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A COMPREHENSIVE STUDY.

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THE DESIGN OF FAULKNER'S LIGHT IN AUGUST: A COMPREHENSIVE STUDY

by
Don Noel Smith

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of the requirements for the degree of
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Doctoral Committee:

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ABSTRACT

THE DESIGN OF FAULKNER'S LIGHT IN AUGUST:
A COMPREHENSIVE STUDY

by
Don Noel Smith

Chairman: Robert F. Haugh

This dissertation undertakes a more comprehensive study of William Faulkner's Light in August than has yet been attempted, through a systematic and integrative approach to the novel and criticism of it. Although the study is devoted specifically to Light in August, long considered one of Faulkner's finest and yet most problematic works, it does relate this novel to the total context of Faulkner's thought, methods, and materials. The study has assumed not only that Light in August is in itself a work of art worthy of careful attention but that a close examination of it cannot fail to illuminate further the entire Faulkner canon.

Chapter I of the study presents a review of current attitudes toward Faulkner and his work and of the criticism of Light in August in particular, delineating the central critical concerns and various critical approaches. Chapter II offers a general conceptual frame of reference; it makes a distinction between Faulkner's artistic vision and its moral context and discusses the assumptions about art, life

and consciousness that seem to underlie his works. Chapter III offers an extensive technical frame of reference; here are examined the structure, the imagery, and the mythic and Biblical parallels, which provide subtle commentary on the action. Chapters IV-VI contain a close exegesis of the distinguishable actions and their relation to each other, set against the conceptual and technical frames of reference already established.

The last chapter attempts broadly to evaluate the success and significance of the novel, concluding that Faulkner is a master of the modern methods he chose to use but that those methods perhaps have certain intrinsic limitations that must be considered in any final assessment of his achievement; this chapter also finds that Light in August is itself an ingenious but rewarding work, sometimes sacrificing dramatic clarity to elaborateness of texture, and that, like the other Yoknapatawpha works, it yields the kind of richly evoked reality that is the mark of a major talent.

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I wish to thank the members of my committee for their part in the completion of this project. Whether many or few, directly or indirectly received, their comments have been useful ones. I especially want to thank my chairman, Professor Haugh, whose guidance has been as unobtrusive as it has been invaluable. To him and to the rest of the committee, as well as to those others, critics, friends, wife, this study owes more than it can credit or merit.

D. N. S.
Ann Arbor, March 25, 1970

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

My aim in this study is quite simply to provide a more complete exegesis and evaluation of Faulkner's Light in August than has yet been attempted, through a systematic and synthetic approach to the novel and commentary on it. I feel that the time is propitious for such a study, because a large and diverse body of Faulkner criticism has accumulated, especially over the past twenty years, because this criticism has, to a very great extent, succeeded in clarifying our image of the author and the nature and scope of his achievement, and because in the specific areas of disagreement that remain controversy seems to have reached a stalemate. As Robert Penn Warren has rather recently noted: " . . . the period of exegesis seems to be drawing to a close."[1] But Warren, who was so instrumental initially in calling attention to the need for Faulkner criticism and in pointing to profitable lines of inquiry,[2] quickly adds that not only will new exegeses continue to appear but "they should appear, if we are not to see criticism puddle and harden into an orthodoxy."[3]

In other words, we keep a work alive by keeping our reading of it alive, and we accomplish this through a continual working back and forth between the text and our assumptions about it, including, necessarily, our image of the author who

produced it. The history of Faulkner criticism, the extent and controversial nature of which is legendary,[4] has been one of adjusting an extraordinarily wide discrepancy between the author and his work and our assumptions about them. Reasons for such a discrepancy are not difficult to discover. Aside from the intrinsic difficulty of the works, in approaching them, critics undoubtedly began with assumptions about the author that they might not have held had his credentials seemed more formidable. Moreover, criticism itself was undergoing something of a revolution throughout the middle of Faulkner's career[5] and was, in addition, trying hard to assimilate the new aesthetic possibilities that artists in all media had been busily exploring for several years; critics had, in a real sense, to learn how to read the texts before they could properly explicate and evaluate them. If one adds to these difficulties the problem of trying to assess the achievement of an author acknowledged great in his own time, a problem which would exist in any time and under any circumstances, one can hardly be surprised at the sprawling proliferation of Faulkner criticism over the past several years. Indeed, Faulkner seems less a phenomenon than an extreme example of what has been occurring in respect to almost every major writer of the modern period.

A result of the immense industry of Faulkner criticism would seem to be that it may now enter a period of consolidation and refinement, proceeding with much greater confidence in the validity of its assumptions about the author and his achievement, as well as his place in relation to literary movements

and traditions. Our image of Faulkner is no longer that of a culturally isolated, untutored genius, who, through sheer inspiration, produced works of startling originality and uncertain profundity. We would now see him as a deliberate literary craftsman, whose interest in art and in becoming an artist existed from his youth, who apprised himself in the early stages of his career, with rather dilettantish fervor, of what was then going on in the literary world, and who, drawing upon his considerable powers of imagination, was at length able to fuse his experience and desire into a vision and an instrument for expressing it uniquely his own.

Instead of seeing Faulkner as a natural talent who overcame the handicap of unfavorable circumstances, current opinion would seem to account him most fortunate in having been able to take advantage of a time and place so favorable to creative effort, considering him as not only heir but conscious heir to a tradition of literary craftmanship and experimentation extending from Flaubert and James through Joyce and Anderson and to a source of literary materials that, in their sociological and moral import, as well as in their dramatic possibilities, have shown themselves to be, in almost every way, extraordinary. In his assessment of Faulkner's achievement, Michael Millgate has claimed: "Indeed, it would seem fair to say that in certain important respects, Faulkner was more actively aware of American and European literary traditions than any other important American novelist of this century, Hemingway not excluded."[6] And, regardless of the extent of Faulkner's awareness, his place in the mainstream

of these traditions would seem assured. As Allen Tate wrote, on the occasion of Faulkner's death: "I believe that as his personality fades from view he will be recognized as one of the last great craftsmen of the art of fiction which Ford Maddox Ford called the Impressionist Novel. From Stendhal through Flaubert and Joyce there is a direct line to Faulkner and it not a mere question of influence."[7]

In speaking of the material to which Faulkner fell heir, Tate continues: "William Faulkner's time and place made it possible for him to extend this European tradition beyond any boundaries that were visible to novelists of New England, the Middle West, or the Far West." Tate's comment that "had William Faulkner invented his myth, it could not have been as good as it turned out to be"[8] is confirmed in the opinion of George Garrett, Jr., who has said that it "becomes more and more evident that Faulkner did not create a myth but worked within a tradition with an established myth."[9] Faulkner's relation to the Southern tradition, including what has come to be called the Southern renascence, perhaps has yet to be sufficiently explored, but the tendency is to regard him as definitely occupying a position in it, without making him out to be, except in an enlightened sense, a regionalist.[10] Even Faulkner's creation of a mythological country has its precedent in the work of his contemporary and fellow Southerner James Branch Cabell, whose Jurgen Faulkner refers to in his very first novel.

And while some critics have been confirming Faulkner's position relative to the European, or modern aesthetic,

tradition, others have been making a place for him in the tradition which critics of the 1950's and 1960's, such as R. W. B. Lewis, Richard Chase, Harry Levin, Charles Feidelson, and others have been defining as the central one in American Literature. R. W. B. Lewis has said that "Faulkner is in many ways the most American of novelists--the writer who most fully subjected a complex and painful sense of life (which for the most part he shared with his European contemporaries) to the special pressure of a home-grown Southern American imagination."[11] And Hugh Holman considers that Faulkner's place is in "the tradition of romantic symbolism." This particularly American tradition, Holman continues, "is in George Snell's terms, and Faulkner's as well, 'Apocalyptic' in that it uses exaggerated fables based upon reality in order to attempt to define a transcendent and cosmic order and a universal meaning."[12] Of Light in August in particular Richard Chase has claimed, "There could hardly be a more characteristically American novel than Light in August--with its realism; its loose structure; its few characters who though vividly presented are never quite convincingly related to each other; its tendency to become a romance by taking on a legendary quality and by alternating violent melodramatic actions with comic interludes and scenes of pastoral idyl; its concern for the isolated self; its awareness of contradictions, racial and other; its symbolism of light and dark."[13]

Although Campbell and Foster's early conclusion about Faulkner's relation to literary traditions is still generally true--that he "cannot be enclosed in any one of them, and yet

to some extent belongs in all of them"[14]--it has undergone important qualification, as our understanding of Faulkner and of the tradition to which he relates have become more refined. It now seems possible to place him in three traditions, which need not be mutually exclusive. He is part of the modern aesthetic tradition, especially in regard to his interest in areas or levels of consciousness and his use of technical innovations in point of view, structure, and symbolism. He is also part of the American tradition of tragic--as opposed to scientific, transcendental, or nationalistic--optimism: that which R. W. B. Lewis, in his American Adam, has described as "the party of Irony"[15] and which seems an indigenous adaptation of a peculiar Christian heritage colliding with the ethical energies of pioneer individualism: doctrines of predestination and original sin in conflict with the empirical evidence of a country whose fate seemed indisputably in its own hands.[16] And he is part of the Southern tradition, especially as represented by writers of the so-called Southern renascence. To oversimplify considerably, one might say that Faulkner belongs to the first of these in his technical resources, to the second in his thematic concerns or his response to the human condition, and to the third in his use of fictional materials. The influence of the "Lost Generation" school is generally recognized in his earliest fiction, but this seems to have survived only in his cynical view of modern existence as being both frenzied and sterile.

To describe Faulkner's status in this way is not at all to detract from the originality and power of his achievement;

it is merely to define more accurately the nature of it. That Faulkner was a bold literary experimenter is not to be denied, but the methods by which he worked were for the most part well-established ones. Had he written The Sound and the Fury in 1969 instead of 1929, his heritage would not have been substantially richer. He came at what we now recognize as the close of a great period of experiment and innovation, and he both drew upon it and expanded its dimensions. He stood solidly upon a native tradition whose view of the human condition developed conjointly with and in response to the founding and growth of a new world. He had a native familiarity with a region whose brief but eventful past had already attained the status of legend or myth, and began to write at a time when poets and novelists throughout western civilization were exposing the disparity and exploring the problematic relation between myth and reality. Faulkner was perhaps well-attuned to see that the tragedy of the South was not to be found in the destruction of a once proud and thriving culture but in its capacity for self-deceit. But if he fell heir to a rich heritage, he has the credit of assimilating and transforming it; and if his talent lay, like Shakespeare's, in synthesizing existing materials, methods, and thought to further his own artistic ambition, then the result is no less original and significant.

Although we perhaps have yet to appreciate the full extent of Faulkner's artistic ambition, we have come to regard him as an artist and a moral philosopher, broadly of a humanist-Christian persuasion, who sees morality as a matter of

the individual conscience and man as inherently good but committed to error; his final view, as he himself has insisted, is optimistic, but seemingly in the sense of what Joseph Gold has seen as a "tragic affirmation."[17] The precise nature of Faulkner's relation to the humanist and Christian traditions has been one of the most prominent concerns of Faulkner criticism during the 1960's. He has stated that he believes in a God and has called himself, at different times, a humanist and a Christian.[18] But the qualifications implicit in his statements, as well as in his work, render his orthodoxy problematic. The ambiguous nature of Faulkner's optimism has also occasioned some controversy, in that it seems to hold out hope only for mankind collectively and not for the individual--in whose conscience, after all, he places his trust for a better tomorrow.

The difficulties in determining Faulkner's philosophical position can be attributed, in a large measure, to his finding it necessary to define for himself, like many of his contemporaries, the nature and grounds of morality as well as the values upon which it is attendant. Faulkner was not, of course, a philosopher in any formal sense, nor perhaps, as Frederick Hoffman has claimed, even a profound thinker.[19] There seems little way of ascertaining the extent to which he had a first-hand acquaintance with the thinkers of his or any other time,[20] but he had obviously felt their impact and drew upon them intelligently and indiscriminately. His thinking no doubt reflects something of a hodgepodge, if not a synthesis, drawn from his Platonic, rationalistic, and romantic heritage as

filtered through modern scientific concepts and those of such men as Bergson, Frazer, and Freud. But the indirectness of these influences and the degree of Faulkner's eccentricity probably should not be underestimated.

If Faulkner is not an original or profound thinker, and there is still little reason for consensus in this matter, it nevertheless seems very important not to neglect the comprehensiveness and cohesion of his thought. Despite the many discussions of Faulkner's "world view," no one has yet seriously attempted to explicate the relations among what we may certainly call his metaphysic, ethic, and aesthetic, though the texture of his work increasingly reveals a consistency of vision extending to minute detail. And although his world view no doubt underwent some modification over the years, this seems less the result of a "change of heart," in Frederick Hoffman's view, than one of method;[21] in a later study of Faulkner's development Joseph Gold holds the same view, finding that Faulkner moved "from metaphor to discourse," though his message remained the same.[22]

By the time he wrote Light in August, at any rate, Faulkner's conceptual frame of reference was fully matured, and this novel represents a comprehensive synthesis of his existential, moral, and aesthetic vision. Few critics would disagree with James Roberts that it "is probably Faulkner's most complex and difficult novel."[23] Largely because of its difficulty, the text and our assumptions about it stand in less satisfactory relation than they do in the case of any other of his major works. Since the novel is composed of

interspersed but relatively independent and contrasting actions, one is faced with the problem of reconciling the diverse ironies that arise from such a juxtapositional scheme. Moreover, the abstract conflict underlying the action is itself ambiguous: if in previous novels Faulkner posits a dichotomy between meaning and meaninglessness, he here examines their point of intersection and the nature of their interpenetration.

Critical response to Light in August has been extensive, varied, and, as to be expected, controversial. Although generally considered one of Faulkner's best and most significant works, claims for its greatness are often accompanied by reservations about the nature and degree of its success as a work of art, and some critics would still dispute its merit. Comment may range from the early opinion of John Arthos that "in Light in August Faulkner made his most ambitious effort to raise questions about the meaning of a life controlled by pain, tracing one individual's life to its farthest origins in history . . . "[24] to a recent attack on the novel by Elmo Howell, who finds the characters to be mere embodiments of "certain ideas," who "fail to come to life as convincing human beings"; he claims that the novel is "overserious and burdened with ideas" and that it "shows signs of exhaustion of spirits."[25] Comments on the characters, especially, are apt to be diametrically opposed. For instance, Richard Chase remarks: "The Reverend Hightower is one of Faulkner's best characters,"[26] and Harold Kaplin questions: "Has there ever been in fiction a character so reduced to impotence, so dramatically vivid in his passivity as Hightower?"[27] On the other hand, Joseph

Warren Beach says that "Hightower is one of the most strained and obscure of all Faulkner's characters,"[28] and Michael Millgate reflects that "Hightower is not a fully realized character, though he might have become so if Faulkner had told the story of his life . . . with a higher degree of dramatization."[29]

Such differences of opinion are of course easy enough to demonstrate and appear more emphatic when taken out of context; no doubt they often reflect our misunderstanding of each other rather than any basic misreading of the work. Of much greater importance than exhibiting or attempting to settle any controversy is trying to effect some kind of synthesis of the diverse views on the novel. As Joseph Gold has pointed out:

> Light in August must certainly be one of the most written about novels in the twentieth century. It has been considered from just about every conceivable point of view. . . . One cannot help but feel that in the case of Light in August the result of so much criticism has been fragmentation rather than synthesis.[30]

But the task does not lie simply in an attempt to integrate the fragments into one consistent and comprehensive interpretation; for various as the studies have been, they have certainly not exhausted the possibilities of the novel. In one of the most recent books on Faulkner, Richard Adams has remarked:

> Critics have had a great deal of trouble in efforts to demonstrate any general unity in Light in August, and have sometimes concluded that it is an inferior book. The majority, however, feel that, unity or no unity, it is one of Faulkner's greatest works. Evidently there is something in it that has not been adequately explained.[31]

My own study, then, to a large extent, must proceed on the assumption that the best synthesis is a better analysis.

Although there seems to be little point in simply describing the controversy surrounding the novel, a sketch of what have been the most prominent critical concerns should help to delineate the exegetical problems. It is of course impossible to represent fairly the extent and diversity of the criticism on Light in August. Perhaps I can best attempt to do so by relating the criticism to the three major elements of conflict in the novel: religion, sex, and race, as they manifest themselves in a specifically Southern setting. That these may be considered the major elements seems commonly agreed upon and even obvious, though, to be sure, Faulkner does not limit their use to Light in August. In trying to distinguish among the various approaches, I do not see how I can avoid implying that individual studies are more limited in their views than they are and that the lines of inquiry are more clearly established than they are. In other words, the order I am trying to effect in my presentation is not one necessarily inherent in the body of criticism itself, for many studies take a rather eclectic approach.

It seems ironic that at the same time criticism has been trying to determine Faulkner's precise relation to the Christian tradition and exploring his symbolic use of Biblical material, it has also been acknowledging him to be a bitter antagonist of the church--one whose indictment of the American Protestant institution has its modern parallel only in Joyce's assault on the institution of Irish Catholicism. Light in August has drawn particular attention as Faulkner's "Calvinist" novel, and several studies have attempted to demonstrate not only that

the novel is an indictment of Calvinism but that the world view underlying it is Calvinistic. Remarks on the issue became wide-spread following an interpretation of the novel by William Van O'Connor, who claims that "this novel at center is a probing into the terrible excesses of the Calvinist spirit" and that "if one does not perceive that the Calvinist spirit is the central issue in Light in August, the novel will of necessity seem confused in theme."[32] The issue has also received specific treatment from Ilse Dusoir Lind, Alwyn Berland, Robert J. Barth, and Elmo Howell.[33] But whereas O'Connor and Lind stick to the presumed Calvinism in the novel, Berland and Barth would extend their discussion of it to the author's own view of things. Berland contends that although Faulkner indicts the practices of Calvinism in the novel, he himself unconsciously subscribes to a Calvinistic conception of existence. Barth, in a formidable study that also examines other of Faulkner's works, attempts to place Faulkner's thinking directly in the Calvinist tradition; unfortunately, his erudite and valuable study is marred by his lack of discrimination in selecting evidence--for which he is justly brought to task by Richard O'Dea in one of the more penetrating considerations of Faulkner's relation to Christianity.[34]

Critics less quick to jump to conclusions or on band-wagons have managed to keep Faulkner's evident distaste for religiosity in broader perspective. Although finding "Hell-fire Protestantism" to be a major theme, Cleanth Brooks concludes that "in Light in August his criticism of the harsher Protestantism is not a gratuitous gesture that disturbs the

work of art: it is absorbed into the total pattern of meaning."[35] Keeping Faulkner's conceptual frame of reference Christian, Hyatt Waggoner says that "'Puritanism,' or punitive religious moralism, is perhaps the chief intended antagonist in Light in August. . . . " However, he sees the author's ire as directed toward the form Christianity may take and not against its spiritual or conceptual basis: the story of Joe Christmas is thus a "rebuke to the community . . . for its corruption of Christianity from a religion of love and life to one of hatred and death." But "meanwhile there is Lena to suggest a Christianity different from that of McEachern or Hines." To Waggoner, Lena represents an "'unconscious Christian,'" who is "a witness to the efficacy of the three theological virtues, faith, hope and love,"[36] Lawrence Thompson would enlarge the conceptual frame of reference, considering Lena as representative of pagan rather than essential Christian virtues. According to him:

> . . . in none of his other novels does Faulkner unburden himself quite so furiously as to what he believes to be certain aberrations in Christian practice. . . . The basic counterpart or polarity, here, is derived from Faulkner's rebellious insistence on contrasting certain pagan attitudes with certain Christian attitudes for the purpose of honoring the pagan. Whatever concepts Faulkner here salvages from his own Christian heritage he reinterprets, as a means of separating them from those meanings in Christian dogma.[37]

Some critics would put the indictment at greater distance. Robert Burrows finds that, from Light in August to A Fable, "the view of the church presented in Faulkner's works has not mellowed with the passage of time, but has become more incisive in its criticism, more trenchant in its condemnation";

but he substantially qualifies his conclusion: "Although his criticism of institutional Christianity is not the figure in the carpet of Faulkner's work, there are innumerable strands of the warp and woof of its fabric which make this criticism as substantial as it is constant."[38] Looking at the matter more abstractly, Richard Adams would have it that "the religious parallels in Light in August are not used to inculcate any religious belief that Faulkner himself may have had, nor are they intended primarily to express his criticism of other people's beliefs. Their function is to help build the artificial static obstacle to the motion of life. . . . "[39]

Although most critics have used Calvinism loosely or used a more inclusive term, a few have taken it in a rather restricted sense and have consequently been bothered by Faulkner's lack of literal accuracy. Noting that Faulkner makes the religion of Light in August Presbyterian, in spite of the overwhelming numerical superiority of the Baptist and Methodist denominations in the South, Hugh Holman points out: " . . . Faulkner is remarkably ignorant of the government and instruction of that church. He gives it an episcopal government quite contrary to the government by elders from which it gains its name."[40] Elmo Howell finds Calvinism to be the major concern of the novel but also to be a "queer subject for Faulkner," in that it is "alien" to Faulkner's part of the South. In his effort to prove Light in August to be a novel of ideas essentially lacking in the kind of verisimilitude characteristic of other Yoknapatawpha novels, Howell outrageously misquotes W. J. Cash. Quoting his words out of

context, Howell has Cash contend that "the old Arminian doctrine of Free Will--the doctrine most natural to the frontier, and most congenial to the Southern pattern generally--" has constituted the essential character of Southern religion.[41] What Cash actually says is quite contrary to what Howell implies and is very relevant to the whole question of Calvinistic elements in Light in August:

> . . . as the pressure of the Yankee increased, the whole South, including the Methodists, would move toward a position of thoroughgoing Calvinism in feeling if not in formal theology. It would never completely arrive there, to be sure. The old Arminian doctrine of Free Will--the doctrine most natural to the frontier, and most congenial in many respects to the Southern pattern generally--would retain a great deal of vitality always. God would continue to be, in considerable measure, a sort of constitutional monarch, bargaining for the allegiance of His subjects and yielding a quid for a quo. Nevertheless, everybody did come increasingly, and without regard for his traditional creed, to think and speak of Him as being primarily the imperious master of a puppet-show. Every man was in his place because He had set him there. Everything was as it was because He had ordained it so. Hence slavery, and, indeed, everything that was, was His responsibility, not the South's. So far from being evil, it was the very essence of Right.[42]

And later Cash is even more emphatic: " . . . militant Protestantism, as we know, had always stood at the heart and center of the South--had here, perhaps, survived in its pristine vigor of feeling more fully than anywhere else on earth."[43]

Cash's description is very instructive, especially in view of Faulkner's public statements reiterating that he simply used the materials available to him and expressing a constant preference for the individual as opposed to the institutional response[44] and also in view of such astute observations as Olga Vickery's that, in Faulkner, man's "talk of determinism

is, therefore, but one more stratagem of evasion whereby he hopes to shift responsibility from his shoulders to that of some supernatural power."[45]

I have dealt extensively with the views on religious extremity in Light in August because this issue has been one of the most discussed and troublesome in the criticism of the novel; inevitably, as we have seen, it extends itself to the whole canon and involves the question of Faulkner's relation to the Christian tradition. It would seem that Light in August represents an indictment of Calvinism insofar as there are elements of this in the Southern Protestantism with which Faulkner was familiar and which he used to dramatize man's institutionalized inhumanity to man. But the problem cannot of course be laid to rest in such a general fashion, for one has still to demonstrate convincingly the basis for Faulkner's indictment of the church and his particular view of the human condition, relative to moral responsibility, as these are evinced in the text itself.

Also falling into the religious category, though not providing conflict but a means of structuring and commenting upon it, is the so-called and much-discussed Christ symbolism in the novel. Here the biggest issue has been of course Joe Christmas as a Christ figure. Critics have long been obliged to acknowledge such symbolism in Light in August, but they have differed greatly on its precise meaning and importance. A few have seen the symbolism functioning inversely as an ironic contrast, but most have concluded that we are to recognize some kind of positive relation between Joe Christmas and Christ.

For example, Robert Slabey explains that "Joe embodies a 'negative incarnation': i.e., he is not God humanized but man dehumanized, not God accepted as a human being but man rejected as a human being."[46] From a different and more general point of view, Joseph Gold considers that "for Faulkner the value of the Christ myth lies in its powerful portrayal of the possibilities for everyman, of the 'Christ' that every individual might be, and this possibility is realizable only through identification, through love."[47] As for the importance of the Christ symbolism, Hugh Holman considers it to be the unifying device of the novel; he finds Christ analogies functioning in respect to Hightower and Lena Grove as well as Joe Christmas.[48] On the other hand, Irving Howe comments: "Remove the several cloudy suggestions that Christmas is some sort of Christ figure, and it would hardly matter: Christmas affects us as a vulnerable man, not as a religious token."[49] The current attitude, which seems to be one of weariness with the whole Christ symbolism industry, is reflected in John Hunt's remark on the presence of such symbolism in the novel: " . . . suffice it to say that it is obvious, inescapable, and sometimes simply obtrusive."[50] All of which, unfortunately, does not make it any more explicable.

The sexual element in the novel has usually been examined in relation to the religious or the racial, critics especially noting the puritanical repression of a natural appetite and the Southern concern with miscegenation. But it has also received attention as an important theme in its own right. Cleanth Brooks finds that man's attempts to keep himself aloof from

woman's subjugation constitutes a major theme,[51] and Samuel Yorks says that Light in August derives its "plot configuration from a series of temptations of Joe by women" and that "the story of Joe Christmas is basically that of the fugitive male."[52] Remarks on the sexual element in Light in August often occur in the context of commentary on Faulkner's treatment of women characters in general, and Richard Chase, Irving Howe, and, not surprisingly, Leslie Fiedler are among those who have had something to say on this subject. As Chase sees it, "According to Faulkner's gynecological demonology . . . men are more interesting and valuable than women but the dark or Satanic principle of the universe decrees that they are the weaker sex and are doomed to be frustrated and ephemeral." He sees Lena Grove as a "somewhat bovine earth mother" whose effect is to "baffle, fascinate, outrage, and finally defeat men."[53] Howe complains that "Faulkner's inability to achieve moral depth in his portraiture of young women clearly indicates a major failing as a novelist." As he sees it, "To regard Lena as an agent of morality and let it go at that, is to graze the notion that goodness is contingent upon a noble paucity of intelligence."[54] And Fiedler contends that Faulkner "believes in the terror of mere inert female flesh not as a fact of life but as an article of faith."[55] As Fiedler's comment would indicate, the difficulties of an author's characters are not infrequently identified as his own; it is not surprising, then, that Faulkner has been found to be a misogynist, as well as a Calvinist and a segregationalist. The misogynist label was perhaps first applied by Maxwell Geismar,[56] and it seems to

have become an "article of faith" among certain critics. According to Mme. Claude-Edmonde Mag..y: " . . . all critics have been struck by what they call his 'Puritanism,' his obvious repugnance for all that concerns the mystery of sex, as well as his deep-seated misogyny. . . . "[57] And Vincent Hopper says of the sex conflict: "In the author's personal abhorrence of the physical lies the uniqueness of his treatment of this ancient theme."[58] Naomi Jackson comes to the rescue of both Faulkner and women, chastizing Howe and Fiedler especially, and finding Faulkner, on her own account, to be a great admirer of womenkind, whose criticism of the shallow flapper is but indicative of his "commitment to a greater ideal of The Feminine."[59]

Obviously, Faulkner rejects the chivalric concept of Southern womanhood, and he makes use of the folk humorist's version of the femme fatale, as well as her archetypal progenitor the earth-mother fertility figure. Just as obviously, it is almost always the man who confronts moral choice and its consequences; Faulkner's woman characters most often cannot recognize or do not need to recognize moral complicity. A problem lies in just how seriously Faulkner intends his romanticization of the reproductive and maternal function and just how we are to interpret, then, the masculine-feminine dichotomy. In other words, to what extent does Lena Grove, with her placid acceptance of sex and its natural and social consequences, function as pure contrast and to what extent as a literal alternative to the violence in Light in August?

The racial element in the novel has, at once, been commented on extensively, any analysis of the novel having necessarily to deal with it, and rather taken for granted as a convenient catalyst arising out of Faulkner's use of Southern materials. Insofar as the meaning of the novel as a whole is concerned, it has hardly been grappled with. Critics who have been so perceptive in delineating the guilt of the old Southern order and the significance of paternal and fraternal relations in Faulkner's other works have largely ignored Light in August, although in this novel are first defined the problems that are to occupy the heart of Absalom, Absalom, Go Down, Moses, and Intruder in the Dust. Reasons for the neglect are not difficult to discover. Although religion and certainly sex serve to motivate the action in all the story lines, the problem of racial identity seems limited to Joe Christmas. In trying to demonstrate unity in the novel, critics have usually proceeded by analogy, concerning themselves with a search for the common denominator underlying ostensibly different situations. Thus, Joe's concern for his racial identity, Hightower's obsession with his grandfather's fatal mission, and Lena's pregnancy may be seen as having the common effect of alienating them from their fellows. Such a procedure seems to put the incidents and the actions on a separate but equal footing. Moreover, the ambiguity of Joe's racial identity has apparently further thwarted efforts to come to terms with the racial element. Some critics have simply ignored the ambiguity and called Joe a mulatto--thus failing to grasp perhaps the most essential point of the novel.[60] Others have acknowledged the

ambiguity but gone on to treat the novel as if it did not exist. It seems fair to say that the validity of most of these interpretations would not be altered had Faulkner definitely indicated that Joe is of mixed blood. In short, some critics have been able to perceive a racial problem only in terms of race.

A failure to penetrate fully the significance of the racial element, together with a lack of flexibility in approaching the structure, seems to be the main drawback of studies which find the unity of the novel to reside in the opposition between individual and community roles. Those who give such a reading, among them some of the more prominent of Faulkner critics, see race, religion, and sex as dramatic vehicles for Faulkner's concern with two kinds of self, or with the self and the role society would impose. Olga Vickery sees the novel as a study of the relation between "the public and private world." She finds that "because of the interpenetration and interdependence of the public and private worlds, each character is multidimensional" and that "in a sense, the individual and the community are obverse reflections of each other."[61] Frederick Hoffman has called this relation a conflict between the "inner and outer" selves--one the product of internal and the other of external pressures.[62] Michael Millgate sees in Light in August "the fundamental irony which Faulkner explores to a greater or lesser degree in almost all of his novels; the gulf between appearance and actuality, the contrast between the public and the private self."[63] And Cleanth Brooks finds significance in all of the characters'

being to some extent outcasts from the community, which is itself something of a central character. Although he considers repressive Protestantism and the struggle of the sexes to be major themes, he considers them to be closely connected to the more basic theme of alienation.[64]

But the concepts of alienation and of the conflict between abstract role and the living person are capable of such general application that they may fail to delineate, or may even obscure, important distinctions. Dichotomize the social and institutional from the individual and the natural as we will, Joe's alienation, because of his presumed mixed blood, remains different in kind, not degree, from that of any other character, and more seems to rest upon that difference than upon any analogies drawn from the various actions. To be sure, race is ultimately metaphorical in Faulkner, but the vehicle used must make some difference in what we construe the tenor of the metaphor to be.

Faulkner's subtly allusive methods and his tendency to treat ritualistically behavior related to sex, race, or religion--as well as the violence in which they may manifest themselves--has caused critics to pay a good deal of attention to the mythic import of his work; and Light in August has received its share of this attention. Those who approach the work in terms of anthropological mythology tend to see both Joe Christmas and Christ as representative of a more abstract figure: the scapegoat or the dying-reborn god of the vegetation myths. As Walter Brylowski would have it, in his recent book on Faulkner and myth: "Both Christmas and Christ are examples

of an archetypal pattern with the Christ 'legend' used as one of Faulkner's often explained 'tools'. . . ."[65] In such approaches Lena Grove becomes of course an earth-mother figure, often associated with the fertile Diana; and Hightower, the extra thumb here, becomes whatever can be made of him. A cautious Michael Millgate, for instance, notes the apparent allusions to the succession of the priesthood of Nemi and the ancient festival of Diana, as described in The Golden Bough, but says the parallels may be accidental.[66] A considerably less cautious Beach Langston, drawing upon Frazer, Jung, the Bible and the Upanishads would have Lena to symbolize Diana, the Virgin Mary, and Eve and finds Hightower to be both a "limited imitation of Christ" and a "Buddha figure," who at last attains "pari-nirvana"; the celebrated wheel image of the Hightower section "unites its Buddhist-Christian symbols into a Jungian mandala."[67]

The presumed black and white blood of Christmas, the light-dark imagery, and the sexual strife in the novel have of course been abstracted to ultimate levels of duality, to the conflict between good and evil and between male and female principles of creation. Frederick Asals explains that "the tension expressed in the metaphor is finally the old Manichean opposition; the irrevokable human paradox of indwelling light and darkness, Yang and Yin, the rational and the irrational."[68] Of course the fact that the mixed blood is only suspected and that therefore a dichotomy may not in reality exist makes such an opposition more problematic than it might first appear.

Closely related to the symbolic-mythic readings are those which stress the primitivistic element in the novel. Most emphatic of these is that of John Kimmey, who contends:

> The primary concern of the novel . . . is man's relation with the natural world. . . . Protestantism in the South, miscegenation, man's search for identity are ancillary to this basic concept that the author dramatizes on page after page in inescapable terms. To overlook it is to mistake the shadow for the substance."[69]

Although some of the symbolic and mythic treatments seem excessively ingenious, most of them have valid and valuable insights to offer; for Light in August is, quite simply, an ingenious novel, perhaps excessively so. There is no doubt that Faulkner has deliberately incorporated material from the Bible, The Golden Bough, and perhaps other sources. The question is how it functions and how well it succeeds. Presently, there seems little to be gained from simply demonstrating the presence of various symbolic elements or making the work yield to a consistent archetypal reading. The problem now lies in relating the diverse symbolism to a central interpretation which will not do violence to either the text or our own credulity.

Rather opposite to but not contradictory to readings which stress the symbolic nature of the work--and to be sharply distinguished from those which emphasize Calvinistic determinism--are the more or less naturalistic ones which view the sexual, racial, and religious elements in relation to their psychological and sociological implications. These commonly find Christmas and Hightower, who figure most prominently in such readings, to be victims of environmental circumstances and of traumatic childhood incidents--especially as represented by Joe's experience

with the toothpaste and Hightower's with his father's battle-marked coat. Although few critics would analyze the novel from a purely naturalistic point of view, some of the more prominent ones who have considered Joe Christmas a victim are Irving Howe, Hyatt Waggoner, and Alfred Kazin.[70] Other equally prominent critics have taken an opposite view, seeing both Christmas and Hightower as tragic figures, who suffer the consequences of their own moral choices. These tend to emphasize the conclusion of the Christmas and Hightower stories, seeing in Joe's death and Hightower's final vision, the tragic criteria of bitter recognition and ultimate change of fortune. John Longely, Jr., has perhaps the best known of these interpretations. He compares Joe with Oedipus and contends that those who see him as victim are quite wrong, that the mainspring of his action lies in his determination to will his fate and in his refusal to submit to a prescribed role.[71]

One cannot help but feel that, underlying the whole problem of free will versus determinism in Light in August, on either a naturalistic or a theological level, is a good deal of the kind of semantic confusion that the advent of pragmatism should have rendered passé. This is not at all to say that the question of the relation between free will and determinism in Light in August is irrelevant, unresolvable, or merely a matter of how one looks at it. On the contrary, it seems one of the important questions one can ask about the novel and perhaps the whole Faulkner canon. But to come to grips with it, one has to be very careful to keep the terms unequivocal, the thinking of the author and that of the characters in their

proper spheres, and the author's means distinct from his ends. In Faulkner studies this is a considerable chore.

Having reviewed the criticism of the work, trying to delineate the central concerns and problems, I must again apologize for making studies appear more exclusive and more extreme in their views than they actually are; if I have an excuse, it lies in my lack of a reasonable alternative. I now proceed to a systematic consideration of the novel, from which, it is hoped, a central interpretation will emerge that will represent something more than a compromise with the existing commentary. My approach will be to sketch what seem to be the existential, artistic, and moral assumptions underlying the novel; to consider structure and symbolism as represented in the arrangement of the action, the imagery, and the mythic parallels; to examine individually the distinguishable actions and their relations to each other against the framework of underlying assumptions and techniques that I will have already discussed; and finally to evaluate the novel in terms of its success and significance as a work of art.

Because of the textural density of Faulkner's works, a comprehensive study of any one of them is presented with the alternative of being either repetitious or digressive. In the approach I have chosen, I will not be able to avoid some repetition, but I think this preferable to the frequent and extensive digression that might otherwise be necessary.

NOTES

[1]Robert Penn Warren, ed., "Introduction: Faulkner: Past and Future," Faulkner: A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966), p. 21.

[2]Robert Penn Warren, "William Faulkner," William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism, eds. Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1960), pp. 109-124.

[3]Warren, "Past and Future," p. 21.

[4]For a review of the book-length critical works on Faulkner, see Appendix I.

[5]E.g., see James B. Meriwether, "Faulkner and the New Criticism," Books Abroad, XXXVII (Summer 1963), 265-268.

[6]Michael Millgate, The Achievement of William Faulkner (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 289.

[7]Allen Tate, "William Faulkner, 1897-1962," Sewanee Review, LXXI (Winter 1963), 162.

[8]Ibid., pp. 162-163.

[9]George P. Garrett, Jr., "The Influence of William Faulkner," Georgia Review, XVIII (Winter 1964), 420.

[10]E. g., see Hugh C. Holman, "William Faulkner: The Anguished Dream of Time," in his Three Modes of Southern Fiction (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1966), pp. 27-47: Arlin Turner, "William Faulkner, Southern Novelist," Mississippi Quarterly, XIV (Summer 1961), 117-130: Warren, "Past and Future," pp. 4-5.

[11]R. W. B. Lewis, "William Faulkner: The Hero in the New World," Critical Essays, ed. Warren, p. 204.

[12]Holman, Three Modes, p. 34.

[13]Richard Chase, The American Novel and Its Tradition (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1957), p. 210.

[14]Harry M. Campbell and Ruel E. Foster, William Faulkner: A Critical Appraisal (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1951), pp. 159-160.

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[14]Harry M. Campbell and Ruel E. Foster, William Faulkner: A Critical Appraisal (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1951), pp. 159-160.

[15]R. W. B. Lewis, The American Adam (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 7.

[16]I am indebted to my chairman, Professor Robert F. Haugh, for some of the phrasing here.

[17]Joseph Gold, William Faulkner: A Study in Humanism from Metaphor to Discourse (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966), see his concluding chapter, pp. 188-200.

[18]On belief in God: see the index to Lion in the Garden: Interviews with William Faulkner 1926-1962, eds. James B. Meriwether and Michael Millgate (New York: Random House, 1968); on being a Christian: Faulkner in the University, eds. Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner (Charlottsville: University of Virginia Press, 1959), p. 203; on being a humanist: Faulkner at Nagano, ed. Robert A. Jelliffe (Tokyo: Kenkyusha Press, 1956), p. 95.

[19]Frederick J. Hoffman, William Faulkner (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1961), p. 116.

[20]Malcolm Cowley says of Faulkner: "He did not read the moral or social philosophers of our time, but there was in fact a great deal of disguised ethics, with a touch of metaphysics, in the Symbolist poets and novelists, who had founded what has often been called a religion of art;" See The Faulkner-Cowley File (New York: The Viking Press, 1966), pp. 153-154. Blotner's catalogue shows few works of philosophy on Faulkner's shelves. See Joseph L. Blotner, William Faulkner's Library, a Catalogue (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1964). Faulkner told Jean Stein: "Everybody talked about Freud when I lived in New Orleans, but I have never read him. Neither did Shakespeare. I doubt if Melville did either, and I'm sure Moby Dick didn't." See "William Faulkner: An Interview," Three Decades, eds. Hoffman and Vickery, p. 78. But Faulkner professed acquaintance with Bergson and said that he had obviously been influenced by him. See "Interview with Loïc Bouvard," Lion in the Garden, eds. Meriwether and Millgate, pp. 70, 72. And apparently Faulkner was familiar with the one-volume edition of The Golden Bough. E.g., see Walter Brylowski, Faulkner's Olympian Laugh (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1968), p. 84, n., citing Carvel Collins in a speech to the American Literature Section of the Modern Language Association, December 28, 1967. Richard P. Adams says of Faulkner that "it is fairly safe to assume some knowledge on his part of just about anything that was current in 1910 to 1930, including popular works of science, philosophy, and history." See Faulkner: Myth and Motion (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 10.

[21]Hoffman, William Faulkner, p. 106.

