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Religious Symbolism in William Faulkner's *Light in August*

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, T.U.

In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Master of Arts in English

By

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Letter of Recommendation

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Parmila Thapa Magar has completed her thesis “Religious Symbolism in William Faulkner's *Light in August*” under my supervision. She ~~has~~ has carried out completed her research from ...to ...April 2022. I hereby recommend this thesis to be submitted for viva voce.

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Letter of Approval

— This thesis entitled “Religious Symbolism in William Faulkner's *Light in August*” submitted to the Central Department of English, TU, Kirtipur by Parmila Thapa Magar has been approved by the undersigned members of the research committee.

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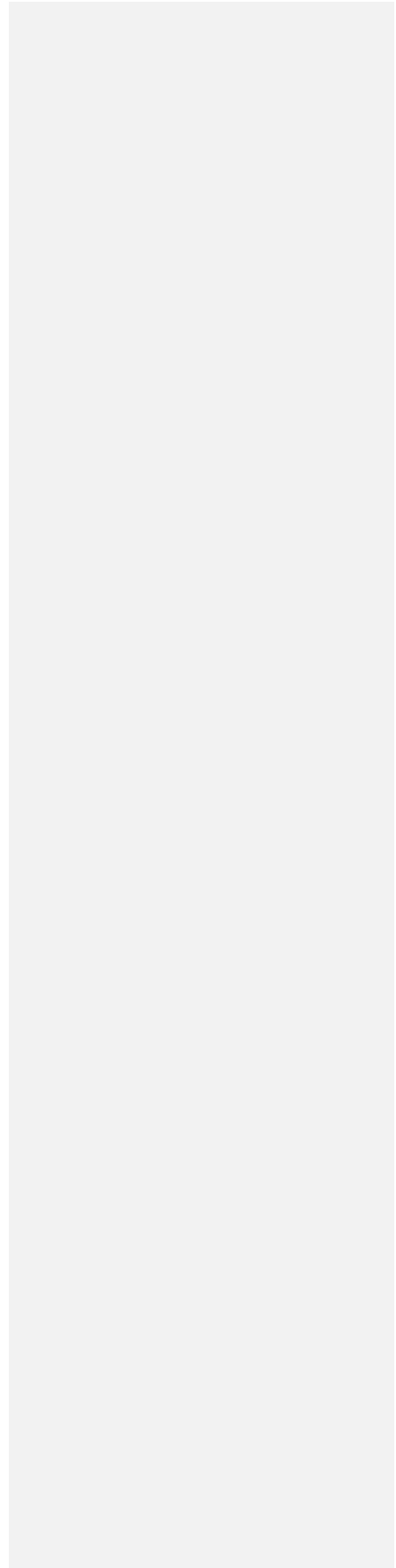
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April 2022

Parmila Thapa Magar

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Religious Symbolism in William Faulkner's *Light in August*

Abstract

This research explores meaning of religious ~~the issue of~~ symbolism in Faulkner's *Light in August*. Symbolism is an artistic movement or style using symbolic images and indirect ~~suggestion~~ suggestions to express mystical ideas, emotions, and states of mind. Faulkner's *Light in August*, reveals the symbolic houses as a means of increasing several of the novel's important themes: the isolation and alienation of the individual, the search for identity, the significance of the community, and the perversion of formalized religion. Houses, especially bedrooms, kitchens, and the windows to various rooms, play a significant and long overlooked role in the novel. Faulkner through this novel uses difference ~~character~~ characters to depict the theme of human suffering, rebirth and ~~after life~~ afterlife. Joanna Burden, Joe Christmas' mistress, ~~the descendant of a New England family,~~ rejected by many of her neighbors and also tries to possess and dominate him sexually, and so meets her death. Lena Grove, a country girl seduced and deserted by Joe Brown. Milly Hines, Doc Hines's daughter dies in childbirth because her enraged father refuses to let a doctor deliver her mulatto child. Percy Grimm, a brutal National Guard captain hunts Joe down after the latter escapes from a deputy. Ostensibly, simple-hearted, fecund young woman pursues her lover because he is the father of her child and she continues looking for him so that she can see different parts of the South. Eupheus Hines (Doc), Joe Christmas' grandfather. A hot-tempered little man, he is often in fights. Calvin McEachern, Joe's foster father. In Faulkner's *Light in August*, the whites are demonstrative of grudge against non-white people. This novel is placed in an orphan home by his demented grandfather, he is to lead a tortured life of social isolation, as he belongs neither to the white nor to the black race; in fact, he prefers

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this kind of existence. After staying with the fanatical Calvin McEachern during his boyhood, Joe knocks his foster father unconscious and strikes out on his own, rejecting any friendly overtures. At last, he is driven to his final desperate act: He kills his benefactress, Joanna Burden, and faces death at the hands of merciless Percy Grimm. Joe Christmas is not able to retain memories from his tragic origin. His whole life is the central vehicle for a broader self-determination. He is knowledgeable about his troubled and murderous origins. So, his reflection on his origin differentiates him from the other Americanized.

