well, in both of his schools. He has learned the difference between a culture that promotes life and one that promotes death.[7] He realizes that what Cass refers to as Old McCaslin's «legacy and monument» is actually a historical mistake based on the corrupting urge to dominate life through the imposition of the will.

There seems to be, at least, a certain degree of myopia on the part of those literary critics who condemn Ike. In fact, his position on property and ownership derives from *another* (an alternative) trend in American thought, having already been set out, almost a hundred years earlier, by one other than Ralph Waldo Emerson. In «Hamatreya», for example, Emerson contrasts the fond voices of the men who believed that they could own the land by means of their self-imposed laws, and the voices of the earth itself, which concludes:

> «They called me theirs,
> Who so controlled me;
> Yet every one
> Wished to stay, and is gone.
> How am I theirs,
> If they cannot hold me,
> But I hold them?»

The emergence of this voice –the Earth-Song– into Emerson's poem signifies an identification with nature, what is essentially the same kind of identification with the consciousness of the natural world that Isaac achieves in «The Old People». Should we be surprised then, that Emerson's response to that voice is more or less the same as Isaac's?

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6. It is true that Faulkner said of Isaac in an interview with Cynthia Grenier: «I think a man ought to do more than just repudiate. He should have been more affirmative instead of shunning people», James B. Meriweather & Michael Millgate, eds., *Lion in the Garden: Interviews with William Faulkner 1926-1962* (London: U of Nebraska P, 1980 [1968]), p. 225. But it also seems clear that he was playing coy with the interviewer here. He gives a rather more complex and positive view of Isaac in several of his comments in Frederick L. Gwynn & Joseph Blotner, eds., *Faulkner in the University* (Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 1959). See for example pp. 47 and 55, and his remarks on p. 69 concerning the destruction of nature in «The Bear», which also refer indirectly to Isaac´s character.

7. In this context the reader should take into account Eric J. Sundquist´s argument, in *Faulkner: The House Divided* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1983), 133-44, that Isaac´s renunciation is contingent on an «act of grief» for the multiple abuses perpetrated by L. Q. C. McCaslin.

When I heard the Earth-song
I was no longer brave;
My avarice cooled
Like just in the chill of the grave.

In fact, several aspects of Isaac's argument in Section 4 of «The Bear» interestingly correspond with Emerson's thought. But then, the philosophy of Transcendentalism is also based on the same Romantic idea of what I am referring to here as a shift in orientations. One writer has gone so far as to specifically locate the source of Ike's (and Faulkner's) rejection of the concept of property in the writings of Rousseau.[8] And yet, when Ike refers to «the oblongs and squares» that human ownership fatuously imposes on the land (an idea that is still in his mind in «Delta Autumn») the source could just as well, and probably more likely, have been a poem like «Hamatreya» or the beginning paragraphs of Chapter 1 of «Nature», which so tantalizingly describe the impositions of the structures of society –and by extensión of the rational mind– onto the «untamed» natural environment.[9]

The Romantic split between Reason and Intuition refers to two quite different ways of understanding and living in the world-Freneau's choice or Isaac's. If we can begin to consider the issues broached by the Romantic revolution in these terms, then we can also begin to perceive how this conflict manifests itself in practically every aspect of the life of the mind of our own century. The debate beween Isaac and Cass in *Go Down, Moses* is Faulkner's most concentrated attempt to deal with this problem.

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8. Lewis M. Dabney, *The Indians of Yoknapatawpha: A Study in Literature and History* (Baton Rouge:Louisiana State UP, 1974), 118-157 (see especially pp. 139-41).