[22]Joseph Gold, Metaphor to Discourse, pp. 3-20.

[23]James L. Roberts, "The Individual and the Community: Faulkner's Light in August," Studies in American Literature, eds. Waldo McNeir and Leo B. Levy (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1960), p. 132.

[24]John Arthos, "Ritual and Humor in the Writing of William Faulkner," William Faulkner: Two Decades of Criticism," eds. Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1954), p. 110.

[25]Elmo Howell, "A Note on Faulkner's Presbyterian Novel," Papers on Language and Literature, II (Spring 1966), 183, 187.

[26]Chase, American Novel, p. 215.

[27]Harold Kaplin, "The Inert and the Violent: Faulkner's Light in August," in his The Passive Voice (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1966), p. 114.

[28]Joseph Warren Beach, American Fiction 1920-1940 (New York: Macmillan Co., 1941), p. 136.

[29]Millgate, Achievement, p. 131.

[30]Joseph Gold, "The Two Worlds of Light in August," Mississippi Quarterly, XVI (Summer 1963), 160.

[31]Adams, Myth and Motion, p. 84.

[32]William Van O'Connor, The Tangled Fire of William Faulkner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1954), pp. 72-73.

[33]Ilse Dusoir Lind, "The Calvinistic Burden of Light in August," New England Quarterly, XXX (Sept. 1957), 307-329; Alwyn Berland, "Light in August: The Calvinism of William Faulkner," MFS, VIII (Summer 1962), 159-170; Robert J. Barth, "Faulkner and the Calvinist Tradition," Thought, XXXIX (Spring 1964), 100-120; Howell, "Faulkner's Presbyterian Novel," pp. 182-187.

[34]Richard J. O'Dea, "Faulkner's Vestigial Christianity," Renaissance, XXI, no. 1 (Autumn 1968), 44-54.

[35]Cleanth Brooks, William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 62.

[36]Hyatt H. Waggoner, William Faulkner: From Jefferson to the World (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1959), pp. 101, 108.

[37]Lawrence Thompson, William Faulkner: An Introduction and Interpretation (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1963), p. 80.

[38]Robert N. Burrows, "Institutional Christianity as Reflected in the Works of William Faulkner," Mississippi Quarterly, XIV (Summer 1961), 146-147.

[39]Adams, Myth and Motion, p. 88.

[40]Hugh C. Holman, "The Unity of Faulkner's Light in August," PMLA, LXXIII (March 1958), 161.

[41]Howell, "Faulkner's Presbyterian Novel," p. 184.

[42]W. J. Cash, The Mind of the South (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. 1941), p. 81.

[43]Ibid., p. 334.

[44]E.g., see Faulkner in the University, pp. 73, 86.

[45]Olga W. Vickery, The Novels of William Faulkner (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1959), p. 234.

[46]Robert M. Slabey, "Myth and Ritual in Light in August," Texas Studies in Literature and Language, II (Autumn 1960), 328.

[47]Gold, "Two Worlds," p. 161.

[48]Holman, "Unity of Light in August," pp. 155-166.

[49]Irving Howe, William Faulkner: A Critical Study, Vintage Books (2nd ed., rev.; New York: Random House, 1962), p. 210.

[50]John W. Hunt, William Faulkner: Art in Theological Tension (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1965), p. 15.

[51]Brooks, Yoknapatawpha Country, p. 68.

[52]Samuel A. Yorks, "Faulkner's Women: The Peril of Mankind," Arizona Quarterly, XVII (Summer 1961), 121-122.

[53]Chase, American Novel, p. 212.

[54]Howe, Critical Study, pp. 144, 206.

[55]Leslie A. Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel (rev. ed.; New York: Stein & Day, 1966), p. 322.

[56]Maxwell Geismar, "William Faulkner: The Negro and the Female," in his Writers in Crisis (London: Secker & Warburg, 1947), pp. 143-183.

[57]Claude-Edmonde Magny, "Faulkner or Theological Inversion," Critical Essays, ed. Warren, p. 71.

[58]Vincent F. Hopper, "Faulkner's Pradise Lost," Virginia Quarterly, XXIII (Summer 1947), 407.

[59]Naomi Jackson, "Faulkner's Women: 'Demon-Nun and Angel-Witch,'" Ball State University Forum, VIII (Winter 1967), 12-20.

[60]Cleanth Brooks has noted the failure to acknowledge the ambiguity of Joe's mixed blood as a common misreading (Yoknapatawpha Country, p. 49).

[61]Vickery, The Novels, p. 66.

[62]Hoffman, William Faulkner, p. 69.

[63]Millgate, Achievement, p. 127.

[64]Brooks, Yoknapatawpha Country, pp. 47-74.

[65]Brylowski, Faulkner's Olympian Laugh, p. 103.

[66]Millgate, Achievement, pp. 134-137.

[67]Beach Langston, "The Meaning of Lena Grove and Gail Hightower in Light in August," Boston University Studies in English, V (Spring 1961), 48-51, 60, 58.

[68]Frederick Asals, "Faulkner's Light in August," Explicator, XXVI (May 1968), item 74.

[69]John L. Kimmey, "The Good Earth in Light in August," Mississippi Quarterly, XVII (Winter 1963-1964), 1.

[70]Howe, Critical Study, pp. 200-214; Waggoner, From Jefferson to the World, pp. 100-120; Alfred Kazin, "The Stillness of Light in August," Three Decades, eds. Hoffman and Vickery, pp. 247-265.

[71]John L. Longley, Jr., The Tragic Mask: A Study of Faulkner's Heroes (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1963), pp. 196-197. See also Robert D. Jacobs, "Faulkner's Tragedy of Isolation," Southern Renascence: The Literature of the Modern South, eds. Louis D. Rubin and Jacobs (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1953), pp. 170-191.

CHAPTER II

A CONCEPTUAL FRAME OF REFERENCE

The artistic vision and the moral context

In the preceding chapter I suggested that if there remained a discrepancy of any significance between Faulkner's work and our assumptions about it, this lay in an incomplete appreciation of his artistic intentions and ambition. In this chapter I hope to effect some desirable adjustment by attempting to delineate the relation between what I would call his artistic vision and its moral context and by insisting on the primacy the former must have in any analysis of his fiction. My concern here is not specifically with the nature of art and its problematic relation to morality, nor with considerations more appropriate to philosophy or history of ideas, though such problems and considerations may hover always at the periphery of my discussion. Rather my concern is with clarifying the conceptual basis of Light in August, as well as Faulkner's work in general, in order to facilitate my later explication of that novel. Analytically speaking, I will be advancing no new definitions or distinctions but simply applying conventional ones to Faulkner's particular case. I perhaps do not need to say that my aesthetic frame of reference is basically Aristotelian--this seems as inevitable as it will become obvious. And although my interpretation of Faulkner's intentions

may occasionally seem innovative, it is probably more eclectic than it would at first appear.[1]

That Faulkner has made many moralistic statements outside his work, that his work is full of moral implication, that his characters encounter moral problems, gain moral insight, make moral decisions, and that the reader is compelled to do likewise are matters beyond dispute. But as a literary artist Faulkner had his primary concern in dramatizing the process of cognition leading to insight, or recognition. And the dramatic impact of such recognition depends no more upon the traditional morality of the author than upon that of the characters and readers. An undue emphasis on what is usually called Faulkner's "moral vision" has led to analyses of his works that seem to assume human <u>will</u> rather than cognition to be his central focus and, as a corollary, good conduct rather than true-seeing to be the criterion by which we are to judge his characters. Thus, design comes to be sought mainly in statement, or thematic relationships, an effect that would seem to equate dramatic action with illustration and to confuse a description of life with a plan for living.

By saying that Faulkner's concern lies generally in dramatizing the process of cognition, I mean that it has to do finally with the problem of human consciousness: its capacity to comprehend but fragmentarily and discontinuously and, consequently, to misjudge its own limitations, fostering an illusory conception of self. The failure, or hamartia, of Faulkner's characters is ultimately cognitive rather than moral. (To be sure, there is moral failure, but this proceeds

from a defect of comprehension instead of will.) The fictional action may then become one whose unity is predicated on the principle of that which is necessary to effect the desired recognition, or insight into the truth of the matter. In Faulkner this truth of course acquires its meaning in reference to a moral context, as I shall try to demonstrate later, and perhaps necessarily implies a code of conduct. The truth about oneself and one's relation to the universe, organic and moral, may be either instinctively or cognitively perceived. Usually, Faulkner associates instinctive, or perhaps intuitive, perception with his women characters and with the Negro community. Temple Drake, of Requiem for a Nun, is his only major woman character who is shown arriving at a moral truth through a process of cognition. To say cognitive is not necessarily to say rational or logical, though a cause and effect relation, or pattern, is certainly evoked. Of course the reader alone may be able to comprehend the full scope and larger meaning of this pattern, since the character can hardly be apprised of symbolic correspondences that relate his individual experience to historical and mythic events.

Considered in this light, the bulk of Faulkner's work belongs to a very general, old, and extensive body of literature that has to do perhaps finally with identity, with who and what we are, and that derives its dramatic energy from the contrast of our conception of ourselves in relation to the world with things as they really are; one which is not primarily concerned with space explored or physical exploits accomplished but with a mental and emotional quest, undertaken deliberately,

inadvertently, or inevitably, concluding in a realization of the discrepancy between illusion and reality and usually carrying strong moral implications. The revelatory element may of course be well mixed with other attractions. This literature would include much of tragedy and of the Bildungsroman, which in recent times seems to have largely taken over the function of the older tragedy, often adapting the same abstract action to the demands of a different medium and audience. A traditional theme, or key concern of this literature, from Prometheus Bound to A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, has been, in relation to illusion and reality, the ironic paradox of freedom and bondage. In the American South Faulkner found a fresh an powerful vehicle for dramatizing this perennial human concern--just as the Greeks found it in their legends and Joyce in his native Ireland. Or, perhaps it would be just as well to say that in this ancient concern he found the meaning of the Southern experience. Faulkner's innovation, if indeed it represents one, was, as John Longley, Jr., has suggested, to regard an entire region as his protagonist.[2] There are not two Souths in Faulkner, but one; the identity has remained the same: the wasteland of the present simply mirroring the reality behind the dream of the past, the Civil War neither freeing the Negro from economic and social subjugation nor the white from enslavement to a grandiose and sterile illusion but merely changing the manifestation of things--as a syphilitic sore reflects the corruption previously concealed by an unblemished complexion. Faulkner would bring to a recognition of its own self-deceit a South that remains

enraptured by the memory of its profligate night, refusing the evidence of its own bodily corruption that it has lain with no chaste maiden but a foul, and indeed an ancient, whore.

Although this interpretation of the South in Faulkner's works may seem radically unqualified, I believe it to be in keeping with the general view that has been emerging in recent years. Few critics today would consider Faulkner as at all infatuated with the values or value of the antebellum society. Certainly, he knew and depicted the cliched charm of the legend, but he also knew it to be fatally deceptive. The dream-become-legend is a fateful Duessa; the South is her mad devotee, once young, who has remained arrested in his mental and emotional immaturity even while his body has withered toward impotence and death. Faulkner would recognize that madness combined with a certain amount of dash and color must inevitably gain our wistful applause, and he may prefer the energy and intrepidity of a former generation, even to perpetrate a great evil, to the degeneracy of the modern hollow men, but he surely would not have us blinded to the essential character and seriousness of either time's immoral infatuation: with a dream of what was to be or the legend of what once was.

Perhaps it was a failure to distinguish between the concerns of the traditional artist and the traditional moralist that led George Marion O'Donnell to mistake completely the drift of Faulkner's fiction.[3] In attributing moral vigor to the "traditional" forces of the old order and an absence of morality to the "antitraditional" forces of the modern world, he failed to see that the new is but the old with the mask off.

It has been customary to acknowledge the debt owed O'Donnell even while qualifying his views, but quite likely, he did more damage than good to the future of Faulkner criticism, getting it off and running but on the wrong track.[4] He seems to have given his attention more to inference than to the action itself, and so the design came out more his than Faulkner's.

Standing as a fitting symbol of Faulkner's primary concern throughout his career is the central focus of his very first novel: the terrible wound in the forehead of Donald Mahon. However ingenious and inconclusive one finds the interpreting of symbolic names, Faulkner does use them, and it requires small ingenuity here to note that Mahon represents the Southern pronunciation of man and that Donald is commonly listed as of Gaelic origin, meaning "world ruler" or "world conqueror." Here, as almost always, Faulkner's irony is compassionate; it is simply that man's intelligence leads him to aspire, and his aspirations inevitably unbalance his intelligence.

The number of mental defectives that follow Donald Mahon in Faulkner's works gives ample and ironic testimony to another old verity which the antebellum founders did not heed; that he whom the gods would destroy they first make mad. Benjy Compson, Jim Bond (great-grandson of Thomas Sutpen), and Lonnie Grinnup (or Louis Grenier, whose family founded the great Frenchman's Bend Plantation) are the last of their would-be illustrious lines, indicating that what began in madness must end in madness. They are the literal representatives of their great-grandfathers' minds when stripped of illusion and self-deceit. Destroying a land and enslaving a people to erect

a gaudy, gabled dream--subject like all else to decay or conflagration--was quite simply madness to Faulkner, in however colorful and dashing a form it might come. The idiots lack those powers of the human consciousness--rationality, imagination, right reason--that their great-grandfathers, mad with aspiration, abused; and they come to dwell without fanfare: Benjy in an institution, Jim Bond in the woods and fields, howling around the ashes of a mansion that was his by right of blood, and Lonnie Grinnup in a tent on the land to which his family once laid claim. Furthermore, to get somewhat ahead of myself, it is in the mad Eupheus Hines, with his squat, diminutive shape, his filthy clothes and tobacco-stained goatee, spittle dribbling from his lips, madly ranting about white supremacy, even while accepting his very sustenance from those to whom he argues himself superior, that we are to see the stock image of the old Southern colonel, nobly erect in his immaculate white linen, with his snow white mustache and goatee, drawling in cultured tones his patriotic rhetoric, garnished here and there with flourishes of classical learning, while behind his illustrious presence, providing the means of his finery, his learning, his leisure, there endures a hundred bent backs and pairs of black hands, measuring out their lives down endless rows of cotton. And like his caricature Hines he has sundered from him and condemned to a human limbo the very children and grandchildren who share his blood.

Faulkner is, in effect, inverting the myth. He is not, and this cannot be too emphatically stressed, contrasting the legend with factuality or actual history. The distinction lies

between honesty and dishonesty in the myths that we live by.

Faulkner's public statements yield further evidence that as an artist he was concerned with true-seeing and with dramatizing the process leading to it rather than with standards of conduct. At the University of Virginia he made the following response to a general question about human behavior:

> I think that probably no writer would set himself up to judge. If he'd begun to judge the people he writes about . . . the gods . . . might withdraw the gift. If he began to preach or proselytize or pass judgment, that the fire might go out. Also, I think the writer is not really interested in bettering man's condition. He really doesn't care a damn about man's condition. He's interested in all man's behavior with no judgment whatever. That it's motion, it's life, the only alternative is nothingness, death. . . . Maybe the writer has no concept of morality at all, only an integrity to hold always to what he believes to be the facts and truths of human behavior, not moral standards at all. But that man in his books does what man will do, not what man should do but what he will do, maybe what he can't help but do.[5]

And in the well-known interview with Jean Stein he had this to say:

> Life is not interested in good and evil. Don Quixote was constantly choosing between good and evil, but then he was choosing in his dream state. He was mad. He entered reality only when he was so busy trying to cope with people that he had no time to distinguish between good and evil. Since people exist only in life, they must devote their time simply to being alive. Life is motion, and motion is concerned with what makes man move--which is ambition, power, pleasure. What time a man can devote to morality, he must take by force from the motion of which he is a part. He is compelled to make choices between good and evil sooner or later, because moral conscience demands that from him in order that he can live with himself tomorrow. His moral conscience is the curse he had to accept from the gods in order to gain from them the right to dream.[6]

In response to a question about his conception of "virtues," also at the University of Virginia, Faulkner insisted upon the substitution of "verities":

> Well, let's use a little better word to me than virtues--they're the verities of the human heart. They are courage, honor, pride, compassion, pity. That they are not virtues, or one doesn't try to practice them, in my opinion, simply because they are good. One practices--tries to practice them simply because they are the edifice on which the whole history of man has [been] founded and by means of which his--as a race he has endured this long. That without those verities he would have vanished, just like the mastodon and the other ephemeral phenomena of nature have come and gone in the history of the world. Man has endured despite his frailty because he accepts and believes in those verities. That one must be honest not because it's virtuous but because that's the only way to get along. . . . That is, they are the verities to be practiced not because they are virtue but because that's the best way to live in peace with yourself and your fellows. . . .[7] (brackets and last ellipses editors')

I have given a good deal of the context in these three quotations because Faulkner's repetitions often reflect different shades of meaning. I realize that, even with ample quotation, one can make Faulkner's statements support very nearly anything he chooses; but although they must be used with discretion, they are almost always enlightening, once the seeming contradictions and equivocations are sorted out. In the middle quotation, for instance, he uses "good and evil" quite equivocally: early in the passage these words represent abstract, rationalized categories; at the end they acquire an experiential reference, having to do with one's own feelings about his actions. The distinction, which Faulkner is quite aware of without specifying it, is the one that keeps perplexing Huck Finn. Nor is Faulkner likely to use such an elusive word as <u>truth</u> with clear and consistent reference to any particular context. In the first quotation, "the facts and truths of human behavior" suggest a descriptive, existential truth; in the third, "verities of the human heart" reflect an interpretive,

moral truth. These "verities" would more appropriately be called values, but presumably, Faulkner would have them considered truths of the heart because he wishes to distinguish them from false values, or rationalized reactions, and because he wishes to emphasize that they represent the only viable response to the human condition and that they also represent the basic human impulse. Although in his public statements Faulkner sometimes sounds like a meliorist or a relativist, as in the last quoted passage above, his statement at other times and his works themselves would reveal him to be neither. The moral universe is absolute, and in defining himself in relation to it, man will always pay for his wisdom with suffering.

If one makes allowance for rhetorical confusions, which are not really remarkable, given the circumstances of most of Faulkner's statements about his work, the meaning emerges quite clearly: the artist is not a moralist in the sense of passing judgment or prescribing conduct according to abstractly defined criteria of good and evil; he simply describes the truth of life as he sees it with the utmost of his integrity; his values are conceived not as good and evil but as true and untrue--as apprehended by the unbiased or enlightened consciousness and as based upon what will and will not work insofar as, finally, racial survival and human identity are concerned. The "truth" of the artist has reference to these values and thus necessarily implies a moral context or basic ethic.

In turning now to consider more specifically the relation between the artistic vision and the moral context, I hope I am not merely confusing the issue by insisting that dramatic recognition is impossible and the truth itself quite meaningless in the absence of a commonly understood and accepted moral context. Oedipus does not shrug when he learns that he has killed his own father and had children by his mother--nor do we. The dramatic impact of his recognizing truly who he is and what he has done rests upon universally acknowledged, elemental moral strictures, grounded perhaps in social survival itself and usually reinforced by the authority of a divine will. If Oedipus could shrug, the information revealed to him would be, to use one of Faulkner's distinctions, a fact rather than a truth. It would show him to be mistaken, but the mistake would have nothing to do with self-deceit and real identity, would have no relevance to his conception of himself and his relation to the world.

Now, in treating the American South, historically defined, as a protagonist, Faulkner was confronted with the problem of an Oedipus who shrugs. As represented by a Thomas Sutpen or a Lucius McCaslin or by a modern mob, the South is not at all unaware of the nature of its actions, it simply refuses to consider them in a moral context. The context itself is not lacking; it is just that certain actions are not referred to it. After abandoning a wife, refusing to acknowledge a son, indirectly encouraging fratricide, and rejecting the responsibility of siring a bastard upon the teenage daughter of his greatest admirer, Thomas Sutpen considers that his plans

have gone awry only because he has made a mistake somewhere, and in the absence of a recognized moral context, it is no more than that. Sutpen is not, as Rosa Coldfield would have it, a devil, deliberately willing evil; his dream simply blinds him to moral reality. And blinded by an illusion, first of what it could be and then of what it once was, the South rationalizes away the injustice and rapacity that its own moral strictures would logically condemn. It is as if Oedipus should acknowledge the fact that he had murdered his father and had children by his mother but should dismiss it, pointing out that they, after all, were Thebans, whereas he, by virtue of legal adoption, was a Corinthian and that the plague therefore had to be the result of some other agency, perhaps a spiteful foreign power. The truth recognized, then, ultimately has to be one which sweeps away illusion and rationalization and confronts one with the enormity of who he is and what he has done in the face of an inclusive, universally conceived morality. Such recognition may, of course, be reserved for the reader.

Probably the most distinguishing characteristic of Faulkner's moral Weltanshauung is that he assumes this truth to be in itself sufficient for bettering the human condition. (and bettering here means the acceptance of moral responsibility and the suffering it entails rather than any possible elimination of the need for them). In other words, true-seeing is tantamount to good conduct if the will of man is innately good. And none of Faulkner's characters--with the possible exceptions of Jason Compson and the early, atypical Januarius Jones--having a rational command of alternatives, ever deliberately

wills evil. To label the effects of a character's actions as evil is to make an empirical judgment, but to see this evil as proceeding from a defect of will rather than cognition would be to make a faulty inference about the author's world view. Milton's Satan, being perfectly cognizant of the beautiful innocence of Eden and of the consequences of his actions for good or evil and having a moral awareness that causes even him to falter momentarily in his awful purpose, yet by an effort of sheer malicious will determines to despoil that beautiful innocence. Such rationally chosen, deliberate evil is antithetical to Faulkner's basically benign view of human nature. Faulkner might have depicted a Lear but not an Edmund. He does not deal with rationally conceived evil nor with the brutal malice that bursts through all rational restraint, as in a John Claggart or a Guido Francechini. The evils of Faulkner's characters, even Flem Snopes, Popeye, and Temple Drake, can be laid to an incapacity to conceive of the moral universe rather than to a rejection of it. And if this incapacity is irremediable, as it is with Flem and Popeye, Faulkner bases it in congenital defects and environmental deprivation, thus rendering it relative. Flem and Popeye are not so much evil as hopeless, and they pose no active threat to the community. Much the same can be said of Hines. We may indeed consider his actions evil, but to mistake the nature of their origin would be, from Faulkner's viewpoint, to make a dangerous dichotomy: considering him as one of <u>them</u> rather than one of <u>us</u>, thus duplicating his error. Quite obviously Faulkner has made him mad, and our very laws disallow our deeming

willfully evil the actions of one who lacks comprehension. Dramatically speaking, however, his madness does not render his actions unique or excusable, as they would be before the law: it simply defines the nature of his actions--which, after all, but epitomize those of Yoknapatawpha, past and present. Hines is a grotesque but true reflexion.

Jason Compson is probably an exception because, having a rational command of alternatives, he does deliberately and maliciously do harm, and one would have to resort to the veriest kind of sociological determinism to find extenuating factors in his upbringing and environment. His rationally considered actions prove of course the ultimate in madness in view of their rebounding effects: as do Satan's, his projected triumphs turn to ashes. Significantly, Faulkner himself has said that Jason " . . . to me represented complete evil. He's the most vicious character in my opinion I ever thought of."[8] I am quite aware that illusion is involved in the thinking of both Milton's Satan and Jason, and I am aware of the Socratic argument, notably in the "Protagoras," that no man would knowingly choose evil, knowledge thus becoming the sole virtue. But Satan and Jason, if ignorant of the evil done themselves, are not at all ignorant of that done to others; and Socrates' argument, at least pragmatically considered, is a <u>reductio ad adsurdum</u>. It would perpetrate irresponsible rationalization by making a scapegoat of ignorance. But even allowing for Jason, Faulkner seems to see evil not in intent but as a consequence, growing out of human hurt and fear and aspiration.

That the recognition of the truth is itself sufficient for the betterment of mankind means also that man, taken as a whole, has free will, or the potential of choice: it does not mean that all men are able to exercise it or that all who are able to do exercise it; nor does free will mean--and has never meant, to my knowledge--that man is the sole arbiter of his fate. Upon achieving moral insight and acknowledging one's own complicity in the fate of mankind, one is confronted with the choice of affecting the human condition for good or for evil and of assuming the responsibility for the part he has played and is to play in thus affecting it.[9] Whether determinism is at work up to this point is quite simply a pointless question, since it is manifestly impossible to choose freely without a clear knowledge of the true alternatives. Indeed, Faulkner may use environmental or hereditary determinism to demonstrate man's complicity in the fate of man. But he never uses it as an excuse. To lay the blame for inhumanity upon naturalistic forces or a divine will is to rationalize, to deceive oneself further, to side-step the responsibility of choice; and the same is finally true of attempts to blame a given society and the institutions peculiar to it: in each case one posits a scapegoat of an <u>it</u>, a <u>he</u>, or a <u>they</u> in order to avoid the terrible fact of his own complicity and his own choice of assuming responsibility for it. To back away from the choice of acting for good or evil, to withdraw into a rationalized innocence represents a failure of moral courage that amounts to a choice for evil, for one cannot help but be involved. Choice, then, is finally paradoxical: the assertion of one's

freedom depends upon his accepting his bondage to his fellow-man and the suffering that entails. One can, of course, like Satan, assert his freedom by willing evil, but again, Faulkner's faith in man's good will does not generally admit of this possibility.

His conception of man as the victim of his moral blindness rather than malicious will would seem to give Faulkner his compassion and hope. For the blindness is both inevitable and pitiable; and enlightenment is always possible--indeed, always in the possession of some--and the suffering it entails is always endurable. Faulkner apparently sees the role of art as important here. As he said at Nagano: "I believe . . . that art is the strongest and most durable force man has invented or discovered with which to record the history of his invincible durability and courage beneath disaster, and to postulate the validity of his hope."[10] Still, we must continue to make the difficult distinction between what art is and what it does. And still, the artistic vision is Faulkner's; the moral context is shared by all of us.

Art, life, and consciousness

To better explain my contention that Faulkner's art is basically concerned with what I have called the process of cognition, I offer here a discussion of his expressed and implied views on the relation of art, life, and consciousness.

Richard P. Adams has seized upon two of Faulkner's statements concerning life as motion and art as stasis to serve as the touchstone of his recent book. Adams explains:

> The basic hypothesis of my investigation is expressed in two statements made by Faulkner in 1954, in an interview with Jean Stein for the Paris Review. He said that "Life is motion" and that "The aim of every artist is to arrest motion, which is life, by artificial means and hold it fixed so that a hundred years later, when a stranger looks at it, it moves again since it is life." These two apparently simple remarks imply a profound and complex attitude toward the world and man's destiny, which requires for its expression a difficult esthetic doctrine and an elaborate exercise of artistic and technical discipline.
>
> My belief is--and my hypothesis therefore holds--that Faulkner had this attitude from the beginning of his career, that he learned what it meant and what it demanded esthetically, and that in time he developed adequate strategies and techniques to embody it in his fiction.[11]

A somewhat overlapping approach to Faulkner's conception of motion and stasis, in relation to time, has been presented by Karl E. Zink in one of the earlier and finer articles on Faulkner, "Flux and the Frozen Moment." As Zink explains his approach:

> This study is restricted to an exploration of the meaning of one aspect of form in the Faulkner novels. This is the concept of stasis, which is the key to an increased understanding of Faulkner's concept of Time, and of the human state in time.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> I take it for granted that flux or change is for Faulkner a primary condition of all Life. The imagery of torrent, the important role of natural process, dynamic nature as the "ground" of human action--all bespeak this fundamental assumption. . . . What we must do here is to explore the possible meanings of this impulse to stop motion at least momentarily and to arrest flux or change.[12]

The statements Adams quotes are of course ones Faulkner has variously reiterated on different occasions, and the view they entail has been remarked by critics other than Adams and Zink.[13] All in all, however, there is nothing particularly new in an artist's seeing life and his work in terms of motion and stasis with respect to time. The concept of the arrested moment or

suspended action is essentially a way of seeing and describing, a method, which may be shared by artists of all persuasions. Indeed, motion, flux, change, mutability, temporality, finitude, whatever name one finds most accurate, is a self-evident fact of life that has long been the subject of poetry and prose; and the concept of art as fixing a given fragment of the flux into a shape refined and eternal is as common to Shakespeare's sonnets as to Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn," which appears to have had such a profound meaning to Faulkner. Still, to reduce Faulkner's views to a matter of Ars longa, vita brevis would be an unjustifiable oversimplification. What is perhaps significant about Faulkner's treatment of the subject is that, following the modern aesthetic dictum that form should reflect content, he did not simply make statements about the relation of motion and stasis but tried to capture it in the very form and texture of his work and to use it as a kind of basic premise on which to found his interpretation of man in the world.

Faulkner seems to have conceived rather early in his career the notion that the sad truth of both art and life lay in the bondage of each to its own peculiar felicity, which is to say stasis and motion, or permanence and change. The notion of art as occupying an existence somehow apart from and contrary to life is of course a fanciful one, and it finds its principal expression in Faulkner's early poem-sequence The Marble Faun. The sequence is about the yearning lament of a sculptured marble faun for the ever-shifting panorama of earth, whose identity, fixed by immutable laws, nonetheless remains constant:

. . . Away
To brilliant pines upon the sea
Where waves linger silkenly
Upon the shelving sand, and sedge
Rustling gray along the edge
Of dunes that rise against the sky
Where painted sea-gulls wheel and fly.

Ah, how all this calls to me
Who marble-bound must ever be
While turn unchangingly the years,
My heart is full, yet sheds no tears
To cool my burning carven eyes
Bent to the unchanging skies:
I would be sad with changing year,
Instead, a sad, bound prisoner,
For though about me seasons go
My heart knows only winter snow.[14]

The poem has perhaps little intrinsic worth, but it is instructive in that it should serve as a corrective to the view that Faulkner saw motion and attendant change as responsible only for the tragic nature of life.

Aside from this fanciful distinction, Faulkner's thinking on the matter appears to be that, whereas life is motion, man perceives and conceives in terms of stasis, which is but the illusion of motionlessness. Art becomes the closest thing possible to the realizing of an illusion, for it is life imitated, contained and refined, or "arrested," as Faulkner would have it, "by artificial means." The problem occurs when the same concepts of containment and refinement are applied to life itself rather than the imitation of it. Art conceived as art has Faulkner's blessing and admiration, but life conceived as art, as a romance by Walter Scott or Thomas Nelson Page, he seems to see as lying at the roots of man's tragic folly. And in this respect he is not far different from two writers whose influence he most certainly felt: Mark Twain and James Joyce.

Harnessed in the service of a storybook illusion, human ambition, courage, and energy result but in sound and fury, become but the posturings of a lunatic. Olga Vickery, quoting effectively from Sartoris, has explained the attempts of the antebellum founders to arrest life:

> Although they cannot escape their own involvement in time nor the doom which must ultimately overtake them, they can and do seek to impose their "designs" on the future by means of their descendants. Sutpen builds his plantation and establishes his dynasty to outlast time. Similarly, Sartoris bequeaths his name and his dream through his son Bayard to all succeeding generations. Both men's actions constitute a defiance of time's destructiveness through an attempt to match man's achievements against time. Though they cannot wrest a personal immortality from time, they can, they think, perpetuate themselves through their descendants. John Sartoris still continues to "stiffen and shape that which sprang from him into the fatal semblance of his dream." Time has changed both the appearance of the land and the customs of its people, but still the Sartorises, inevitably named after the first John and Bayard, continue to play the game of Sartoris, "a game outmoded and played with pawns shaped too late and to an old dead pattern." And Sutpen's descendants, whatever their personal feeling about him, affirm his design through their own actions even at the cost of their happiness and very lives.[15]

Although Faulkner uses motion of life advisedly, equating it with neither time nor, precisely, change, Vickery has well described Faulkner's view of what happens when man attempts to foster a static illusion upon reality, or the motion of life itself.

Art and the grand illusion of the antebellum founders are alike attributable to the fact that the human consciousness registers a static, exclusive image of a fluid, inclusive reality. This "fact" pretends to no particular validity in reference to epistemology or perceptual psychology; it is simply a way of explaining the artist's concern with the persistent

failure of the human consciousness to recognize its own limitations and reconcile itself to the finitude and other contingencies of human existence. The inability to reconcile static conceptions of self and the world with the constant motion of life results in human anguish and in the aspiration to create something grand and imperishable. When this aspiration becomes so obsessive that it causes one to violate the moral principles that guard the very survival and identity of his species, it has become madness.

It is man's capacity to perceive but fragmentarily, singly, and discontinuously the wholeness, multitudinousness, and continuity of life that leads to his positing apparent dualities, or perceptual dichotomies, such as freedom-bondage, good-evil, innocence-guild, and flesh-spirit. The duality is "apparent" because it is a condition not of reality but of man's perception of reality; it is abstract rather than experiential. The apparent duality gives rise to an apparent paradox: only by accepting the latter of the dual items can one achieve the former; in attempting to reject the latter one deprives himself of the former. The neat dichotomizing on the abstract level results in inversion on the experiential level: in attempting to assert one's freedom from the organic and moral ties that bind him to earth and his fellowman, one merely enslaves himself to an illusion; in dogmatically adhering to an abstractly conceived good, one merely perpetuates evil; in attempting to withdraw into innocence, one merely incurs greater guilt; in seeking to exhalt the spirit alone, one merely dehumanizes the flesh. Dichotomizing does not

alter the essential unity of things, it simply creates a world of illusory values, throwing one's conception of reality out of alignment with reality itself. One must realize instinctively or discover through a process of cognition the distinction between true and false values, which is as much as to say, between static images and the unity and continuity of life. Since this insight is a matter of the individual cognitive experience, the responsibility for sustaining the moral order, as Faulkner sees it, rests squarely and solely upon the individual conscience.

I might digress briefly here to point out that one should, however, be careful how he interprets Faulkner's emphasis on the individual conscience in respect to political matters. It would seem that in Faulkner's view, government begins with and has no meaning except in relation to the individual's acceptance of moral responsibility; devoid of this, social contract is a mockery: there is only the institutional tyranny of governmental, church, military, or commercial interests. But at the same time that he would consider it fallacious to assume that responsibility can be laid elsewhere than on the individual, he would no doubt consider it equally fallacious to assume that the individual conscience can be trusted to discern and resist all temptation to rationalize away part of its burden. For instance, as I shall mention later, that ubiquitous institution the jail is in Faulkner, as in Hawthorne, really an ambiguous symbol: it may stand for the inevitability of human error but also for the collective wisdom of man in establishing a means of dealing with it. The political and judicial systems are no more than systems; and when the individual conscience fails, they also fail, becoming

not a means of reinforcing the laws of the moral universe but of perpetrating tyranny and injustice.

The relation of motion and consciousness has important bearing upon Faulkner's much-discussed concept of time. Being motion, life is eternally now. Last year, yesterday, a minute ago exist only as images of the memory, and since consciousness resides in gradations of such images, the past is always contemporary. Faulkner's concept of time need not be either historical, natural, phychological, or mechanical. It is artistic: time is the ironic discrepancy between present image and present reality--between the legendary image of the Southern aristocrat and the foul reality of Hines or the tortured figure of a martyred god and that of a dying criminal. Time is the sadness of old age contemplating the image of its own youth. As Faulkner said to Jean Stein: " . . . my own theory [is] that time is a fluid condition which has no existence except in the momentary avatars of individual people. There is no such thing as <u>was</u>--only <u>is</u>. If <u>was</u> existed, there would be no grief or sorrow."[16] The grief and sorrow is the price of man's consciousness, which is the repository of time, but without it man would be a mere organism, responsing instinctively and reflexively to constant motion, and the beauty of both life and art would be lost to him.

The identifying of time with consciousness has significant technical implications. In expounding upon Faulkner's handling of time in relation to his artistic concern with arresting motion, Richard P. Adams has said:

> Intuitively, we are aware of time going on, and of temporal relations among events as they happen. But Faulkner often departs from a straight chronological presentation in his fiction, and, by a calculated scrambling of the time dimension, short-circuits our intuition so as to concentrate the energy of a large amount of motion on a single, artificially fixed and isolated moment. When it succeeds, this technique may have the effect of compressing a lifetime into a single event. The scrambling prevents our feeling time as a thin, straight string with events marked off at measured intervals; instead, we feel it as a heavy cluster, knot, or tangle, with all the ends lost in the middle. Motion is lost, or stopped, and time is held still for esthetic contemplation.17

Agreeing with Adams in the main, I would yet say that Faulkner's intention is to concentrate a large amount of consciousness, not "motion," on a particular instant, and I would expand the dimensions of consciousness from "a lifetime" to all time; for the aim is to make recognition as forceful and comprehensive as possible. Thus, we may see a dramatic incident in relation to different dimensions: not really according to a temporal but a cognitive frame of reference. We may see it in light of an ur-event (the abstract hamartia itself), an anthropological-mythological event, a Biblical event, an event from the Southern past, and possibly an event from the character's own past--or perhaps one should say, in light of the meaning that such events accrue. Any or all of these dimensions may be drawn upon at any given point to provide added insight into the significance of the experience at hand. The method, which apparently derives from Joyce, might be called one of typological refraction. It is not a matter of establishing different levels of meaning, as in allegory, but of enlarging the frame of reference for a given experience, allowing us to see it through such perspectives as the author considers relevant. The effect

may be to invest the experience with greater significance or to divest it of the significance it would pretend to have. The refractions of Icarus-Satan-Christ-St. Stephen in Chapter 5 of A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man either magnify or diminish the significance of Stephen Dedalus' decision, depending on whether one considers Stephen a valid interpreter of his own experience. Joe Christmas' death and multilation we are invited to view in relation to the bloody ritual of succession observed by the priesthood at Nemi; the martyrdom of the Son of God, unacknowledged and crucified by his fellow Jews; the disinheriting and emasculation of the sons of the Christian South; and in relation to previous incidents from Christmas' own past. Given the seriousness of death, we could not reasonably consider these perspectives as diminishing or undercutting the significance of this particular event. The ironies that such a method generates, however, are indeed difficult to control, as Wayne C. Booth has aptly pointed out in his Rhetoric of Fiction.[18] At best, the method clarifies meaning or at least renders it agreeably ambiguous; at worst, it gives us all something to argue about.

And although the method makes great demands upon the reader, entangling him in various perplexities, it forces him to participate in the process of cognition leading to insight, which constitutes the basic action of Faulkner's mimetic art.

NOTES

[1]My debt to other critics in this chapter is too deep and far-ranging to permit specific credits. I can no longer trace the metamorphosis through which certain ideas have gone nor determine whether a given similarity is a matter of influence or coincidence. Inevitably, a thought or a manner of phrasing may seem to echo a source familiar to the reader. I can only say that in any such instances my obligation is sincerely felt even if it is not specifically acknowledged, and I might say the same for the following chapters of this study.

[2]John L. Longley, Jr., Tragic Mask, see especially pp. 234-236. Although I have profited from Longley's discussion of certain characters' symbolizing various tragic aspects of the South, my own treatment and interpretation differs substantially from his.

[3]George Marion O'Donnell, "Faulkner's Mythology," Three Decades, eds. Hoffman and Vickery, pp. 82-93.

[4]E.g., Edmond L. Volpe has remarked: "Faulkner's own critical attitude toward the tradition needs emphasis because it refutes George Marion O'Donnell's still slavishly accepted thesis that Faulkner equated traditional morality with the Sartorises. Faulkner made no such simple equation. . . . It is clear in Faulkner's novels that the author was aware that the moral heritage the Sartorises transmitted to their heirs was a terrible and oppressive burden." A Reader's Guide to William Faulkner (New York: Noonday Press, 1964), p. 86.

[5]Faulkner in the University, p. 267. Faulkner's impromptu responses to questions in conferences and interviews are often and understandably erratic in syntax. Rather than sprinkle them with sic's, I will simply say here that I have made every effort to reproduce them exactly.

[6]Stein, "An Interview," p. 80.

[7]Faulkner in the University, pp. 133-134.

[8]Faulkner at Nagano, p. 104.

[9]Faulkner of course finally decided to make Temple Drake's moral ignorance remediable, and in an essay that discusses her growth in awareness, R. F. Haugh comments: "She moved to the moral universe of Requiem for a Nun by becoming aware of

immorality, and this gave her choice." See "Faulkner's Corrupted Temple," English Studies in Africa, IV (March 1961), 8. It is very important to realize, as some critics apparently have not, that recognition of the moral universe must precede choice.

[10]Faulkner at Nagano, pp. 186-187.

[11]Adams, Myth and Motion, pp. 3-4

[12]Karl E. Zink, "Flux and the Frozen Moment: The Imagery of Stasis in Faulkner's Prose," PMLA, LXXI (June 1956), 286-287.