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Key Words: Symbolism, religion, suffering, Christmas, isolation, dominate

This research probes the issue of symbolism in Faulkner's *Light in August*. There ~~has~~ have been critical interest in the symbolic ~~re~~³presentation of religious meanings in William Faulkner's *Light in August*. ~~Major~~ A major interest has centered on the symbols of timelessness and discussions of Joe Christmas as a god figure. This paper explores a comprehensive examination of all forms of symbolism presented in the novel as they relate to the myth of ~~the myth of a~~ dying god. Freedom and recognition are precious things to Joe Christmas. His mother, Milly, is impregnated by a Mexican man whom her father does not like. Milly's father kills the Mexican man and gets her ~~died to die~~ in ~~a~~ labor pain. The pain of denial and ~~the~~ haunting history of his birth goes on affecting the life of Christmas. His search for recognition and stability in life is further ruined by the racist responses of various people ~~of to~~ Jefferson. The major character Joe Christmas and his struggle to achieve ~~recognitions~~ recognition are foregrounded in the text.

William Faulkner's *Light in August* has many references to Christianity. He employs a great deal of religious symbolism in all of his characters. These parallels seem very intentional, even though, Faulkner himself says he did not do it purposely.

William Faulkner says he did not put the Christian parallels in intentionally. Many critics argue that there is no religious symbolism in this novel and that other critics are looking too deep into the novel. The most obvious of his ties to the Catholic background and knowledge is reflected in his writing *Light in August*.

William Faulkner was born in New Albany in Christian family. His family was a mixture of Presbyterians and Baptists. As an adult, he became a communicant of the Episcopal Church in Oxford, but he rarely attended services there. In response to a question on his view to Christianity, Faulkner said: "I have the sort of provincial Christian background I feel that I'm a good Christian—whether it would please anybody else's standard I don't know" (203). According to Amy Dooley (who is the research assistant of the Center of Faulkner Studies Southeast Missouri State University), Faulkner spoke about religion being something a Southerner absorbs as part of the culture, and he can't stop using it. He said it doesn't matter if he believes it or not. It appears as if Faulkner uses Christianity in his writing to aid his themes of human suffering, renewal of rebirth, human continuity, and death.

~~Joe Christmas is not able to retain memories from his tragic origin. His whole life is the central vehicle for a broader self-determination. He is knowledgeable about his troubled and murderous origins. So, his reflection on his origin differentiates him from the other Americanized.~~

Similarly, Miss Burden is also a social vagrant. She lives in the small town of Jefferson, Mississippi. She has an obsessive love affair with Christmas. She is internally conflicted. Her strict religious upbringing forbids sex outside of marriage. She is simultaneously desperate to remove her misunderstanding with Christmas. She begins to pray for Christmas to turn around his life and commit to their relationship; her act pushes Christmas away from her. Her need for home conflicts drastically with

his inner desire. The lovers' quarrel results in homicide.

Miss Burden's attempts to "reform" Christmas by turning him into a devout black activist only alienate and confuse him further. While he's uncomfortable in white society, he seems totally unwilling to give up his position "passing" as a white man, and the idea of helping black people seems disgusting to him. This inability to reconcile his simultaneous desire for and hatred of both whiteness and blackness leads him to want to kill Joanna.

Christmas kills Miss Burden, avoiding luckily the bullet she has planned for him. This act effectively ends the whiskey business with Joe Brown. The father of Lena's baby, Joe Brown is a rakish kind of guy with little moral fiber. He boozes, gambles, and bootlegs, and he doesn't seem to have any sense of ethics or responsibility to anyone he gets Lena pregnant and abandons her (twice), and he rats out Joe Christmas to get the \$1,000 reward. This guy is a bad friend and an even worse boyfriend. He operates as a kind of foil to the loyal and hard-working Byron Bunch. Brown is so upset to have lost his easy money supply. He sets the Burden house afire with the corpse inside.