9. It must be indicative of *something* that so few critics have chosen to place Isaac in the context of the Emersonian tradition, which is where he certainly belongs. Graham Clarke, «Making Out and Digging In: Language As Ritual in *Go Down, Moses* » in Robert A. Lee, ed., *William Faulkner: the Yoknapatawpha Fiction*, (London: Vision, 1990), 147-64, has at least shown some movement in this direction. He equates the plantation system with Ahab´s hatred of the whale, describing it as an economy «based on thwarted energies so deep and basic, as to establish an alternative myth of American expansion, as far from Emerson´s individual 'vision' as 'possible' (pp. 153-4). His use of «alternative» here is somewhat confused, since it is clear that, from the very begining, Emerson´s intuitive individuality was a reaction against the predominant rationalistic materialism of American society. In any case, Clarke is on the right track when he points out that «a farming culture is associated with a negative vocabulary of order and control [...]. The clearings for farms, thus, cut through and into the original South-breaking down the circular, organic, holistic wilderness. In its place is left a geometry of possession symptomatic of the culture´s way with the world: angular, linear and separate [...]» (p. 154). His urge to mimic certain ideologies concerning language, however, prohibits Clarke from fully appreciating the complex (and irrational) *unity* of nature, mind and language that is at the heart of Emerson's thought; and as a consequence, he seems to miss the real significance of «that silence which was never silence but was myriad» which Isaac hears, and translates into words, at the end of «Delta Autumn».

It is understandable, for the reasons that I have already mentioned, that the general critical opinion tends to favor Cass's position. And may be it should be suggestive that this reaction to Isaac's choice is comparable to the reaction of the Harvard faculty to Emerson's Phi Beta Kappa Address in 1837. Like Emerson, Ike has an extremely high degree of self-reliance, so high that he is able to «buck the system».[10] And I am not referring simply to his ability to survive unaided in nature. The fact that he can orient himself in the wilderness without a compass or watch is indicative of something else.

In their debate, Cass, who has logic on his side, always finds the right response to Ike's arguments. And since we tend to associate logic with clear thinking, this is one more reason why we also tend to side with Cass's position. The compass and the watch, though, are merely emblematic of the general orientation that Ike has learned to abandon. These instruments, which are used *to measure* (and therefore to fix or delimit) space and time, are products of the logical approach to experience which is the cornerstone of Occidental culture. Our dependence on them for survival is a symptom of our alienation from the immediate, or unmediated, experience of the world. With the aid of technological instruments, we learn to master the *altered* reality that technological instruments produce.

Ike's innate knowledge of the woods is the same innate knowledge of nature (and the self) that Emerson's early philosophy is based on. He has gained access to that indefinite point of connection, or unity, between mind and world that constitutes an *intuition* of truth. This is why, when he is confronted with all of Cass's logical refutations, he is driven to the same illogical principle of self-reliance as Emerson. Just as, by depending on himself, he can find his way through the woods, he can also find his way through the confusing tangle of experience. His ultimate response to Cass is: «And I know what you will say now: That if truth is one thing to me and another thing to you, how will we choose which is truth? You don't have to choose. The heart already knows» (p. 260)

At this point it is clear exactly how much Isaac has learned from Cass, and at the same time, how much of his own education Cass himself has forgotten. Toward the end of Section 4, Faulkner gives us a flashback to an earlier discussion between Cass and Isaac, following Isaac's first encounter with Old Ben (when he would have been 14). And here Cass uses Keats's «Ode on a Grecian Urn» to teach Ike about undying spiritual truth. Cass's gloss on the meaning of the poem is the seed of Isaac's later faith in the truth of the heart:

10. The fact that he permits Cass to make a monthly deposit of 30 dollars in his bank account seems irrelevant in this respect. Rather than a sign of hypocrisy, it can just as well be seen as a sign of his passivity-or even disengagement. The cost of his sacrifice is clear: wealth, power and his marriage. Besides, Faulkner tells us that, although Isaac uses the money, he does not really need it (p. 309). Perhaps the question to ask is whether the essential course of his life would have been any different without it.

> *«He* [Keats] *was talking about truth. Truth is one. It doesn't change. It covers all things which touch the heart-honor and pride and pity and justice and courage and love... They all touch the heart, and what the heart holds to becomes truth, as far as we know truth. Do you see now?»* (p. 297)

The seven-year gap has been crucial for them both. Isaac has consolidated this spiritual lesson. But Cass, like most of us, has been co-opted into the predominant materialistic system and has lost his ability to perceive this kind of truth.

It seems clear that Isaac is not intended to be some kind of aberrant maverick or freak of self-righteousness. I would even suggest (although without trying to force the idea) that if we take this Emersonian perspective on him a bit further, it might become at least credible that Faulkner is depicting him as an experimental version of the American Scholar.