[13]See especially Chapter I, "Motion and Immobility," of Walter J. Slatoff's Quest for Failure: A Study of William Faulkner (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1960), pp. 7-26. To trace many of Faulkner's remarks on art, truth, motion, etc., with relative ease, see Meriwether and Millgate's recent collection of interviews Lion in the Garden. Unlike other works devoted to Faulkner's public statements, including Meriwether's own Essays, Speeches, and Public Letters, it contains a good index, organized according to subject.

[14]William Faulkner, The Marble Faun and a Green Bough (New York: Random House, 1960), pp. 50-51. These works were first published in 1924 and 1933, respectively.

[15]Vickery, The Novels, p. 231.

[16]Stein, "An Interview," p. 82.

[17]Adams, Myth and Motion, p. 7.

[18]Wayne C. Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), see especially "Part III: Impersonal Narration."

CHAPTER III

A TECHNICAL FRAME OF REFERENCE

In the last chapter I presented a general frame of reference for Faulkner's work and the assumptions about art, life, and consciousness that seem to underlie it. In this chapter I will present a technical one for Light in August specifically, having to do with structure and symbolism in relation to the arrangement of the action, the imagery, and mythic and Biblical parallels. Essentially, Light in August exhibits the same technical characteristics as the bulk of Faulkner's fiction: a juxtapositional arrangement of more than one action or point of view or both, often occupying and almost always involving different levels of time; an emphasis on the symbolic, as opposed to the purely descriptive or atmospheric function of imagery; a use of mythic or quasi-historical parallels subtly alluded to through imagery and incident; and a construing of any given conflict and the entire work itself as metaphoric. Although the explication which follows this chapter will necessitate some repetition of its contents, I think it advantageous to precede the explication with a general analysis of the technical makeup of the novel.

It has been customary to regard Light in August as composed of a "triad of actions"[1] involving Lena Grove,

Joe Christmas, and Gail Hightower, and to see Lena and Joe as forming the basic thematic contrast of the novel. Although the general validity of this view seems evident, it nonetheless needs substantial qualification, for it presents an incomplete and somewhat inaccurate picture of the novel and may be taken as indicating a lesser degree of unity than the novel in fact possesses. The adjustments that appear necessary are these: 1) that one-third of the triad is represented by Byron Bunch rather than Lena Grove; 2) that the thirds do not receive equal emphasis, Joe Christmas being the central focus of the work; and 3) that the triad is counterpointed by the action involving Lena, which is entirely unlike it in kind but which does contribute essentially to the total effect of the novel.

If we consider the action of the novel as involving the process of cognition by which moral insight is achieved, then clearly it is to Byron rather than to Lena that something happens in the novel. Lena cannot be the center of a cognitive action, because she represents an intuitive or instinctive apprehension of man's mutual involvement in, or bondage to, the organic and moral process of life. She begins the novel with the insight Byron, Hightower, and Joe must achieve, the latter two tragically, though hers may be of a relatively limited, non-reflective variety. To be sure, Lena has her story, but this has to do with her being in space rather than time or consciousness. No more happens cognitively to her than happens to Lucas Burch, who is purely a creature of space and motion and who remains as instinctively unaware as she is aware of the mutual obligations that bind us. The difference

between what happens to her and what happens to Byron is aptly illustrated at the end of the novel. Byron's final comment is: "I done come too far now. . . . I be dog if I'm going to quit now" (443).[2] Hers is the often quoted one: "My, my, A body does get around. Here we aint been coming from Alabama but two months, and now it's already Tennessee" (444). When Byron refers to how far he has come, he distinctly does not mean in space. He is a man whose conception of himself and his relation to the world has completely altered in the month that he has known Lena. Lena's has altered not a whit, though her circumstances have.

With Byron rather than Lena considered as one of its principals, the triad begins to bear suspicious resemblance to what Faulkner has variously called, in specific reference to A Fable, that "trinity of conscience" or "trilogy of conscience."[3] As Faulkner explained to Jean Stein:

> Writers have always drawn, and always will draw, upon the allegories of moral consciousness, for the reason that the allegories are matchless--the three men in Moby Dick, who represent the trinity of conscience: knowing nothing, knowing but not caring, knowing and caring. The same trinity is represented in A Fable by the young Jewish pilot officer, who said, "This is terrible. I refuse to accept it, even if I must refuse life to do so"; the old French Quartermaster, who said, "This is terrible, but we can weep and bear it"; and the English battalion runner, who said, "This is terrible, I'm going to do something about it."[4]

The first response bears a striking resemblance to Joe's, the second to Hightower's, and the third to Byron's. Whether Joe has the chance to do otherwise or not, he very evidently does not accept the terms of life and does pursue a course of action leading to his destruction. Hightower, being acutely

aware of man's suffering yet lacking moral courage, withdraws from willful involvement. Byron attempts to do what he can by his own interpretation of what is rightful. Each of these characters is brought to a recognition of his true condition: Joe that his life has been a circle that he never got out of (though the exact nature and extent of his recognition is obscure) and Hightower that his immunity has been a rationalization, that he has been all along an agent of the very horror from which he sought to withdraw. Byron's case is different. Since Faulkner does not encumber him with a past, it is as if his meeting with Lena constitutes the first day of his life. Recognition for him continues to expand throughout the novel as he comes more and more to realize and accept the implications of his attachment ot her.

Although these three are the only characters in whom we may trace a process of cognition, the other characters also depict modes of consciousness. Lena Grove and Lucas Burch are central characters along with the three above and represent respectively an instinctive comprehension and a complete absence of comprehension of the moral universe. These five central characters are introduced in the first three chapters and figure in the action throughout the novel, except for the long flashback of Joe Christmas, which does take up nearly one-third of the novel. The other characters belong almost entirely to the life of Joe and reflect a variety of rationalized responses to the moral universe. The Hineses are of course brought into the lives of Hightower, Byron, and Lena, and their function in these is a key one, but their role in the

novel is defined by their relation to Joe. A cast of characters representing various modes of consciousness is certainly not new to Light in August. We find it especially in The Sound and the Fury but also in Soldier's Pay and As I Lay Dying and, to a less obvious extent, in Sartoris and Sanctuary. For instance, the vacuous, amoral creature of pure reflex is seen in Temple Drake as well as Lucas Burch.

To consider Byron as one-third of a triad of actions based on different responses to man's inhumanity and Joe as the main focus of the novel is not to deny Lena's great importance. She is the main character of the counter action, which also involves Byron and Lucas, and she continues to function thematically as a contrast, constant, and possibility. Her serene acceptance highlights the violent rejections and tortured evasions of the other characters. Her instinctive apprehension and unchanging consciousness become an index to the other characters' aberrations from the grounds of man's organic and moral existence. And she represents not so much a pattern as a possibility for recognition and acceptance of moral responsibility. In a sense, she is for Byron the chance taken, for Hightower the chance missed, and for Joe the chance never offered. She does not represent an alternative to the violent inhumanity of man; Byron Bunch represents the alternative. Nor does she represent an idyllic escape from that violence--as some have interpreted the ending of the novel; escape is demonstrated by Lucas Burch, who catches a freight train out of Jefferson. And she does not represent the kind of static

peace that Joe Christmas seeks and finds only in death. Although Faulkner does romanticize her in the folk humor tradition of the country gal and in the symbolist tradition of the maternal-fertility figure, she is not a primitivistic ideal toward which nostalgia or reform should direct itself. It is important to note that Byron's attachment to her leads him into rather than away from the trouble and turmoil of life. In loving Lena he comes to experience directly and subjectively the human anguish that he has previously known and responded to but sympathetically. And his own anguish, as well as that of mankind, does not remain behind him in Jefferson but accompanies him in the person of and, potentially, at the breast of the woman he loves.

The contrast between what for convenience sake one may call the world of Lena and that of Jefferson forms the main structural strategy of the novel. In relation to the rest of the work, Lena's adventure is like a knitting needle thrust through a large ball of yarn, carrying out on its point a single unravelled thread. The point and butt of the needle, apparent on either side of the ball, would be the first and last chapters. These really represent a prologue and epilogue, framing the work and standing outside the tight unity of place and time.[5] They contain the only present action that stands outside the time encompassed by the events of the ten day period, Saturday through Monday next, and the places of Jefferson, Mottstown, and immediate environs.* The action

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*See the chart describing the narrative structure, Appendix II.

proper begins in Chapter 2 with an external description of the leading character Joe Christmas and his coming to work at the mill in Jefferson. This chapter also introduces Byron Bunch, who serves as its narrative reflector, and Lucas Burch, or Joe Brown; it contains the first meeting of Byron and Lena, which takes place on Saturday, present time, and further reference to the fire at Joanna's. The third chapter introduces Hightower, giving the details of his early life in Jefferson and establishing the relationship between him and Byron Bunch. Chapter 4 brings Byron and Hightower together for the purpose of expositing, from an outside point of view, the details of the murder and also the continuing involvement of Byron in the life of Lena. The chapter ends with them in conversation on Sunday night. The first four chapters use present tense to describe present action. Chapter 5 switches to Joe Christmas on the previous Friday morning just after midnight and to the past tense. The focus then remains on Christmas and past action through Chapter 12. The past action which begins with Christmas on Friday morning is carried through to the striking of the clock Friday midnight. There is then a flashback, beginning with Chapter 6, to Joe's distantly remembered past at the orphanage. The past action continues through his experience there, then with McEachern, then on the road, then with Joanna in Jefferson for three years, extending beyond the point at which it began on Friday midnight, and ends with Joe's flight in the early hours of Saturday morning. The first part of Chapter 13, still in the past tense, shifts to the scene of Joanna's murder, where the marshall is beginning

the investigation later in the day. The latter part of the chapter returns us to Byron and Hightower and to the present tense. The Monday and Tuesday following their Sunday night conversation are skipped over with scant reference, and on Tuesday evening Byron is again entering Hightower's house for further consultation. Four days of the present action proper and most of the life of Joe Christmas have now been covered. Chapters 14-19 recount the flight, the capture, the circumstances of birth, and the death of Christmas and the continuing involvement of Byron in the life of Lena. The action concerning Christmas is described through various narrators and shifts between past and present, extending from Joe's disturbing the Negro church on Tuesday through his death on the following Monday. Chapter 20, Monday evening, covers Hightower's childhood and final vision. Chapter 21, standing like the first chapter outside the action proper, deals with Lena again on the road--three weeks after the birth of her baby and the death of Joe and one month after her arrival in Jefferson--this time with a man and baby in tow. The last four chapters are devoted to the resolution of the actions involving the five central characters, just as the first four are devoted to their initial exposition. In Chapter 18 Burch escapes; in 19 Christmas is killed; in 20 Hightower achieves recognition; and in 21 Lena is again on the move, and Byron is with her.

Although Joe Christmas is kept at a distance for the most part from just before the murder onward, he nonetheless remains the chief focus of attention throughout the bulk of the novel either directly or indirectly. Thus, it may seem

self-evident to some readers, however loosely constructed they consider the novel, that Joe is the central focus and that his story is what Light in August is "about"; but others are unconvinced. For instance, Richard P. Adams, a formidable critic of Faulkner whom I have previously cited, has recently taken the position that Lena Grove is the main character, considering Joe as "the most direct foil and the most obvious antithesis to Lena." According to Adams, "To assume that Christmas is the protagonist of Light in August, as critics have done, is to classify the story as a tragedy and to find, as many critics have found, that it is lacking in unity, faulty in structure, and full of irrelevancy."[6] Adams' case seems one of poor tactics resulting from a good but indiscreetly applied strategy. In any event, it becomes necessary to belabor the point that whereas there is more than one focal character, Joe is the most important and that whereas there is more than one action, his is the one on which the novel is based--his would remain significant without Lena's, but hers would lose all shape and significance without his.[7] Joe figures in many more chapters than any other character, having a major role in at least fifteen of the twenty-one. His story eventually involves all the other significant characters directly, with the exception of Lena. His life is presented in far greater detail than that of any other character. The action proper of the novel, occupying the ten days between the deaths of Joanna and Joe, is not just dominated but defined by his story. And it is in relation to him, giving the novel its depth and solidity, that there emerges Faulkner's preoccupation

with the South as a historical entity suffering the pain of its own self-deceit.

Although the following outline would seem to grant the Lena Grove action more independence and separate significance than it has, it should serve to clarify the structural scheme of the novel:

I. Temporal, or cognitive, main action

A. Independent action. Central character: Joe Christmas

1. Secondary episodes

1) Joe, the dietician, the young interne, et al., Hines

2) Joe, Bobbie Allen, her friends et al., McEachern and wife

2. Primary episode: Joe, Joanna, Grimm et al., Hightower; also Brown, Byron, and the Hineses

B. Dependent action. Central characters:

1. Hightower (achieves recognition through Byron's and Joe's agency)

2. Byron (achieves recognition through Lena's agency; is tangentially related to Joe)

II. Spatial, or physical, counter action. Central characters:

A. Lena Grove

B. Lucas Burch, or Joe Brown (his name in the main action)

C. Byron Bunch (Hightower functions in this action as a confidant to Byron, and the Hineses' role is tangential and purely thematic in relating this action to the main one.)

As the outline shows, there are five central characters, though these are not equal in importance. Three of them are each the focus of a process of cognition leading to a certain degree of recognition, Hightower's being the most extensive. Joe and Byron also experience an obvious change of circumstances.

It is significant that Hightower's physical circumstances do not change and that he alone of the central characters is left in Jefferson. The other two of the five, Lena and Burch, experience only a change of circumstances; the point of their being in the novel is that they do not experience a cognitive change--either through lack of need or lack of capacity. To call these five characters central is to say nothing about the vividness or profundity of their conception or their contribution to the final value of the novel. As the emphasis given their roles would indicate, Hines and Joanna--who represent Southern and Northern racist attitudes, or, more broadly, fallacious moral positions in respect to one's fellow-man--are of major importance in the novel. Considered as character and contribution Lucas Burch will of course not bear comparison with Joanna.

The I and II designations in the outline somewhat belie the real relation of the action. The novel is built around the story of Joe with that of Lena serving as a counterpoint and not a subordinate or parallel story, being different in kind and mode of action. The structure is more like Heywood's A Woman Killed with Kindness or Henry IV, Part I, than King Lear. In relation to Joe's story, the actions involving Hightower and Byron, which are to be distinguished in that Hightower's extends into the past and Byron's into the future, are subordinate and are alike in kind. Hightower's is also of the same mode, but Byron's is not. That is to say, all three actions, independent and dependent, are based on the process of cognition and are defined by the characters' achieving separate

recognitions; but whereas the consequence of Joe and Hightower's recognition is tragic, that of Byron is comic, in Dante's sense of the term. And Hightower is more nearly subsumed by and integrated into the Christmas action. As the last member of an old slave-holding family and as a former minister of God, Hightower is, from the moral standpoint, doubly implicated in the fate of Joe. Byron, who has no past and no status as a professional mediator would seem doubly absolved. Yet, ironically, it is he who assumes and Hightower who rejects the responsibility of mediating between the worlds of Joe and Lena.

Aside from their differing in kind and mode, the stories of Lena and Joe differ considerably, as has been frequently noted, in the technique of their presentation. The counter action is quite conventional, being presented in a straightforward, chronological manner, without flashbacks or subordinate plots. It consists of a small number of characters and has no real involvement with the past, either of the characters themselves or of the society of which they are a part. It is not superficial but certainly of the surface, having the simple, timeless quality of a folk tale and illustrating, with its struggle between the sexes, a folksy bit of pseudo-wisdom. If it stood alone and were recounted in its entirety by a narrator such as the furniture dealer of the last chapter, it would be no more than that. But it does not stand alone, and the seriousness of Burch's involvement in the fate of Joe Christmas, the sober learning experience undergone by Byron, and the thematic value given Lena keep it of a piece with the main action.

Only the first and last chapters of the novel, which function as prologue and epilogue, convey a distinct folk humor tone.

The main action, on the other hand, is quite differently presented. It is episodic and convoluted, working back and forth in time and consisting of flashbacks and subordinate actions. It contains a relatively large number of characters and is intrinsically involved with the past, both with the characters' individual lives and the historical development of the society of which they are a part. For instance, we first see Joe Christmas through Byron's eyes when he first comes to Jefferson three years before the present action of the novel; we next see him, very indirectly, as Byron recounts the details of the fire and murder to Hightower; the omniscient narrator then takes over, with the focus on Joe alone on the day before the murder; at the striking of midnight on that same day, there is a flashback to Joe's childhood, about thirty years before he came to Jefferson; we then follow the episodes of his life chronologically up to his fleeing the house of Joanna early Saturday morning, present time; we next see him through the narration of a Negro messenger, disturbing the Negro church on Tuesday night; the omniscient narrator then shifts abruptly and briefly to the consciousness of Joe at the scene of the disturbance: further on in the same chapter we encounter Joe immediately and in the present tense on Friday morning, the day of his capture in Mottstown; the narration shifts briefly back to the days that he has been fleeing like a harassed animal and then reverts to the present, leaving Joe just as he is about to enter the town; in the following

chapter, Chapter 15, we are given the details of his capture through Faulkner's voice of the community: in Chapter 16 there is another flashback, through the Hineses' narration, to the circumstances of Joe's birth and his being placed in the orphanage; we then learn he has been killed and in Chapter 19 get the details of his escape and execution, part of these being supplied through the narration of Gavin Stevens. As B. R. McElderry, Jr., has pointed out, the action thus moves on three levels of time: the present; the immediate past, consisting of Joe's three years in Jefferson: and the remote past, consisting of the early life of Hightower, Joe, and Joanna.[8] To McElderry's divisions there should be added the recalled past of the Civil War and immediately after, which Hightower and Joanna are very much aware of, though they did not live through it. But, again, we are not here dealing with levels of time as such. Faulkner's convoluted structure represents a deliberate effort to present the past as a viable element of the character's present consciousness and responses, though, to be sure, the character may not be aware of the causations at work.

Faulkner is, however, concerned with the dramatic rather than the philosophical implications of destroying chronology; he tells a story chronologically when he thinks that way the most effective. The convoluted method of construction is one that Karl Zink has said is characterized by "accretion," or "a circular movement forward" and "flashback," or "long excursions into the past or into tangential present areas"; one that Joseph Frank has labelled "spatial form"; and one that Faulkner has said is "a good deal like dressing a

showcase window."[9] As Faulkner points out: "It takes a certain amount of judgment and taste to arrange the different pieces in the most effective place in juxtaposition to one another."[10] The end desired is an arrangement that will produce the most concentrated and comprehensive insight on the part of the reader. Joe's story is actually a terrible Bildungsroman, but the chronological method usually employed in this genre would for Faulkner dissipate the dramatic energy he wishes to concentrate on climactic points of recognition. Again, he is dealing with an Oedipus who shrugs and who is as immune to conventional stimulants as Eliot's etherized patient. Thus, we have Joe's violent death and mutilation immediately preceded by the details of his birth, from which we learn the shocking fact that his own grandfather took an active part in precipitating the misfortunes of his desperate life. In a similar, though not so dramatic, fashion we learn of the influence of grandfathers on the lives of Joanna and Hightower. The effect desired is perhaps more particular to drama and the short story than to the novel, which lacks the brevity that permits concentrated attention and the reinforcement that spectacle, or visual rendition, supplies. Consequently, a single reading of the novel seldom suffices. The technique is not peculiar to Faulkner, of course, though his employment of it seems unique.

The main and counter actions are literally more integrated than one might first suppose, as Malcolm Cowley discovered when he tried to excerpt a portion of the novel to include in his Portable Faulkner.[11] The mutual involvement is mainly

attributable to the overlapping roles of Byron and Burch. Lena's story surrounds Hightower's, touching it only once: in birth; and Hightower's surrounds Christmas', touching it only once: in death. In effect, Hightower stands as a barrier between the worlds of Joe and Lena; Byron functions as a mediator between them; and Burch is an evil agent in both, more in the sense of his being irresponsible and dishonorable than consciously villainous.

But the technical question of whether Faulkner has succeeded in sufficiently unifying the main action and the counter action is one I hope to consider later. Certainly, my explication of their relation, though meant to be descriptive, necessarily indicates a certain measure of success. Perhaps just as certainly, the relation is one that permits a great deal of ingenious speculation.

Imagery

Since the imagery of Light in August is basically similar to that of the bulk of Faulkner's work, a thorough study of it would quite exceed the scope and intentions of this project. Nevertheless, the imagery does contribute significantly to the total design, and no analysis of the novel could be complete without some discussion of how it functions. Such a discussion is made difficult of course by the very flexibility of the term imagery, which seems to expand or contract as circumstances demand; by the variety of approaches that can be taken to the subject; and by the fact that no single detail in Faulkner's works is likely to be purely descriptive but almost always

carries symbolic overtones. Faulkner is a very apt pupil of the modern school of novelists that has sought to fuse form, idea, and action, and the result is a density of texture in his work that makes analysis a most painstaking process: the microcosm consistently reflects the macrocosm of his artistic vision.

Richard Chase has called the texture of Faulkner's work "a poetry of physics,"[12] and indeed one might divide his imagery into that of physical phenomena, having to do with velocity, mass, geometric pattern, reflection, refraction, etc., and that of perceptual phenomena, or sensation, which we construe in such polarities as wet-dry, hot-cold, etc. Especially Faulkner's white male characters tend to make dichotomized associations of these polarities. On the one hand, they associate consciously or unconsciously: stillness, curvature, softness, warmth, darkness, indirectness, ambiguity, femininity, Negro, bondage, death; and on the other: movement, linearity, hardness, coolness, dryness, light, directness, clarity, masculinity, white, freedom, life. Thus, in Light in August when physical conflict is imminent, the feeling of the characters involved is rendered impressionistically as a cool wind. When Joe fights with the other boys over the Negro girl, " . . . it was as if a wind had blown among them, hard and clean" (137). And when Byron prepares to fight Burch, "then a cold, hard wind seems to blow through him" (373). The idea of coolness and movement is associated with the freedom from normal restraint involved in physical combat, which the male sees as a direct, uncompromising way of settling difficulties.

As Joe walks through Freedman Town on the night of Joanna's murder: "On all sides, even within him, the bodiless fecundmellow voices of Negro women murmured. It was as though he and all other manshaped life about him had returned to the lightless hot wet primogenitive Female." And he runs till he reaches "the cold hard air of white people" (100). Such yin-yang associations are of course pervasive in literature and life, and are often used by authors to reflect a character's inability to reconcile a polarized conception of life. They are as common to Ahab, Lord Jim, or Stephen Dedalus as to Joe Christmas. But one should not confuse Faulkner's own world view, as some critics apparently have, with that of his characters, which he may convey impressionistically through imagery. Faulkner was quite as aware as Melville that the inability to reconcile such polarities is a problem not of reality but of man's consciousness of it, that only in rare, peaceful moments is one able to see the sea and the sky interpenetrate on the horizon. And, again like Melville, Faulkner saw that man's inability to reconcile the polarities is inevitable, irremediable, and often tragic. But although having to grant the Ahabs, Sutpens, and even Christmases, the heroic nature of their struggle, he would direct man's aspiration toward those values which compensate for the anguish of conciousness and would prefer the heroes of life, Ishmael and Byron, over those of romance.

Other imagery in Light in August worth attention is the martial, the chivalric, and that of flight and pursuit. But since Faulkner's imagery does embrace such a wide range of

possibilities, I would like to limit my discussion of it hereafter to Faulkner's emphasis on the basic necessities of life: clothing, food, and shelter--or, more specifically, houses. Whether these constitute imagery or merely a source of it concerns me less than the fact that Faulkner attaches a great deal of significance to them. With clothing, or dress, are associated concepts of identity; with food, concepts of acceptance and rejection; and with houses, concepts of confinement, alienation, and aspiration.

Clothing.--Since a good deal about a person, society, or occasion is conveyed by manner of dress, one takes it for granted as a common descriptive and symbolic device of fiction. Faulkner uses it conventionally to characterize individuals and their society and to delineate personal and social relationships. If there is anything unique in his treatment of it, this lies in his acute sensitivity to dress not just as a matter of appearance but as one of the basic human needs that involves us intimately with one another. For example, in Intruder in the Dust, when Charles Mallison is wrapped in the rough quilt that smells of Negro, after being rescued from an icy creek, the act of clothing him in his need places upon him a human obligation quite as much as does the food he is given: it is not the clothing nor the food but the sacred act of sharing that constitutes an obligation money cannot repay--as it can repay the disinterested services of the professional humanitarian Gavin Stephens. And at the end of the novel, Lucas Beauchamp counts him out his fee in pennies, then waits for his receipt.

In characterizing individuals, Faulkner uses dress conventionally to convey a particular image, that usually suggests something about character. Although Faulkner rarely presents a detailed description of a character, he does render a distinct impression: we are made extraordinarily aware of the stale, dishevelled appearance of Hightower, which reflects his moral laxity; of the filthiness of Hines, which makes an ironic comment on his doctrine of racial purity; and of Joanna's plain, clean calico dresses, which both indicate the severity of her daytime role and accentuate her naked abandon at night.

Faulkner's close attention to the dress habits of his Yoknapatawpha County helps to convey the solid sense of reality that is notable in his works. We find the workmen on Saturday afternoons, "all down town in their Sunday clothes and neckties, in that terrific and aimless and restive idleness of men who labor" (41). And they return on Monday mornings "quietly and soberly to work, in clean overalls and clean shirts, waiting quietly until the whistle. . . ." (36) The collarless shirts of the farmers, the hard city clothes of the Memphis vice purveyers, the "always loose and unpressed gray" of the district attorney, the Negro shoes that look "like they had been chopped out of iron ore with a dull axe," the uniform of Percy Grimm, worn with "an air half belligerent and half the self-conscious pride of a boy," convey to us the image of Yoknapatawpha. There is no great amount of attention to descriptive detail or concern for more than general accuracy toward the conventions of that time and place, but the image remains impressively real if not documentary. The image conveys

the impression that this is a certain kind of society, one in which codes of dress are not elaborate but are strictly observed, in which there is a sharp distinction among kinds of work done, as well as by whom, and between work and leisure-time activities. The hat along with a white shirt and tie are the dress of the white man when he is officially not working, if he is a laborer, and signify his freedom and his equality with all white men of any occupation and his superiority to men of darker skin. It is a society that is as delighted and awed by a uniform as by a title: it insists on the principles of equality and natural rights yet gives its love and allegiance to distinction and privilege. It is a society that looks upon the bondage which daily labor represents with a respect akin to reverence, submitting, black and white alike, to the identical harness of overalls, yet that beguiles itself in its off-hours with inflated notions of freedom. It may be no more than generally like any society that ever was, but it is a remarkably human one.

In addition to using dress habits to present a static image, reflecting a type of person or society, Faulkner uses incidents involving clothing to delineate character attitudes and relationships. When Joe does not polish McEachern's shoes properly, he is whipped while dressed only in his shirt and made to polish them again (129); when he will not learn his catechism, he is made to lower his pants and is again whipped (131). The intimate association of a person with his garments makes having to care for another's or being deprived of one's own a keenly felt abasement of one's dignity. The kind of

chore and the circumstances of punishment that Joe endures define the relationship that McEachern would enforce as one between uncompromising omniscience and servile obedience. Joe's fierce rejection of Mrs. McEachern's attempts to assume the same servile role that McEachern tries to exact of him is demonstrated in his resistance to her dressing or undressing him (145) or even to her mending his clothes (93). On the day before Joanna's murder, when he apparently undertakes a ritualistic rejection of his former identity, one of his first symbolic acts is to divest himself of his undergarment and stand defiantly naked in the headlights of an approaching car (93-94). Suggestive of his new identity, apparently accepted as well as thrust upon him, is his donning of the Negro shoes during his flight (289, 297). In fact, the repeated references to shoes in this novel become rather perplexing in that they are numerous enough to call attention to themselves yet seem to evince no particular design. Since shoes are very personal articles and highly evocative as images, the number of references to them may of course be quite accidental.

Some critics have seen a more arbitrary kind of symbolism related to the characters' dress. The removal of Joe's shoes and socks and washing of his feet (145) when he arrives at McEachern's has of course been considered a parallel with the Christ story. The faded blue that Lena wears has been identified as the color of the Virgin Mary. Such associations seem not entirely inappropriate but are in themselves too limited to be very meaningful. Joe's common attire of black and white has been variously noted and made representative

of everything from his supposed mixed blood to a Manichean conception of creation. Again, the attire seems not inappropriate to Joe's persistent attempts to dichotomize experience, but it signifies little in itself. One must also observe that the white shirt and dark trousers is the common attire of other laborers on weekends and evenings in town; Joe's dress thus betokens his identification with the white community and his compliance with its values. He dons overalls like everyone else to work at the mill, at least as soon as he can afford them (30). In fact, it is his observance of this social amenity that sharply distinguishes his alienation from that of Lucas Burch, or Joe Brown. Burch's nonchalant habits of dress reflect his lack of reverence for the commonly shared responsibilities of life. To his fellow workers, who come to work clean and quiet on Mondays, Burch is a gross anomaly:

> That is what they had always remarked about Brown. On Monday morning as likely as not he would appear in the same soiled clothes of last week, and with a black stubble that had known no razor. And he would be more noisy than ever, shouting and playing the pranks of a child of ten. To the sober others it did not look right. To them it was as though he had arrived naked, or drunk" (36).

Food.--Food imagery in Light in August functions much in the same way as that of clothing, but is even richer in implication. Though the statement may sound ludicrous, it would be difficult to find a modern author who attaches more significance to food and eating than Faulkner--unless it would be Joyce, who extends his attention to the digestive and excretionary processes, whereas Faulkner's ceases with swallowing (and this flippant distinction points to a basic difference in the tone of the two writers). In Faulkner the obtaining,

preparing, and sharing of one's daily bread are consecrated activities, which serve as indices to the moral stance of an individual or society. Of course Faulkner could hardly invest these activities with more significance than they already have in our daily life; nothing is literally more important than food, and the rituals surrounding it are, and always have been, symbolic of the total moral and spiritual commitment of a culture. In using one kind of sustenance to suggest another Faulkner is not making an arbitrary correspondence so much as describing one that already exists, in such a way as to draw attention to that commitment. So long as one recognizes that eating is not simply stage business but carries the same kind of significance in Faulkner's fiction that it often does in life, he is not likely to err greatly in interpreting its function--even if he should miss Faulkner's underscoring of its significance through allusions to Christian scripture and the vegetation myths.

Although food imagery in Light in August has received a good deal of attention, especially in relation to Joe Christmas, it seems to play a more pervasive and profound role throughout Faulkner's fiction than has generally been noted. One recalls such varied comment as that made by the dinner scene in Sanctuary, when Benbow is revolted by the blind man's eating; the bickering that goes on around the Compson table, as well as Quentin's misconstrued generosity in buying ice cream for the little girl; the meal Carothers Edmonds must eat alone in "The Fire and the Hearth," once having asserted his white man's prerogative among his Negro relatives; or the rapacious and

indiscriminate appetites of the half-Apache Snopes children in The Town. In Light in August alone I count some forty descriptions of food or eating, without noting indirect references.

Basically, the function of the food imagery can be understood by examining any conditions that might be imposed on the sharing of food and the character's reaction to those conditions. Lena's illicit pregnancy may be frowned upon, but she is offered food and shelter unconditionally; in the same way, she will accept unconditionally the nourishing and care of her child. And when she herself purchases food she observes the time-honored custom of offering to share it with her fellow traveler (25). Hines apparently survives on the food brought him by Negroes, whose generosity in supplying it is as unconditional as that shown Lena. Hightower shares his meals with no one, preparing and eating his food alone. The neighbor women's concern is that he "seemed to eat like an animal" (56), and he is described as "lonely in his lonely and illkept kitchen, holding in his hand an iron skillet in which yesterday's old grease is bleakly caked" (354). His eating habits, like his appearance, illustrate his moral alienation and stagnation. After Hightower has suffered all the ignominy the community cares to bestow on him, he is offered a not unconditional fellowship in the form of food: " . . . after a while the neighbors began to send him dishes again, though they were the sort of dishes which they would have sent to a poor mill family. But it was food, and wellmeant" (63). It is a matter of the greatest irony that Hightower sets up as

his spiritual hero a starving man who, in the madness of war, destroys huge stores and is then killed foraging for something to eat. To Hightower, who perceives the irony differently, it is a triumph of the spirit over the flesh; to Faulkner it is madness. And the destruction of stores yields further irony in that "when he [Hightower] was born his father was fifty years old, and his mother had been an invalid for almost twenty years. He grew up to believe that this was the result of the food which she had had to subsist on during the last year of the Civil War" (409).

In relation to Joe Christmas the food imagery becomes very complex, largely because of the double irony often at work, since he lives in an inverted world. His conscious life practically begins with the deceptive attractiveness of a sweet non-food and ends in a kitchen behind the table of a man who has abjured all forms of sharing. The toothpaste incident of course becomes a pattern for his life. He will continue to set a premium on deceptive false values and to consider them as forbidden fruits which he must take by stealth. The misery or punishment that seems to accompany them he accepts as a measure of their worth. But Joe is born into a wasteland, in which all fruits are blighted; worse than valueless, they induce sickness. Joe sees himself as a Satan figure, rebelling against the order, but since there is no order, only disorder or anti-order, Joe becomes an anti-Satan. Joe refuses to accept a world that would deny him a share of its treasures, but does not know that its treasures are accursed: neither the toothpaste nor Bobbie Allen is as sweetly innocent as would

appear.

Joe, who never in his life sits down to a normal, domestic meal, always finds that which is proffered him to have conditions attached. Upon arriving home with him, McEachern tells the child Joe: "You will find food and shelter and the care of Christian people. . . . And the work within your strength that will keep you out of mischief" (126). Mrs. McEachern brings him food surreptitiously, and Joanna leaves it for him on the kitchen table. The proffering in none of these cases is in the interest of sharing but is intended to impose a duty or define a hierarchical relationship. Joe's rejection of conditions is indiscriminate, however, as is illustrated by his rejection of Byron's offer to share his lunch (30). The only condition here is that they look upon each other as fellow humans. Joe's last days see an ironic reversal of the rejection motif that equates food with human fellowship. Remembering his having been fed in a Negro cabin, Joe thinks: "And they were afraid. Of their brother afraid" (293). In the fields during his flight, "he would make himself eat of the rotten fruit, the hard corn . . . with resultant crises of bleeding flux" (292). (The peristalsis perhaps represents an inversion of his prior vomitings.) Now that he is ready to accept what the earth can truly offer him, he finds himself an alien being.

Food is of course associated with sex in Joe's story, the sweet-smelling garments of the dietician and her sweet-tasting toothpaste being alike indicative of something made artificially palatable. One notes that Bobbie Allen and Joanna Burden are

also associated with food and that his experience with both begins with his partaking of something sweet. Sex is one of the basic needs, like clothes, food, and shelter, but simply has more powerful dramatic and metaphoric possibilities. It represents not only the most intimate form of sharing but is an activity in which sharing is obviously a sine qua non. More than any other ritual its enactment reflects the unity and continuity of the organic and the moral universe. And, generally, unlike the other needs, it may itself constitute a center of conflict. But to regard the sexual conflict in Faulkner's works as constituting in itself the meaning of that conflict would be to mistake completely Faulkner's oblique methods. When "symbolism" is combined with such forceful realism, the likely result is that the empirical fact continually threatens the implied metaphoric one. The same is true of the racial problem, the rise of Snopesism, the destruction of nature, etc. The reader must be aware and on guard. As we shall see later, food and sex become symbolically fused under the aegis of Freud and the mythic fertility goddess.

The texture of Light in August, like most of Faulkner's fiction, is so imbued with the Southern experience that the descriptive and the emblematic become inextricable. A casual, descriptive detail, seeming to provide no more than a kind of humorous verisimilitude, may yet reflect the underlying tragic absurdity and sickness of a whole society. For instance, in Sartoris, when young Bayard is out on a spree, he is smitten with drunken camaraderie and wishes to share his whiskey with the Negro musicians accompanying him; since he has no extra

container and since Negroes may not drink from the same bottle as white men, the social law is ingeniously upheld and fellowship still paid homage by having the Negroes drink from the radiator cap of his car. In Faulkner's South, Negroes do not eat the same kind of food, wear the same kind of clothes, live in the same kind of houses, nor share the same sexual privileges as white men. They may labor in the fields and kitchens to obtain and prepare the white man's food, but they may not partake of it--except as leftovers, use the same utensils, eat at the same table, or, in strict form, eat in the same presence. To Faulkner this discrimination represented not simply social inequity but so deep a violation of basic human values as to preclude the survival of any civilization that should institute it. The fictional world, however general, of course draws its plausibility from the real one, but Faulkner was not interested, as an artist, in social reform; rather, he was concerned with revelation, with holding up the mirror for man to see what he has done to himself. And the South is simply a cardinal example of his madness. Although cryptic beyond explication, the little Negro boy's song that Joe hears on his arrival in Jefferson seems beautifully suggestive of the complex, contradictory relation between the so-called races as manifested in food and sex taboos; it combines in garbled form the frantic problems of fixing identity and reconciling denial and desire; it also illustrates perhaps the confusion of man's wits that follows upon his pitting them against the natural scheme of things:

Say dont didn't.
Didn't dont who.
Want dat valler gal's
Pudden dont hide. (199)

Houses.--The house is one of the most highly charged and complex images in Faulkner, as well as in all literature. Like the forest, of which it is the obverse, it may reflect quite contradictory values, representing both a shelter synonymous with human need and a monument synonymous with human desire and aspiration. In Faulkner it may function as symbol, metaphor, and allusion. Archetypally, the house may represent either alienation and exclusiveness or security and shared commitment, oppositions often reflected in the prideful castle and the humble cottage. Sociologically or historically, these types may find their embodiment in structures that become fixed symbols of a specific time or region. Perhaps more than anything else, the plantation mansion and the Negro shack are the symbols of Southern civilization, indicating a goal aspired to and the price paid for it: the grandeur, such as it was, and the shame, such as it remains. Together they represent the institutionalized inhumanity of slavery, and they stand always in the background, if not the foreground, of Faulkner's fiction, the one gaunt and decaying, alive only to memory, the other ramshackle but still thriving. Houses such as the jail, courthouse, and church, also omnipresent in Faulkner, are the physical manifestations of less particular institutions. The meaning of these, however, unlike that of the mansion and Negro shack, is finally ambiguous. Neither the courthouse nor the jail, for instance, carry the single implication that chancery or Newgate carry in Dickens.

Metaphorically speaking, the house of Hightower, almost covered by shrubbery and with its stone sign out front, is a grave, in which Hightower has entombed his moral vitality. Joe Christmas' forcing his way into the house to die is a figurative breaching of the barriers that Hightower has erected around his moral sensibility. In a psychoanalytic sense, this same scene may be taken as a symbolic enactment of the lie that Byron Bunch had encouraged Hightower to tell--that Joe was with Hightower on the night of Joanna Burden's murder. Hightower's evoking the spirit of his grandfather at the moment of his grandfather's death is a form of fantasy homosexuality, on the unconscious level, and constitutes autoeroticism. Joe's death in Hightower's own house, however, constitutes an actual and horrible intercourse with the reality itself, which Hightower has so assiduously avoided. Now, since sex, as referable to Freudian constructs or the fertility myths, is finally a metaphor for man's moral or spiritual condition, just as it is in T. S. Eliot, one is thus faced with the kind of doubling or fusing of symbolic and metaphoric implications that puts literary terminology at something of a disadvantage. The sex metaphor is also working in another of Faulkner's ubiquitous houses, the brothel. And metaphor may combine with allusion, for instance, in the often mentioned stables. Joe's sleeping in a stable on the night before the murder represents a kind of lower scale incarnation or transvaluation--the supposedly human become animalistic--and it also alludes to the Biblical stable, in which the divine became human. Al allusion to an established metaphor may be evident in such names as Temple Drake--which recalls the

Biblical admonition that the body is the temple of the spirit and is to be kept holy.

Houses may provide a thematic focus or structural principle for an entire world. In Sanctuary we find a progression from the ruined mansion to the brothel to the courthouse; in Requiem for a Nun, from the first jail to modern Jefferson; in the Snopes trilogy, from a sharecropper's shack to a mansion; in The Reivers, from the innocent stable to the Memphis brothel; and in Absalom, Absalom, we see the Sutpen mansion in all its phases--from raw earth to ashes.

Generally speaking, the house represents literally man's alienation from external nature and metaphorically his alienation from his own nature. The house as opposed to the forest, or external nature, may be expressive of the dichotomy and inversion principle that is central to Faulkner's concept of reality as well as his fictional technique. The house is an artificial edifice erected from the materials of earth in the interest of man's frailty and fear. As opposed to the organic continuity of the forest, it is from the beginning a static object doomed to decay or conflagration. It is the symbol of civilization, its walls emblematic of man's alienation from natural processes and his will to overcome their sway. But the dichotomizing of man's world and the natural world is of course an illusion, such as an ant might entertain if he had the capacity, and leads in reality to inversion. The house comes to wall in rather than wall out fear and frailty. It becomes a means not of freeing man from the terrors of the forest but of closing him up with his own.

