

the novel. The manuscript, composed between September 1937 and June 1938, survives among Faulkner's papers at the Small Special Collections Library. The pagination of the document confirms that Faulkner wrote the two stories in alternating chapters, composing a chapter of one and then a chapter of the other. He did not write "The Wild Palms" in its entirety, then write "Old Man," and then shuffle the chapters. This structural experimentation was characteristic of Faulkner's work from the late 1920s until the early 1940s, a period that saw publication of *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), *As I Lay Dying* (1930), *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), *The Hamlet* (1940), and *Go Down, Moses* (1942)—all of which take liberties with conventional narrative structure.

Faulkner's publisher, however, seems not to have understood what he was doing. Saxe Commins, Faulkner's editor at Random House, changed the title of the novel from *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem*, an inclusive title, to *The Wild Palms*, the title of the primary story. The change in title, made over Faulkner's objections, caused confusion for many years after publication. Scholars and critics did not recognize *The Wild Palms* as a novel. The history of subsequent editions did not help matters. In 1948 both "The Wild Palms" and "Old Man" were issued separately, in individual paperback volumes.¹⁹ In a 1954 paperback the two narratives were published together but one after the other, with the full text of "The Wild Palms" appearing first, followed by "Old Man" in its entirety.²⁰

The novel was also bowdlerized. Faulkner objected to this sanitizing but was overruled.²¹ The setting-copy typescript, like the manuscript, is among Faulkner's papers at the Small Special Collections Library.²² On the typescript Faulkner's editor has marked out the word "shit." He has preserved Faulkner's comma and has substituted four ellipsis points for the profane word. Proofs for the book do not survive, but further changes in the final line must have occurred there. On page 339 of the first edition, the final page of "Old Man" and of the novel, the comma and the ellipsis points have been replaced by an open two-em dash and an exclamation point (see figure 8). The final line now reads:

"Women —— !" the tall convict said.

19. *The Wild Palms* (New York: New American Library, 1948); *The Old Man* (New York: New American Library, 1948). For these and later editions, the word "The" was added to the title of "Old Man."

20. *The Wild Palms and The Old Man* (New York: New American Library, 1954).

21. Faulkner had little leverage with his publisher in 1939. Random House was the fifth imprint to publish his work and was carrying him as a *succès d'estime*. His first book with Random House, *Absalom, Absalom!*, had not sold well; *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem*, with another biblical title, was not likely to do better—hence, presumably, the change in title. In 1939 Faulkner was best known as the author of *Sanctuary* (1931), a scandalous novel about a young woman who is raped with a corn cob. It is not surprising that the publisher bowdlerized *The Wild Palms*. The sanitizing, however, was incomplete: the words "pricks" and "cunts" appear on p. 52 of the first edition, and "Shit!" appears on p. 101. Later, after he had won the Nobel Prize in 1949, Faulkner swung more weight at Random House, and the heavy editing of his texts ceased.

22. Both the manuscript and the setting-copy typescript of the novel have been published in facsimile in *William Faulkner Manuscripts*, vol. 14, parts 1 and 2, ed. Thomas L. McHaney (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1986).