Emerson's approach to education is existencial. For him, life itself teaches us how to live, with the result that living and learning come to be the same thing. The underlying form of this existencial education is circular: we learn *from* the world to live in harmony and joy *with* the world. In fact, this integration of the human into nature constitutes harmony and joy, and inevitably leads to creativity.

In «The American Scholar» Emerson identifies three «masters» for this existencial student, this «school-boy under the bending dome of day»: nature, the past (most immediately in the form of books), and his own actions. Obviously, this kind of individualistic education rejects, if it does not denigrate, all social institutions (whose purpose, after all, is to transmit socially-acceptable ideologies). This is why those highly respectable gentlemen of the Harvard faculty found Emerson's address so objectionable. But notice the extent to which Ike has followed this subversive syllabus. Through Sam Fathers he learns to commune with the spirit of nature; through the ledgers in the commissary he learns about the past of his own family (and culture); and through his own actions he learns about the complex nature of self-reliance and renunciation.

Certainly, Ike learns from, and deeply reflects on his own experience during his whole lifetime; he is still learning and reflecting at the age of 73 in «Delta Autumn». And when, in «The Bear», he has made his irrevocable commitment to a life of loneliness and relative poverty, he himself almost marvels at the existential process that made him what he is. As he contemplates «the bright rustless unstained tin» that is his empty inheritance from Uncle Hubert, he thinks

> and not for the first time how much it takes to compound a man (Isaac McCaslin for instance) and of the devious intricate choosing yet unerring path that man's (Isaac McCaslin's for instance) spirit takes among all that mass to make him at last what he is to be, not only to the astonishment of them (the ones who sired the McCaslin who sired his father and Uncle Buddy and their sister, and the ones who sired his Uncle Hubet and his Uncle Hubert's sister) who believed they had shaped him, but to Isaac McCaslin too [...]. (pp. 308-9)

But this reflection really serves to underline Faulkner's own interest in the formation of a character that is able to say no, no matter what the cost, to the culture he was born into.

The issue of Ike's possible descent from the American Scholar deserves a more extensive treatment than I can give it here. A glance, however, at Emerson's description of the high price of self-reliance, of the renunciation of the predominant materialism of American society, might be pertinent at this point. It is tempting to think that Emerson was talking about his own struggle to achieve both intellectual independence and acceptance when he says of the scholar:

> Long must he stammer in his speech; often forego the living for the dead. Worse yet, he must accept-how often! poverty and solitude. For the ease and pleasure of treading the old road, accepting the fashions, the education, the religion of society, he takes the cross of making his own, and, of course, the self-accusation, the faint heart, the frequent uncertainly and loss of time which are the nettles and tangling vines in the way of the self-relying and self-directed; and the state of virtual hostility in which he seems to stand to society, and especially to educated society.[11]

But this moving description of the price of principled sacrifice can also be applied to Isaac, especially when we see him as old man in «Delta Autumn».

At the climactic moment of their debate in «The Bear», Isaac iterates to Cass (importantly, his final words in the exchange) that «Sam Fathers set me free», a phrase, as we all know, that reverberates throughout the book. But the source of that ground-motif of freedom could also very easily be Emerson: «In self-trust, all the virtues are comprehended. Free should the scholar be-free and brave. Free even to the definition of freedom, "without any hindrance that does not arise out of his own constitution"».[12]

Viewed within the Emersonian tradition, Ike is not really an aberration at all. Or, to put it more precisely, he embodies the alternative pole of that Romantic conflict whose tensions we are still living with. He is the kind of aberration that our society sanctions-up to a certain point. Natty Bumppo, significantly, never renounces his «white gifts»; Cass, in spite of his early education, is co-opted into the world of banks and farms. If however, the renunciation is irremediable, as in the case of Bartleby, the maverick is usually merely permitted to expire. Or, if the negation develops into an open rebellion, as in the case of Randle McMurphy, the maverick must be castrated, or lobotomized, or somehow disempowered.