Nature is for Faulkner, as for Shakespeare, Hawthorne, Melville, Conrad, or the Bible, a conscious metaphor; the obverse

of the house, it also represents the externalization of man's moral condition and may have positive or negative implications. When Faulkner points to what we have done to nature, he is pointing to what we have done to ourselves. The life principle that remains constant in nature, whatever the circumstances, becomes synomymous with man's moral sensibility: it may be abused, degraded, and despoiled but may not be destroyed and always admits the possibility of restoration. In Faulkner's last novel The Reivers we see his old equation at work: woman=life principle=moral sensibility. The prostitute Everbe Corinthia (will always be a maiden) is redeemed from the degradation of the brothel by the homage of the American boy Lucius Priest--a variant of Frazer's priest-king and consort of the fertility goddess--who loses his innocence but not his faith in his encounter with human corruption. What Lucius recognizes in Everbe is of course what Byron recognizes and does homage to in Lena. And what both do for their goddess-charges is what Ike McCaslin refuses to do for the land he inherits.

An encounter with nature in the raw may indicate either a pleasant or a stormy reunion with the grounds or elemental springs of man's moral being that leads to a revival of moral order, as in As You Like It or King Lear. But nature, particularly as wilderness, may also be an externalization of man's inner nature as untamed by moral law, as blinded to it, or as expelled from its grace. The forest of Hawthorne's Scarlet Letter, the woods in the first canto of The Divine Comedy, and the Biblical wilderness offer respective examples. A case could be made for this negative implication of nature in

Joe Christmas' flight after the murder. There is a progression in his last days from human shelter: the Negro hut which he shares with Brown; to a shelter for domestic animals: the stable he sleeps in the night before the murder; to the shelterless abode of wild animals: the woods and fields in which he lives for a week. We may see him as finding his way out of this figurative moral wilderness, or jungle, through divine intervention--the "strange thing" that "came into his mind" on the night before he surrenders (293) --and so making his way toward Mottstown and a terrible redemption. Or we may see him as confronting, in nature, the basic processes of the moral universe and thus coming to recognition, as does Lear. In either case, rebirth is indicated through a return to a more elemental existence, and in either case, I think we have to admit a divine intervention in Joe's process of cognition. Nature conceived as metaphoric of a moral wilderness on the secular level has been considered at work in Requiem for a Nun. Robert F. Haugh sees the individual development of Temple Drake from moral ignorance to recognition as paralleled by the political development of Yoknapatawpha from a wilderness to a legally constituted entity which partakes of, or receives its identity from, The United States as a whole. As Haugh expresses it: "From wilderness to a federal republic in the name of consent and obedience to the rule of the law in a social contract; from the wilderness of degeneracy to individual moral responsibility--such is the interplay of Faulkner's ideas in political and private morality."[13]

But whether used in a positive or negative metaphoric sense, nature never has for Faulkner the horror that Conrad or Melville may lend it. His sentimentality seems obvious. Perhaps like most other modern American writers, he could not really take nature for granted, because he was too conscious of the change wrought on it. And in such works as "The Bear" that empirical fact may seem to threaten the metaphoric one. At least, it may for American readers with a romantic heritage, to whom childhood and unspoiled rusticity or wilderness are synonymously representative of a pagan splendor lost. Probably Faulkner's most consistent use of nature as the obverse of the house is, however, expressed in Lena Grove as opposed to Hightower.

In further and more specifically examining the house image in Light in August, we must be careful to distinguish between its meaning as shelter and as monument. Insofar as it fulfills an unpretentious function as a refuge from an inclement environment, a place for carrying on domestic processes, and a center of love and fellowship, it remains one of the consecrated human needs, like clothing, food, and sex. Just such a shelter is represented by the cottage of Lucas and Molly Beauchamp in "The Fire and the Hearth" of Go Down, Moses. But when the house is conceived as a monument to a grand aspiration that must be achieved at any cost, it inverts in reality the function of the shelter, walling in horrors unknown to the forest, as well as placing a blight on domestic processes and a curse on love and fellowship. The distinction between the two meanings is aptly illustrated in King Lear: in a wretched hovel amid

the good will and fellowship of a wise fool and a sane man pretending insanity, the maddened king fumbles toward a truth denied him among sycophants in courts and castles. The madness of Lear, like the blindness of Oedipus, is of course an externalization of his previous condition, his illusory rationality, indicating that the impairment can now be recognized. Unfortunately, the South clings to its courts and castles, unable to recognize itself as it is. In both Absalom, Absalom and Light in August, Faulkner focuses on the ironic juxtaposition of the decaying monument and the wretched shelter beside it: the one, a setting for misery and death, is destroyed; the other remains, harboring such life, fellowship, good will, and hope as survives and endures.

In view of the significance of houses throughout Faulkner's fiction it is not surprising that Light in August was apparently first given the title of Dark House.[14] The applicability of the title is quite convincingly borne out in the imagery, which abounds in houses described as dark. Hightower's house is depicted as "brown, unpainted and unobtrusive . . . almost hidden save for that gap through which from the study window he watches the street. So hidden it is that the light from the corner street lamp scarcely touches it" (49). Later it is described as a "dead and empty small house" (271). Noting Hightower's name and the kind of pun Faulkner has employed in Sanctuary, one might legitimately find a resemblance in his appearance and that of a ruined mansion. Take, for instance, this picture of him:

> He is in his shirt sleeves, tall, with thin blackclad legs and spare, gaunt arms and shoulders, and with that flabby and obese stomach like some monstrous pregnancy. The shirt is white, but it is not fresh; his collar is soiled, as is the white lawn cravat carelessly knotted, and he has not shaved for two or three days. His panama hat is soiled, and beneath it, between hat and skull against the heat, the edge and corners of a soiled handkerchief protrude. He has been to town to do his semiweekly marketing, where, gaunt, misshapen, with his gray stubble and his dark spectacleblurred eyes and his blackrimmed hands and the rank manodor of his sedentary and unwashed flesh, he entered the one odorous and cluttered store which he patronized and paid with cash for what he bought. (269)

Joanna's place is "an old colonial plantation house" (31). "It was a big house set in a grove of trees; obviously a place of some pretensions at one time. But now the trees needed pruning and the house had not been painted in years" (197-198). It is frequently described as dark: " . . . the house was dark and hidden in its shaggy grove" (103). In growing realization, Hightower sees the "churches of the world" as "endless, without order, empty, symbolical, bleak, skypointed not with ecstasy or passion but in adjuration, threat, and doom . . . like one of those barricades of the middleages planted with dead and sharpened stakes, against truth and against that peace in which to sin and be forgiven which is the life of man" (426-427). The orphanage (perhaps supported by the churches) in which Joe spends his first years is "a big long garbled cold echoing building of dark red brick soot-bleakened by more chimneys than its own, set in a grassless cinderstrewn-packed compound surrounded by smoking factory purlieus and enclosed by a ten foot steel-and-wire fence. . . ." (104)

Joe Christmas' life is little more than a series of violent encounters in a series of enclosures: in the dietician's

closet; in McEachern's woodshed, where he is beaten for not learning his catechism; in a barn, fighting over a Negro girl; in Bobbie's room at the restaurant, where he is beaten by her friends; in houses of prostitution, "beneath the dark and equivocal and symbolical archways of midnight" (196); in Joanna's old plantation house, where he commits rape and perhaps murder; in the Negro church house, where he drives out the worshipers; and finally in Hightower's sequestered refuge, where he suffers mutilation and death. The most significant non-violent incident of the novel takes place not in a dark but a "darkie" house, the Negro hut in which Lena's child is born. The distinction is not really a flippant one, if we consider that it is just such an irony that expresses Faulkner's view of the Southern experience; for the hut symbolizes the capacity to suffer bondage and endure without abusing basic human values. The hut continues to stand and to serve as shelter after the dark monument beside it is in ashes.

The names of Lena Grove and Hightower of course identify these characters respectively with freedom and confinement, natural continuity and artificial, illusory stasis, and they define their relation to Joe Christmas. Lena represents the world of real value, fertility, renewal that he never encounters. Hightower, whose former profession would make him a mediator, is actually a barrier, closing in Joe Christmases by closing them out of his life. When Byron explains his object in bringing the Hineses to the old minister, Hightower screams: "Get out of my house! Get out of my house!" (342) The Hineses are forced out of Hightower's house, but later, Joe Christmas

forces his way in, precipitating the involvement Hightower sought to avoid, in death exacting the concern denied him in life. The metaphor at work here is double-edged and full of paradox. Hightower is a man of sensibility but no courage who withdraws in self-righteous isolation and rationalized innocence to indulge a spiritual fantasy. His isolation is of course illusory: by refusing the choice of good and evil, he has chosen the latter and therefore becomes the Satan that the photograph of him depicts (59). His indirect involvement in institutions that reflect man's inhumanity is seen in his contributing to "an institution for delinquent girls in Memphis" (49). While he supports the home for unwed mothers, whose very existence depends on the failure of individual responsibility, his own wife, wedded but not a mother, jumps from the window of a Memphis hotel (50). He stands thus as a barrier to his fellowman, and is the more responsible in that his chosen profession would lead others to look upon him as a mediator. He is a high tower repulsing human woe and turning it back upon its own devices. It is the barriers of his rationalized indifference from which his wife leaps and the Hineses are rebuffed and which Joe penetrates in death. But the point of the house symbolism does not finally reside in this negative, or satiric, meaning. An awareness of the Hineses and Joe may not be excluded from Hightower's conscience, however high the wall around it. Their entrance into his actual house symbolizes the penetration of human woe into his conscience, which he has tried to secure against the world. And that penetration precipitates a cruel revival, for man's moral

sensibility, like the life principle of creation, is indestructable, however long it may remain dormant, walled in, or covered in forgetful snow. Considered in light of its consequence, Joe's forcing his way into Hightower's house to die is not simply an act of poetic justice, a bringing of the responsibility to rest where it belongs, but an act of mercy and love, in that it frees Hightower's moral sensibility from the rationalizations that bound it. Joe thus becomes a savior to his persecutor, the antichristic old minister. The emphasis does not lie upon the consequences of Hightower's inaction but the consequences of Joe's action, setting Hightower free from the dark house of himself. Faulkner's dark house is ultimately referable, like Eliot's wasteland, to the conscience of the individual human being.

At the risk of belaboring the point, I call attention to the numerous references to windows in the text, there being some dozen or more entrances and exits from these in addition to several instances of looking through them. The window is a major image of alienation and confinement in Light in August, as well as in other works of Faulkner. The alienated Hightower sits continually at the window of his dark, almost hidden house, and there is the remarkable description of the alienated Joe Christmas staring balefully through the window into the convivial barbershop (98-99). The window may serve as a device for emphasizing the artificial, prison-like confinement of the indoors by juxtaposing the freshness and fertility of the outdoors, as in this description of McEachern's house:

> The clean, spartan room was redolent of Sunday. In the windows the clean, darned curtains stirred faintly in a breeze smelling of turned earth and crabapple. Upon the yellow imitation oak melodeon with its pedals padded with pieces of frayed and outworn carpet sat a fruitjar filled with larkspur. The boy sat in a straight chair beside the table on which was a nickel lamp and an enormous Bible with brass clasps and hinges and a brass lock" (128).

The window may also serve as an escapeway from the confinement, though the freedom sought is not unequivocal. Death is the freedom Hightower's wife seeks in her leap from the hotel window, having been frustrated by her upbringing in a seminary and by the marriage that she thought would free her from it. Lena uses the window to escape the watchful confinement of her brother (5), in a sense instinctively seeking the freedom to fulfill her natural responsibility. And she uses it again, more as a matter of principle (6), to leave his house, in an effort to find her mate and comply with social responsibility. Lucas Burch, on the other hand, seeks freedom <u>from</u> responsibility and uses the window of the Negro shack to escape the confinement represented by Lena and their child: " . . . he looked at the window in the rear wall. Then he looked back at the closed door behind him. . . . Then he was gone, through the window, without a sound, in a single motion almost like a long snake" (379). Joe Christmas of course goes in and out of his bedroom window at McEachern's and enters Joanna's kitchen through the window, but he bursts through the door of Hightower's house, long closed to anyone but Byron Bunch, the representative of man's calm but persistent good will.

In passing, and for speculations's sake, one might note that the mill, the arch foe of the forest, or grove, is

the chief industry of Yoknapatawpha. Lena's brother works at a sawmill (3-4); Eupheus Hines was once the foreman of one (326); and the planing mill is where Byron and Lena meet and is the occupation from which she wins him away.

The mythic method

The use of myth certainly plays an important part in the design of Light in August, from either a thematic or structural point of view, but it does precipitate more problems than this study can adequately attend to. One problem is the diverse application of the term myth in relation to Faulkner's works. We may speak of his use of Biblical myth, such as the Christ story; vegetation myths, notably as explicated in The Golden Bough; Greek myths, such as the legend of the House of Atreus; the myth of the South itself; or the Yoknapatawpha myth that he has created. The term may also be used adjectivally to describe the scope, concerns, or effects of his works.[15] My focus here is limited to myth as an external frame of reference that serves to structure and comment upon the action. Such use of myth in Light in August seems largely limited to the Christ story and The Golden Bough, and I will consider only these, though some commentators have seen parallels with the Buddha story, the story of the fall, and the legend of Oedipus.[16] Once a distinction between external and intrinsic myth is made, a further problem develops in that though the anthropological myth remains external, the Christian myth is, like the historical myth of the South, an intrinsic element of Faulkner's fictional materials. The Christ story is not just a matter of

myth but of viable religious faith among Faulkner's characters and readers. If Christ is considered a literary personage, a parallel with his life may still produce irony, but if he is considered a living spiritual entity and subject of worship, the irony becomes much more complex and profound. In Faulkner's works it seems we are forced to consider him as both.

Another problem is the inherent difficulty of the mythic method of symbolism, especially since it is employed not as an allegorical but a refractory device. For instance, Lawrence Thompson has admirably described T. S. Eliot's use of myth in this way:

> Eliot's essential procedure, in adapting the "mythic method" to his own needs in The Wasteland, is to invoke a cluster of myths, referentially, so that he may imply analogies or parallels or correspondences between certain elements of primitivistic, pagan, medieval, and Christian myths. Indirectly, he arranges to let that cluster or grouping or sequence of parallel values (moral and religious) serve as a yardstick which implicitly measures the actions of those subhuman beings who inhabit his modern land of waste; measures, in such a way as to suggest the causes and consequences of their moral shortcomings, and then implies possible correctives.[17]

And Thompson goes on to point out the similarity of Faulkner's use:

> Like Joyce and Eliot, he often arranges to invoke several different "mythic" narratives in one work so that all of them may serve implicitly as backdrops, or as yardsticks, against which the reader may measure Faulkner's modern characters.
>
> For example, in The Sound and the Fury, the modern actions of the Compson family are dramatized against three mythic backdrops which are established through oblique forms of hinting: an element of Christian myth, several elements of primitivistic ritual, and what might be called "mythic" elements in Macbeth's celebrated fifth-act negations concerning life-time-death.[18]

The problem lies in how one employs the yardstick--whether the refractory lens of the myth are seen as magnifying or diminishing

the stature of the character, incident, or scene. Ward L. Miner represents a rather widely held point of view in his early book on Faulkner when he says that in The Sound and the Fury and Light in August "the values of the present are thrown against the values of the Bible and the present is made to look despicable by contrast."[19] Miner assumes that Faulkner is using the method for the same purpose as Eliot: to diminish or indicate the lack of significance of a contemporary event. But most recent critics of Faulkner assume that Faulkner's measurement is positive, that he wishes to magnify the significance of the contemporary event. What is so confounding about James Joyce's use of the method is of course that he would seemingly have us view an event or character through both sides of the lens at once, Leopold Bloom becoming both a genuine representative and a caricature of the Odysseus archetype.

Also, the highly generalized analogies of the method give a great deal of latitude to ingenuity, which has perhaps nowhere been more exercised than in mythic analyses of Faulkner--so much so that responsible commentary has been made somewhat suspect by its similarity to or its being compounded with random leaps of the imagination. Mythic correspondences have sometimes been elaborated without much regard for how they contribute to a coherent interpretation of the work as a whole. It is as if the correspondences themselves have been seen as invested with some inherent, almost mystic value, which is not diminished even if they should be accidental or "unconscious." As Arthur Symons has defined modern symbolism, of which the mythic method is an aspect, it is "a form of

expression, at the best but approximate, essentially but arbitrary, until it has obtained the force of a convention, for an unseen reality apprehended by the consciousness. It is sometimes permitted us to hope that our convention is indeed the reflection rather than merely the sign of that unseen reality." As he goes on to say: "It is all an attempt to spiritualize literature, to evade the old bondage of rhetoric, the old bondage of exteriority."[20] There hovers over Symons' definition, despite his careful qualification, the feeling that symbolism is somehow more than a communicative device, that it may invest the work of art with some of that transcendent value usually ascribed to holy scripture, that it has indeed broken the bondage of rhetoric. Since Wayne Booth's Rhetoric of Fiction at least, we are less likely to be tricked by that old illusion of freedom and more likely to regard symbolism as a kind of veiled rhetoric, providing external commentary in a very subtle form. Insofar as the symbolism constitutes an external frame of reference, it remains to a large extend "approximate" and "arbitrary," serving as a guide to the reader's universalizing of the particular instance. And this is not at all to say that it is merely decorative or gratuitous. But one should no doubt be chary of taking the correspondence for the meaning or trying to effect a point by point comparison that there is insufficient detail to support.

A further problem is that, considered in terms of effect, Faulkner's use of the method must be distinguished from that of Eliot or Joyce because of an inherent difference in the basic material of his fiction, that which provides setting,

character, immediate conflict, and background involvement. Despite certain historical similarities, the American South is quite different from Joyce's Ireland; at least there is good reason for Faulkner's imagination to have responded to it in a different way from Joyce's to Ireland. That inescapable historical fact of wholesale human and environmental exploitation, of a schism of race and blood, of grand but ignoble aspiration, set in a new world full of promise and possibility and coming to a head in a civil war that devastated a young civilization: all this within a relatively brief span of time provides a metaphor of such moral and dramatic force and complexity that the reinforcing of its universality through symbolic correspondences to other archetypal embodiments of the human experience seems almost irrelevant, like holding up candles to a bonfire. Once one sees that the decadent, wasted land and people of Faulkner's modern South mirror the moral corruption of the glittering legend to which it does homage, that the stale, neglected body of Hightower is but the externalization of his grandfather's corrupted spirit, which he has allowed to usurp his own, what further comment is necessary? Perhaps Faulkner thought it was in order to prevent the universal application from being obscured by the sociological fact.

In turning first to the Christ parallel in Light in August, I think it necessary to try to determine at the onset Faulkner's interpretation of Christ that lies behind his use of Him as symbol, for His life is no more closed to varying interpretation than Faulkner's own works: the Synoptic Gospels

give us three, and John adds a startling fourth. It seems generally agreed that Faulkner considered Christ in humanistic terms, seeing Him as a moral teacher and example rather than as a spiritual object of ritualistic worship; he emphasizes the passion and resurrection, disregarding the ascension. Certainly, as Lawrence Thompson has pointed out, he rejects the sins of the flesh, or the whole idea of a distinct body and soul, one being more or less the devil's property and the other belonging to God.[21] In fact, he would see just such a dichotomy as resulting in an inversion of the church's role in human affairs. The mystery of the incarnation, with its fusion of mortal flesh and divine spirit, would seem the salient, transcendent fact of the Christ story for him in that it perfectly expresses the freedom-bondage paradox. Seen as continuous human experience rather than spiritual history, the incarnation binds God, that which is immortal, to be man, that which is mortal; and the crucifixion, the suffering out of love for the transgressions of others, frees man to be God: an act of common humanity becoming not just one of obedience to the stipulations of a Mosaic code but one of true worship, as explicated in the teachings of Christ.

As Faulkner seems to see it, the church has rejected the continuity of Christ in the flesh; He becomes a spiritual hero to be celebrated in the imagination of those too weak to follow his example in deed. The crucifixion itself the church has made into a mere talisman of aesthetico-mystic experience, a fetish, a work of art--something molded by the imagination into a form most pleasing to the initiated senses, something from

which any details irrelevant to that experience have been excluded, a matter of life, suffering, and death become a matter of illusion. The church faces backward to an event exalted in its imagination, offering the spiritual ecstasy of that in supplantation of the human agony around it, failing to see that the one without the other is a meaningless abstraction. The relation of the church to the spiritual Christ is precisely that of Hightower to the spirit of his grandfather--which lives only in his imagination. The illusion is one shaped by him and the Negro cook, one from which all the horror of sweating, bloody flesh has been excluded and only the spiritual glory of the deed remains, demanding neither moral choice, love, forgiveness, nor sacrifice. It is this carefully molded illusion instead of the "crucified shape of pity and love" (428) that Hightower offers his congregation, who come with "faces full of bafflement and hunger and eagerness . . ." (427) and whose uninitiated senses fail to perceive it as any viable alternative to the suffering of their existence.

The spirit-flesh dichotomy is one that, again, leads to inversion in reality. The Christ the church exalts is really antichrist, a conjured spirit who rules its consciousness and imprisons its moral sensibility, whose worship in reality perpetuates hatred and division rather than love and harmony. True to the letter of Christ's teaching, the church offers charity to its fellowman, but this takes the form of such good works as supporting orphanages, which but reflect a failure of the kind of individual moral responsibility that the God became flesh to demonstrate and from whose bleak walls little Joe

Christmases never really escape. The laity, who come seeking succor, are merely confounded by the finer mysteries of worship and continue in the old ways of ritualistic scapegoating as a means of resolving their moral difficulties. The true Christ, as opposed to the historical man who died on the cross and the fictional hero of the church's imagination, is one who perseveres in all humanity.

To Faulkner's synthesizing imagination, the crucifixion and the Civil War apparently became obvious and powerful analogues: both were violent events that were supposed to free men from bondage and effect peace and harmony, or unity. Neither did so, apparently because the leadership in each instance abdicated its responsibility, casting over the ugly events themselves a kind of hallowed splendor and making them the subjects of esoteric appreciation. As a defrocked minister and surviving member of a decadent aristocracy, Hightower combines in his person both analogues.[22] Like the church's Christ, his grandfather, the eternal Southern hero, is a harmful fiction. The real grandfather was a starving man who died in sudden agony defending an inglorious cause. By perverting the meaning of Christ's death, the church simply insures the continuation of ritualistic sacrifice, just as Hightower insures the continuation of Negro bondage by perverting the meaning of a war in which his grandfather met death. Both are the more blamable because, posing as mediators, they act as barriers. Like any other analogy this one can be pushed to the point of contradiction, but it is quite meaningful so long as one considers both events as refractory devices or as vehicles in

Faulkner's metaphor of the human condition.

The most controversial point about the Christ parallel in Light in August has been of course the precise sense in which Joe Christmas is to be seen as a Christ figure. The arbitrary hints in the text that have led critics to construe Joe as a Christ figure are perhaps tenuous enough, but the number of them, together with the external evidence offered by Faulkner's other works, provides sufficient proof of the intended connection. Most of the following parallels have been noted by one critic or another: Joe's paternity is uncertain; his mother is unwed at his conception; his name is both Christmas and McEachern (son of each one, or man); his initials are J. C. (a very tenuous connection); his feet are washed by a woman (Mrs. McEachern); the man who betrays him is called his disciple, and he is called the master; his middle years are obscure and are rapidly skipped over; he works in a kind of carpenter shop (the planing mill); he casts out false spirits (in destroying his cache of alcohol); he undergoes three temptations, variously interpreted,[23] in the symbolic wilderness of the modern South; he forces persons from a house of worship (the Negro church); he is betrayed for money, or the hope of it; he is killed in a ritualistic manner when in his mid-thirties with the sanction of an outraged populace; he suffers five wounds, not counting emasculation. Other such correspondences could probably be discovered but are in themselves meaningless enough; a seventy-year-old grandmother of twenty could be a Christ symbol so long as we knew to consider her in light of the significance that such a correspondence might have.

Interpretively speaking, Joe may be seen as representative of Christ in several ways. Faulkner seems to have accepted Sherwood Anderson's view that all men are Christ in that they all suffer innocently for the sins of others; as Mr. Parcival expresses it in Winesburg, Ohio: "Everyone in the world is Christ and they are all crucified." More specifically Joe is Christ in that he represents a potential savior to his people, the spirit-flesh dichotomy being parallel to the black-white one. It is not that Faulkner proposes racial fusion as the ultimate sociological solution, though he has publicly stated this idea.[24] Like Lena's, Joe's symbolic value lies in the response of others to the possibility that he represents. As is often pointed out, Negro and white are abstractions which have nothing to do with physical characteristics. If the South, or any other part of the country, should wake up all black tomorrow, racial discrimination would undoubtedly still exist. Race, as Stephen Dedalus says of paternity, is "a legal fiction." Joe's generic makeup is uncertain: he may be half Mexican, like Joanna's half-brother; but it would make not the slightest difference if he were generically part Negro. Both Joe and Christ offer a resolution of a dichotomy that inversely results in human bondage, and until the freedom they represent is accepted, the emancipation and the crucifixion are at the same time mere historical facts, long beyond our apprehension, and harmful fictions that perpetrate inhumanity. But Joe is most meaningfully a savior in the sense I mentioned earlier: his death frees the moral sensibility of Hightower--brings him to moral recognition--from the bonds of rationalization fostered

upon it by the worship of an illusion. The effect of Joe's death upon the individual conscience is seen as the only way of freeing mankind from the evils of mankind that Joe innocently incorporates.

Correspondences between other characters and personages of the Christ story seem somewhat more gratuitous. In the counter action Byron, Lena, and her child form an obvious holy family. Lena is a young, unwed, serenely accepting mother; Byron is an older man who accepts the responsibility of caring for her and her child without regard for social stigma. Their being on the road in the last chapter has been seen as corresponding to the flight into Egypt. Lena's child being born on the same day Joe Christmas dies has been considered a kind of resurrection, leading into a new cycle, the outcome of which is uncertain. Since the counter action is precisely that, however, we probably should not regard the birth of Lena's child as taking place on the same plane of experience as Joe's death; it is born under good auspices, not in the wasteland, where all values are inverted. Not so much seems to be gained from considering Lucas Burch as a Judas who has no conscience to be stricken, and he makes an odd Holy Spirit. Although Beekman Cottrell is somewhat over-ingenious in drawing parallels, he is undoubtedly right to see Hightower as Pontius Pilate,[25] a specious authority who makes a futile attempt to intervene and who can no more wash his hands of the matter than Lady Macbeth. Joanna Burden's name and beheading would seem to associate her with John the Baptist, but the connection appears more puzzling than profitable. Hines may represent the rabble,

which takes upon itself the authority that the Hightowers default (an analogy with Southern political history is also evident here). Percy Grimm has been suggested as the Roman soldier, he who would see to it that whatever violence is done be done according to law in an orderly fashion. There seems little reason to speculate upon Biblical correspondences among characters outside the present action of the novel. And we must see some of the correspondences indicated as tenuous and as providing only very generalized comment on the action.

Correspondences to the vegetation myths of Frazer's The Golden Bough are perhaps more obscure but seem structurally more important than the Christ parallel. These two external frames of reference are not necessarily mutually exclusive: the former may be seen as inclusive of the latter. Although Robert Slabey has said that Joe is more nearly related to the scapegoat god of the myths than to Christ and Lawrence Thompson has seen Lena Grove as representing a pagan rather than a Christian value;[26] there is no real contradiction here unless one becomes too technical in his insistence on applicability. The vegetation myth represents another avatar, a broader lens or a more general point of view from which to see, as Walter Brylowski has suggested, both Christ and Joe Christmas. At the same time, one may not assume, as Brylowski apparently does, that Christ is no more than another avatar of the scapegoat for Faulkner and that "it is only in this broad outline that Joe Christmas is to be thought of as a Christ figure."[27] Christ is too viable an entity in the western tradition to become such, even if Faulkner intended it, as he surely does

not. There remains the distinction between a neutral and a highly charged, or an explicative and an evocative, correspondence. The dying-reborn and scapegoat god represents the former and Christ the latter.

Although analogy hunting among the vegetation myths can produce some farfetched and occasionally ludicrous results, one simply cannot ignore the fact that in Light in August, as well as in other works, Faulkner was reaching for just such correspondences. Carvel Collins and Mary Jane Dickerson have discovered them in As I Lay Dying,[28] and Robert Slabey has suggested and Richard P. Adams traced the subtle allusions to the corn spirit myth in Sanctuary.[29] In fact, Frazer's celebrated corn spirit seems to have greatly caught Faulkner's imagination as a means of commenting upon the presence or absence of moral fertility. A perversion of its natural function is seen not only in the corncob used on Temple Drake but in the corncob pipe of Gavin Stephens, continually handled but never lit. In Light in August Joe Christmas's life is associated with the unnatural spirits of the corn, or alcohol; and it is the natural corn that Joe's system rejects in his flight after the murder, having been too long accustomed, one supposes, to the wasteland fare. In the counter action the corn serves its rightful function as Lena breakfasts on cornbread at the Armstids before continuing on to Jefferson (23). Of course, Faulkner has to substitute maize for the original cereals.

One is forced to qualify continually his remarks on these correspondences, however, because they are so subtle that their very existence has been thought debatable and because

they admit of such varying interpretation. Faulkner has not given us the help that Eliot provides in his notes to "The Wasteland," and no one has yet undertaken the major task of clarifying Faulkner's use of the vegetation myths, though there has been much comment on it. Whether Faulkner wove the analogies so subtly into his work out of a desire to thicken the texture and make more comprehensive the meaning or whether he entertained the idea that the analogies, even if not apprehended, lent some value to the work is more than I can say. The imposition of an arbitrary symbolic structure has in the past reflected a world view that accepted magical correspondences as a part of the divine scheme of things: for instance, Dante's making his lines, stanzas, cantos, and the division of his subject reflect the unity of the trinity in The Divine Comedy; or Spencer's making the stanzas of "Epithalamion" reflect the hours of the day and the lines, the degrees of a circle; or Brown's discussion and symbolic employment of the number-pattern five in Garden of Cyrus. Perhaps Faulkner and other symbolists, especially Joyce, were at least flirting with superstition in their use of mythic symbolism;[30] certainly, Faulkner's conception of avatars of human experience reflects more than an aesthetic posture. But though of some ultimate importance, these questions need not immediately concern us. Whether an unapprehended, arbitrarily imposed symbol may be a contributing aspect to a work of art is a matter that would involve us more deeply in I. A. Richard's distinction between the value and the "communicative efficacy" of an art work[31] than would seem profitable at this point. The distinction could be reduced to

such absurdities as whether one lies if he keeps his fingers crossed behind him. All I wish to do here is explicate the correspondences that seem more or less evident, pointing out how they contribute to the structure and statement of the work as a whole. I will try to steer a course between excessive ingenuity, as Robert Slabey indulges in when he finds that the handlebars of the bicycle commandeered by Percy Grimm are "phallic symbols related to the horns of the boar" that killed Adonis and the undue caution Michael Millgate exhibits when, after presenting strong evidence, he concludes that "these suggested correspondences between Light in August and the mythology and anthropology surrounding the figure of Diana may be entirely accidental."[32]

The key metaphor underlying the use of the myths of course has to do with fertility-barrenness, organic processes of the land and people becoming symbolic of moral ones. Generally, Lena Grove has been seen as the earthmother, or fertility goddess, and Joe Christmas as the scapegoat demigod, also associated in Frazer with the dying-reborn god of vegetation, the priest-king, the king of the woods, and the consort of the goddess. Although Faulkner may have been familiar with other works of anthropological mythology and apparently had keen insight into Joyce's and Eliot's use of such myths, The Golden Bough no doubt served as the chief source of the correspondences in Light in August. Faulkner may have relied upon the one volume abridged edition (1922); at least it would seem to suffice.[33] The first chapter of Frazer's work, as Michael Millgate has noted, seems especially suggestive of correspondences.[34] Here

Frazer describes the now well-known ritual involving the succession to the priesthood at Nemi, a woodland lake on the shores of which was a grove sacred to Diana:

> In this sacred grove there grew a certain tree round which at any time of the day, and probably far into the night, a grim figure might be seen to prowl. In his hand he carried a drawn sword, and he kept peering warily about him as if at every instant he expected to be set upon by an enemy. He was a priest and a murderer; and the man for whom he looked was sooner or later to murder him and hold the priesthood in his stead. Such was the rule of the sanctuary. A candidate for the priesthood could only succeed to office by slaying the priest, and having slain him, he retained office till he was himself slain by a stronger or a craftier.[35]

Since it is the office and not the man that partakes of divinity, the ritualistic combat is a means of keeping the office strong by keeping the strongest man in it.

The goddess in her various metamorphoses is associated with the physical, moral, and perhaps political well-being of the community: and her consort, the priest-king, becomes a kind of demigod protector who is responsible for it. As Frazer sees it, the ritual responsible for the well-being or fertility of the land came to be combined with that of scapegoating, which insured the moral well-being of the people, the personified divinity thus becoming "not merely the dying god of vegetation, but also a public scapegoat, upon whom were laid all the evils that had afflicted the people during the past year."[36] Frazer makes this interesting comment on the practice:

> Joy on such an occasion is natural and appropriate; and if the dying god appears to be the object of that fear and abhorrence which are properly due not to himself, but to the sins and misfortunes with which he is laden, this arises merely from the difficulty of distinguishing, or at least of marking the distinction, between the bearer and the <u>burden</u>. When the <u>burden</u> is of a <u>baleful</u> character,

> the bearer of it will be feared and shunned just as much as if he were himself instinct with those dangerous properties of which, as it happens, he is only the vehicle.[37] (italics mine)

The applicability of this comment to Joe Christmas is obvious, not just in the general sense of his being hunted down and killed as a "nigger" rather than a murderer (which he is not proved to be) but in the specific sense of Miss Burden's murder being laid upon him and even in his being described as standing before the barber shop "so cold, so baleful" that his partner Brown, inside, ceases his incessant talking and "so still and baleful" that a young Negro outside, stops whistling and moves cautiously past him (98-99, italics mine).

Of further interest in respect to Joe Christmas is Frazer's noting that "only a runaway slave" was allowed to break a branch from the tree sacred to the goddess and therefore become entitled "to fight the priest in single combat." " . . . if he slew him he reigned in his stead with the title of King of the Wood. . . . The flight of the slave represented, it was said, the flight of Orestes; his combat with the priest was a reminiscence of the human sacrifices once offered to the Tauric Diana."[38] In that he must flee as a Negro, Joe may correspond to the runaway slave, and he may further correspond to Orestes in that he has committed, in the eyes of the chivalric Southern male, what amounts to matricide. Southern womanhood was of course considered the repository of domestic and moral values, and in her death at the hands of a suspected Negro, Joanna Burden became an honorary member of that society. It seems quite probable that Faulkner associated the romantic

concept of Southern womanhood with the goddess herself, who in the wasteland of inverted values, would be a barren figure. To be sure, there were apparently two conceptions of Diana: one of the chaste, man-like huntress and another of a fertility deity who presides over the birth of offspring. These two conceptions have been variously associated with Joanna Burden and Lena Grove, but such a complicated correspondence can be spared if we merely consider that the main action represents a world in which values are the inverse of those in the counter action.

In fact, correspondences to the myth make a good deal more sense if sought separately in the two actions. In the counter action the ritualistic combat for succession to the kingship and role as consort is staged between Byron and Lucas Burch. The reenactment is, however, ironic in several ways. The goddess in this case is a flesh and blood woman about whom no one entertains any illusions, Byron having lost those he started with by the time the combat takes place (349-362). Lena is definitely not the object of idolatry, cult worship, or chivalric inclinations traditionally extended to Southern womanhood. As a minor instance, the men she rides with make no attempt to help her in or out of the wagon. We may perhaps see her as the idol of an anti-chivalric tradition in modern literature, in reference to whom, as to Molly Bloom, a definite code of conduct may be delineated, with Byron Bunch and Leopold Bloom becoming models of "courtesy"; but in Light in August Lena stands for reality rather than romance. The homage paid her is a homage to the flesh. The combat

itself is for principle rather than for possession, since the old consort Burch is quite willing to relinquish his role, and the vanquished combatant is not slain but is the one who succeeds to the title. Byron, in taking upon him the care of another man's abandoned woman and bastard child, is well aware that the community sees him as a kind of scapegoat, but the "burden" he assumes is not of a "baleful" character and consists of the fortunes rather than the "misfortunes" of mankind. And at the end of the novel he and Lena go on their way, symbols of continuing health and hope in the organic and moral universe.

The main action is set in a symbolic wasteland where values are consistently inverted. Sex is not a means of expressing love or producing offspring but of casual lust, commercial profit, or symbolic rebellion. And the serving of food is not a matter of caring for a need or extending hospitality but involves a variety of motives quite ulterior to these concerns. It is a world in which the nominally divine is in reality satanic, where a blessing becomes a curse, where bloody contests for the hand of a sterile goddess continue to perpetuate not order and well-being but chaos and sickness. In his odyssey through this wasteland, the frustrated king candidate Joe Christmas engages in an unspecified number of ritualistic combats over a variety of perversions of the fertility goddess. Three of these form the major episodes of his story, one in childhood, one in late adolescence, and the last in maturity. The last is of course the most significant and constitutes the action proper of the novel. The three episodes, involving the dietician, Bobbie Allen, and Joanna

Burden, are made parallel in several ways. In each case the woman is the object of illicit sex act, or acts, in which she is, if not an unwilling, at least an unfeeling and unproductive participant. In each case she is more or less the guardian of the food Joe eats. In each case Joe's relation with her is preceded by his, in effect, stealing a forbidden sweet. And in each case, in addition to the woman-goddess and the antagonist Joe, we find a character who vanquishes Joe and a father figure who represents a perverted authority and who attempts to intervene in vain. Hines is a real grandfather, McEachern a father by adoption, and Hightower a defunct spiritual father. I find no ready correspondent to the father figure in Frazer, unless we consider him the owner of the runaway slave. It is important to recognize that Joe is not an official candidate for the priesthood, or kingship, but that he is a rebel against what he supposes to be the order and the terms according to which legitimate contest is conducted. Joe does not consort with the goddess according to the rules, but takes her by sublimation, stealth, or force. He comes to hold her in contempt, and his taking of her is his mockery of the order. The role Joe prescribes for himself is that of a Satan: he does not for a minute doubt the inherent value of the order against which he rebels; in fact his very identity is postulated upon that supposed value. In the wasteland, however, we have not simply a negation but an antithesis of value, and so, ironically, Joe is a Christ in spite of himself. In terms of the myth analogy, Joe refuses to pluck the golden bough that entitles him to official combat; he insists on usurping the

prerogatives of the king while retaining his status as a runaway slave, and in each case the discovery of this status leads to his vanquishment--but by a set of rules different from those that apply to official combatants. The runaway slave may be equated with the possibility of his Negro blood. The golden bough, if I am not mistaken, represents the white branch of the tree of man, which Joe might possess officially as his identity if he wished. There may be some irony in the fact that Frazer finally equates the golden bough with mistletoe, a parasitic growth.[39]

In the childhood episode, Joe is an innocent participant in the drama that will set the pattern for his relations with others throughout his life--or at least reflect the pattern he was born into. He is not consciously an antagonist here nor aware of sex as such. The dietician is merely "a mechanical adjunct to eating," and her boyfriend is "not yet an enemy" (105). That she represents a perversion of the goddess' role as guardian of food and reproduction is indicated in her being a "mechanical adjunct" and in her attaching "a great deal of importance not so much to love, but to being caught at it" (107). To the child the woman is attractive without, to his consciousness, being sexually stimulating. She is to him a "pleasing association and pleasing in herself to look at--young, a little fullbodied, smooth, pink-and-white, making his mind think of the diningroom, making his mouth think of something sweet and sticky to eat, and also pinkcolored and surreptitious" (105). We may see Joe's stealing of the forbidden sweet, the toothpaste, as a sublimated form of intercourse,

and the imagery (105-106) would support such a view, but it should be emphasized that the child's thus expressing unconscious sexual desires is not the "meaning" of the incident. Although the association of woman, food, and sex may be psychologically valid according to Freudian constructs, it achieves its meaning in relation to an aesthetic and, in the larger sense, moral frame of reference, not in relation to a psychological one. The sickness Joe suffers from the sweet but non-nutritive and emetic toothpaste is emblematic of the experience he will undergo in his relation with women.