Issac represents an extreme form, especially for the 20th-century, of what we

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11. Ralph Waldo Emerson, «The American Scholar», in Nina Baym, op. cit., pp. 867-8.
12. Ibid., p. 869.

might think of as recessive, or complementary, trait of our national character. Is he really so different from those other great 19th-century Emersonian scholars of renunciation, Thoreau, Dickinson and Whitman? The wide range of reactions to Issac´s choice, both by the characters in the book and by its critics, might be taken as a barometer of our own confused reaction to our Romantic, or our spiritual heritage. Those of us who fail to appreciate the value of what Issac represents are, perhaps, blindly dismissing something that we need, that is dying, and that should be cherished and respected.

«DELTA AUTUMN»

So we return to the central question that these central stories in *Go Down, Moses* raise: Is Ike a failure after all? For in act, there *is* a difference, and perhaps an important difference, between him and those other great renouncers of our culture. Emerson, Thoureau, Dickinson and Whitman were all writers.

The proper transcendental use of our intuitive link with nature is to convert its silent wisdom into language. The course of the American Scholar, as Emerson sets it out, leads naturally to theology or to poetry.[13] Through the human mind, when it is properly used, the unconscious natural forces that propagate life take on consciousness. Nature thus transcends itself into words, and language becomes an affirmative and creative means of evolution.

But Uncle Ike´s old age seems to be barren. As far as the intrinsic value of his choice is concerned, this is the question that «Delta Autumn» poses: What good was his sacrifice if he has not been able to influence anyone else in his environment?[14] Isolated

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13. In «Nature» (1836) Emerson rather painstakingly investigates the basic terms of his philosophy of what we would refer to today as a holistic interrelation of mind and world. That person who would apply himself to such a wider vision of nature, he refers to as a naturalist. In «The American Scholar» (1837) Emerson refines those basic ideas and expresses them more concisely. The naturalist has now become the scholar. In «The Divinity School Address» (1838) he applies these ideas specifically to religion, and the scholar becomes theologian. And finally, in «The Poet» (1844), the process reaches its climax when he concentrates on the role of language in this circular whole. The theologian becomes the poet.

14. An interesting approach to this problem is that of Robert H. Brinkmeyer, Jr., «*Go Down, Moses* and the Ascetic Imperative», in Evans Harrington and Ann J. Abadie, eds., *Faulkner and the Short Story. Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 1990* (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1992), 206-207. This writer compares Isaac to the early Christian ascetics, whose radical individualism, he says, threatened the stability of society by setting «examples of the holy life that many of the most powerful individuals of the Roman world followed, at times drastically disrupting the established order by drawing these figures away from public life and their financial states» (p. 208). Brinkmeyer's reading of Ike is highly ambivalent (he even goes so far as to discuss parallels with Adolph Hitler); and he ends up, like most other critics, focussing on everything that Ike *does not* do. Still, by describing him as a possible agent of gradual and indirect change. Brinkmeyer takes a step toward a positive re-evaluation of the meaning of Isaac's sacrifice.

and ineffectual, Isaac certainly does seem rather pitiful in this story. Indeed, he is apparently able to communicate much more effectively with the horses at the hunting camp than with the younger men who surround him.

But then, is this really a cause for recrimination?[15] Or does it, instead, tell us something positive about Uncle Ike?

Most readers tend rather uncritically to sympathize with the condescension of Roth and Legate and their friends toward Ike, and this in spite of the fact that the story is told from his point of view and that we know the complex history that made him what he now is. It seems to me, on the contrary, that one of the purposes of «Delta Autumn» is to show the ultimate consequences of Isaac´s sacrifice and his nobility in accepting them. But I suppose we can only appreciate this irony if we have at least begun to experience the kind of reversal in values, or shift in orientations, that the history of Isaac´s education depicts. Roth and his friends obviously have not. This new generation has lost the ability to respect (as did General Compson, Major DeSpain, and even Cass) Isaac´s asceticism-in the same way, significantly, that they have lost the profound love and respect for nature with which Isaac was nurtured.

The terms of this particular generation gap explain the tremendous charge of irony in Roth´s ill-tempered rebuke to Uncle Ike. Once again, it is surprising that so many readers unquestioningly side with Roth when he says: «So you´ve lived almost eighty years [...] And that´s what you finally learned about the other animals you´ve lived among. I suppose the question to ask is, where have you been all the time you were dead?» (p. 435).

At this moment, though, Roth is feeling guilty, and vulnerable, about his abandonment of the woman who has had his baby. What Ike had said to provoke this response was not at all inane. True wisdom is most often deceptively modest:

> There are good men everywhere, at all times. Most men are. Some are just unlucky, because most men are a little better than their circumstances give them a chance to be. And I´ve known some men that even the circumstances couldn´t stop. (p. 345).

Here, unwittingly (or intuitively), Ike has hit the nail on the head. A careful reconsideration of Roth´s words and actions in the story might admit the speculation that he would like to marry this woman who so strongly and generously loves him.

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15. Annette Bernert, «The Four Fathers of Isaac McCaslin», in Arthur F. Kinney, op. cit., 181-9, obviously believes that it is. She writes that «By the time of "Delta Autumn" all Ike seems practically to have gained is the trust of horses [...] a trust because of what he lacks, not what he has» (p. 183). And yet, the phrase from the story that she herself quotes in this sentence tells us that what he lacks is «the *corruption* of steel and oiled moving parts that *tainted* the others» (italics mine).

Knowing, however, that she is black (not that she is his relative), he feels constrained by the law, or perhaps more precisely, by the restrictions of the code of the South. In other words, what Ike says merely underscores Roth´s own unhappy recognition that he is *not* one of those good men whom «even the circumstances couldn't stop».

Of course, the irony of the exchange comes from our knowledge of Isaac´s past. Through his initiation into the culture of the Old People and his link with the impersonal forces of nature, through his privileged role in the deaths of Old Ben and Sam, Ike has been much more deeply *alive* than any of the others at the camp can even imagine.

Emily Dickinson, who probably knew as much about the mechanics of renunciation as anyone can, expressed this paradox immaculately:

> A Death blow is a Life blow to Some
> Who till they died, did not alive become–
> Who had they lived, had died but when
> they died, Vitality begun. (N° 816)

Isn´t it really Roth and the others who are spiritually dead? Isaac, sadly, believes so, as his response to Roth´s petulant insult reveals: «"Maybe so", he said, "But if being what you call alive would have learned me any different, I reckon I'm satisfied, wherever it was I´ve been"» (p. 346). We, of course, know where he has been: totally immersed in that whole, complex living world of nature that Faulkner so powerfully evokes at the end of «The Bear».

What is so moving (and hardly pitiful) about the Ike of «Delta Autumn» is his patient forebearance before the ignorant impertinence of his youthful and insensitive inferiors.

It may be true that Ike is a failure. But is he really to blame for that failure? Considering the fact that he had witnessed the voluntary death of Old Ben-the spirit of the Big Woods-it seems most likely that he was always aware of the futility, in utilitarian terms, of his decision. The real failure in «Delta Autumn» is to be located in the younger generation´s lack of perception. The juxtaposition of Ike´s calm and dignified resignation with the young hunters´ unfeeling blindness only emphasizes the consequences of our continued adherence to Freneau´s choice, the failure of 20th-century American society to keep alive the spiritual vision to which Ike had consecrated his life.

At the heart of the Romantic revolution is a glimmering awareness that the exaltation of the self over nature which is always implicit in the rationalistic mentality is, in the long run, destructive to the ongoing life that natural processes insure. This way of using the mind (as Thomas Pynchon so clearly realizes in *Gravity´s Rainbow*) ultimately converts life into death. In Faulkner´s work, figures like Thomas Sutpen and L. Q. C. McCaslin, with their grandiose designs to impose themselves on the wilderness and establish a dynasty, stand as representatives of this innate nihilism of Occidental culture. And in this sense they are the not-too-distant American cousins of Victor Frankestein.