By simply being a witness to the illicit sex act between the dietician and the interne Charley, Joe becomes a passive antagonist interfering with the relation of the goddess and her consort. It is the dietician, in her rage to abuse him who insists on his inferior status, calling him a "little nigger bastard" (107). Significantly, Joe does not receive the official punishment he expects for stealing: "It never occurred to her that he believed that he was the one who had been taken in sin and was being tortured with punishment deferred and that he was putting himself in her way in order to get it over with, get his whipping and strike the balance and write it off" (107). So at this early age Joe finds himself not permitted what Hightower calls "that peace in which to sin and be forgiven which is the life of man" (427). Since the dietician neither punishes nor forgives but tortures him with waiting and the repeated epithet of "nigger bastard," Joe sees Negrohood as constituting an awful sin indeed. One might say that he spends his life trying to expiate it, to

be punished and forgiven for being a "nigger." But it makes more sense to say that Joe accepts such forgiveness as impossible and so rebels against an order that would subject him to eternal torture without hope of expiation. Like Satan he will make his hell endurable by mocking heaven.

In adolescence Joe experiences the second reenactment of the ritual. This time the goddess doubles as a waitress and prostitute in a restaurant that serves as a front for the real commercial venture. Having once seen the waitress Bobbie, Joe returns to the restaurant alone, as McEachern has expressly forbidden him (153), and he takes food by stealth in that he has insufficient funds to pay for the pie and coffee he orders. The waitress makes a concession, however, telling the proprietor that he had not ordered the coffee, just as she later makes a concession by not requiring him to pay, in the usual manner, for her sexual favors. Joe's relation to her is, then, unofficial from the beginning. He consorts with the goddess, accepts her favors, without abiding by the appropriate rules. His relation with her is tolerated by her official protectors because he is not really interfering with her commercial duties. When the relation finally does interfere, "Bitching up as sweet a little setup as I could have wanted" (190), Joe is beaten and exiled from the presence of the goddess. Again his status as runaway slave rather than rightful participant is insisted upon in that the outraged prostitute calls him a "nigger son of a bitch" (190) and her friend refers to him as one of "these country bastards" (191).

In the first episode Hines and in the second McEachern stands in relation to Joe as a kind of self-appointed God-proprietor who has his own designs for Joe. Both attempt to intervene in Joe's affairs in order to carry out their own plans for him, but neither succeeds. The father motif is a complex and important one in Light in August but seems only tangentially related to the symbolic correspondences with The Golden Bough.

With his adolescent experience the pattern is set and Joe has entered manhood. In his fifteen years on the road he continues to take white prostitutes by stealth in that they consider him an official white customer. Now it is he who insists on his Negro status, however; he accepts the beating that ensues as simply the price of his need to gloat, to demonstrate his scorn of those who torture him.

With Joanna, Joe experiences the final reenactment of the mythic ritual. Their relation begins with his slipping stealthily through her kitchen window and eating the peas sweetened with molasses that he finds on her table (201). Later he rapes her, and after a period of time becomes her lover. The relation ends in Joanna's murder, and since the murder is laid to an alleged Negro, she attains the sacred status not granted her in life. The final combat takes place between Joe and Percy Grimm, the self-appointed champion of white womanhood. Here the imagery is strongly reminiscent of the opening pages of The Golden Bough. Frazer describes the incumbent priest as "a dark figure with a glitter of steel at the shoulder,"[40] and Faulkner several times refers to the

flashing of light off the gun and handcuffs of Christmas, as in: "his raised and armed and manacles hands full of glare and glitter like lightning bolts" (406). On the same page glittering is used again to describe Joe's hands, and Grimm's "young voice" is described as "clear and outraged like that of a young priest." This time it is Hightower, another older man and father figure, who attempts to interfere, but he is, like McEachern, struck aside, first by Joe and then by Grimm. Hightower also attempts to intervene in the affair of Byron, Lena, and Burch and is equally unsuccessful. Perhaps we may see him, McEachern, and Hines as representing a pseudo-moral authority--like Old Testament gods standing for a dated and unworkable code--which the characters of both worlds recognize as irrelevant.

In Faulkner's application of the Frazer myth there are obvious parallels with the Christ story. Christ was also a rebel against the existing order whom the Pharisees saw as an unorthodox, unauthorized pretender to the priesthood and kingship. And the crucifixion has commonly been viewed as a scapegoating ritual. In the inverted world of Yoknapatawpha the rebel pretender of course becomes the legitimate embodiment. In dying beneath the burden of collective sins, Joe restores moral sensibility to the wasteland of Hightower's conscience. Just how positive an event Hightower's recognition represents is a problem I will discuss later. Meanwhile in Lena's world a less terrible form of the ritual is played out, countering death with birth.[41]

In dealing with Faulkner's use of the ritual described by Frazer, I have not attempted to present a greatly detailed account of possible correspondences nor to debate the various ways in which they may be interpreted. If my description or interpretation of them occasionally raises more questions than it answers, I can only say that such correspondences are inherently tenuous and that until more conclusive studies are available, my views may be taken as tentative. Although Faulkner's use of the myths may always remain too obscure for satisfactory explanation, further study is needed and will likely be attempted. But even at this point one can certainly say that, however ingenious and occasionally wide of the mark the work already done in this area or that of the Christ symbolism may prove, it has served the very valuable function of drawing our attention closer to the experience and meaning of the work.

NOTES

[1]Howe, Critical Study, p. 203. The term has been variously repeated.

[2]All page references are to the Modern Library edition (New York: Random House, 1950). Since many succeeding quotations will appear less conventional than these, I might say here that Faulkner's eccentricities of spelling, syntax, and general presentation are well known and are the more problematic for not being very consistent. As in quoting his public statements, I have made every effort to be faithful to the text.

[3]Stein, "An Interview," p. 75; Faulkner in the University, p. 62.

[4]Stein, "An Interview," p. 75.

[5]Michael Millgate has also noted that the first and last chapters function as prologue and epilogue (Achievement, p. 124).

[6]Adams, Myth and Motion, pp. 87, 92.

[7]I am aware of Faulkner's statement, which Adams quotes, that the conception of Light in August began with Lena Grove and that it "was mainly the story of Lena Grove" (Faulkner in the University, p. 74). But two pages earlier he has said that Joe Christmas' not knowing who he is formed "the tragic, central idea of the story" (Ibid., p. 72). One can only say that answering questions and writing novels are different activities and that the evidence of the artist and that of the text may be equally valid and yet diverge considerably.

[8]B. R. McElderry, Jr., "The Narrative Structure of Light in August," College English, XIX (Feb. 1958), 202.

[9]Karl E. Zink, "William Faulkner: Form as Expression," South Atlantic Quarterly, LIII (July 1954), pp. 43-66; Faulkner in the University, p. 45.

[10]Faulkner in the University, p. 45.

[11]Faulkner-Cowley File, pp. 28-29.

[12]Richard Chase, "The Stone and the Crucifixion: Faulkner's Light in August," Two Decades, eds. Hoffman and Vickery, p. 205.

[13]Haugh, "Faulkner's Corrupted Temple," pp. 15-16.

[14]See James B. Meriwether, The Literary Career of William Faulkner: A Bibliographical Study (Princeton: Princeton University Library, 1961), p. 67; also cited by Millgate, Achievement, p. 318, n. 15.

[15]For further comment on the term myth as variously applied to Faulkner's works, see Brylowski, Faulkner's Olympian Laugh, pp. 11-16.

[16]E.g., see Langston, "Lena Grove and Gail Hightower," pp. 51-63; Adams, Myth and Motion, pp. 89-91; Longley, Tragic Mask, pp. 51, 194-195.

[17]Thompson, Introduction and Interpretation, p. 23.

[18]Ibid., p. 25.

[19]Ward L. Miner, The World of William Faulkner (New York: Pageant Book Co., 1952), p. 142.

[20]Arthur Symons, The Symbolist Movement in Literature (rev. ed.; New York: E. P. Dutton, Inc., 1919), pp. 1-2, 8.

[21]Thompson, Introduction and Interpretation, p. 165.

[22]Joseph Gold has commented:

> "Hightower not only represents one failure of man--the unquestioning submission to the past; he represents another as it is embodied in the church. Institutionalized religion is dominated by its history, not by its generating spirit. What Hightower preaches from the pulpit is not so very different from what is often preached there. His sermons parody all sermons. The church lives in the high-sounding words, not in action. It tells its congregation about the exploits of the past, rather than about the needs of the present, and finally it fails to prevent the crucifixion of the very Christ (Man) who is the reason for its being." ("Two Worlds," p. 165)

[23]E.g., see Holman, "Unity of Light in August," p. 157; Asals, "Faulkner's Light in August," item 74.

[24]E.g., see "Interview with Russell Howe," Lion in the Garden, eds. Meriwether and Millgate, p. 258; Faulkner in the University, pp. 215-216; Faulkner at Nagano, pp. 182-183.

[25]Beekman W. Cottrell, "Christian Symbols in Light in August, MFS, II (Winter 1956-1957), 210-212.

[26]Slabey, "Myth and Ritual," p. 329; Thompson, Introduction and Interpretation, 172-173.

[27]Brylowski, Faulkner's Olympian Laugh, p. 29.

[28]Carvel Collins, "The Pairing of The Sound and the Fury and As I Lay Dying," Princeton University Library Chronicle, XVIII (Spring 1957), 114-123; Mary Jane Dickerson, "Some Sources of Faulkner's Myth in As I Lay Dying," Mississippi Quarterly, XIX (Summer 1966), 132-142.

[29]Slabey, "Myth and Ritual," p. 330; Adams, Myth and Motion, pp. 59-62.

[30]Malcolm Cowley has made this interesting comment: "The Symbolist movement was not only a religion with saints and martyrs; it was also a sort of international freemasonry (of the French or Grand Orient rather than the Scottish Rite). Many of its moral precepts proved somewhat confusing to the uninitiated" (Faulkner-Cowley File, p. 155).

[31]I. A. Richards, Principles of Literary Criticism, see Chapter IV, "Communication and the Artist," pp. 25-33.

[32]Slabey, "Myth and Ritual," p. 332; Millgate, Achievement, p. 136.

[33]See Brylowski, Faulkner's Olympian Laugh, pp. 82-84.

[34]Millgate, Achievement, p. 319, n. 21. Noting that the date of the festival of Diana is August 13, Millgate points out that, if we consider the action of Light in August to be contemporary with its publication, 1932, then the date would have fallen on a Saturday of that year; and Joe waits till midnight has struck Saturday eve before going up to Joanna on the night of her murder. (Ibid., pp. 318-319, n. 19). Millgate also cites Frazer to the effect that the church seems to have converted this festival into that of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, which comes August 15. (Ibid., p. 319, n. 21). Remarking on Joanna's death in relation to the community, the omniscient narrator says that "she had supplied them at last with . . . a Roman holiday almost" (252).

[35]Sir James George Frazer, The Golden Bough (1 vol. abr. ed.; New York: Macmillan Co., 1922), p. 1.

[36]Ibid., p. 668.

[37]Ibid.

[38]Ibid., p. 3.

[39]Ibid., see Chapter LXVIII, "The Golden Bough."

[40] Ibid., p. 2.

[41] In trying to connect the Christian and pagan myths, Edwin M. Moseley calls attention to the palm fan Lena carries, noting that it may have some reference to the "palms of Palm Sunday that usher Christ into Jerusalem at the beginning of holy week" and also that "Sir James Frazer points to several uses of the palm in fertility rituals to produce rain. . . ." See "Christ as Social Scapegoat: Faulkner's Light in August," in Moseley's Pseudonyms of Christ in the Modern Novel: Motifs and Methods (University of Pittsburg Press, 1962), p. 140.

CHAPTER IV

JOE CHRISTMAS

In the last chapter we saw how Faulkner uses the fertility myths, namely Frazer's description and interpretation of the succession to the priesthood at Nemi, in Light in August to structure and comment upon the action. Each of the three major episodes in Joe Christmas' life may be seen as an initiation ritual that is a symbolic reenactment of the mythic succession. The first, at the orphanage, is an initiation into conscious existence; the second is an initiation into maturity; and the third is an initiation into a new identity--to Negrohood and to death. All are traumatic. The period of eleven days, Friday through Monday next, which contain the present action, forms, however, the dense core of the novel for which everything else is largely a preparation. Here Faulkner brings into dramatic focus, epitomizes, the personal history of the characters involved and that of the society that they make up. We are made familiar with the details of the characters' lives that have shaped their destinies and prescribed their roles in the present drama. And the details extend further back in time and consciousness, involving fathers and grandfathers and that watershed of the Southern experience, the Civil War.

The concerns with Calvinism, modern existentialism,

and Christ symbolism in the novel seem often to have obscured the fact--and some critics have even denied it--that Light in August is a central document of Yoknapatawpha County, dealing directly with the Southern experience in its entirety. To be sure, the themes of the decadent families, the rape of the land, the rise of Snopesism, the enduring Negro are not immediately in evidence; the familiar names of Yoknaptawpha are given little more than passing reference; and there are no named and specifically Negro characters of any importance. But it is simply that the myth is here more abstractly considered. In Hightower we find the decadent aristocrat, lost in a dream of the past and unable to function in the present, sensible of the wrongs in his society and perhaps of the complicity of his own family in creating that society, yet too weak to take upon himself the responsibility for dealing with them. In Hines we find the dregs of white society that identifies quite literally with the old order and that attempts to fill the vacuum left by the abdication of leadership, a caricature of the old voice of authority, now propounding a militant, fanatic racism, devoid of even the gesture of compassion, honor, or responsibility. Hines and Flem Snopes are of course the legitimate heirs to the office, the distilled embodiments of the arrogance and greed on which it was founded. And in Percy Grimm we discover a mutation of that voice: the same old fascistic approach, the chivalric idealism, the absolutism, the formal regalia, now in the name of a new federalism. The North as an attitude as well as a geographical area, circumscribing the South and turning it in upon itself,

is always felt in the Yoknapatawpha works, and is here present in Joanna Burden, the Northern abolitionist, an alien yet central figure in the Southern experience. Joe Christmas represents in the abstract the racial problem on which the very identity of the South rests, and, truly, it is only in the abstract that the problem exists. Although not individualized, the Negroes are felt throughout the novel as a collective entity, representing the oppressed, better self of the human race. Together with the independent hill people, such as Byron Bunch and Lena Grove, who have never identified with the false values of the Southern romance, they form the repository and account for the continuity of the true human values. And the events of the novel accumulate toward and climax in Hightower's daily vision: the glorious illusion, full of magnificient ghosts, who still haunt the dark house of Southern history. Those who find in the novel the existential predicament of modern man can hardly be in error, however, for it is a modern man's interpretation of the Southern experience--and this is ultimately referable to the human condition of modern times and of all times.

The central figure of the drama is of course Joe Christmas, surely one of the most vivid and at the same time enigmatic studies of alienation in all literature: orphaned, nameless, homeless, friendless, raceless, who has lived his life inside a picket fence of "named and numbered days." No critic has surpassed Alfred Kazin's early and often cited description of him as "an abstraction seeking to become a human being . . . the most solitary character in American fiction,

the most extreme phase conceivable of American loneliness."[1] His story is a terrible Bildungsroman with the calculated impact of a classic tragedy. He is born into an inverse world, where fatal illusions substitute for sustaining realities, where a wild dream of freedom has become a nightmare of human bondage that perpetuates itself in rituals of bloody violence, where brother is turned against brother and fathers deny their sons. The religion professed is in practice devil worship, homage to a Calvinistic God of the characters' own creation, whom they exalt as the author of their misery. McEachern's Bible has "brass clasps and hinges and a brass lock" (128). Calvin Burden reads to his children from a Spanish Bible, "the once gilt and blazoned book in that language which none of them understood" (213). Hines pours over his Bible through "steelrimmed spectacles" (110) that distort rather than clarify the message. And "Sweet Jesus" is evoked only as a curse. The characters' roles have become so prescribed, they have so molded themselves to abstract patterns of behavior, that they appear as puppets or chessmen, moved by an invisible player and devoid of human consciousness and human feeling. Joe is simply that most alienated figure in a world that is alienated from its true God and its true humanity, a victim among victims: of being human and of failing to be. It is the world of Hightower's final realization, where " . . . all air, all heaven, [is] filled with the lost and unheeded crying of all the living who ever lived, wailing still like lost children among the cold and terrible stars" (431).

Of course Joe is a victim: psychologically, sociologically, archtypally. What could be clearer than that? Psychologically he may be defined as a stimulus-response mechanism. His character, his response to life, is determined by Hines, the dietician, McEachern, Bobbie Allen, and later Joanna, who project onto him that which they cannot face in themselves. By considering him as incarnate evil, Hines justifies his own behavior toward his daughter Milly and Joe. By considering him as sinful, McEachern justifies his own self-righteousness and the need for a rigorously disciplined life. For the dietician and Bobbie he becomes the whipping boy for their own guilt in engaging in illicit sex. Bobbie calls him "nigger" not because she knows him to have Negro blood (she has previously refused to believe he has) but because McEachern has called her a harlot and she cannot face this reality of what she is. Sociologically, he and they are the victims of a society whose values have gone awry. Itself a composite, historical entity, the society is personified in its various aspects in the characters themselves, and especially in Joe Christmas, who is a battleground of incompatible, unreconcilable forces. Identity is determined according to abstractly conceived and arbitrarily enforced criteria. One is not simply a member of the human race but must be white or black, not simply a child but a bastard or a legitimate offspring. Sex, which is evidently for Faulkner one of the most profound and sacred human rituals and therefore a powerful metaphor, expressing the transcendent unity and continuity of life, becomes the focal point of division and disruption,

sundering man from woman and parent from child. Archetypally, Joe dies like Christ and the scapegoat god, the innocent incorporation of the evils of his fellowmen. Joe cannot be a son, a male, or even a human being: these are determined by criteria that do not admit him, except as an evil possibility.

But just as surely as Joe Christmas is a victim, he is a being with free will who inevitably incurs guilt. Joe's innocence is not to be defined in the same sense as that of the sheep he kills, and in whose blood he washes in an attempt to come to terms with the natural fact of menstruation--which has, like other natural facts, been presented to him grossly distorted. Faulkner himself has said of Joe:

> . . . he didn't know what he was, and so he was nothing. . . . That was his tragedy, that to me was the tragic, central idea of the story--that he didn't know what he was, and there was no way possible in life for him to find out.[2]

On another occasion Faulkner has said of him:

> . . . I think that you really can't say that any man is good or bad. I grant you there are some exceptions, but man is the victim of himself, or his fellows, or his own nature, or his environment, but no man is good or bad either. . . . I don't think he was bad, I think he was tragic.[3]

What Faulkner says here, and what he is saying in his works, is that either-or categories are experientially invalid. One is not good or bad, innocent or guilty, and enforcing an abstract dichotomy results in an experiential inversion. Joe's society demands that he be either white or black, but he has no way of knowing which he is, and he cannot accept himself as simply a human being. As Faulkner says " . . . his only salvation in order to live with himself was to repudiate mankind, to live outside the human race. And he tried to do

that but nobody would let him, the human race itself wouldn't let him."[4] Only at the end of his life does Joe discover that he can be neither-nor, both-and--that he has that choice.

The troublesome problem of whether Joe is a victim or not, of determinism versus free will--which, as I indicated in the first chapter, has been a point of controversy in interpreting the novel--is largely a pseudo one. In the philosophical sense it is unresolvable in the same way as William James's famous example of the man who circles a squirrel while it goes round a tree, keeping its underside toward him. Whether the man actually encircles the squirrel or not, as James points out, is a matter of distinguishing between two incompatible definitions of encirclement. In one sense he does, in another he does not. But since philosophical ends should not be confused with the fictional ones for which a character is manipulated, there is no reason even to raise a semantic issue. Seen philosophically, naturalistic determinism is a scientific way of describing human behavior in such a manner as to predict and perhaps ultimately control it; and Calvinistic determinism is a theological way of interpreting God in such a manner as to diminish the role of man in effecting his own salvation. Seen fictionally, naturalism and Calvinism are not ends but means, not ways of interpreting existence but of producing a desired effect. Naturalistic theories of behavior presented fiction with new possibilities, giving the author a freer hand in establishing plausible motivation: we may explain Joe Christmas's behavior by the constructs of unconscious association, though the import of his actions does

not reside in the same context as those of a case study. And Calvinism may become for the characters a means of justifying the status quo. Now, whether the author sees Calvinism as a defense mechanism or naturalism as but the manifestation of the will of God seems an improper question here. The concern is with a dramatic action leading to man's recognition of his moral complicity in his own fate and that of his fellowman, his fixing his true identity. At the point of recognition man may be said to have a choice: for good or for evil. But whether the choice made is itself preordained by the will of God, determined by environmental and hereditary factors, or effected by individual free will seems to me much a matter of faith. I think Faulkner would contend that, pragmatically considered, man must choose at least as if he has free will, lest he commit himself to rationalized illusions and become a blind puppet enslaved to them. Only if we see Joe Christmas finally as a human being possessed of powers of will and cognition does his sacrifice become different from that of the sheep, become not a meaningless end to a meaningless life. In choosing not to shoot back at Percy Grimm, he actively submits to his fate.

The enigma of Joe Christmas is, however, not limited to problems of definition. Proving stumbling blocks to interpretation are simple matters of unity and coherence in his story: of how the various conflicts are to be related and why Joe performs certain of his actions, or how his circumstances render these explicable. The problems here are of two different orders: those related to the formation

of his identity and those related to his assumption of a new identity. In the first period of his life, which contains the past action up to the day before the murder, we are given a great number of details, but these often seem to support incompatible or unsatisfactorily related interpretations. The problem here is of a general interpretive nature, one of reconciling conflicting modes of apprehending Joe's behavior. In the second period, which takes up the eleven days of present action, Friday through Monday next, supporting details are scanty or non-existent. We see Joe doing things or learn indirectly that he has done them, but the absence of detail prevents us from even speculating why. Here we are faced with the problem of determining not only how we are to interpret his actions but why the motivating circumstances have been left so ambiguous.

From birth to rebirth

Both orders of problems have been exceptionally well-delineated by Walter Slatoff, who has his own interpretation of Faulkner's intentions. Slatoff's description of the difficulties relative to the first order, that of details which seem to support conflicting interpretations, is here summarized in his own words from a presentation that takes up several pages.

> Perhaps better than any other of his creations, Joe Christmas illuminates Faulkner's general methods and intentions. . . . On the one hand, he compels us by dozens of means, many completely explicit, to think of Joe Christmas as Christ or very much like Christ. On the other, he presents Joe not only as a killer but as an extraordinarily violent man. . . .
>
> Apart from these two opposed general views of

> Joe there are several other views and understandings of him we must hold in suspension and seek to reconcile. At times one is led to feel that Joe's primary problem is his Negro blood or belief that he has Negro blood and that it is chiefly this which alienates and destroys him. . . .
>
> During the years he lives with McEachern [however] his difficulties are in no way related to his Negro blood. The McEacherns apparently never suspect it . . . .
>
> . . . . . .
>
> What makes it most difficult to interpret Joe in terms of his mixed blood, however, is the extent to which Faulkner urges us to look at Joe's problem in other terms. A number of critics have urged that we see Joe essentially as victim of narrow or fanatic Protestantism with its unnatural attitude toward sex. . . .
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Complicating one's understanding of Joe's story still further is the strong emphasis on still another aspect of Joe's life--one which has so far been largely overlooked by commentators--his generally unsatisfactory experience with women and sex. . . .
>
> His life is largely a series of disastrous relationships with women. . . .
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Finally, by persistently tying together Joe's relations with women and the eating and rejection of food, Faulkner seems to be suggesting that much of Joe's problem is that he never had a mother and can find no satisfactory substitute.[5]

Slatoff goes on to say that whereas to a certain extent we can relate some of these themes, or conflicts, we are unable to do so satisfactorily: we are left with "the feeling we have about uninterpreted life itself, that there is a highly complex set of relationships which we cannot quite grasp.[6] Although all the difficulties that Slatoff raises cannot be resolved, perhaps he, as much as the details themselves, stubbornly resists reconcilation. The technical frame of reference I elaborated in the preceding chapter, and particularly the parallel with the fertility myths, should to a large extent relate the various conflicts that Slatoff has delineated. The conflicts of race, religion, and sex all have to do with characters trying to make Joe the projected embodiment of their

own guilts, desires, and frustrations--designating him as their "nigger" and thereby denying him humanity, malehood, and the possibility of redemption--and with his rebellion against their attempts. Although Joe does not put together on a rational, conscious level the interacting concepts of a white, preordaining god, an immanent Satan, a chivalric ideal of womanhood, white supremacy and the fear of miscegenation, sex guilt, etc., he nonetheless responds to them; and the reader is left to make the symbolic and logical associations--or to translate an associational pattern into a causal one--and to perceive the irony of Joe's predicament, which would be a comic outrage, were it not a tragic one. Joe is a eunuch trying to assert his prowess in a sterile harem. Nothing can come of it. The dietician's epithet of "little nigger bastard" castrates him at the beginning of his life just as surely as does Grimm's knife at the end of his life. Faulkner does not invent the "highly complex set of relationships," they are implicit in his materials; but with the aid of Frazer, Freud, and the Bible, he is able to integrate them into a fictional whole.

Joe begins life as an unlucky candidate for an abstract label under which can be grouped willy-nilly all that we refuse to face in ourselves. Joe becomes a "nigger" at those crises in the characters' lives when a distinction between <u>them</u> and <u>us</u> becomes psychologically desirable and institutionalized patterns of conduct require an expulsion of evil. So long as his daughter is a bitch who indulges in the abomination of illicit sex and produces a Negro bastard, Hines

is spared the responsibility of being a bad parent, and so long as white remains right he is justified in the treatment he has accorded his grandson. The dietician calls Joe a "nigger" not out of any knowledge of his origins but out of an emotional need, and she evokes an institutionalized response from the matron in order to eliminate him as the threat she supposes him to be. To be sure, she has heard the children call him that, but to them it is merely a word denoting certain general physical characteristics.

The incident with the dietician actually pulls together on an associational level all the areas of conflict that Slatoff enumerates. Food and sex, maternal figure and sexual partner may be associated according to Freudian psychoanalytic constructs and are as well incorporate in the earth-mother figure. Psychoanalytically, mythically, and perhaps biologically, the female is to the male all things: providing nourishment, security, sexual pleasure, and an idealized object of aesthetic and moral veneration.

That the eating of the toothpaste is intended to represent an unconscious substitution for sexual intercourse seems evident in the imagery of this passage:

> He squatted among the soft womansmelling garments and the shoes. He saw by feel alone now the ruined, once cylindrical tube. By taste and not seeing he contemplated the cool invisible worm as it coiled onto his finger and smeared sharp, automatonlike and sweet, into his mouth." (106)

Joe is innocently engaged in autoeroticism, with the tube becoming a phallus and the smearing of the paste into the mouth, the ejaculation into the vaginal canal. He becomes of course violently sick, and consequently, he is revolted when the

dietician, in essence, offers him more of the same activity: "Her voice went on, urgent, tense, fast: 'A whole dollar. See? How much you could buy. Some to eat every day for a week. And next month maybe I'll give you another one.'" But Joe has already had more than enough:

> Looking at the dollar, he seemed to see ranked tubes of toothpaste like corded wood, endless and terrifying; his whole being coiled in a rich and passionate revulsion. "I dont want no more," he said. 'I dont never want no more,' he thought. (109)

Years later, being told of menstruation deflates his idealized image of woman and he envisions female bodies in the same kind of imagery: "In the notseeing and the hardknowing as though in a cave he seemed to see a diminishing row of suavely shaped urns in moonlight, blanched. And not one was perfect. Each one was cracked and from each crack there issued something liquid, deathcolored, and foul" (165). He leans against a tree and vomits. It is important to note, however, that the associations formed in Joe take place under unnatural auspices. The toothpaste is not a food and is incapable of nourishment. It is "automatonlike," just as is the dietician's lovemaking, which is devoid of passion, love, or reproductive intent. His revulsion at Bobbie's "sickness" is not so much caused by the natural fact itself as his introduction to it. He discovers from another boy that women are "doomed to be at stated and inescapable intervals victims of periodical filth." But immediately added is the important distinction: "<u>That was how the boy told it</u>. . . ." (161, italics mine) Later when the waitress herself explains menstruation to him during a love tryst, "it did not shock him now" (170). In other

instances, we may see his dumping of the food Mrs. McEachern brings him (135) as a rejection of the maternal role she tries to assume and his throwing of Joanna's food (208) as a rejection of her as a fit sexual partner.

The dietician is, for the child Joe, a mother surrogate and an unconsciously construed sexual partner, but not simply in her association with food and sex. As the woman in his life she is the goddess figure who fulfills all his needs, gratifies all his senses. She is aesthetically "pleasing in herself to look at" (105), and she is the moral authority he looks to for punishing and therefore erasing his trespass. The dietician is an unworthy vessel for his trust, but Joe cannot know this. What he does know is that she refuses to punish him conclusively and to forgive him, that she causes him to be expelled from her presence, and that her actions apparently have something to do with his being a "little nigger bastard." So we may see Joe as feeling that the term excludes him from her favors and from any hope of expiation. The goddess has abandoned him to his own sensual and moral devices. Faulkner is not dramatizing a case study interpreted in light of psychoanalytic theory, but he is using that theory, as well as the anthropological theories of Frazer and others, to which it closely relates, to construct a metaphor of the human condition.

The incident with the dietician leads of course to Joe's being adopted by the McEacherns, who are not ones likely to restore the faith of a small boy who has undergone an identity trauma. McEachern is an inflexible Presbyterian to

whom the food that God grants him and he grants Joe is token of a hierarchical relationship; thanks must be returned for it with appropriate servility of manner, at prescribed times and in the prescribed form. His god is one before whom acts do not signify, expiation is impossible, and people are absolutely and from the beginning either elect or damned. McEachern would stand in the same relation to Joe. When Joe returns from fighting over the Negro girl, whose favors he has scorned, he finds "no incongruity at all in the fact that he was about to be punished, who had refrained from what McEachern would consider the cardinal sin which he could commit, exactly the same as if he had committed it" (139). When McEachern gives him a calf for what he believes to be evidence of Joe's "beginning to accept what the Lord has seen fit to allot you" (158), it is neither a reward nor an incentive: it is a kind of promissory note to be recalled when McEachern considers it due and for which Joe is absolutely accountable. Glad to have the calf, Joe nonetheless suspects the motive behind the giving of it:

> . . . he looked at it, and it was again too fast and too complete to be thinking: <u>That is not a gift. It is not a promise: it is a threat</u> thinking, 'I didn't ask for it. He gave it to me. I didn't ask for it,' believing <u>God knows I have earned it</u>" (158)

Faulkner is of course here up to his old trick of telling us what a character is <u>not</u>, or not quite, thinking in order to clarify the character's response. Joe comes to suspect ulterior motives behind any proffer, but he never consciously articulates his suspicions, nor does he attempt to distinguish between due and undue obligation. Rather, like the other

characters of the novel, with the exception of Byron and Lena, he sets up rationalizations to protect himself against having to feel responsible. So long as he does not ask for something or can consider he has earned it or paid for it, he owes no one anything. Like Hightower he seeks refuge in a legal distinction. In the case of the calf both the giver and the receiver display bad faith. True, the possibility of Joe's mixed blood never enters into his relation with McEachern, but McEachern would have him a "nigger" just the same, both in the sense of his demanding servility of Joe and Joe's being necessary to his considering himself one of the righteous elect. As a moral authority, McEachern is no better guide than the dietician, and so Joe comes to despise and rebel against a God who would hold his subjects in niggerhood, demanding servility and holding out no hope of redemption.

Mrs. McEachern is no goddess to inspire love, trust, and devotion. She is "a patient, beaten creature without sex demarcation" (144), who presumes upon his masculine independence. The opposite of her husband, she would forego punishment altogether, attempting to bind him to her by debts incurred that he would not be allowed to pay off. Joe must also protect himself against any obligation to her. When he returns from the dance hall to take the rest of her hidden money, he insists on his freedom: "I didn't ask you for it. . . . Remember that. I didn't ask, because I was afraid you would give it to me. I just took it. Dont forget that" (182).

The possibility of his mixed blood--which is to say the possibility of making him an official "nigger," an

identity established by the common accord of the society of which he is a part and sustained by its legal, political, economic, and religious institutions--does of course enter into his relation with Bobbie Allen during the McEachern episode. Unlike Mr. and Mrs. McEachern she does become the recipient of his love and trust, though, again, she is an unworthy vessel. Commenting on how the racial conflict seems to have little significance in this middle episode, Slatoff notes that when Joe tells Bobbie he may have mixed blood:

> . . . it does not seem particularly important to him. Nor does Bobbie's violent rejection of him seem sufficient to account for his later obsession with the problem. It is true that she makes much of his Negro blood in her hysterics after the dance hall episode and even calls him "a nigger son of a bitch" (190), but we do not feel it is this which bothers her so much as the fact that he has gotten her in a jam with the police.[7]

Slatoff has made the proper point here but has somehow put the wrong construction on it. When Joe tells Bobbie about the possibility of his mixed blood, he is naively sharing interesting and confidential information with one he loves and trusts. "She told him about the sickness of the first night. . . . So he told her in turn what he knew to tell" (170). Mixed blood is an intriguing subject like menstruation, one they can talk about and come to terms with. Joe does not connect the mixed blood with his being a "nigger"--he never accepts that connection.

The incident with the dietician, which has such an important unconscious impact on his development, takes place when he is only five and is soon forgotten: "He had already forgot the toothpaste affair. . . . He was so busy avoiding her [the dietician] that he had long since forgot the reason

for it. . . ." (123) But that Faulkner wishes us to see the impression it makes as an active determinant of Joe's later behavior, though lost to his conscious apprehension, is clear from his flashing back to it just as the point when the clock is striking Friday midnight and also from his beginning the flashback with the cryptic words: "MEMORY BELIEVES BEFORE KNOWING REMEMBERS. BElieves longer than recollects, longer than knowing even wonders" (104). When Bobbie does call him "a nigger son of bitch," she touches tender scar tissue. Slatoff is perfectly right in saying that Bobbie is not concerned with the possibility of his mixed blood "so much as the fact that he has gotten her into a jam with the police." Bobbie, like the dietician, is scapegoating, projecting her guilt. His confession of his suspected Negro blood becomes an excuse for her blaming him for her being called a harlot and for her being in a jam. Perhaps her "violent rejection of him" is not alone "sufficient to account for his later obsession," but taken together with the impression made by the dietician incident, latent in his memory, and his experience with McEachern, it is. And Joe is not specifically obsessed with the possibility of his mixed blood: he is obsessed with the determination that no one will make a "nigger" out of him--no man, woman, society, or god.

Upon being expelled from the goddess this second time, Joe drinks down a bottle of artificial spirits and enters maturity, his character now formed into that of the archetypal rebel. In the words of the Negro woman at the church he disturbs: "It's the devil! It's Satan himself!" (282) But

against the baleful figure to whom we are introduced in the early chapters and the fleeing, harassed animal we see in the later ones, we are given the portrait of the child and adolescent whose love and trust has been shattered by those who would use him as a means of sustaining their own false identities. The alternative offered him he sees as abject subservience to or violent rebellion against what he assumes to be the true values in life.

He of course postulates his identity upon the latter, and for it to "work," the values must stand unquestioned. We are told that during his years on the road "for a while it worked" (196). But when he meets a white prostitute who does not differentiate between white men and black, his world order is turned topsy-turvy. Hence his savage reaction and his subsequent attempt to assume a Negro identity. But though he has been used as a "nigger," he is not yet ready to become a Negro, to accept Negro values: " . . . all the while his nostrils at the odor which he was trying to make his own would whiten and tauten, his whole being writhe and strain with physical outrage and spiritual denial" (197). Joe will be near death before he becomes a Negro--if indeed we are to assume he ever does.

In the Joanna Burden episode, Joanna herself usurps to a large extent the focus of attention. From a purely dramatic point of view, Joe, being the less bizarre of the two, serves as a register of our own response, becomes the norm by which we are to judge her action. In his effort to impress us with her abandonment, Faulkner even commits an

obvious and amusingly ironic faux pas. He remarks of Joe: "It could not be said that he corrupted her. His own life, for all its anonymous promiscuity, had been conventional enough, as a life of healthy and normal sin usually is" (227). Joe Christmas? we say.

In Joanna the relation of race, religion, sex, and womanhood is brought into dramatic fusion. Niggerhood is absolutely essential to her identity--the basic premise upon which her world and her relation to it are founded. The Negro is the cross that she has been elected to bear; and she sacrifices her natural female role to the demands of self-righteous martyrdom. The unconscious hypocrisy underlying her position has of course been widely noted. In his early book on Faulkner William Van O'Conner comments: ". . . . Joanna's helping of the Negro is a duty undertaken . . . abstract and impersonal. She acts not out of sympathy for other human beings but out of an obligation to carry out God's design in a depraved world."[8] Hyatt Waggoner contrasts Joanna with Hightower, noting that she takes on responsibility whereas he shirks it; still, her assumption of "the white man's burden" is a means to her own ends rather than those of the Negro:

> She accepts Joe Christmas, paradoxically, because he is, or she thinks he is, a Negro, not because he is a human being. . . . Her very idealism forces her to place him, in black or white. . . . she cannot accept a mixed, impure, ambiguous world, any more than Joe himself can. . . .[9]

The abolitionist, in other words, is just as intent as the South on using the Negro and keeping him in his place, though

for other than economic purposes. Joe is not to be a stud, siring field hands and kitchen help, but she would use him to decoy--or betray--others into serving as instruments of her own grand design. Olga Vickery remarks on the relationship:

> . . . he is the Negro, the symbol of her responsibility, her sin and damnation, and most important, her salvation. Her pleading, bribes, and threats are her attempt to make him translate into living flesh and act her concept of the Negro. He is to ignore his own uncertainty, admit his black blood, his sinfulness, and his dependence for salvation on her and her God. Joe's refusal to submit himself to that formula threatens that myth for the sake of which she has continued to draw breath. She reacts to his recalcitrance, as the mob does later, by resorting to violence.[10]

As well as being a religious fanatic and a fanatical racist, Joanna is the extreme incorporation of the anti-woman. She is a virgin spinster nearing menopause and engaged in masculine pursuits. The forceful entrance of a man into her life is a call to her long suppressed natural function, " . . . as though instinct had warned her that now was the time when she must either justify or expiate" (230). Yet, it is not to reality but to romance that Joanna turns in her attempt to express that function: "During that period (it could not be called a honeymoon) Christmas watches her pass through every avatar of a woman in love. . . . It was as if she had invented the whole thing deliberately, for the purpose of playing it out like a play" (226). Her sexual relation with Joe is staged as a lewd chivalric romance with herself cast as heroine. Her avid, aggressive sexual activity of course parallels her crusade on behalf of the Negro. Her nymphomania is devoid of real passion, reproductive efficacy,

or even affection. She takes her loving like her righteousness purely in the abstract, and both are equally wide of the mark. As Olga Vickery notes: "She is not having intercourse with a man but with an image of her own creation, with the idea of 'Negro' for which she has given up her life."[11]

But Joanna is not, like Hines, a caricature; Faulkner perhaps could grant even the hypocritical abolitionist a grace not extended to the white-trash racist. Like Joe, and even more than Hightower, she is made to appear the pathetic victim of her own delusions and those fostered upon her from the past. There is poignant irony, as well as ludicrousness, in the lonely old maid attempting to assume a role for which she is too late and too lost. She comes to Joe at the confessed age of forty-one with her hair down about her shoulders, and he thinks: "She's trying to be a woman and she dont know how" (210). And poignant also is her being fooled by menopause into thinking that she is indeed to have a child, to justify her being a woman, after all:

> A frost had come, and some of the leaves were beginning to turn. The marked day on the calendar came and passed; she gave herself another week, to be doubly sure. She was not elated, since she was not surprised. "I am with child," she said, quietly, aloud. (233).

The autumn frost is of course a bitter commentary on her false spring. Joanna's grandfather is as much a fanatic on race and religion as Hines. Both are white supremacists, disagreeing merely on legal grounds. Calvin Burden thinks of the Negroes as "Damn, lowbuilt black folks: low built because of the weight of the wrath of God, black because of the sin of human bondage staining their blood and flesh" (217).

Ironically, the Mottstown community even thinks for a time that the Hineses are abolitionists: "It just said, 'They are crazy; crazy on the subject of Negroes. Maybe they are Yankees,' and let it go at that" (299). Like Hightower, Joanna looks upon her father as a phantom: "The only time I can remember him as somebody, a person, was when he took me and showed me Calvin's [the grandson's] and grandpa's graves" (220). It is then that her father tells her:

> Your grandfather and brother are lying there, murdered not by one white man but by the curse which God put on a whole race before your grandfather or your brother or me or you were even thought of. A race doomed and cursed to be forever and ever a part of the white race's doom and curse for its sins. Remember that. (221)

The curse, however, is that epitomized by the name Calvin that the grandfather and grandson bear, a way of thinking that would reduce persons to mechanisms, absolving them of individual responsibility and the pain of conscience. Like the other characters in Joe Christmas' world, Joanna is one of the lost children, lost in the timeless corridors of human folly and human tragedy.

From rebirth to death

With the murder of Joanna and the events that immediately precede and follow it, explication is faced with a quite different problem from that of reconciling details that seem to support divergent interpretations. Here Joe's actions appear to be quite arbitrary, and though we are occasionally made privy to his thoughts, these are rendered with a great deal of ambiguity and are really no more explicable than his actions; for the most part, we see him at a distance or

indirectly through the narration of other characters. Again, it is Walter Slatoff who has most articulately delineated and detailed the difficulties in interpreting this phase of Joe's life, and again I shall summarize his remarks in his own words from several pages of text:

> . . . Faulkner clearly wishes . . . in the final chapters of his [Joe's] story, to complicate our responses further. First of all, Joe, himself, remains almost completely opaque. In the final chapter of his story, describing his capture, imprisonment, escape, and execution, we see him only from a distance, and in the chapter describing his flight after the murder of Miss Burden he is never shown thinking directly about the murder or in any but the most general terms about the meaning of his former or present action. . . . We know that he has attacked a Negro congregation and cursed God from the pulpit. We can interpret this as a parallel of Christ's cleansing of the temple and as a general act of defiance, but it does not suggest any kind of progress or change, especially in view of his flippant attitude afterward. . . . We can infer that some kind of softening has taken place when instead of asking for food with the harsh words he can feel "marshalling in his mind" he finds himself asking quietly what day it is and then saying "thank you" (p. 290). An even deeper change is suggested when he is remembering a kind of Last Supper in the Negro cabin . . . and when he realizes later that the reason he feels at peace is that he doesn't have to bother about having to eat anymore" (p. 295).
>
> Beyond this there is no illumination or resolution of the previously developed themes. We understand that Joe is tired of running and struggling, but as far as we can tell he has been led to this only by physical weariness and by the compulsive awareness (imposed only by the Christ theme) that on Friday he must give himself up. The suggestion, made by his use of the word "brother," that he has accepted his Negro blood is so fleeting and so underdeveloped that we cannot really feel that he has achieved any resolution of this problem. . . .
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> . . . . . .
>
> In the final chapter of Joe's story Faulkner goes far out of his way to prevent us from resolving or ordering our understanding of Joe or the meaning of his life experience. . . . We have no direct knowledge of what he is thinking or feeling. Furthermore, Faulkner introduces two new characters, Gavin Stevens and Percy Grimm, and devotes the major part of the chapter to the actions and emotions of the latter. It is true that the chapter opens with various speculations about why Joe ran to Hightower's house after escaping and why, once there, he let himself

> be executed without fighting back. But these are presented clearly as uninformed speculations and are so general and so unrelated to the specific questions we have about Joe that they offer no real illumination. Their effect, and clearly this is Faulkner's intention, is to leave our questions unresolved. . . . and Stevens' interpretation of Joe's final actions and whole life in terms of alternately ruling white and black blood is so general and mechanical that it can hardly be taken seriously. . . . like most of Stevens' "explanations," it ceases to be comprehensible or coherent when one reads it closely. . . .
>
> . . . . . .
>
> The chapter, and the story of Joe, ends immediately after the castration with the suggestion that Joe is finally at peace and that the memory of him will remain forever with those who watched him die. It is an effective ending, and one feels that somehow Joe's life and death were significant. But I do not think we can close in at all on the nature of that significance. . . .How are we to interpret Joe's peacefulness? Simply as relief that he doesn't have to run anymore, or as the achievement of some more full and serious acceptance of his fate? Are we to view the castration as a perversion on Grimm's part or as a fitting and somehow necessary part of Joe's fate and a necessary aspect of the crucifixion ritual? . . . How seriously are we to take Joe's "ascension" and the suggestion that he has performed a redemptive function? . . . We cannot help but see the ending also as a travesty upon meaningful ritual or religious experience, especially since Faulkner chooses to end the scene with the scream of the fire siren.[12]

Slatoff has again delineated the immediate difficulties of the text, but again he seems to put the wrong construction on them--or at least an unsatisfactory one--concluding finally that Faulkner deliberately chose to leave the elements of his work in a state of permanent suspension or unresolution and that this choice was governed less by a consistent view of art and life than by the demands of his own "temperament."[13] Nevertheless, his analysis does clarify the problems with which a more satisfactory interpretation must come to terms.

Difficulties of the kind Slatoff notes begins with the day before the murder in Chapter 5, which details Joe's actions from sometime after midnight on Friday morning till

the striking of midnight on the same day. Joe's actions appear ritualistic but both they and his thoughts and feelings are flatly described in an almost reportorial style, and neither Joe's thoughts nor the narrator's comments permit us to understand clearly why Joe behaves as he does. We know only that he is in a disturbed state of mind: that he premediates or anticipates something's happening and that this is apparently connected with Joanna. Quite evidently Joe has set out deliberately to alter his identity or at least make a significant break with the routine he has established over the past three years.

Literally, his relationship with Joanna has reached an impasse that seems to require some drastic measure. She insists that he accept her plans for him and demands that he prostrate himself before her god; he responds with the traditional non serviam. " . . . he knew that she was not convinced and she knew that he was not. Yet neither surrendered; worse: they would not let one another alone; he would not even go away" (244). But for the most part, Faulkner chooses to leave the literal accountability of Joe's actions in question, presumably to emphasize their symbolic significance. Abstractly, this impasse in Joanna and Joe's relationship represents one between the will to subdue and the will to resist that can be resolved only through violence or the creation of a new set of values and a new ethic. And so we find Joe undergoing a figurative rebirth, indicated by his return to a more elemental state of existence; moreover, this rebirth is refracted through the Christ story specifically, for it is in this final

ritualistic contest, occupying the present action of the novel, that the Christ avatar of the scapegoat god is most distinctly and meaningfully evoked. In these last days Joe moves from a complete rejection of his nominally human identity through a week outdoors of living like a hunted animal to a return to human society, for which he now assumes responsibility or guilt. He goes through a figurative incarnation, birth, baptism, ministry, and passion; and he perhaps demonstrates two aspects of Christ: first the superhuman prophet of John and then the more humble, loving figure of the Synoptic Gospels. In this latter embodiment he displays the Christian ethic that is capable of resolving, paradoxically, the ancient dichotomy and impasse: freedom is not asserted through subjugation nor resistance but through accepting, out of love, or the feeling of a shared identity, one's bondage to earth and his fellowman.

Although not all of the difficulties can be resolved and although the murder itself and the extent of Joe's conscious recognition are rendered deliberately ambiguous, the broader meaning of Joe's actions during the last days of his life seems reasonably clear. When we first enter the consciousness of Joe in Chapter 5, he is lying awake in the earlier hours of Friday morning, apparently thinking of the impending encounter with Joanna. His partner Burch, or Brown, comes in drunk, and Joe slaps and chokes him to sleep, then goes outside. Here his figurative rebirth begins, now apparently in the fetal stage, in that his succeeding actions represent a rejection of human identity and the assumption of a more

primitive one. He first divests himself of his undergarment and stands defiantly naked in the headlights of an approaching car. He then goes to sleep the remainder of the night in a stable. As I have indicated earlier, this incident seems to carry a great deal of symbolic weight. It represents a kind of lower order incarnation or transvaluation, which is in itself perhaps somewhat ambiguous. We may see the animal identity suggested here, in the murder, and in his succeeding flight as indicating a brutalizing of his human sensibilities. But we must remember the irony at work: the only human society Joe has known in his inverted world is an inhuman society; thus, only through a painful rebirth may he become truly human. His return is to a more brutal but also a purer form of existence, in which false images and values can be purged. This incident is also an allusion to the stable of Christ's birth, in which a higher order incarnation becomes manifest.

Following his sleep in the stable, Joe's actions continue to reflect his complete isolation from human kind and rejection of domestic amenities. He goes into the woods, where he builds a fire and sleeps awhile longer; after arising, he shaves, using the surface of a spring for a mirror, goes to get food, returns to eat it alone, and reads his cheap magazine, using the earth and a tree for his chair. Faulkner undoubtedly intends a reference to Genesis here, the woods representing Eden and the cheap magazine the book of life, such as it is, with which the solitary Adam acquaints himself. We are told: "He had previously read but one story; he began now upon the second one, reading the magazine straight through

as though it were a novel" (97). Having finished the magazine, Joe proceeds to eradicate another aspect of his former identity and occupation by destroying his cache of whiskey. This spilling of the whiskey, or man-made spirits, would seem an antithesis to his drinking it down upon leaving the restaurant at the end of the adolescence episode, when "with his bloody head and his empty stomach hot, savage, and courageous with whiskey, he entered the street which was to run for fifteen years" (195). This incident has reference to the vegetation and Biblical myths in that the distilled liquor represents an abstraction and perversion of the corn and in that the spilling of it represents a casting out of evil spirits. It also represents the breaking of the water that occurs prior to birth.

Later in the day, Joe eats his dinner alone in a restaurant and pauses to stare balefully through the barbershop window, a study in complete alienation:

> Yet though he was not large, not tall, he contrived somehow to look more lonely than a lone telephone pole in the middle of a desert. In the wide, empty, shadow-brooded street he looked like a phantom, a spirit, strayed out of its own world, and lost. (99)

Joe then flees through Freedman Town, whose identity he is not yet ready to assume, reacts with animal hostility to the Negro males he meets on the road, and returns to Joanna's house, where he waits outside the window till the clock is striking twelve.

The murder of Joanna, whatever we make of the ambiguity surrounding it, represents at the same time a bloody birth, baptism, and perhaps intercourse. The slashing of Joanna's

throat is the severing of the umbilical cord, the last link that bound him to his former identity. He will no longer be able to live even nominally as a human being but will be hunted like a beast. Viewed in terms of an Eden parallel, which may be tenuous, the act represents intercourse between Adam and Eve (the taking of her maidenhood), which means loss of innocence and consequent complicity, guilt, and death. Again, however, we must bear in mind here the inversion of values. The beheading of Joanna, her name, her being born late in her parents' lives, her mannish habits would seem to connect her obviously with John the Baptist, as well as would her seeing herself as a righteous prophet "crying in the wilderness." Since Faulkner sometimes fuses Biblical incidents, a practice which results in a kind of doubled refraction, we may see the beheading of Joanna also as John's baptism of Christ, which initiates his public ministry. Though this parallel seems obviously intended, it perhaps has no more than descriptive significance; at least, I am unable to determine the precise meaning to be had from seeing Joanna as John the Baptist.

In his violent baptism and in his subsequent cleansing of the temple, seen in his driving the worshippers from the Negro church, Joe would seem to reflect Christ the outraged prophet and overturner of the old order, who does, afterall, bear some resemblance to the rebellious Lucifer. Certainly, the incident shows Joe still rejecting and condemning human frailties rather than assuming responsibility for them and still confusing submission with subjugation or servility. The change that takes place in Joe, initiating he re-entry into human

society and assumption of a true human identity, is represented in at least three ways. His donning the Negro shoes on the day after he disturbs the church at least foreshadows an acknowledging of the values of the Negro community, its awareness of the common bondage of humanity and its courage to counter oppression with love. We may see this incident as also foreshadowing his execution as a "nigger." His acknowledging of Negro values seems reflected in his remembering his "last supper" at the Negro cabin; of the Negroes he thinks: "And they were afraid. Of their brother afraid" (293). On an organic level, the change is shown in his coming to realize the true value of food and to expiate the sacrilege he has practiced toward it:

> He thought of eating all the time, imagining dishes, food. He would think of that meal set for him on the kitchen table three years ago and he would live again through the steady and deliberate backswinging of his arm as he hurled the dishes into the wall, with a kind of writhing and excruciating agony of regret and remorse and rage. (292)

And the change is finally marked by an incident that can only be explained as a kind of divine intercession. By the day before he enters Mottstown, Joe has reached an almost comatose state, in which he desires neither food nor sleep; it is then that the inexplicable compulsion comes upon him:

> That night a strange thing came into his mind. He lay ready for sleep, without sleeping, without seeming to need the sleep, as he would place his stomach acquiescent for food which it did not seem to desire or need. It was strange in the sense that he could discover neither derivation nor motivation nor explanation for it. He found that he was trying to calculate the day of the week. It was as though now and at last he had an actual urgent need to strike off the accomplished days toward some purpose, some definite day or act, without either falling short or overshooting. (293)

Although Slatoff sees this cryptic incident as "imposed only by the Christ theme" (Above, p. 154), the Christ theme cannot be dismissed with an only. Faulkner offers us here the interpretation that Joe's assumption of a new humanity is not only sanctioned but prompted by divine intercession. At any rate, in the Joe Christmas who moves toward Mottstown and a reunion with his fellowmen, we are to see the Christ of love who endures the passion and exemplifies the Christian ethic. Perhaps it is overly ingenious to distinguish between the Christ of John and the Christ of the Synoptic Gospels. Certainly, Faulkner intends some distinction, but this may be simply between the Christ of the ministry and the Christ of the passion.

Joe's re-entry into human society is marked by the care he takes to make himself presentable. Before hitching a ride into town, he shaves, and once there, he goes immediately to the barbershop, then buys fresh clothing. That he has now achieved a truly human identity is indicated by the impression he makes on the onlookers: "He never acted like either a nigger or a white men" (306). In other words, he has transcended the either-or categories that have troubled him all his life. In accepting his common humanity and the guilt that entails, he has freed himself from bondage to illusion, though his freedom will cost him his life. He demonstrates the Christian ethic not only in accepting his guilt but specifically in his turning the other cheek when his captor Halliday strikes him "a couple of times in the face" (307).

A complication arises from Joe's subsequently escaping, seizing a gun, and striking down Hightower. Literally, we may

see his actions as the result of an entirely new identity crisis brought on by the visit of his grandmother, whom he never knew to exist. Although the connection seems tenuous, Faulkner may have intended Joe's last act of resistance to correspond to Christ's last desperate cry, as reported by Matthew and Mark, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (27:46; 15:34) Both the act and the cry may be seen as alike expressive of the uncontrollable despair that man born of woman must finally endure. More likely, we are to parallel his escape on Monday with the resurrection. Like Christ, Joe for a brief time reassumes his old identity. The grandmother's visit to the jail would represent the visit of the women to Christ's tomb. The imagery of ascension in which Joe's death is described (407) further supports this reading.[14] In either case, Joe does submit to his fate. Whether he makes a conscious sacrifice or merely takes the opportunity, out of weariness, to commit suicide, in not shooting Percy Grimm, we cannot determine; but I think we are to view his refusal to inflict injury on his tormentor as an active choice and demonstrative of the Christian ethic. We can only guess at the message in Joe's "peaceful and unfathomable and unbearable eyes" (407). But though he is killed as an abstraction, he dies as a human being, and it is perhaps this experiential truth that is so affecting to the onlookers. The screaming siren which closes the scene and which Slatoff takes to be a mockery of it may be a mechanical representation of the "wailing" of the "lost children" that Hightower envisions at the end of his story (431). The meaning of Joe's death in Hightower's house, I have already

explained; his coming there is left as deliberately a matter of coincidence, fate, or divine guidance as is Lena's coming to Byron at the planing mill ten days earlier.

As Slatoff points out, the final chapter of Joe's story is considerably complicated by the introduction of two new characters, Percy Grimm and Gavin Stevens, and the latter's explanation hardly helps to clarify anything (Above, p. 154). Although the structural effectiveness of thus introducing them is certainly debatable, I wish at this point simply to note that Grimm, as one of the major actors in this final and most significant episode of Joe's life, must also be given the personal history that explains though does not excuse him. Both he and Stevens belong to the inverted world, the land of illusions: Percy Grimm being a compound of the names of the romantic poet and the famous tellers of fairy tales and Gavin Stevens being possibly a mutation of the names of the chivalric knight errant (Gawain) and the first martyr of the church (St. Stephen)--which is not necessarily to say "Christian."[26] One is a participant and the other an inept speculator on the scene of human misery. Aside from what "facts" he is in command of, Stevens' explanation of Joe's behavior is an exercise in irony. As Lawrence Thompson has pointed out, Stevens is just as accepting of the Negro myth as any of the other characters. Concerning Stevens' interpretation, Thompson comments:

> Faulkner trusts to his dramatic irony, there, and it becomes clear if we apply the same kind of reasoning to the actions of Percy Grimm. Was it Grimm's white blood which would not let him shoot the manacled Joe Christmas through the table? Was it also the white

> blood which would not let him use the knife to castrate Joe after Percy had angrily snatched it up?

Thompson concludes that there " . . . must have been more black blood than white in Percy Grimm."[15] In fact, since the Negroes constitute the repository of true human values in this novel and since we are dealing with an inverted world, Stevens' interpretation becomes valid enough if we read black for white and vice versa.

As I mentioned earlier, the murder of Joanna and the extent of Joes recognition are rendered ambiguous; these two ambiguities, it seems to me, must qualify our interpretation of the meaning of Joe's actions during his last days. They concern whether we are to assume "beyond reasonable doubt" that Joe does murder Joanna and whether we are to assume that he achieves complete recognition--that he consciously accepts the Christian ethic as well as demonstrates it.

Joe's thoughts and actions seem to give us every reason to believe that he does commit the murder, and yet we cannot deny that Faulkner leaves us with little more than circumstantial facts and a knowledge of probable intention and that, in addition, he offers us apparently conflicting evidence.* We have the facts that Joanna is murdered, that her house is burned down, that Joe is in her bedroom with a razor on the day of her murder, and that he flees with a gun with which she had attempted to shoot him. And Joe's thoughts lead us to assume that the undefined <u>it</u> or <u>something</u> that he anticipates doing or happening is the murder of Joanna. On the other hand,

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*For the conflicting evidence see Appendix III.

we cannot definitely connect the facts: the murder is never described, nor, as Slatoff has pointed out, is Joe ever "shown thinking directly about the murder" (Above, p. 154); there is an obvious time discrepancy between Joe's flight and the burning of the house; and Burch's testimony is obviously false. Moreover, even if the intention were explicitly established, it does not constitute the deed. Certainly, we are to see Burch, who is also made suspect, and the community at large as acting on stereotyped emotional impulse rather than on the evidence; and so one might contend that the whole point of the ambiguous and meager evidence is to make a satiric comment on Southern justice: the community, acting on no more than the testimony of Burch, a man who has obviously perjured himself, adopts the opinion that Joe is a "nigger" and consequently a murderer and gleefully sets about to hunt him down and execute what it takes for justice upon him. The point has some validity but is not the whole one, for it hardly explains why the reader himself should be denied conclusive information.

Faulkner's oblique treatment of the murder may be an anticipation of the method on which he bases an entire novel in Absalom, Absalom: that of establishing certain central occurrences, the circumstances of which are obscure and which admit therefore of varying interpretations, for the purpose of arriving finally not at the facts but the truth of them. The method bears some resemblance to that of the mystery story, but the end is totally different. The question of "whodunit," or a similar question, may be posed, and our every

impulse is to try to establish that fact, as well as a plausible rationalization for why it should have been done. But the truth Faulkner would have us reach is not a factual one. To know who has done it and why, we are to consult our own conscience; for it is there that we must determine whether Joe is a murdering nigger bastard or an innocent legitimate human being. If Faulkner has depicted the community as not acting on the facts but on its own prejudices, perhaps he has attempted deliberately to prevent the reader from judging on the basis of them.

Aside from the question of whether Joe commits the murder, there is a question of the extent to which he comes to a true moral recognition of himself and his relation to the world: whether he consciously assumes the values of the Negro community and of Christ as well as having the designation of "nigger" placed upon him and being executed as a scapegoat by his fellowmen. Certainly, Joe achieves at least a limited recognition. As he rides into Mottstown, he thinks upon his life:

> It had been a paved street, where going should be fast. It had made a circle and he is still inside of it. Though during the last seven days he has had no paved street, yet he has travelled farther than in all the thirty years before. And yet he is still inside the circle. 'And yet I have been farther in these seven days than in all the thirty years,' he thinks. 'But I have never got outside that circle. I have never broken out of the ring of what I have already done and cannot ever undo,' he thinks quietly. . . . (296)

And it would seem that in his thinking of the Negroes who fed him as brothers (293), he shows conscious acceptance of a shared identity. But, as Slatoff has noted, the reference is a meager one; and after the passage quoted immediately above,

Joe's thoughts are never again rendered. Possibly, Faulkner wishes to offer, as he has in the past, an alternative, naturalistic explanation for Joe's actions: his trance-like behavior we may attribute to hunger and emotional trauma. But the naturalistic explanation is no more than an alternative and does not comprise the meaning. Again, it would seem that through ambiguity Faulkner wishes to direct our attention to what he considers to be the relevant truth. We are to examine not the causes but the import of Joe's actions.

And the truth is that perhaps it does not matter whether Joe commits murder or achieves moral recognition, anymore than it matters whether he has Negro blood. We are to see him as a human being and a dehumanized being, a victim and a man with will and consciousness who chooses his own fate, white and black, guilty and innocent, damned and a redeemer and to come to terms with what his death means in our own individual consciences. Dorothy Van Ghent, it seems to me, has the best commentary on the meaning of Joe's story:

> . . . every child, whatever his innocence, inherits guilt (as the potential of his acts) for the condition of man. The inversion of natural order begins here with first self-consciousness: the child is heir to the sins of the "fathers." Thus the crime that is always pervasive . . . is identified in a new way--not primarily as that of the "father," nor as that of some public institution, but as that of the child--the original individual who must necessarily take upon himself responsibility for not only what is to be done in the present and the future, but what has been done in the past, inasmuch as the past is part and parcel of the present and the future. The child is the criminal, and it is for this reason that he is able to redeem his world; for the world's guilt is his guilt, and he can expiate it in his own acts.[16]

Interestingly enough, Van Ghent's comments are made in reference to Pip and the opening scene of Dickens' Great Expectations.

But it is not surprising that they are applicable here, for they describe the same universal problem of man's having to bear the whole weight of past human error as well as reenact it on his own account. Although Pip as a child is forced to care for Magwitch--innocence necessarily submitting to the tyranny of human misery that extends back beyond its birth--he nonetheless must bear the responsibility for his humane and criminal act, and in far greater measure than he as a child, though feeling guilt, can apprehend or appreciate. Much the same can be said of Joe, as child and man. In fact the Southern experience is precisely that of "great expectations."

So whether Joe is a Negro or not and whether he is a murderer or not, he truly dies as both. And whether he himself achieves recognition is not so important as whether his death brings about Eliot's cruel April in man's moral being. This subject, as a structural necessity, occupies the chapter of the novel following Joe's execution and will be our concern in the next chapter of this study.

NOTES

[1]Kazin, "Stillness of Light in August," pp. 252-253.

[2]Faulkner in the University, p. 72.

[3]Ibid., p. 118

[4]Ibid.

[5]Slatoff, Quest for Failure, pp. 178-184.

[6]Ibid., 185.

[7]Ibid., 181.

[8]O'Connor, Tangled Fire, p. 76.

[9]Waggoner, From Jefferson to the World, p. 112.

[10]Vickery, The Novels, pp. 76-77.

[11]Ibid., p. 76.

[12]Slatoff, Quest for Failure, pp. 185-189.

[13]Ibid., pp. 253-265.

[14]The days Faulkner emphasizes from the murder of Joanna to the death of Christmas may reflect a rather obvious design. Saturday, the day of Saturn, is when Joe overturns the old order. Tuesday, day of the war god Gyr-Tyr, is when he disrupts the Negro church. Friday is the day of the crucifixion but also the day of Freya, goddess of love. Monday, or moon day, when Lena gives birth and Joe is killed, may have reference to Diana and fertility ritual. Frazer says of Diana: " . . . conceived as the moon, and especially, it would seem as the yellow harvest moon, she filled the farmer's grange with goodly fruits, and heard the prayers of women in travail" (Golden Bough, p. 163). Frazer also notes that certain peoples have offered human sacrifices to the moon to insure well-being (Ibid., p. 514). Probably, Faulkner had additional and more esoteric reasons for his choices. E.g., see Millgate, p. 129, n. 34.

[15]Thompson, Introduction and Interpretation, p. 79.

[16]Dorothy Van Ghent, The English Novel: Form and Function (New York: Rhinehart & Co., 1953), p. 136.

CHAPTER V

HIGHTOWER

After Joe Christmas Hightower stands as the most complex and probably the most significant figure in Light in August. In function he becomes that which R. P. Blackmur has called Henry James's "fine central intelligence,"[1] not so much structurally but to the extent that upon his sensibility the events of the novel are finally registered and brought into unified focus. He is given a highly developed consciousness that serves as a partial interpreter or chorus and that offers the opportunity for a more complete and explicit recognition. Criticism of Hightower has been mixed, with critics generally acknowledging his function but expressing some reservation on how successfully this has been realized. For instance, in specific reference to Hightower, Irving Howe finds that "Faulkner is almost always uncertain in his treatment of those characters who serve both as chorus and center of intelligence."[2] But any such uncertainty would seem less a consequence of Faulkner's treatment of Hightower than of the desirable irony that arises from his dual function as commentator and focus of a cognitive action: that which makes him an appropriate commentator, his contrived detachment, is that which constitutes the moral fallacy he is finally to recognize. Hightower is quite appreciative of the misery of "poor mankind"; his

fallacy is to consider mankind a them rather than an us. His analysis of what he realizes to be the impending "crucifixion" of Joe Christmas is accurate enough: "Since to pity him would be to admit self-doubt and to hope for and need pity themselves. They will do it gladly, gladly. That's why it is so terrible, terrible, terrible" (322). But he does not yet see that in his passive acquiescence he is one of them and that he had himself achieved his supposed right to that passivity with "voluptuous and triumphant glee" (429). He is to realize that executioner and victim are not opposing thems but that they, along with the self-appointed neutrals make up a single us, a "composite of all the faces which he has ever seen" and "his own is among them" (430).

Although Hightower has been the subject of some critical controversy--largely concerning how fully realized he is as a character, how effectively his story is integrated into the total design of the novel, how his final vision is to be interpreted, and specifically whether he is "redeemed"--the meaning of his action is certainly more immediately apprehensible than that of Joe Christmas. As Michael Millgate has said: "The 'idea' informing Faulkner's presentation of Hightower is clear; it is, indeed, sufficiently implied in the obvious symbolism of his name."[3] Being highly sensitive to the terrors life holds and yet lacking the moral courage to engage them, Hightower elaborates a rationalized defense against both involvement and guilt, walling up his sensibility and turning inward to indulge in the terrorless creation of his imagination, based on the past event of his

grandfather's death. In terms of the sexual metaphor that runs throughout the novel, his daily vision represents a form of autoeroticism or masturbation. The equation of physical and moral states is, in fact, nowhere clearer than in his case. His "almost hidden" house is like a grave, with its stone monument out front proclaiming "Rev. Gail Hightower, D.D." (50), the D.D. standing for "Done Damned," as Byron is told, though it might just as well be Done Dead. The almost putrid condition of his house, clothes, and body is repeatedly emphasized; for instance:

> . . . as soon as Byron enters the house he feels the corners of his nostrils whiten and tauten with the thick smell of the stale, mankept house. And when Hightower approaches, the smell of plump unwashed flesh and unfresh clothing--that odor of unfastidious sedentation, of static overflesh not often enough bathed--is well nigh overpowering." (261)

The innocent Byron thinks: "It is the odor of goodness. Of course it would smell bad to us that are bad and sinful" (261). The purchase of food, which Hightower prepares in an "illkept kitchen" and eats alone, constitutes his only involvement with the community, and this is kept at a minimum by his paying "with cash for what he bought" (269). He is of course childless. So completely has Hightower effected his stagnant isolation, his detachment from living humanity, that when Byron first tells him of Lena's unfortunate circumstances and his own blundering attempts to help her, "it is as though he were listening to the doings of people of a different race" (70).

Hightower's withdrawal is not, however, a simple case of staying out of harm's way, as is Byron's up to the point that Lena enters his life. Hightower has both inherited and

consciously chosen positions that commit the trust and dependency of others. From his grandfather, who actively advocated slavery, and his father, who actively protested it, though fighting against the North, he inherits a name that would seem to carry with it the responsibility of leadership. He deliberately chooses to be a minister and a husband, though to promote his own end of sequestration rather than to assume the duties that these roles involve. In failing to meet his secular, religious, and marital responsibilities, he does not simply avoid trust but betrays it. He is finally the most culpable character in the novel because he is shown to be the most conscious and capable and yet also the most derelict. Although Hines's behavior exceeds his in sheer viciousness, Hines is simply not as answerable. Hightower's will to abrogate his rightful duty of making himself an instrument of others' needs is just as stubbornly persistent as that of Hines, and McEachern, or Joanna to presume a wrongful duty and make others the instruments of it; and he reasserts this will when his rationalizations are in danger of flagging. When he learns that the sheriff is on Joe's trail with dogs, he reasons with himself:

> 'I have bought immunity.' It is like words spoken aloud now: reiterative, patient, justificative: 'I paid for it. I didn't quibble about the price.' . . . Then sweat, heat, mirage, all, rushes fused into a finality which abrogates all logic and justification and obliterates it like fire would: I <u>will</u> not! I <u>will</u> not!' (271-272)

And when he turns Byron and the Hineses out of his house, he feels compelled to insist nakedly: "It's not because I cant, dont dare to . . . it's because I wont! I won't! do you

hear?" (342) But Byron and the Hineses have sat before him, we are told, "almost like a jury" (338), and in the end will and rationalization together buckle before his Judge, "the final and supreme Face Itself" (428). In willing not to choose, Hightower has already chosen; and though he deludes himself with rational justification, the choice is for evil, just as surely as that of Satan, whom his photograph resembles (59).

But if Hightower is the most culpable character, the one most responsible for allowing, as Faulkner has said in a different context, Satan to "usurp the legend of God,"[4] he is also one of the lost children and perhaps the most anguished for being able to realize most fully the extent of that lostness. He too is the victim of causations beyond his control or immediate comprehension. Born late into the lives of a sickly woman and an unsympathetic man, he is, like Joe and Joanna, the child of a father he never really knows, the gulf between them being not merely one of age and temperament but of bitter experiences undergone and old griefs endured. Yet, the bitterness and grief reach beyond their moment in time to touch him and render him unfit for life. His finding the battle-marked coat, put safely away in the attic, is his traumatic childhood experience that robs him of his own identity, renders him castrate, makes him a ghost. This experience of his is of course analogous to Joe's affair with the toothpaste and to Joanna's being shown the hidden graves of her grandfather and brother and told of the black curse. Again, the psychological causation thus established is

symbolic of a greater one, and to explain the characters' circumstances is not to excuse them. They are to be judged and yet, perhaps, be found deserving of mercy.

In relation to the structure of the main action, Hightower is to the final episode of Joe's life what Hines is to the first and McEachern is to the second; all are authority or father figures whose obsessive illusions lead them to abuse the responsibility vested in them. Hightower functions similarly in the counter action, and though he is more or less tricked into putting his capabilities to use in delivering Lena's baby, he is finally an irrelevancy in their lives and remains behind, moored in Jefferson. In reference to the Christ story, Faulkner probably intends that Hines, McEachern, and Hightower represent ironic versions of the three wise men. All of them are connected with nativities of sorts, and none of them appreciate the meaning of the births they witness. McEachern's connection is with a legal birth--through adoption. Of the three, Hightower alone achieves wisdom.

As I said at the end of the last chapter, Hightower's recognition follows Joe's death as a structural necessity, since upon his consciousness the meaning of that death is registered and thus, Faulkner must surely have hoped, made apprehensible. It is his coming to recognition that makes Hightower the focus of his own action. Like the other major characters of the present drama, he is given his history, which explains without excusing. This is recapitulated in his final chapter in order to bring to bear the fullest degree of consciousness upon his recognition. As with Joe and Joanna

we see him first from an outside view, learning of his experience in Jefferson from his arrival to the present and obtaining the details of his disgrace and withdrawal. Not until later, as with them, are we to realize the human being, complicated by his history, that extends beyond the face.

Hightower's story conveniently breaks down into three phases: his childhood, his marriage and ministry in Jefferson, and his involvement with Lena and Joe, through Byron's agency, during the present action. Dichotomy and inversion appear in the very first phase. Reality, as exemplified by his father and the father's battle-marked frock coat, with its patch of Yankee blue, represents a terror that Hightower can come to terms with only by putting it safely in the past and subjecting it to the transforming powers of the imagination. The coat, which so fascinates Hightower, reflects the contradictory, impure functions that life demands. His father was married in it, preached in it, and finally went to war in it. Its fabric consists of dissimilar patches, one of them even coming from the uniform of the enemy. The coat also represents the tendency of an active, involved man to put the past behind him, for when the father returns from the war he never wears it again (410). " . . . when the war was lost and the other men returned home with their eyes stubbornly reverted toward what they refused to believe was dead, he looked forward and made what he could of defeat by making practical use of that which he had learned in it" (415). The father's fallacy is to think that he can put the past behind, like an old coat closed up in a trunk in the attic. The reality of complicity

and guilt cannot be so easily removed. For Hightower the blue patch provides vicarious contact with the world of grim actuality, which he can celebrate only in his imagination. He touches the patch with "horrified triumph and sick joy and wonder if his father had killed the man from whose blue coat the patch came. . . . " (411) After his experiences with the coat, Hightower goes to the kitchen to request the story of his grandfather and the number of Yankees he killed. Together he and the cook resurrect the image and deeds of the grandfather, coloring them with their fantasies.

His father, however, represents an ominous, living reality, the terrors of which cannot be kept at a safe aesthetic distance. Hightower identifies with his mother, who "was one of many children of a genteel couple who had never got ahead and who seemed to find in the church some substitute for that which lacked upon the dinnertable" (413). Hightower's impression is that his father "was a stranger to them both, a foreigner, almost a threat":

> He was more than a stranger: he was an enemy. He smelled differently from them. He spoke with a different voice, almost in different words, as though he dwelled by ordinary among different surroundings in a different world. (416)

The father, though somewhat of the McEachern mold, clearly has Faulkner's approval. He is a man of strong will and simple principles who can incorporate paradox and contradiction:

> . . . who had been a minister without a church and a soldier without an enemy, and who in defeat had combined the two and become a doctor, a surgeon. . . . As though it [his conviction] had seen in the smoke of cannon as in a vision that the layingon of hands meant literally that. As if he came suddenly to believe that Christ had meant that him whose spirit alone required healing

was not worth the having, the saving. (415-416)

Though a man of extremes, impatient with the weakness of others, the father is at least immersed in life. And much the same can be said of the grandfather and his contemporaries. To be sure, the wasted landscape of Faulkner's modern South mirrors the moral condition of the old order, and there is little to distinguish between the bravado of the confederate heroes and that of Percy Grimm, but Faulkner would seem to prefer them to the hollowmen of Hightower's generation, who lack even the courage to sin boldly. What Hightower's grandfather was and what Hightower, and the South, makes of him are of course two different things. As Olga Vickery has said: "Hightower's dead grandfather can carry any symbolic and emotional weight with which the young boy's imagination endows him. His father, on the other hand, continually interferes with the symbol and unconscious process of myth-making by his very physical presence."[5] Thus Hightower "found no terror in the knowledge that his grandfather on the contrary had killed men 'by the hundreds' as he was told and believed. . . . No horror here because they were just ghosts, never seen in the flesh, heroic, simple, warm; while the father which he knew and feared was a phantom which would never die" (418).

Hightower's inversion of illusion and reality Faulkner seems to see as the problem of the South as a whole, which has made of defeat and death an aesthetically gratifying legend full of pleasing ironies, such as the grandfather's being killed in a henhouse after burning the Yankee stores. Who but the South could have lost so gloriously, lost not

because of the exuberant heroics of its boy-gods, who regarded war not as a grim venture to be successfully transacted, as did the dull Yankees, but as a holiday to be passed in pranks and madcap adventure. So goes the legend. It would have been no doubt a disaster, an artistic outrage, for the South to have won. Unfortunately, the charm of the legend offers an escape from the frequently uncharming, ambiguous, and abrasive task of dealing with reality.

The church to which Hightower "willingly surrendered," and whose attitude toward the crucifixion parallels that of the South toward the Civil War, he chooses with an eye to escaping from life:

> He went there, chose that as his vocation, with that as his purpose. But he believed in more than that. He had believed in the church too, in all that it ramified and evoked. He believed with a calm joy that if ever there was shelter, it would be the Church; that if ever truth could walk naked and without shame or fear, it would be in the seminary. When he believed that he had heard the call it seemed to him that he could see his future, his life, intact and on all sides complete and inviolable, like a classic and serene vase, where the spirit could be born anew sheltered from the harsh gale of living and die so, peacefully, with only the far sound of the circumvented wind, with scarce even a handful of rotting dust to be disposed of. (419)

This passage is notable for its imagery of walling in, or out, but also for its evoking of Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn," with its famous and extensively debated conclusion "Beauty is truth, truth beauty." For this is the equation that Hightower makes and sees as the perfect reason for sequestering himself with his vision. Hightower makes the dichotomy between a pure, etherealized beauty--as exemplified in the carefully imagined account of his grandfather's deeds and death--and

the considerably removed, gross imitation of it in the earthly goings-on of men whose souls are but sense. As Hightower says to his wife: "Surely, when God looks about at their successors, He cannot be loath to share His own with us" (425). It would seem that to Faulkner the equation is a risky one, based on the overly exclusive view of beauty and truth to which man's limited consciousness condemns him. The worship of a spiritual beauty is ironically that which eviscerates Hightower and blinds him to the truth of himself and his relation to the real world. Hightower's "artistic" consciousness is projected in his reading of Tennyson, whom Faulkner satirizes unjustly in Light in August as a poet who endorses a fallacious art-life dichotomy. Hightower opens his "dogeared" Tennyson, and "soon the fine galloping language, the gutless swooning full of sapless trees and dehydrated lusts begins to swim smooth and swift and peaceful. . . . It is like listening in a cathedral to a eunuch chanting in a language which he does not even need to not understand" (278).

To the girl who seizes upon Hightower as a chance for freedom, the church is not, however, a sanctuary for art lovers but a prison. He is quite responsive, for "he believed at once that she was beautiful, because he had heard of her before he ever saw her and when he did see her he did not see her at all because of the face which he had already created in his mind" (420). Marriage with Hightower, however, proves frustration of a new sort, because to him "it was not men and women in sanctified and living physical intimacy, but a dead state carried over into and existing still among the living

like two shadows chained together with the shadow of a chain" (420). The woman finds living like two shadows more than she can bear and makes her final bid for freedom by jumping out of a hotel window. She, like the ministry, is but a means to the end of his getting to Jefferson to worship at the sacred spot where the events so exalted in his imagination actually took place. Hightower does not consciously scheme to use either his wife or the ministry--rather, he naively thinks they would be quite amenable to his desires; simply, to his inverted way of thinking, the beautiful illusion is the truth, the reality, and life is the play or game. To the machinations of his more practical wife in getting him his church, he responds: "Yes. I see now. That's how they do such, gain such. That's the rule" (422). Even after the community has given him to understand that the unity to which he has sworn himself in marriage is real, is more than the "shadow of a chain," and that the shame and disgrace of the wife is also that of her husband, he continues to play by the rules, keeping to the letter of the covenants he has made. And it is upon this formal basis that he presumes to advise Byron: "Think what you are doing. You are attempting to come between man and wife" (268). And later he counsels him upon the rules of the love game: "If you must marry, there are single women, girls, virgins. It's not fair that you should sacrifice yourself to a woman who has chosen once and now wishes to renege on that choice" (276). Hightower's every word is an irony, and Byron is quick to see the contradiction in the man who has resigned from society, supposedly under its compulsion,

and yet still abides by categorical moral distinctions, saying of his involvement with Lena: "I knew you would not like it . . . but I did not expect this. That you too would turn against a woman wronged and betrayed" (276). As Cleanth Brooks has remarked, Hightower "still stresses a God of justice rather than mercy, for his sincerest belief is that he has somehow 'bought immunity.'"[6] Hightower's idea of payment is based on legality rather than reality, empirical or divine. He would strike a just bargain with his neighbor, his conscience, and his God. So long as rationalization allows him to think he has earned something or paid for it, he can, like Joe, exempt himself from feeling obligation. The justice both invoke, however, is but the projection of their own need.