Ike, though, is able to resist the temptations of his cultural heritage he has learned to accept the natural cycle of life and death, as Faulkner reiterates, with both pride and humility. We may want to criticize his somewhat annoying passivity, but that quality, too, only reflects the quiet acceptance of the natural world that he identifies with. Emerson, once again, described this passivity very well: «Nature is thoroughly mediate. It is made to serve. It receives the dominion of man as meekly as the ass on which the Savior rode». But the «dominion of man» should be respectful. He should learn, like Isaac, to take pride in his own humility and to use the gift of nature wisely. The continuation of this passage from «Nature» is pertinent in this context:

> It [nature] offers all its kingdoms to man as the raw material which he may mould into what is useful. Man is never weary of working it up [...]. One after another, his victorious thought comes up with and reduces all things, until the world becomes at last only a realized will-the double of the man.[16]

Characteristically, Emerson was trying to think here in terms of the humble and respectful human use of nature. But as always, his words were ambiguously prophetical. He knew that the same principle applies to the proud and aggressive human use of nature. Ike's ironic forebearance in «Delta Autumn» is the equivalent of the silent acceptance of the woods of the murderous chainsaws of the lumber company.

Not completely silent, though. As I've already said, Isaac never ceases to learn from and reflect on his experiences. In his final ruminations, where the novel´s two major themes of race and the relationship with nature are drawn together into a single complex, Ike seems to be convinced that our addiction to «progress» will lead to the destruction of both human and natural diversity. And while one aspect of this conviction is his obvious fear of miscegenation,[17] the important point for the context of the present discussion is his vision of imminent disintegration: «No wonder the ruined woods I used to know don't cry for retribution! [...] The people who have destroyed it will accomplish its revenge» (p. 364).

Ike knows that in destroying the natural world we are also destroying ourselves. And he understands how useless it is to try to halt the mindless progress of progress. Indeed, to act in this direction, for example, taking ownership of the McCaslin plantation, would require manipulation and domination, an imposition of the will. And this is precisely the basis of the orientation that he has renounced. Even more, through his

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16. Emerson, «Nature», in *Eight American Writers: An Anthology of American Literature* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1963), 204.

17. I have attempted to address the question of Ike's problematic sense of guilt and responsbility toward blacks in a separate article, which focusses more specifically on the theme of race relations in the novel. See Paul Scott Derrick, «*Go Down, Moses:* An Essay in (Extended) Coherence», *Revista de Estudios Norteamericanos*, 4 (1996) 357-80.

identification with nature Ike has been able to transcend the selfishness and egotism that, for us, seem to be the norm. The ritual of the hunt has taught him that all lives emerge from and merge into one larger life. Ahab could never «strike through the mask» because, in his rage against death, he wanted to force the natural world to bend to his own will. But Ike is an Emersonian scholar. In accepting death, humbly and with pride, he has been able to escape from the limitations of the self.

That moment when he beholds the enigmatic buck after his rite of initiation is only one more in a distinguished line of mystical revelations that have inhabited our literature ever since the Puritans wandered into the forest, searching for signs of an invisible God in the visible realm of His creation. Emerson too, in one of his own flashes of light, has captured that moment of visionary recognition: «Here we find ourselves not in a critical speculation but in a holy place, and should go very warily and reverently. We stand before the secret of the world, there where Being passes into Appearance, and Unity into Variety.»[18] This vision of a temporal material world suffused with timeless spirituality never ceases to illuminate Isaac´s life.

At the end of «Delta Autumn», Ike is calmly prepared to accept his own death-and the death of the woods-to pass back through the secret, from variety into unity. All of these threads of the American experience come together as he assesses what has been, at least from the point of view of our recessive Romantic heritage, a life of significant toil in relation to the land, the earth, that is his patrimony:

> Because it was his land, although he had never owned a foot of it. He had never wanted to, not even after he saw plain its ultimate doom, watching it retreat year by year before the onslaught of axe and saw and log-lines and then dynamite and tractor plows, because it had belonged to no man. They had only to use it well, humbly and with pride. Then suddenly he knew why he had never wanted to own any of it, arrest at least that much of what people called progress, measure his longevity at least against that much of his ultimate fate. It was because there was exactly enough of it. He seemed to see the two of them-himself and the wilderness-as coevals [...] the two spans running out together, not toward oblivion, nothingness, but into a dimension free of both time and space where once more the untreed land warped and wrung to mathematical squares of rank cotton for the frantic old-world people to turn into shell to shoot at one another, would find ample room for both-the names, the faces of the old men he had known and loved and for a little while outlived, moving again among the shades of tall unaxed trees and sightless brakes where the wild strong immortal game ran forever before the tireless belling immortal hounds, falling and rising phoenix-like to the soundless guns. (p. 354)

18. Emerson, «The Poet», ibid., 285.

Whatever else they maybe, these are not the thoughts of a man whose humanity has failed.

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By midnight moons, o'er moistening dews
In vestments for the hunt array'd.
The hunter still the deer pursues,
The hunter and the deer-a shade.

Faulkner most probably wasn´t thinking about Freneau's poem when he wrote the spiritual soliloquy that forms the undercurrent of «Delta Autumn». On the other hand, he certainly did have Keats's «Ode on a Grecian Urn» in mind. Is it merely a coincidence that both of these poems appeal to an escape from the self into a timeless realm of the imagination where spiritual life suspersedes physical death?

I don´t think we have adequently perceived what Faulkner manages to do through the figure of Isaac McCaslin. It seems clear that he recognized an underlying relatedness between the native Americans´ reverential and essentially holistic approach to the world and the Romantic vision, as he received it from Keats. By converging them as positive (and subversive) influences on the formation of Isaac´s personality, Faulkner not only points out that relatedness, but also traces the origins of the typical individualistic American anti-hero to the Romantic split between Reason and Intuition. And, going one step further, he depicts how that character was formed by 19th-century forces, and then places it in the middle of the 20th century.

American Romanticism, or Transcendentalism, was born of the same historical currents. It ultimately makes very little difference whether Emerson´s work was a *conscious* influence on Faulkner or not. The point is that they were both looking for a way to talk about how those historical forces, and our reactions to them, can and have shaped our lives.

I have suggested that Ike´s failure may really be *our* failure-those of us who read and try to understand the novel-a failure of our own vision. Although Ike is not a writer, Faulkner is. And through this character Faulkner also carries out the Emersonian program of translating the silent voice of nature´s living forces into words (just as Keats also translates the unheard melodies that the figures on the urn pipe to his soul).

Think for a second about those other anti-heroes that I mentioned earlier. Ike´s passivity may be comparable to Bartleby´s is also extinguished in the end. But his death is not in vain. In this «Story of Wall Street», his apparently absurd existence actually changes the consciousness of the nameless lawyer (and narrator) who exemplifies the selfishness and materialism of American society. Randle McMurphy may be lobotomized and silenced, but his sacrifice releases the stilled voice and repressed memory of Chief Bromden, who also tells us the story. And it should be needless to point out that the

revival of Chief Bromden´s consciousness at the end of the book constitutes a possible return to the native American heritage to which Isaac dedicates his whole life.[19]

Maybe the question itself is not yet very clear. But the answer, as the title of the novel indicates, must lie in achieving freedom-which permeates every story in *Go Down, Moses* - if we can take him seriously as a Romantic writer. Now, when our relationship with the environment seems to be approaching some kind of climax, the pertinence of the Romantic «return to nature» is beginning to be clarified. Isaac McCaslin took those issues seriously enough to renounce the heritage of Occidental culture. Maybe it is time for us to give Isaac´s choice the respect and serious consideration that it deserves.

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19. The only consistently positive assessment of Isaac's character that I am aware of is given in Carey Wall, «*Go Down, Moses:* The Collective Action of Redress», *The Faulkner Journal*, 7: 1-2 (Fall 1991/Spring 1992) 151-74. Wall also realizes that, in her words, «Arguments claiming the futility of Ike McCaslin's renunciation come solidly out of Western (EuroAmerican ethnocentric) rationalism» (p. 152). Her own argument, though, is quite different from mine in that she depends on theories from anthropology to put the case that «the significance of Ike's renunciation is that it sets off a collective action, which means that it taps into collective deep knowledge» (p. 166). While I agree with a great deal of what Wall says in this article, it also seems that her approach gives her license to a certain degree of sophistry in making unsubstantiated claims about the effects of Ike's life on his wife, on Roth Edmonds and on Edmond's lover.