Not until Joe Christmas dies in his kitchen does he divine his unconscious motives, see through his rationalization, and admit to himself that his gestures to the ministry, to marriage, to the community, to the home for unwed mothers he has so charitably supported have been merely to delude his fellowman and his own conscience. The sign outside his house proclaims what has been his occupation all along:

REV. GAIL HIGHTOWER, D.D.
Art Lessons
Handpainted Xmas & Anniversary Cards
Photographs Developed

Lessons in illusion making are all he has to offer his congregation. The present is important only as an anniversary of the past. Not reality but an image of it is what he has committed himself to developing. The "Xmas" may be a baldly ironic way of saying that he does not recognize the Christ

in Christmas. To be sure, the Greek Chi may be as meaningful a symbol as C-h-r-i-s-t, but one can consider only the probable intention.

Before Joe Christmas forcefully makes his way into Hightower's house, thus symbolically freeing the old minister's moral sensibility from the high tower that he has erected around it, Hightower has involved himself in life to the extent of delivering Lena's baby. Some critics have seen this event as being sufficiently restorative to prompt his later effort to "save" Joe. But the restoration she provides would seem as yet partial and temporary. True, he sees himself as newly envigorated. He chooses to read Henry IV rather than his customary Tennyson (355), and of course we are to contrast the supposed wastrel prince who metamorphosizes into the responsible sovereign with the poet whose most famous work is in commemoration of a dead man; but then Hightower immediately goes to sleep over his book. Later when he goes to call on his patient, Lena, he speaks with "a hearty voice that almost booms" (357); but upon her mentioning that the Hineses, whom he has refused to help, have returned to town, his face resumes its former mien: " . . . it is almost as though it had grown ten years older while he stood there. Or like his face looks now as it should look and that when he entered the room, it had been a stranger to itself (358). And being still a pseudo-wiseman, he has nothing to offer Lena but the stale moral pronouncements he has tried to foster upon Byron. He does make the effort to prevent an execution in his own house by telling Joe's pursuers the

lie that Byron had previously urged him to tell, and Olga Vickery rather inexplicably calls this his "one fumbling but heroic attempt to save Christmas."[7] But the lie was never meant to save Joe from the justice presumably due him; it was merely to permit his grandmother a merciful period of grace with him. Save Joe Christmas for what? or from what? From the death and mutilation that will force Hightower and the onlookers to confront the discrepancy between illusion and reality, between abstractly conceived images and bleeding flesh? Hightower's fallacy is to think he can care for Lena without caring for Joe. Had Hightower's assisting at the birth of Lena's baby <u>followed</u> his futile attempt to prevent Joe's being slaughtered in his own kitchen, then one might see the design of the novel as indicating some kind of permanent restoration.

Dramatically, the birth event in Hightower's life seems one of those pitiful ironies, like the reunion of Lear with Cordelia, which reinforces through contrast the catastrophe that impends, underscoring the awful and inevitable working out of the fate to which the character is committed. Thematically, Hightower's assistance at the birth has different implications for the counter and main actions, as is in keeping with their obverse relation. Just as in the inverted world an abstractly conceived good becomes experientially evil--like the foul odor of Hightower, which Byron takes for the smell of goodness--so in the right-side-up world of Lena even those characters caught in the backwash of life, Byron, Hightower, Mrs. Hines, are allowed to perform useful and revitalizing

services. In her world, by simply being a woman, Lena functions as the goddess, rendering fertile all that accepts her sway. In the main action the import of the birth's coming before the death is that Hightower is unable to comprehend the significance of the nativity until he has witnessed the crucifixion. And Hightower "witnesses" not only in the sense that he observes the execution of Christmas but in the sense that he later experiences sympathetically its agony: "Out of the instant the sandclutched wheel of thinking turns on with the slow implacability of a mediæval torture instrument, beneath the wrenched and broken sockets of his spirit, his life. . . . " (429-430) Hightower now experiences an epiphany, making him a true wise man, who comprehends the birth of a new ethic: out of division and death come unity and love, as projected in the epilogue that follows. Faulkner's telescoping of Biblical events--birth and baptism, crucifixion and ascension and new nativity--is not without its meaning.

When Hightower muses that the usefulness Byron has "restored" to him must be all he has left to experience, the narrator comments cryptically: "But it is not all. There is one thing more reserved for him" (363). What is reserved for him is the recognition of his own self-deceit and the now ironic truth that the isolation and irrelevancy he has so long coveted and contrived for is his, but to be borne with suffering and remorse.

Hightower's recognition, his coming to witness, gathers itself slowly, fragmentarily, reflected in the much-admired wheel image (426-432). Hightower first seems

to realize that he betrayed his duty to his congregation, which looked to him for guidance, and that the church itself has betrayed its duty to man (426-427). He thinks that perhaps he also betrayed his wife, "became her seducer and her murderer, author and instrument of her shame and death" (427), concluding that "after all, there must be some things for which God cannot be accused by man and held responsible" (427). Then he begins to realize that he has not been the victim he has taken himself to be. Looking back on his early experiences in Jefferson, he sees through his rationalized martyrdom as a wronged husband and a social outcast; he now perceives that he had manipulated people as one would cards in a game, betraying them into breaking a trust in order to effect a situation that would preclude the need either for his involvement or guilt. "He seems to watch himself, alert, patient, skillful, playing his cards well, making it appear that he was being driven, uncomplaining, into that which he did not even then admit had been his desire since before he entered the seminary" (428-429). But still Hightower rationalizes that he has paid for the right to live as he pleases and that "it is any man's privilege to destroy himself, so long as he does not injure anyone else, so long as he lives to and of himself" (429).

The process of realization, as depicted in the wheel image, has now, however, gone too far for rationalized defenses or even will to stop it. Frantically he tries to pull back: "I dont want to think this. I must not think this. I dare not think this" (429). In reference to this point in

Hightower's realization, the skeptical Walter Slatoff comments: "Surely no writer could do more to prepare for and promise illumination and resolution."[8] Slatoff notes that the passage (below) which follows this promise clearly suggests a cause and effect relation that is to clarify the resolution suggested by the image of the wheel, which is subsequently "freed now of burden" (430):

> Then if this is so, if I am the instrument of her despair and death, then I am in turn instrument of someone outside myself. And I know that for fifty years I have not even been clay: I have been a single instant of darkness in which a horse galloped and a gun crashed. And if I am my dead grandfather on the instant of his death, then my wife, his grandson's wife . . . the debaucher and murderer of my grandson's wife, since I could neither let my grandson live or die . . .
>
> The wheel, released, seems to rush on with a long sighing sound. (430; Faulkner's ellipses)

The logic that the diction and syntax indicate, Slatoff observes, promises more than it fulfills, serving really but "to extend the highly figurative and alogical equation of himself with his own grandfather, an equation which both he and we have already established." Thus, he concludes: "We wonder now whether we have observed a moment of tragic illumination or an escape into fantasy and confusion."[9] Slatoff's objections are cogent and, in view of the climactic nature of the passage, perhaps justifiable, but they are not unassailable. In the first place, Faulkner has no particular obligation to abide by rhetorical conventions, especially when trying to represent the workings of consciousness. And in the second, though the relation between Hightower and his grandfather's moment of death has already been established (e.g., see 418), Hightower here realizes his ultimate betrayal:

that his own grand illusion has deceived him or, rather, that he has betrayed himself by letting it usurp his life. Though the grand illusion was in a sense his grandfather's as well, we must distinguish between the fleshly man and the spiritualized image of him. We may think of the real grandfather as a self-deceived man, destroying himself and others, but we would soon be at a loss for dramatic evidence, since the story is not about him; he is but a very minor character, given passing and rather pleasant reference. His inflated image, however, pervades the novel as the idealized embodiment of the South's sickness; and Hightower, who believed in it and perpetuated it, now sees it shrink: the killer of hundreds of Yankees become the ignominious debaucher and murderer of a lonely, frustrated housewife.

Slatoff seems to criticize a metaphoric relation for not being, literally, a logical one, but he is justified in finding this passage more muddled than it should be. In the sentence " . . . if I am the instrument of her despair and death, then I am in turn instrument of someone outside myself," instrument seems to be used in a deliberately equivocal sense. At least, it admits of equivocal interpretation: "instrument of her despair and death" meaning agent of and "instrument of someone outside myself" meaning dupe of; Hightower causes his wife's undoing but is himself undone by the image of the grandfather. The two clauses may also be seen as redundant: going from the particular instance in the subordinate clause to the general instance in the main clause--in which case instrument ceases to be equivocal. In view of

the equation that follows the sentence, the first, equivocal, reading would seem to make more sense. Moreover, the impact of this climactic revelation is dissipated by its obscurity and by Hightower's previous realizations. He has already considered that he is "perhaps" his wife's "seducer and her murderer" (427); that the hero he presented to his congregation in place of the actual Christ is a "swaggering and unchastened bravo killed with a shotgun in a peaceful henhouse, in a temporary hiatus of his own avocation of killing" (428); and that, as previously pointed out, he is himself his grandfather's ghost, his life having stopped at the moment of his grandfather's death. Given these previous realizations, we are puzzled as to what new revelation either Hightower or we are to grasp, and when we do grasp it, we are likely to be dissatisfied with Faulkner's handling of it or doubtful about the extent of our insight.

Having realized his own self-betrayal, Hightower is now prepared to perceive the composite face of mankind, the halo of faces, of which his is one. And in light of this transcendent unity, the faces of Christmas and Grimm, which would seem the most nearly opposed, blend into one. Unable to pray, Hightower can think only of the "unheeded crying of all the living who ever lived, wailing still like lost children" (431). He offers a final, feeble rationalization: "I wanted so little. I asked so little. It would seem . . . " (431; Faulkner's ellipses). The little he wanted was not to be one of those children, and it would seem that ironically he gets his desire. The expulsion of illusion from Hightower is

presented in imagery nearly identical to that describing the expulsion of life from Joe Christmas (cf. 407 and 431); but whereas Joe's death is seen as "triumphant," making a permanent imprint upon the memories of those who observe it, Hightower is left "empty and lighter than a forgotten leaf and even more trivial than flotsam lying spent and still upon the window ledge which has no solidity beneath hands that have no weight. . . . " (431) It would seem that Joe is granted a kind of life in death and Hightower the death in life that has always been his lot but which he now recognizes for what it is.

Then comes the apotheosis toward which, in a sense, the development of the novel has accumulated, the apparition of life that erupts out of nothing "like the crater of the world in explosion" (431). Although some critics have seen this event as a positive one, the logic of the novel would indicate it to be the ironic fulfillment of Hightower's chosen destiny, and since the presentation of it is ambiguous, our interpretation must be guided by what seems most appropriate to the total design of the work. Faulkner himself has commented on the ending of Hightower's story, but his remarks do not provide a great deal of help. Asked whether Hightower literally dies and whether he achieves "some sort of salvation," Faulkner replied:

> He didn't die. He had wrecked his life. He had failed his wife. He had failed himself, but there was one thing that he still had--which was the brave grandfather that galloped into town to burn the Yankee stores, and at least he had that. Everything else was gone, but since he had been a man of God he still tried to be a man of God and he could not destroy himself. But he had destroyed

> himself, but he still couldn't take his own life. He had to endure, to live, but that was one thing that was pure and fine that he had--was the memory of his grandfather, who had been brave.[10]

Faulkner makes clear that we are not to assume Hightower dies, as a few critics have supposed, and he seems indeed to endorse the vision of the grandfather as a positive event. But unfortunately, Faulkner's public remarks do not have any collective weight of textual evidence behind them that would enable us to adjust our interpretation of their meaning. The words pure and fine and brave can be double-edged. Percy Grimm is undoubtedly brave, and the purity and fineness of Hightower's conception is precisely that which leads him to turn his back on a world that seems impure and not so fine. The whole point of Lena Grove is obviously that she is not an immaculate, idealized virgin and of Byron that his bravery is of a mundane, unflamboyant sort. There is, however, little point in ingenious quibbling. If Faulkner's remarks seem contrary to my interpretation, I can only point to the evidence of his novel.

On the remaining issue of whether Hightower does achieve some kind of salvation or redemption (which is often related to the problem of whether his final vision is ironic), critics are about evenly divided.[11] The issue seems to rest upon the question of whether or not we equate redemption with recognition. As I indicated in Chapter 2, Faulkner does seem to assume that the truth is itself sufficient for moral conduct: though Hightower has deluded himself, his will is good; if it were not, his recognition would be of no consequence.

On the other hand, he is left alone in Jefferson, and it is too late for him to mend his former betrayals. He can only suffer, but then, Faulkner sees suffering itself as ultimately redemptive. The confusion, seems to be one between dramatic circumstances and their effect. Literally, Hightower can no more be restored to a life of involvement with others than sight can be restored to Oedipus or life to Cordelia. At the same time, a tragic purgation has taken place, and the insight gained through catastrophe and sustained through suffering is surely to be accepted as positive. If Oedipus and Lear are redeemed, then Hightower is redeemed, but to consider him literally restored to fruitful involvement would be to confuse a tragic effect with a melodramatic one.

But though the Hightower action can be construed generally in Aristotelian terms, to compare him with Oedipus and Lear or even to designate his recognition as formally tragic could lead to a misunderstanding of its particular import. The divinity that intercedes in Joe's last days, prompting his return to humanity and assumption of guilt, is here present as judge, "the final and supreme Face Itself, cold, terrible because of Its omniscient detachment" (428). Hightower realizes not only his self-deceit but the true extent of his lostness. He is left past rationalization or even prayer, judged, and dependent on mercy for whatever salvation may be his. The conscience of Hightower, the South and all mankind, Faulkner seems to say, is finally answerable to an authority beyond itself; at least, the individual conscience

partakes of a greater one, which may be called divine. One should be cautious, however, about identifying this divinity with the Christian God. Perhaps the greatest difficulty in reading Faulkner has been, and still is, to know when one has distinguished the message from the metaphor. Faulkner might well say that the moral universe is a good deal older than Christianity and that the Christ story is but one of its instances.[12] At any rate, we are to see the death of Joe Christmas and the witness of Hightower as, in a sense, making the world possible for Byron and Lena, who make the world possible at all and who go on their way, demonstrative of unity and love coming out of division and death.

NOTES

[1]Richard P. Blackmur, ed., The Art of the Novel, by Henry James (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962), p. xviii.

[2]Howe, Critical Study, p. 208.

[3]Millgate, Achievement, p. 131.

[4]Faulkner in the University, p. 63.

[5]Vickery, The Novels, p. 224.

[6]Cleanth Brooks, "William Faulkner: Vision of Good and Evil," in his The Hidden God (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 37.

[7]Vickery, The Novels, p. 79.

[8]Slatoff, Quest for Failure, p. 191.

[9]Ibid., p. 192.

[10]Faulkner in the University, p. 75. See also p. 45.

[11]For those who consider the vision negative and Hightower not redeemed, see Holman, "Unity of Light in August," p. 162; Vickery, The Novels, pp. 70, 79; Volpe, Reader's Guide, p. 160; Gold, "Two Worlds," p. 165. For those who consider the vision positive and Hightower redeemed, see Brooks, Yoknapatawpha Country, pp. 70-71; Waggoner, From Jefferson to the World, p. 115; Jacobs, "Tragedy of Isolation," 182-183; Darrel Abel, "Frozen Movement in Light in August," Boston University Studies in English, III (Spring 1957), 42-44; Carl Benson, "Thematic Design in Light in August," South Atlantic Quarterly, LIII (Oct. 1954), 542. These views are not presented without qualification in either case.

[12]Faulkner has very nearly said as much: " The Christ story is one of the best stories that man has invented, assuming that he did invent that story, and of course it will recur. Everyone that has had the story of Christ and the Passion as a part of his Christian background will in time draw from that" (Faulkner in the University, p. 117). And in speaking of the peculiar "light" from which the title of the novel derives, Faulkner says: "It lasts just for a day or two, then its gone, but every year in August that occurs

in my country, and that's all that title meant, it was just to me a pleasant evocative title because it reminded me of that time, of a luminosity older than our Christian civilization" (Ibid., p. 199). But the light with which Christ is identified in the book of John might well have had some influence.

CHAPTER VI

BYRON BUNCH, LUCAS BURCH, LENA GROVE

Byron Bunch

Byron Bunch has received less critical attention than any other major character in Light in August, no doubt for the evident reason that he hardly seems to need it. Byron is a stock figure of the common little man who shoulders unbidden and without professional obligation the duty of caring for his fellowman, accepting as valid the moral conventions of his society but acting "according to his lights," or the dictates of his own individual conscience. He is not, however, naively good, as is Huckleberry Finn, nor does he become the center of a conflict between societal and individual morality: he perceives the discrepancies that often appear between the demands of an abstract code and those of the empirical situation and makes adjustments without fuss.

Byron bridges the gap between the worlds of the main and the counter action; unlike Hightower, he is able to respond to the needs of the characters in both, recognizing that he has to care for Joe Christmas as well as Lena Grove. In his acceptance of responsibility, his active involvement, and his non-rebelliousness he becomes a foil to the other three central figures: Burch, Hightower, and Christmas. Technically, he also functions to provide an outside, objective view of Joe's experiences in Jefferson and to keep the reader

unobtrusively informed on the progress of the counter action, at least up to the point that Faulkner wishes to bring it to a climax, in Chapters 17 and 18, with the birth of Lena's baby. And in that Hightower comprises his audience, he serves to link him to the stories of Lena and Joe.

Faulkner's giving Byron no past is as much as to give him a clear conscience. Although Byron has sought to occupy himself as desperately as Hightower has to gain inaction, accepting the old saw that the devil finds work for idle hands, his keeping himself busy is just as much his way of avoiding emotional involvement. Still, his withdrawal has none of Hightower's selfish motives in it, unless one chooses to call selfish a timid unwillingness to give or receive hurt.

What the advent of Lena in his life accomplishes is to involve him subjectively and selfishly with another person. His recognition is not to be that his life has been a meaningless circle, because he has founded his identity upon rebellion against a world of meaningless values, nor that his rationalized betrayals of others have been finally a betrayal of himself but that the attractions to which his own nature responds will not permit his objectivity nor his exemption from giving and receiving pain. Involvement with Lena does not initiate in him, as some have claimed, an awareness of responsibility to others and a willingness to assume it in spite of social pressures. His good nature and quiet courage are evinced before her arrival. He is the only man in town who cares or dares to associate with the pariah Hightower; of their

relationship Byron thinks:

> I dont reckon there is anybody in Jefferson that knows that he sits in that window from sundown to full dark every day that comes, except me. Or what the inside of that house looks like. And they dont even know that I know, or likely they'd take us both out and whip us again, since folks dont seem to forget much longer than they remember." (63)

His instinctive good nature is summed up in his spontaneous offer to share his lunch with Joe, as soon as he realizes that Joe has no money to buy food:

> He knew as well as if the man had told him that he did not have a nickel in his pockets and that in all likelihood he had lived on cigarettes for two or three days now. Almost with the thought Byron was offering his own pail, the action as reflex as the thought." (30)

What happens is that Lena penetrates his defenses and his isolation just as Joe does Hightower's, coming to him through mistake, coincidence, or divine guidance. But the sensibility she awakens in him is different from the one Joe awakens in Hightower--though it is equally to subject him to pain and suffering. "Then Byron fell in love," we are told. "He fell in love contrary to all the tradition of his austere and jealous country raising which demands in the object physical inviolability" (42).

Although Byron's coming to realize what love will demand of him seems carried forward till the end of the novel and projected beyond it, he does experience a clearly marked trauma of recognition, leaving him, we are to understand, internally changed. This comes with the birth of Lena's child, which shatters in him the idealized image, true to the demand of "physical inviolability," that he has maintained in spite of observable facts. The anguishing, bloody ritual of organic

nature that he witnesses sweeps aside all rationalization and illusion, just as does the bloody social ritual of Joe's death for Hightower. The recognition is precipitated by the shock of seeing Lena in labor but is held temporarily suspended while he goes for help: "It was as though there lurked in his mind, still obscured by the need for haste, something which was about to spring full clawed upon him" (346-347). The ominous, impending knowledge is rendered imagistically here, as it is in Hightower's case. Upon returning to Lena, he hears the baby cry, and recognition springs upon him like the clawed beast the image depicts. The sequence of events is summed up in the following passage:

> . . . he had saddled the mule and was already galloping toward town while he still seemed to be looking at her, at her face as she lay raised on her propped arms on the cot, looking down at the shape of her body beneath the sheet with wailing and hopeless terror. He saw that all the time he was waking Hightower, all the time he was getting the doctor started, while somewhere in him the clawed thing lurked and waited and thought was going too fast to give him time to think. That was it. Thought too swift for thinking, until he and the doctor returned to the cabin. And then, just outside the cabin door where he had stopped, he heard the child cry once and something terrible happened to him.
>
> He knew now what it was that seemed to lurk clawed and waiting while he crossed the empty square, seeking the doctor whom he had neglected to engage. He knew now why he neglected to engage a doctor beforehand. It is because he did not believe until Mrs Hines called him from his tent that he (she) would need one, would have the need. It was like for a week now his eyes had accepted her belly without his mind believing. (349-350)

In effect, Faulkner invokes poetic license to enter the thought processes of Joseph, husband of Mary, projecting him into circumstances if not sordid at least unspectacular. Here is no miraculous event, occurring once throughout all

time, in which he has been divinely appointed to participate. Rather, he must meet the painful demands of common reality, bearing the onus of his involvement unsustained by any illusion. What Byron realizes is that his love is not a goddess but a woman, and an impure one at that, who has had sexual intercourse with a specific flesh and blood male:

> With stern and austere astonishment he thought It was like it was not until Mrs Hines called me and I heard her and saw her face and knew that Byron Bunch was nothing in this world to her right then, that I found out that she is not a virgin And he thought that that was terrible, but that was not all. There was something else. . . . It was something like the terrible and irremediable despair of adolescence Why, I didn't even believe until now that he was so. It was like me, and her, and all the other folks that I had to get mixed up in it, were just a lot of words that never even stood for anything. . . . It aint until now that I ever believed. . . . That there ever was a Lucas Burch (352)

In other words, Byron has tried desperately to believe in the virgin birth. But the ideal of motherhood and maidenly chastity in their separate beauties immaculately fused has just come tumbling down about him. The finely wrought marble pedestal, Faulkner reiterates, along with James Joyce, has a base of quite common but more valuable and durable clay. In an ideal sense Lena is neither the Virgin Mary nor cult-object fertility goddess, but in a real sense, for those who can accept her as she is, she is both. And the homage she requires is to the living, reproductive flesh.

Following his recognition, Byron walks down the street in Jefferson a changed man, almost ready to explode with the passionate anguish he had tried so hard to avoid:

> He could feel himself breathing deep, as if each time his insides were afraid that next breath they would not

> be able to give far enough and that something terrible would happen, and that all the time he could look down at himself breathing, at his chest, and see no movement at all, like when dynamite first begins, gathers itself for the now Now NOW, the shape of the outside of the stick does not change; that the people who passed and looked at him could see no change: a small man you would not look at twice, that you would never believe he had done what he had done and felt what he had felt, who had believed that out there at the mill on a Saturday afternoon, alone, the chance to be hurt could not have found him. (365-366)

The final effect of Byron's recognition is not, however, tragic. He takes the opportunity offered him for again rendering homage and service, but this time to a woman about whom he can have no illusions. And he fights his losing battle with Burch to win her.

Further frustration is reserved for him, though, in that he fails on first attempt to consummate officially his love, Lena turning him out of her bed in the furniture dealer's truck. It is his persistence in the face of failure, however, that marks him as Faulkner's paragon: he fails to avoid hurt, to keep knowledge of Burch's conduct and character from Lena, to bring her and Burch together as man and wife, to help the Hineses and Joe, to whip Burch, and finally, to consummate his love--even his drawing Hightower out of isolation is simply a result of his failure to engage a licensed physician for Lena. Yet, at the end he can say: "I done come too far now. . . . I be dog if I'm going to quit now" (443). He has finally to realize not only the seemingly endless failures and frustrations of life but the strength of his own desire and determination to overcome them. As Hyatt Waggoner has nicely expressed it: "His burden, finally, is total recognition

of the impurity, the injustice, the unresolvable irony of life itself. When he has learned this, he knows not to ask for justice but for mercy and the strength to persevere."[1]

It is possible that Faulkner puts more burden on him than his characterization will bear. For a man whose actions we expect to speak louder than words, he is easily the most garrulous character in the novel; and for one whose ingenuous thought is synonymous with gesture, he does, in his homely idiom, some fairly nimble philosophizing. He remains perhaps a Sunday school hero, and we see little of ourselves in him, either to fear or rejoice in, but he is relieved from the folk humor cliche of the fall guy or the moral one of the humble servant by the process of cognition he painfully undergoes. Through good will, endurance, and recognition of true values, he transcends the scapegoat image.

Lucas Burch

Also bridging the main and counter actions but undergoing no cognitive change is Lucas Burch, or Joe Brown. Burch is perhaps the only totally unsympathetic character in Light in August; McEachern, Joanna, Hightower, Grimm, and even Hines can be seen as the victims of societal and individual illusions, as lost children who misguide themselves with false values in a world turned upside-down. In Burch, however, morality is not misconstrued but absent. The lack of a past in his case indicates the lack of a conscience. He is the epitome of aimless and meaningless motion, a mechanism rather than a man. In Byron's words he is like "one of these cars running along

the street with a radio in it. You can't make out what it is saying and the car aint going anywhere in particular and when you look at it close you see that there aint even anybody in it" (32).

Although he betrays both Lena and Joe, acting as an agent of evil in the main and counter action, he in himself poses no real threat and does no lasting damage. Burch is of course the Judas figure in the novel, who sells his benefactor for expected gain. He is an amoral creature, that responds neither to individual nor societal standards. He displays no concern for Joe's possibly being a Negro or for his sleeping with a white woman, until he can profit by the information; and, unlike Judas, his conscience suffers no remorse for his betrayal. Burch has the animal cunning to realize and depend upon the stereotyped reaction that the epithet "nigger" produces, but he can do no more harm than others permit him to do. Even though he designates Joe as a scapegoat upon whom the community may release its pent up violence, he is no more actively responsible for Joe's death and mutilation than Judas is for Christ's. The betrayal in each case is made possible only by a hostile community ready to fix its collective guilt upon a common hate object. The betrayal of a Hightower or a Pilate is of far greater consequence, for they prove faithless to a public as well as a private trust; their responsibility is not just to the victim but to the victimizers and the community as a whole. Despite discrepancies in Burch's testimony concerning the murder and his suspicious behavior at the time

the fire is discovered, I think we are not asked to consider him seriously as a suspect--any more than Byron and the sheriff consider him as one. It is important, however, that we have almost as much reason to suspect him as Joe and that the community has more. Byron says of him at one point that his being let out of jail to help chase Christmas makes him a "kind of murderer trying to catch himself to get his own reward" (88) and at another point that "he must have looked more like a murderer than even Christmas" (265). But Byron's remarks seem more to underscore the ambiguity surrounding the murder than to implicate Burch, except in the figurative sense: murder denotes specifically the slaying of a human being, and in labeling Joe "nigger," Burch has in effect dehumanized him. Burch is simply not presented as a character capable of a deed of such consequence. He does not even warrant a tear from Lena, who survives his slight to her honor with small perturbation. Again, one of the other characters sums him up:

> He puts me in mind of a horse. Not a mean horse. Just a worthless horse. Looks fine in the pasture, but it's always down in the spring bottom when anybody comes to the gate with a bridle. . . . I don't reckon he'd do even a mare any permanent harm." (32)

Though a key figure in the novel, he is not a character of major significance and is certainly not a complex one. The verdict of the other characters is that of the reader. Several critics have viewed Light in August in terms of the discrepancy between the public and private self, and with Joe, Joanna, Hightower, and to some extent, Byron, Faulkner does give us an outside view of the character and then moves inside

to reveal the complex individual behind the public image. But with Burch, as with Lena, the view from the outside and the inside is largely the same. The only time Faulkner brings us really close to Burch is when he is in flight from Lena and his newly born son:

> . . . while he stands looking both ways along the empty track his face, his expression, is that of an animal fleeing alone, desiring no fellowaid, clinging to its solitary dependence upon its own muscles alone and which, in the pause to renew breath, hates every tree and grass-blade in sight as if it were a live enemy, hates the very earth it rests upon and the very air it needs to renew breathing. (379-380)

And when we enter his thinking a little later we find nothing but resentful, solipsistic impressions that scarcely even amount to rationalizations:

> 'All Lucas Burch wanted was justice. Just justice. Not that he told them bastards the murderer's name and where to find him only they wouldn't try. They never tried because they would have had to give Lucas Burch the money.' 'Justice. . . . That was all. Just my rights. And them bastards with their tin stars, all sworn every one of them on oath, to protect a American citizen. . . . I be dog if it aint enough to make a man turn downright bowlsheyvick." (384)

Burch's tirade, while characterizing him, is also a fitting comment on the "justice" that all of the characters, even Lena and Byron, in some way invoke, interpreting it according to their needs and erecting themselves a god to embody it.

Burch moves through both worlds in the novel, neither giving nor receiving meaningful pain, achieving nor awakening any kind of awareness. He has a story, which ends as it begins with his fleeing to avoid a responsibility he cannot comprehend. In the novel he represents an absence of the human consciousness that bestows such mixed blessings upon mankind.

Lena Grove

The counter action, of which Lena Grove is the central figure, would be one of the surface, as I remarked earlier, except for its being deepened by its relation to the main action--though to be sure, its function is to extend the scope and profundity of the novel as a whole and clarify its meaning; it makes explicit the positive order that usually remains implicit in an action purporting to a tragic effect.[2] The three central characters of the counter action, Lena, Byron, and Burch, are largely explicable outside the context of the novel, as Joe and Hightower assuredly are not. Their consciousness is not complicated by their personal past nor that of the society to which they belong, if these may be considered distinct; and though they become involved in the main action, Lena only indirectly, they disentangle themselves and leave the troubled world of Jefferson to Hightower and the dead. Of the three only Byron is altered by his experience there; Lena and Burch, the one having no particular need and the other no capacity for a learning experience, leave Jefferson as they entered it, with the same conceptions of themselves and their relation to the world.

In contrast to the Jefferson world of Joe and Hightower, Lena's is one of both organic and moral fertility. It is not without friction, a pastoral idyll, but one in which priorities are kept firmly in view. Although Mrs. Armstid does not approve of Lena, she does not turn her out with cries of "bitchery and abomination." Lena is the reverse of the scapegoat; she arouses people to assume responsibility for themselves

and toward others rather than to project it upon some ready-made, institutionally sanctioned, and abstractly defined personification. Her story illustrates that people can be generous and kind when not blinded by preconceived, defensive notions, demanding stereotyped, puppet-like behavior, which have evolved as a speciously easy method of dealing with the fears and frustrations of life but which have bound them to a vicious cycle of guilt and violent purgation. Perhaps Alfred Kazin is right in saying: "Guilt, not history, is the nightmare from which all of Faulkner's deepest characters are trying to escape."[3] One may say as much for Faulkner's South as a whole.

It would be irrelevant to contend that the difference between a Lena and a Milly (the mother of Joe Christmas) is merely a matter of circumstance: that Lena just happens not to have a fanatical, guilt-ridden father and to have become pregnant by a man of dubious generic origins, for the emphasis obviously does not fall upon the awful capriciousness of fate, or luck, but upon the continuing existence of another dimension of human experience and human possibility. One of the crucial passages in Light in August comes when Lena, exposed to the inverted world in the form of the Hineses, steadfastly resists the illusions that make of it a schizophrenic nightmare. Speaking to Hightower of Mrs. Hines, she expresses the only complaint and confusion that can be attributed to her:

> "She keeps on calling him Joey. When his name aint Joey. . . . She keeps on talking about--She is mixed up someway. And sometimes I get mixed up too. . . .
>
> "She keeps on talking about him like his pa was that . . . the one in jail, that Mr Christmas. She keeps on, and then I get mixed up and it's like sometimes I

> cant--like I am mixed up too and I think that his pa is that Mr--Mr Christmas too--" She watches him; it is as though she makes a tremendous effort of some kind. "But I know that aint so. I know that's foolish. . . .
>
> "I dont like to get mixed up. And I am afraid she might get me mixed up, like they say how you might cross your eyes and then you cant uncross . . . " (359; third and last ellipses are Faulkner's)

Critics have made much of the appellation Mrs. Hines seeks to project upon the baby, Kazin calling it "virtually an annunciation,"[4] but much more meaningful is the fact that Lena insists that his name is not "Joey." In other words, the world should not require another Christ; to use a Faulkner construction, it needs not to need one. But Lena does not yet know what the child's name will be, which is to say, what he and the world will make of him.

In terms of function we may see Lena as providing a dramatic contrast, a constant, and a possibility; and generally, critics have not been behindhand in recognizing these functions. Noting the contrast, Irving Howe has said: "The arrangement of the book thus resembles an early Renaissance painting--in the foreground a bleeding martyr, far to the rear a scene of bucolic peacefulness with women quietly working in the fields."[5] The tonal difference that Howe's comparison aptly describes is struck at the very beginning with the marked disparity between Lena in the first chapter, placid, traveling for the first time away from home, grateful for and yet taking for granted the hospitality shown her, and Joe in the very last chapter, baleful, forever rootless, rejecting outright any attempt to alleviate his privation. But the counter action does more than to highlight the suffering on which the main

action is focused and to comment ironically upon it--after the fashion W. H. Auden has so well described in his poem "Musée des Beaux Arts." As Cleanth Brooks has commented: "Lena's function in the novel ought now to be clear. Faulkner uses her to affirm a kind of integrity and wholeness by which the alienated characters are to be judged."[6] And Michael Millgate, noting that, whereas the identity of the other characters rests upon a duality of aspect, Lena's remains constant, has said that "she seems not so much a character in the book, with possibilities of development and unanticipated variety, as a kind of catalytic force, effecting change but itself unchanging."[7] One must be careful, however, to distinguish between the two meanings of constant implicit in Millgate and Brooks's remarks: Lena displays no discrepancy between motive and act, as does Joe Christmas, and no shifting of roles as does Joanna, and she does not undergo a process of cognition--but much the same can be said of Lucas Burch, and to this extent their function is complementary. Since the values to which Lena remains constant are, however, represented as the true ones, she becomes, as Brooks has pointed out, a norm, or standard, for adjudging the deviations of other characters.

In functioning as constant and contrast, though, Lena becomes neither an alternative nor a paragon. That she represents an alternative to the choice between withdrawing into isolation or incurring guilt through involvement is the mistake Hightower makes. His assistance at a successful birth,

a positive event, albeit accomplished through the inevitable suffering that labor entails, leads him to a false or incomplete sense of useful involvement. And it is equally a mistake on the part of the reader to look upon the world of Lena as capable of supplanting the world of Joe Christmas or upon the novel as presenting a choice between them. Byron, and not Lena, is the paragon, the model of conduct in both worlds, who gains insight through suffering and sustains hope through a courageous will. Lena represents in a positive aspect what Joe represents in a negative one: and that is the possibility for freedom, for redemption, for the continuity of life and moral sensibility. And it is this dual possibility, focused in each instance in a ritual of human anguish, birth and death, that resonates throughout the novel, changing, I should think, the original Dark House to Light in August.

But though having little trouble with Lena's function in the novel, some critics have been bothered by a seeming discrepancy between it and the actual character in whom it is vested, the problem perhaps becoming less one of explication than justification. Irving Howe, calling her "the good unruffled vegetable," contends that "so meager and self-contained an intelligence as Lena's must limit, though not eliminate, our feelings for her."[8] And Maxwell Geismar, in his notorious early comments on Faulkner, tosses her off as "a genial case of arrested development."[9] On the other hand, Hyatt Waggoner feels that "considering that she is so saintly an image, it is remarkable that she seems so real to us."[10] Other critics

have also been quite eulogistic, though occasionally, in their enthusiasm for what she represents, seeming not to distinguish between representation and realization.

There does seem to be a discrepancy in the conception of Lena, but this would appear to lie between Lena as a stock figure of the folk tradition and Lena as a maternal-fertility figure of the modern symbolist tradition, rather than between what she represents and the realization of her as an individual character. As a type, Lena is cast in the folk mode, and in this respect she differs from other maternal figures of the modern novel, such as Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Ramsey, Forster's Mrs. Moore or Mrs. Wilcox, Conrad's Mrs. Gould, or Joyce's Molly Bloom. On the surface Lena's story is that of a young, naive country girl who finds a fellow, a glib talker who makes her pregnant, and, taking advantage of her innocence, gets away on a false promise to send for her. Still trusting, but not enough to make her wait, she sets out after him and with uncanny luck, amounting to premonition, doggedly traces him down. He escapes again, but she is not too perturbed, because she has found another fellow to take his place, a rather humble one, but devoted and likely to make a good provider. It is not difficult to see why Faulkner presents her story in the folk mode: he wishes it to convey a sense of simple reality that is to counterpoint the gothic naturalism of the main action. Its "reality," however, does not come from its representing the unromantic minutiae of everyday life but from its immersion in the very fundamental concerns of life that underlie the abstract preoccupations of a society.

Lena is a goddess to be paid homage in the flesh, not to be exalted in the imagination. But whereas the folk mode provides an effective counterpoint, its comic image of the maternal or matriarchal figure conflicts with the more serious one that Faulkner adopts from the modern European tradition. That is, we have somehow to reconcile the predatory female of the folk tradition with the all-providing mother, representing a secure and harmonic center, who seems to have been taken over from psychoanalytic theory and anthropological mythology and given an aura of mystery and sacredness formerly accorded the Virgin Mary--in fact, the Virgin seems to lose her status as a chaste, aesthetic ideal to become an earth-mother avatar. This discrepancy certainly reveals itself in interpretations of the novel that find the male's resistance to female subjugation to be a major theme (see above pp. 16-17). Obviously, Lena is no Eula Varner, and to see her as such would be to deny the high seriousness of the novel. Lena is given a moral dimension that Eula (of The Hamlet, at any rate) entirely lacks. Yet the folk mode insists on its own image, and critics can hardly be blamed for trying to make something of it.

On the other hand, I find no real discrepancy between the person Lena is and the thematic burden she carries. Lena is a fresh country girl, ignorant rather than stupid, with child for the first time and trying hard to do right by all concerned--including Byron Bunch, whose love, we are given to believe, she returns. Although Lena displays no remorse or shame, she is not oblivious to the fact that she has

committed a social misdemeanor. That she is not insensitive to the indictment of being an unwed mother she shows by lying to Mrs. Armstid about her name. However, when Mrs. Armstid probes, she confesses: "I told you false. My name is not Burch yet" (16). Still, she consistently refuses to express any doubt in Burch, and in the face of others' suspicions, she excuses his conduct. We feel that she is not so gullible as willing to commit herself to trust. As Byron says: "It's like she was in two parts, and one of them knows that he is a scoundrel. But the other part believes that when a man and a woman are going to have a child, that the Lord will see that they are all together when the right time comes" (264). Lena too wants justice, but as has been said of Faulkner's "enduring" characters, she trusts in God without depending on him.

Significantly, Lena's only sign of dismay comes just after the birth of her child, when she believes that Byron has departed for good. Hightower, much concerned over Byron's morality, has been questioning her about their relationship, and she tells him that Byron has proposed and that she has refused. As she begins to describe his farewell, "suddenly her face is quite empty, as though something which gave it actual solidity and firmness were beginning to drain from it. Now there is nothing of dissimulation nor alertness nor caution about it" (361). And when she finishes:

> . . . she begins to cry. She sits upright, the child at her breast, crying, not loud and not hard, but with a patient and hopeless abjectness, not hiding her face. "And you worry me about if I said No or not and I already

> said No and you worry me and worry me and now he is already gone. I will never see him again." (362)

This scene reveals that she reciprocates Byron's love and that she does not, in the end, accept him simply because he is available. Here she displays not only feeling but the same integrity that would not allow her to lie to Mrs. Armstid. She accepts the responsibility for what she has done and is determined to give Burch every chance to accept his. Her place is not to doubt whether he will accept it but to give him the choice to accept or refuse. In addition, she will not impose upon Byron's love. She realizes that, in the eyes of society, whose standards she accepts, she is a soiled woman, but she would not make herself respectable by taking advantage of Byron. She must first be doubly assured of Burch's desertion.

If one finds a fault in Lena between the person and the function, then it is the same fault he must find in Sonia Marmeladov of Crime and Punishment or Agnes Wickfield of David Copperfield. The problem would seem not so much to reside in the authors' characterizations but, as the cliche has it, in human nature: our finding depictions of goodness to be boringly repetitive but custom never to stale the infinite variety of wickedness.

Although the final chapter of the novel and of Lena and Byron's story has aroused objections on technical grounds, critics seem generally agreed that it represents a "comic affirmation." Byron and Lena go on their way, in motion, putting the past behind them and accepting responsibility for the future, Byron still trying to come to terms with frustration

and Lena still placidly enjoying her journey. I point out simply that "comic" here applies to the general movement of the counter action, there being some fine comedy in the Joe-Joanna episode and even an instance or so of it in Hightower's story, and that "affirmation," as applied to this last chapter, should not be to deny the affirmation represented in Joe Christmas' death and Hightower's tragic recognition. From a technical point of view, the narrator of the last chapter is abruptly introduced and has nothing to do with the former action, and the tone jars against that of the preceding two chapters. But Faulkner has used a variety of narrators throughout the novel, some of them abruptly introduced, and the tone becomes less troublesome if we consider that it is the same one with which the novel begins and that the first and last chapters actually constitute a kind of prologue and epilogue. Also, it seems intentionally appropriate that the last chapter should be related by a man lying in domestic peace and intimacy with his wife. We are perhaps to see the narrator and his wife as a forecast of Lena and Byron's future.

But although the concluding chapter of the novel can be, and has been, defended,[11] the issue would seem to be that it requires defending. It represents, perhaps unavoidably, a slackening of intensity and conviction. In the next chapter I will examine the problem the epilogue presents, in that we must experience successively and consider simultaneously two different kinds of affirmation.

NOTES

[1]Waggoner, From Jefferson to the World, p. 110.

[2]Una Ellis-Fermor has a useful discussion of the balance implicit in tragedy in her book The Frontiers of Drama (Suffolk: Methuen and Co., 1945), see Chapter VII, "The Equilibrium of Tragedy," pp. 127-147.

[3]Kazin, "Stillness of Light in August," p. 259.

[4]Ibid., p. 249.

[5]Howe, Critical Study, p. 64.

[6]Brooks, Yoknapatawpha Country, p. 69.

[7]Millgate, Achievement, pp. 125-126.

[8]Howe, Critical Study, p. 205.

[9]Geismar, Writers in Crisis, p. 150.

[10]Waggoner, From Jefferson to the World, p. 108.

[11]E.g., see Adams, Myth and Motion, pp. 93-94; Longley, Tragic Mask, pp. 59-61; McElderry, "Narrative Structure," p. 206.

CHAPTER VII

SUCCESS AND SIGNIFICANCE

My devoting a separate chapter to assessing Faulkner's achievement in Light in August represents more a convenience or organization than an indication of any strictly observable difference between the explicatory and judgmental functions of criticism. As Austin Warren and René Wellek have pointed out in their Theory of Literature: "But though separation between the exegesis of meaning (Deutung) and the judgment of value (Wertung) can certainly be made, it is rarely, in 'literary criticism', either practiced or practicable."[1] Simply, one's explanation argues his convictions; and, moreover, one is obliged to express his opinions at those points in his analysis where they can best be understood and appreciated. This chapter, then, becomes largely an opportunity for expressing more general and digressive remarks on the achievement of the novel. Although the stature of Faulkner's work, including Light in August, is well attested to by the amount of criticism it has received, I hope at least to elucidate some of the problems involved in finally assessing it.

Light in August is an ingenious and in many respects perhaps an overwritten novel. At least, Faulkner has considerably crowded his canvas, attempting to integrate more various techniques and materials than even the expansive frame of the novel is normally expected to contain.

Of course, it seems to be a canon of formalistic criticism that the more disparate the materials and yet the tighter the focus into which they are compressed, the more aesthetically valuable the work.[2] Still, a discrepancy may well remain between evident intention and satisfactory realization. And here I. A. Richards' distinction between the value of a work and its "communicative efficacy"[3] becomes very problematic: just how difficult, how obscurely referential and inferential, may a work become before it ceases to constitute a problem in comprehension and becomes one of coherence: before it ceases to be a comment on the reader's lack of insight and becomes one on the author's failure to integrate successfully his artistic vision?

To say the proof is in the pudding is to say nothing at all, for a literary work is not a pudding. Neither is it a musical composition. That is, two or more flavors or notes may be blended to produce a single effect; literature, however, is not apprehended, even intermediately, through the senses, but directly through the intellect or imagination, which must be apprised of the individual presence of the ingredients before the effect of their union can at all register itself. Now, if the presence of meaning is to register and, importantly, if it is not to be confused with some other meaning, then a work of literature, like the language in which it is written, requires a certain level of redundancy. In the past this level has generally been maintained through direct commentary on the action--either through a chorus of some sort or through the explicit remarks of the author or a trustworthy first-person

narrator. Though the same practice is still very much in evidence, what might be called the aesthetic school of modern literature, with its conception of the author as a kind of deistic God, has preferred to comment on the action scarcely at all or to comment on it indirectly through imagery and perhaps external frames of reference providing symbolic parallels. At the same time, the action itself has become less definite in its configuration and more apt to be comprised in some routine occurrence of daily life, taking place publicly or within an individual's psychic make-up. In other words, nothing much happens. Moreover, the values according to which one must judge the characters' behavior have become, though perhaps no different in their general application, considerably more subtle and flexible in their application to the specific instance. It is no longer easy to tell the villains from the heroes, nor very meaningful to try. Complaining about the problem of values, or "belief," in certain modern novels, Wayne C. Booth notes:

> In To the Lighthouse there is little effort to engage our feelings strongly for or against one or more characters on the basis of their moral or intellectual traits. Instead, the value of "sensibility" has been placed at the core of things; those characters who, like Mrs. Ramsey, have a highly developed sensibility are sympathetic; the "villains" are those who, like Mr. Ramsey, are insensitive. . . .
>
> Similarly, if I say to myself, as I read Ulysses, "Bloom is a bad man because he masturbates in public," or Camus' Stranger is wicked because he commits murder," I am obviously barred from any complete experience of Ulysses or The Stranger. . . .
>
> The problem for the reader is thus really that of discovering which values are in abeyance and which are genuinely, though in modern works often surreptitiously, at work. To pass judgment where the author intends neutrality is to misread. But to be neutral or objective where the author requires commitment is equally to misread, though the effect is likely to be less obvious and may even be overlooked except as a feeling of boredom.[4]

To recapitulate, commentary in fiction is a kind of redundancy often necessary to clarify the meaning of the dramatic action. When this redundancy is eliminated or presented in a less obtrusive form, perhaps because it appears uneconomical or unseemly, the meaning becomes almost inevitably more difficult to grasp; and often increasing the difficulty in modern fiction are the greater liberties taken with choice of subject, with delineation of the action, and with the underlying value structure. Obviously, difficulty in comprehending a work means difficulty in evaluating it. But the problem rather lies in the seeming necessity and yet the impossibility of distinguishing between the work and the methods peculiar to its construction and tradition. An impatience with the latter may result in undue severity toward the former. Booth's impatience with many of the practices of modern fiction, like Samuel Johnson's with those of the metaphysical poets, occasionally leads to excessive emphasis on lesser issues.[5] But the principle that seems to underlie Booth's and Johnson's approach is undoubtedly sound: that one cannot measure a work without measuring a method, and perhaps, finally, an age--which may to a large extent dictate the method. We would like to assert with Percy Lubbock's assurance: "The best form is that which makes the most of its subject--there is no other definition."[6] Open structures and ambiguous commentary have, however, permitted us to make so much of what form makes of its subject that we perhaps deserve Irving Howe's chastisement: "Too often it [modern criticism] proposes <u>ad hoc</u> rationalizations for adjusting mishaps of form to supposed

needs of content, or indulgence of content to presumed requirements of form."[7] We readily agree with what Henry James says in his famous "Art of Fiction": " . . . we do not judge the artist with fairness unless we say to him . . . 'I have no right to tamper with your flute and then criticize your music.'"[8] At the same time, we may complain that it becomes extraordinarily difficult to evaluate finally the performance without taking into account the inherent limitations of the instrument. The following comments on Light in August are meant to delineate inherent difficulties, perhaps limitations, arising out of the methods Faulkner employs, for Light in August is a modern novel of the aesthetic school and displays the characteristics previously described.

In Light in August Faulkner foregoes the shifting perspectives of The Sound and the Fury and As I Lay Dying and relies for the most part on a conventional omniscient point of view. But the narrative voice remains basically descriptive, whether reporting external or internal happenings, and continually qualifies itself with such expressions of doubt as maybe, perhaps, it seemed, as though, or as if.[9] Faulkner also sets up a character, Hightower, who functions somewhat in the nature of a chorus, but his authority is considerably and deliberately undercut by the ironic discrepancy between his pronouncements and his own moral position. Thus, we look in vain for an explicit center of authority that we can trust to provide valid comment on the meaning of the dramatic experience. The external frames of reference supplied by the Bible and vegetation myths do comment implicitly upon

the action, but the general obscurity of the signals that enable us to detect correspondences creates a problem, and the correspondences themselves serve rather to reinforce and expand meaning than to clarify it. That is, the comment they provide can be so variously interpreted that one must already have a good idea of the meaning intended before he can determine specificially how the correspondences contribute to it.

Although the events Faulkner selects to treat are scarcely the routine ones of everyday life, he does require that we make little relative distinction between the meanings of the common and the uncommon, between the relatively trivial and the obviously consequential, from a public point of view. The birth of an illegitimate child to an unknown country girl, an event occupying only peripheral public attention, is, in the thematic design of the novel, an incident of equal importance to the violent death of a suspected arch-criminal, who has been for some days the focal point of intense public concern. Moreover, we are obliged to view a child's experience with stealing toothpaste as equal in meaning to a man's breaking into a house, taking food, and later raping the owner. We are not at all asked to consider the relative significance of the infractions. The emphasis lies upon the fact that the second incident is a typological repetition of the first and that the first is just as significantly illustrative of the intrinsic pattern as the second. To be sure, we are to perceive causation in Joe's development and so find his behavior literally plausible, at least according to the constructs of psychoanalytic theory, but the emphasis does not fall on the

clinical fact that because Joe got sick on stolen toothpaste as a child, he later raped a woman; nor does it fall upon the moral platitude that minor infractions lead to major ones. Rather, the causation we are intended to see is that our individual failures to care for those around us and our tendency to project upon them the guilts for which we do not wish to assume responsibility perpetrate the human misery that we necessarily share. But the problem to comprehension here is the old rhetorical one: where everything receives stress, nothing does; and in Light in August, as in other Faulkner novels, we are left to feel that anything or everything may be quite important. Since the conventional signals of relative significance are suspended, we perceive a flat pattern or no pattern at all. (That Faulkner obviously intends such an effect and that it can be given justification on the principle that form should reflect content are not the issues here.) Faulkner's view of life that dictates the form of his work seems remarkably similar to one of Joe Christmas' realizations: "The dark was filled with the voices, myriad, out of all time that he had known, as though all the past was a flat pattern. And going on: tomorrow night, all the tomorrows, to be a part of the flat pattern, going on." (246)

Although the values underlying the novel emerge as quite conventional ones, they are nevertheless asserted through very unconventional means. Many critics have been puzzled and even offended at being asked to accept a man guilty of theft, promiscuous fornication, bootlegging, assorted mayhem, rape, and possibly murder as a legitimate redeemer who is to be

seriously compared with Christ. And we are hardly to see Lena Grove as a woman who has stooped to folly. We are of course not asked to ignore or excuse their behavior as being publicly censorable, but we are required to examine our position as judges. As Hyatt Waggoner points out: " . . . the whole strategy of the book is designed to prevent the reader not only from sharing their sense of their rectitude [the Protestant community]--this would be easy--but from resting confident in his sense of his own rectitude, his superiority to Joe Christmas, the warped sadist and murderer, and to Christmas's bigoted and cruel tormentors."[10] Not the characters but humanity as a whole is tried against the value structure. And though no values are really held in abeyance, certainly some get much more emphasis than others, and it is not always easy to determine where the emphasis falls. Often this will be the obverse of what we expect: What does Hightower do, except mind his own business and suffer outrage as a husband, minister, and member of the community? Generally, Faulkner challenges us to cast the first stone and stresses sins of omission over sins of commission, but the norms of each novel often appear particular to it. We have to read the separate works in which they appear to discover why Caddy Compson should suffer so greatly for becoming illegitimately pregnant and Lena Grove should escape even the need for expiation.

Additional to these difficulties is a very arbitrary technique of narration. Elements of the action are juxtapositionally arranged, destroying the more immediate coherence that a chronological, cause-effect development ordinarily

provides; and transitions are usually abrupt or lacking. Moreover, distance is varied almost at will: we may move abruptly from indirect report of a character's actions to a direct rendition of his thought processes. Again, the pattern is flat.

Aside from the inherent difficulties arising out of Faulkner's intentions and methods, there are problems of execution particular to the design of Light in August. The second half of the novel, following Joe's flight from Joanna's house at the end of Chapter 12, becomes crowded almost to the point of confusion. The counter action begins to compete with the main action for the foreground of our attention, and we lose the central focus that Joe Christmas has up to now provided. The scene shifts rapidly from one location to another: the scene of the murder, Joe in flight, Hightower's house, Mottstown, the Negro cabin, Burch in flight, Jefferson, and finally Lena and Byron on the road. A variety of narrators are used to describe the various action. New characters are introduced, old ones are reintroduced, and personal histories are newly related or presented in further detail. And our attention is focused individually on the successive resolutions in Chapters 18, 19, 20, and 21, the last four chapters. The result is unavoidably a dissemination of dramatic energy and of our power of attention just at the point where a concentration of them would seem most called for. For instance, the revelation of Hines as Christmas' own grandfather and yet the very initiator of his misfortunes Faulkner has reserved for a later stage of the action and clearly intends it to have

a shocking effect, being the ultimate comment on the perverse inhumanity of Joe Christmas' world. And through Hines' narration he wishes also to interpose between the image of the man fleeing like a harassed animal and that of his bloody execution the image of the innocent, abandoned baby. Yet one critic, Irving Howe, has said that "the grotesque Hines episode, coming at a point where the reader's emotional resources have already been engaged by the tragedy of Christmas, has a distracting rather than intensifying effect."[11] Although Howe perhaps should have seen that the Hines episode (Chapter 16) relates to the very heart of Joe's tragedy, his comment well illustrates the disparity that may exist between an intended effect and the possibility of realizing it, given the limitations of our attention and the demands made upon it by competing concerns.

There is, moreover, the seemingly unresolvable problem presented by the combination of tragic and comic resolutions in a single work. The transvaluation of values implicit in a tragic effect is here additionally made explicit in a comic one. The use of a main action and a counter action no more than tangentially related through incident is in itself not so much a difficulty as is the dissimilar response that they demand. On this point most critics have expressed definite reservations. Hyatt Waggoner has said: "But because we smile at Lena and Byron, though by act of judgment appreciating their virtues, we must in a sense move down to a vision less serious than the tragic to reach the hope which

they alone offer in Light in August. As we sit with Hightower in the twilight, we are likely to feel that the darkness is more powerful than the light."[12] Noting that "it appears that the union of outrage and humor is not an easy one," John Arthos concludes: " . . . the comic contrast fails. Faulkner was not quite prepared to view the search for salvation humorously."[13] And Irving Howe has found that "the novel ends with a world irremediably split between the agony of Joe Christmas . . . and the composure of Lena Grove."[14] I think we do not question the profundity of the comic view as indicating a world larger than the dreams and sufferings of man, with which he is so seriously preoccupied, nor do we necessarily object to its admixture with the tragic. The problem in Light in August lies not in their incompatibility but in their competing for equal emphasis; though the counter action is by all odds the lesser one and though the final chapter does constitute an epilogue, the impression most critics seem to have received is that of two possibilities held in equal and obverse perspective. Perhaps some of the difficulty in reconciling the two resolutions lies in Byron Bunch, who offers us neither a tragic nor a comic purging but a kind of comic didacticism. Although it would be impossible to imagine Light in August without Lena Grove and the counter action and although the novel would undoubtedly suffer from their exclusion (and these are no mean criteria), I think the only fair judgment of Faulkner's combination of effects is that it remains experimental, the question thus becoming not so much whether Faulkner has succeeded in unifying them as whether it is possible to unify

them in the way he has attempted.

The difficulties here sketched, inherent and executive, are ones with which this study has sought to come to terms. And their explication must stand finally as their justification, for there are simply no *a priori* principles to which one can appeal. I have attempted to demonstrate the manner in which meaning is incorporate in the action and reinforced through the imagery and external frames of reference, but whether the novel is worth the effort expended is no doubt a matter for the reader to decide. That *Light in August* does yield to a unified interpretation, that the major difficulties can be reconciled without adjustments of technical mishaps or indulgence of content, would seem sufficient testimony to Faulkner's skill in employing his chosen methods. But one is still left with the problem of whether and to what extent those methods may limit the significance of the achievement.

And the significance of an author's work is perhaps more to be admitted than proven. We may point to its being historically important in its effect upon actual events or important for literary history as representing the prototype, the peak, or the epitome of a given development; and we may point to its efficacy in clarifying certain moral or sociological problems peculiar to one time or all times. But although these criteria are relevant and have the happy faculty of being more or less objective and demonstrable, they remain rather peripheral, and we are left to contend, vaguely, with the originality, scope, variety, profundity, and discretion of the imagination infusing the mimetic experience. And here

the cues become so multitudinous and so intricately and diversely related that, though they register upon a refined awareness, they can rarely be verbalized except as general impressions. Occasionally, we seem to put our finger on the it that charms or offends us, but more often we merely grope for rationalizations that appear to justify the response already dictated by the inherent and accumulated insight of our faculties.

We would like to say of Faulkner what Ian Watt has said of Henry Fielding: that he "brought to the genre something that is ultimately more important than narrative technique--a responsible wisdom about human affairs which plays upon the deeds and the characters of his novels"; and that, upon finishing his work, "we feel as if the stimulation has come from a mind with a true grasp of human reality, never deceived or deceiving about himself, his characters or the human lot in general."[15] To a great extent we can say this about Faulkner, but in the meeting of minds or imaginations, I think we never quite surrender our own to his, trustingly and gratefully. When we do, we too often find ourselves abruptly in the shallows. It seems to me that rarely in reading Faulkner do we not encounter every few pages or so some instance of injudiciousness, a betrayal of haste, a tiresome apothegm, a blatant effect, or, worse, one in which smugness is evident. And indeed one sometimes feels that his vision of man bears an official rather than a personal stamp of conviction, as if he had deliberately contrived to see life steadily and see it whole. For instance, Faulkner's vision of man seems epitomized in his ecce homo description, with Darwinian overtones, of the Reverend Shegog

(The Sound and the Fury) as he shifts from his remote, white-man posture to his shared Negro identity: " . . . his monkey face lifted and his whole attitude that of a serene, tortured crucifix that transxended its shabbiness and insignificance and made it of no moment. . . ." One can excuse the gratuitousness of the description--that it lacks the dramatic evidence that should attest to its validity--for the failure to convince does not lie here but rather in the feeling that the description represents not so much an artistic vision of man as an appropriate conception of him for the artist. It seems to indicate neither belief nor the need to believe but rather that belief is necessary. Simply, when Faulkner pushes too hard, he causes one to doubt his sincerity--not to his work or to his readers but to himself.

At the same time, we can never doubt the creativity and conviction that has motivated the shaping of his materials into a dramatic vehicle of tremendous power. Few writers have ever looked more penetratingly at a given segment of human experience than Faulkner has at the American South or rendered its meaning more dramatically apprehensible. One thinks of Tolstoy's War and Peace, and the comparison seems an edifying one, for it serves further to clarify Faulkner's approach as well as point to its possible limitations. For Faulkner never sought to deal directly with his materials in their entirety as did Tolstoy. Rather he attempted to render their total meaning--comprised in the South as a historical entity and as a metaphor of the human condition--microcosmically, as demonstrable in present consequence. And nowhere does he

reveal himself more a modern writer. If Milton sought for an action and theme of universal proportions, worthy of the significant matters he wished to treat of, Joyce saw worthiness in a different light and sought for a means of revealing the universal significance he saw in mundane personages and incidents. Perhaps as a modern writer Faulkner, or Joyce, had little choice but to use a more restricted focus, to turn from epical possibilities to treat of the events of a lesser day in the lives of lesser beings. Faulkner's characters live in the aftermath of cataclysm, he deals with the titans after they have turned into toads. In the only one of his works that approaches the heroic dimension, Absalom, Abasalom, Faulkner does deal centrally with the dreams and passions that blinded a people and drove them headlong into a clash of civilizations and a painfully extended period of attempted reconstruction and left them at last without the passions and with the dreams made over into legend. Yet, the clash is heard only in the distance; the focus is limited to the aspirations and domestic difficulties of one man; and the whole affair is strained through the consciousness of two school boys, who live long afterwards, trying to fathom its meaning in a cold room in Massachusetts. The novel is magnificently conceived, the experience is all there: but only by suggestion. In Light in August the whole tragic experience is rendered through the lives of little people, who seem indeed, of too small a stature to bear the weight of meaning reflected in their actions.

To be sure, Faulkner is not obliged to be a historical novelist. His concern is with depicting the meaning of the past in the present, and perhaps no one has done this better. At the same time, we may speculate, if futilely, whether attempting to work on the grand scale of War and Peace would have strained the resources of his intellect and talent. A Fable provides an unfair indication, since it is deliberately allegorical and deals but tangentially with the Southern materials that Faulkner handled best. Faulkner used ingenious methods to compress materials of far-ranging significance into his treatment of more limited events, and such compression necessarily makes for dense texture and a sense of great energy. But would the energy seem so great if it had to meet the direct demands of events themselves inherently momentous? The questions I raise are too tenuous and speculative for serious consideration; yet somehow, despite differences of time, intentions, and methods and also because of them, we seem obliged ultimately to measure Ulysses against The Odyssey and Absalom, Absalom against War and Peace, not for the purpose of ranking them but of trying to apprise ourselves of that which is most valid and most significant in a literary experience. And if in such a comparison we find Faulkner lacking, as no doubt we must, we nevertheless attest to his greatness by the men with whom we have to compare him.

I have not tried to assess separately the significance of Light in August here, because it has been at least a sub-thesis of this study that the novel is a central document of what is sometimes called the Yoknapatawpha saga, which,

taken as a whole, may well rank as the most substantial contribution to American Literature. Light in August shares with the other works of Yoknapatawpha those attributes that make a fictional experience a rewarding one: a richly evoked reality, profundity of moral insight and steadiness of judgment, humor, an enlargement of the technical possibilities of the genre, the creation of memorable characters, who somehow extend our acquaintance with human nature. One of the marks of a major talent must be the ability to breathe original life, almost casually, in passing, into a minor character. Faulkner's deftness of touch is instanced in such a character as the prostitute Bobbie Allen, whose stunted presence might well have become a stock object of scorn or sentimentality. But without compromising his depiction of her as warped and shallow creature, Faulkner can permit her a compensating human response to the naive love of Joe Christmas. The same kind of sympathy and detachment is shown in his treatment of Joanna Burden, a major character. As ready to praise as to chastise, Irving Howe remarks on that quality of Faulkner's works about which there is no need to argue but which makes the argument worthwhile:

> American criticism, fascinated by mechanics and ingenuity, is ready to honor everything in a novel--ingenuity of structure, schemes of imagery, deeply inlaid symbolism, weighty moral implications--everything but the immediate rendering of life, the picture itself, which is the novel and without which there would be little cause to read, let alone interpret, works of fiction. It is this abundance of representation, this copiousness of postures observed and manners poetically evoked, that makes Light in August so splendid a novel.[16]

Although critics have often found Light in August to

be a puzzling, uneven work, many expressing doubts about its meaning and its achievement and some even deeming it a failure, very few have neglected to praise it as a brilliant effort and to accord it a high place among Faulkner's works--and certainly not Irving Howe or Walter Slatoff, who have been in many ways the most astute and diligent in raising doubts about it. I hope this study has helped to clear up some of the puzzles and allay many of the doubts. In our judgment of the novel we should, as B. R. McElderry has suggested, "take into account the difficulties Faulkner faced and the resourcefulness of his solutions."[17] To do less, to be niggardly in our appreciation because of real or imagined defects of conception or execution, would surely be to make God's plenty a beggar to want.

NOTES

[1]René Wellek and Austin Warren, Theory of Literature (3rd ed.; New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, Inc., 1956), p. 250.

[2]Ibid., p. 243.

[3]Richards, Principles, pp. 25-33.

[4]Booth, Rhetoric of Fiction, pp. 143-144.

[5]Although Booth's book is certainly an impressive and laudable one, he does perhaps reveal his prejudices. Particularly in "Part I: Artistic Purity and the Rhetoric of Fiction," he tends to set up strawman opponents in the "purity" camp, making their criteria appear excessively dogmatic and doctrinaire. And his contentions occasionally seem somewhat self-evident. He extolls the criticism of Henry James, whose astuteness no one would deny, and denounces Jean-Paul Sartre, whose prejudices anyone would admit. In finding modern fiction to be sometimes a test of one's patience rather than his aesthetic sensibility, Booth is perhaps simply expressing a preference: for an art of clearly and consistently delineated perspectives, configurations, and values to an art of crowded surfaces, blurred figures, and ambiguity. At the same time, one must applaud Booth's insistence that a redundancy factor is not in itself inartistic.

[6]Percy Lubbock, The Craft of Fiction (London: Jonathan Cape, 1954), p. 40.

[7]Howe, Critical Study, p. 200.

[8]Since James's essay is brief and widely anthologized, specific reference seems unnecessary.

[9]Booth counts fourteen "as if" and "as though" comparisons on two pages of Light in August; the pages he cites are 317, 323-324 (Rhetoric of Fiction, p. 184).

[10]Waggoner, From Jefferson to the World, p. 102.

[11]Howe, Critical Study, p. 203.

[12]Waggoner, From Jefferson to the World, p. 120.

[13]Arthos, "Ritual and Humor," pp. 118, 112.

[14]Howe, Critical Study, p. 62.

[15]Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), p. 288.

[16]Howe, Critical Study, pp. 209-210.

[17]McElderry, "Narrative Structure," p. 206.

APPENDIX I

For an account of Faulkner criticism from the early reviews through the late 1950's see Frederick Hoffman's introduction to Three Decades (1960).* Also helpful is Robert Penn Warren's intorduction to Faulkner: A Collection of Critical Essays (1966). For a discussion of the French criticism see Stanley D. Woodworth's William Faulkner en France (1959), and for a detailed account of the British reaction see Gordon Price-Stephens' "The British Reception of William Faulkner, 1929-1962" in a special issue of the Mississippi Quarterly (XVII, Summer 1965, 119-200). R. W. B. Lewis provides a brief but telling resume of the foreign response in his "William Faulkner: The Hero in the New World" (Critical Essays, ed. Robert Penn Warren, pp. 204-207).

The only fault with Hoffman's admirable review is that it is now a decade old, and most of the critical work on Faulkner has been done in that decade. Of the two dozen book-length critical studies that have appeared on Faulkner in The United States, only about half a dozen were published in the 1950's, not counting two which have since been revised. The critical books on Faulkner may be rather easily divided,

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*Publication data for all titles mentioned in this review may be found in the Bibliography.

though not without some overlapping, into three categories: 1) studies which provide separate critiques of all or most of Faulkner's fiction, which may include biographical material and general commentary, and which concern themselves with no particular thesis; 2) studies which limit themselves to Faulkner's treatment of specific subjects and which may advance a thesis; and 3) studies which devote themselves to a specific approach, which advance a thesis or draw definite conclusions, and which usually concentrate on selected works.

Of the generally recognized books on Faulkner, the following belong to the first category: Melvin Backman's Faulkner: The Major Years (1966); Cleanth Brooks's William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country (1963); Frederick Hoffman's William Faulkner (1961); Irving Howe's William Faulkner: A Critical Study (rev. ed., 1962); Irving Malin's William Faulkner: An Interpretation (1957); Michael Millgate's The Achievement of William Faulkner (1966); William Van O'Connor's The Tangled Fire of Wulliam Faulkner (1954); Peter Swiggart's The Art of Faulkner's Novels (1962); Lawrence Thompson's William Faulkner: An Introduction and Interpretation (1963); Dorothy Tuck's Crowell's Handbook of Faulkner (1964); Olga Vickery's The Novels of William Faulkner: A Critical Interpretation (rev. ed., 1964); Edmond Volpe's A Reader's Guide to William Faulkner (1964); and Hyatt Waggoner's William Faulkner: From Jefferson to the World (1959). Thompson and Volpe's works are directed specifically at the less initiated reader, as is Tuck's, but the criticism in both reflects individual insights and is of good quality. Tuck's comments

seem more derivative but are quite competently presented. Thompson's chapter on Faulkner's "Moral Vision" (pp. 159-176) is a highly sophisticated and valuable treatment, which discusses Faulkner against a background of western ideas, attempting to demonstrate what he adopted and rejected in Christianity. All three works give a brief sketch of the literary career, as does O'Connor's earlier study. But Millgate's book is to be singled out as containing the most authoritative account of the literary career so far published. Millgate's work is further distinguished by his often giving information on manuscript versions and providing profitable comparisons of these with the published texts and also by his very perceptive, though cautious and sometimes too charitable, comments on the individual works. Millgate's Achievement should not be confused with his earlier, rather meager William Faulkner (1961). Olga Vickery's book is well known for the consistently high quality of criticism it offers, and she provides one of the most enlightening discussions of the thoughts and attitudes underlying the works. The most valuable of the books in this category seem to me those of Millgate, Vickery, and Waggoner, whose comments are, however, somewhat uneven in quality. Brook's study, though perceptive and certainly worthwhile, seems less inspired. The least valuable of the books are probably Swiggart's and Backman's.

In the second category of critical books, those which limit themselves to a specific subject, I would include Warren Beck's Man in Motion (1961), John Longley, Jr.'s The Tragic Mask: A Study of Faulkner's Heroes (1963), Ward Miner's

The World of William Faulkner (1952), and Charles Nilon's Faulkner and the Negro (1962). Beck's study is devoted to the Snopes trilogy. Longley divides Faulkner's male characters into the comic heroes (those who try to do good), the villains, and the tragic heroes; his study contains perceptive insights on individual works and a good analysis of the nature of tragedy in Faulkner. Miner's book compares the real Oxford and Lafayette county with the fictional Jefferson and Yoknapatawpha county and is critical only in part. Nilon's book on the Negro is of a general, descriptive nature. Both it and Miner's study seem of limited value.

In the third category of critical books, those devoting themselves to a particular approach, I would include Richard Adams's Faulkner: Myth and Motion (1968), Walter Brylowski's Faulkner's Olympian Laugh (1968), Harry Campbell and Ruel Foster's William Faulkner: A Critical Appraisal (1951), Joseph Gold's William Faulkner: A Study in Humanism from Metaphor to Discourse (1966), John Hunt's William Faulkner: Art in Theological Tension (1965), Mary Cooper Robb's William Faulkner: An Estimate of His Contribution to the Modern American Novel (1957), and Walter Slatoff's Quest for Failure (1961). Campbell and Foster's study, the first of book length and one widely known, attempts to define certain themes and techniques and draw some conclusions about the nature of Faulkner's achievement. Despite several observations that seem obtrusively Freudian or otherwise wide of the mark by the standards of current Faulkner criticism, Campbell and Foster made a bold

entry, and their study remains provocative and profitable. They conclude that Faulkner's power comes from the "dramatic tension" produced by his combination of "fatalism" and "deep human sympathy"--though the race survives, the individual is doomed, and consequently "cosmic pessimism" lies at the roots of his vision. Mary Cooper Robb's, book like that of Campbell and Foster, is a general study that attempts to appraise Faulkner's achievement, but despite the promise of its title, it is a superficial work, relying for the most part on the observations of other critics. John Hunt has said of Slatoff that he gives "at once the most brilliant and the least satisfactory total reading." Slatoff finds irresolution in the form of the oxymoron present in the imagery, structure, and meaning of Faulkner's works; and he concludes that such irresolution, while providing the basic tensions in the works, is finally attributable not to art but temperament. If Slatoff does seem to make the worst of the possibilities and to draw perverse conclusions from his analyses, his book is nonetheless a very important one. Although admittedly "special" and "limited," Hunt's study is not at all tangential. He gives quite perceptive readings of the three works on which he focuses, and he concludes that Faulkner's theological tension is that between his "Christian and Stoic visions." Gold unifies his study by means of the rather obvious point that Faulkner's works become less dramatic and more overtly didactic, beginning with "The Bear." He finds that whereas in the early work "a whole novel speaks for Faulkner," in the latter "characters speak for him." He discovers "a paradoxical

tension" between free will and determinism in the works, which is not antithetical to the humanism that lies at the basis of Faulkner's vision. Despite some serious flaws--most of these clearly set forth by Michel Gresset in a review in the Mississippi Quarterly (XIX, Winter 1965-1966, 171-181)--Gold's book is an important one. His comments on the individual works seem consistently on center. The remaining two works, the latest published on Faulkner, both concern themselves with myth. Adam's book is, however, only partially devoted to this subject. Taking Faulkner's statement that "life is motion" and that "the aim of every artist is to arrest motion" as his cue, Adams offers what he calls a "new synthesis" of the works, though he gives comprehensive readings only to Absalom, Absalom and The Sound and the Fury. Several of the critics mentioned above use tension to describe the unique power of Faulkner's talent; Adams' study, it seems to me, goes far toward explaining the view of life and art from which that tension springs. Although Adams is helpful on the conceptual basis of Faulkner's work, his critical comments on the individual works seem less noteworthy. Brylowski takes on the whole canon of novels, treating them chronologically in terms of designated periods. He distinguishes among four levels of myth in the works and sees Faulkner's focal point as the problem of evil in the present, empirical world; this evil is, however, transcended through a faith in man's spiritual dominance, which is conveyed in his myths. Faulkner's vision thus revolves around the "two poles of an empiric reality and a mythic hopefulness." Brylowski seems unnecessarily

esoteric at times, and he relies heavily on Cassier's Mythical Thought and Frye's Anatomy of Criticism for the conceptual framework of his analysis, but the book on the whole seems to repay reading; its importance to the critical canon seems at present difficult to determine.

Articles on Faulkner during the past decade have been so numerous and of such variety that they defy any reasonable classification. Most of these of course concern themselves with individual novels. Several of the ones that relate to Light in August are discussed in the body of this study.

APPENDIX II

Chapter	Present time: Aug 1932*	Time of action & tense	Age of Joe*	Narrator	Place or details
1	Fri	same(pres)		omniscient	Lena on road
2	Sat	1929-1932; same(pres)	33	omn: through Byron	Joe & Burch at mill
3	Sun	same(pres); 25 yrs prev		omn	Hightower & past life in Jefferson
4	Sun	same(pres); few days prev	36	omn; Byron	details of murder--hearsay
5	Fri	same (past)	36	omn	Joanna's; Jefferson; Joe prepares himself
6	Fri:mid night	31 yrs prev	5	omn	Joe at orphanage
7	"	31-18 yrs prev	5-18	omn	Joe at McEachern's
8	"	31-18 yrs prev	5-18	omn	Joe at McEachern's
9	"	18 yrs prev	18	omn	Joe at McEachern's
10	"	18-3 yrs prev	18-33	omn	Joe roaming; at Joanna's
11	"	3-0 yrs prev	33-36	omn	Joe at Joanna's; she recalls youth & Civil War period
12	"-Sat morn	c. 3-0 yrs prev; same(past)	33-36		Joe at Joanna's; phase 2 & 3; murder; in flight
13	Sat-Tue ; Wed	same(past & pres)	36	omn; Byron	Marshall's investigation ; Lena moved to cabin

14	Tue-2nd Fri	same(past & pres)		omn; Negro messenger	Negro church; Joe in flight
15	2nd Fri ; Sat	same(past)	36	omn; voice of community	Mottstown; Joe captured
16	2nd Sun	same(pres); 36 yrs prev	0-5	omn; the Hineses	events of Joe's birth; Hightower refuses to help
17	2nd Mon	same(past & pres)		omn	birth of Lena's child
18	2nd Mon	same(past & pres)		omn	Burch meets Lena; fights with Byron
19	2nd Mon	same(past)	36	omn; Gavin Stevens	Joe's escape and execution
20	2nd Mon	same(pres)		omn	Hightower recalls youth & Civil War period
21	?	30 days after 1st Sat(past & pres)		omn; dealer	Lena & Byron on road; dealer in bed with wife

*William H. F. Lamont has set Joe's age at thirty-six and the present action of the novel in 1932. See "The Chronology of Light in August," MFS, III (Winter 1957-1958), 360-361. I follow Lamont's designation for the sake of convenience. Although Lamont makes much of proving that Joe is not thirty-three at his death, as Christ presumably was, Faulkner has been deliberately ambiguous or casual about Joe's age. Clearly, Joe dies in his mid-thirties, and that evidence seems sufficient to establish the arbitrary correspondence in age.

APPENDIX III

Evidence suggesting Joe commits the murder

Joe has been established as an obsessive, violent character, and he obviously contemplates a deed of some moment. He thinks variously: "Something is going to happen to me. I am going to do something" (91). Later he thinks: "Maybe I have already done it" (97), and "I had to do it already in the past tense . . . She said so herself" (245). When he enters Joanna's room, he says, "It wont need any light. . . ." (246)

We are given reason to believe that the it or something contemplated is murder. We are told of Joe's reaction to the third phase debate with Joanna that "he would have died or murdered rather than have anyone, another man, learn what their relations had now become" (237). Joanna says at one point, "Maybe it would be better if we both were dead" (243) and later, "Then there's just one other thing to do." "There's just one other thing to do," Joe repeats (245). When Joe bends over Brown on the night before the murder, we read: "This is not the right one Anyway he did not reach for the razor" (91). Joe later has the razor in his hand when he encounters the Negroes on the road (102); and when he enters Joanna's room, "he held the razor in his hand. But it was not open yet" (246). He still has a razor on the following Friday morning; when he tries to shave with it, he finds it

dull (293).

Motive is provided by the impasse in their relationship: " . . . neither surrendered; worse: they would not let one another alone" (244); by Joe's self-confessed outrage at her beginning to "pray over" him; and by self-defense.

We are told that, following his capture, "Christmas had made no denial" (370), and the sheriff says that Gavin Stevens has told him that Joe "would plead guilty and take a life sentence" (401).

There seems to be no other event of sufficient significance to account for Joe's strangeness before and after the night of the murder, for his flight and his awareness that he is being pursued.

Conflicting evidence

The it or something is never given an explicit referent. The author does not describe the murder nor ever designate Joe directly as the murderer. Joe himself is never shown thinking specifically of murdering Joanna either before or after her death.

The evidence Brown gives the sheriff is full of lies. His story of how he learned of Joe and Joanna's relationship (81-82) disagrees with the facts (239-240). His story of how Christmas returns "about seven o'clock" to tell him "I've done it. . . . Go up to the house and see" is an obvious lie, since we know that Joe fled, hitchhiking a ride, while it was still dark (247). Brown says he saw the house was afire "about eight o'clock," yet the countryman does not discover the fire till eleven, and Brown's account of his own actions does

not agree with that of the countryman (see 78-79, 83-84, and 254).

Aside from the discrepancies in Brown's story, there is the discrepancy in the facts themselves. Whether Joe commits the murder or not, he quite apparently does not set the fire, and we have the Mottstown narrator's observation that "if he had not set fire to the house, they might not have found out about the murder for a month" (306). Insofar as reconciling the two facts is concerned, we have only Byron Bunch's speculation about Brown that "he may have helped Christmas do it. But I dont reckon so. I reckon that setting fire to the house was about his limit. And why he done that, if he did, I reckon even he dont know" (87). Byron of course knows even less than the reader.

Other details we are given--that Joe lays the razor on the table before lighting the lamp (246) and that he flees with the gun, one hammer still cocked, specifically in his right hand (250)--help little, but if anything present a problem to any reconstruction of just how he committed the murder. Did he grab the gun with his right hand and pick up the razor and slash her throat left-handed before she could fire the other barrel?

Nor is the motive that Joanna starts praying over Joe presented as much more than his own uncertain rationalization for why he is so angry with her. He first thinks the "outrage" lies with her having fooled him about her age and the coming of menopause (92-93).

There are alternative explanations for his fleeing with knowledge of pursuit; he has, though unintentionally,

commandeered a car at the point of a gun; and his disturbing of the Negro church would further contribute to his being a self-conscious fugitive. Moreover, we have the testimony of the Mottstown narrator that "it was like he never even knew he was a murderer, let alone a nigger too" (307). We may take this impression as evidence of Joe's having transcended the either-or categories, but we may take it also as literal evidence of his innocence.

Although Stevens has told the sheriff that Joe will plead guilty and take a life sentence, this indicates courtroom strategy rather than evidence--and especially since Byron has told Hightower: "He aint never admitted that he killed her. And all the evidence they got against him is Brown's word, which is next to none" (341).

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