The researcher uses symbolism as method of study to diagnose meaning behind the novel. The whole life of Joe Christmas is full of the burden he feels of due to black blood. He cannot explain it. He cannot deal with it. He hides himself away from the rest of the white community. He is connected very closely to the Southern view of race. Panescu Irina-Carmen is a noted critic of Faulkner who examines the entire spectrum of the author's thematic content. Carmen makes the following remarks with the whole thematic content of Faulkner:

Faulkner is as real today as he was a century ago. His Yoknapatawpha County comes as an additional proof that sometimes the imagination equals the

present reality or it goes further, into anticipating a future reality. The men and the events in the book come to re-affirm an essential fact, that is, fiction makes the real appear more real than it actually is, or than it should be. Sadly but incontestably, an acclaimed writer can descend into the labyrinth of the human mind and extract from there all the evil that we recognize afterwards in life.

(10)

Faulkner takes as his literary business the reaffirmation of essential facts. Facts related to human life, history and geography is dramatized by Faulkner in most of his novels. He can also discover all the beauty and innocence that people see in their lives. Faulkner did have the talent of drawing people into novels. He makes his characters move on the stage of life.

Hunt Nigel discovers the encyclopedic design of the novel *Light in August*. The vast hotchpotch of incidents, events, their interconnections and coincidental occurrences demands too much attention from readers. But its vastness offers plenty of possibility of getting life-affirming lessons and wisdom. Hunt Nigel is puzzled by the lengthier and complicated design of *Light in August*. His brief view regarding this aspect of the novel is cited below:

As a narrative, *Light in August* is an encyclopedia of open connections. The story's vast catalog of people, places, and incidents is held together by associations that are compelling but imprecisely articulated. The clearest example of this phenomenon is the relationship between the successive generations portrayed in Faulkner's chronicle. Joe's abrupt transitions oblige the reader to perform the connective tasks of identifying patterns of behavior and instances of narrative repetition. (33)

Nigel's view is undoubtedly credible because *Light in August* includes various

incidents and events. The inclusion of transition is an innovative step in the history of the discourse. Joe is struck by nonstop incidents in which he is trapped. To be close to the racial practice is one thing but one actually requires the strength to free him from the brutal cycle of slavery and confinement.

Robert Alter believes that race relation has undergone massive change in America. Those who were oppressed and enslaved are now equipped with every rights which a white person can get in America. In this current context, Faulkner's historical mode of repeating the painful past hardly carries conviction. Alter asserts his view in the following extract:

The relationship between the history of slavery in North America and the current state of race relations in the USA remains unarticulated in the story itself, requiring the reader of Joe's saga to construct a belief system capable of imposing coherence on this labyrinthine constellation of accidents, genetics, language, and capital. By conceiving of his text as an indefinite network of implied but inconclusive interpretive possibilities, Faulkner suggests we all collectively construct the meaning of racism, according to the stories which constitute our own mythological traditions. (41)

History cannot be important at all time. Some histories are meant to be buried in the grave of time. If there was even small trace of such brutal discrimination in today's world then this historical reminiscence can be fruitful. But present scenario has undergone huge progress and change. It would not be relevant and sensible to scratch the old wound when the society is heading towards the unique level of progress.

Du Bois holds that "actually designates two very different things. On the one hand, it is a matter of physical characteristics different from our own; on the other hand, it is matter of ideology, a doctrine concerning human races"(13). He provides

the bleak picture of the Blacks living in white society. He suggests with the white, the conflict of the Black while staying in society and studying in schoolhouse was so fierce. He further adds:

With other black boys the strife was not so fiercely sunny. Their youth shrink into tasteless sycophancy or into silent hatred of the pale world about them and mocking distrust of everything white; or wasted itself in a bitter cry. The "Shade of the Prison-house" closed round about us all: walls strait and stubborn to the whitest, but relentlessly narrow, tall, to sons of night who must plod darkly against the stone. (5)

To be black, in that sense, means to be so in exclusively white terms. According Du Bois:

A black living in the white society suffers from the double consciousness- the double standards of a citizen, where one is born an American but discovers that one is not fully a citizen by virtue of being racially designated black.

Why, one ask, is being black treated as antipathetic being as American? (64)

This leads to the notion of irreconcilable doubleness, where being black does not equal being an American yet much of what is original about being an American.

Then, there occurs a crisis in identity and the self-respect of the African American.

Richard Schickel notices subversive ethos in *Light in August*. Faulkner discourages the trend to separate history from fiction. Both fiction and history can come in joint cohesive form. Faulkner is a good example of how the fusion of both history and fiction serves humanity trapped in the chaos of silliness and shortsightedness. Schickel discloses the following viewpoint:

Light in August destabilizes conventional categories of fiction and reality in a way that mirrors the sense in which racism itself is a tragic historical reality

supported by an elaborate fiction of racial superiority. By challenging the Western separation of history and fiction, *Light in August* has been enormously successful in provoking dialogue and deepening our understanding of the factions that constitute our social environment. (27)

Faulkner's praiseworthy accomplishment is similar to that of his far off ancestor Joe Christmas. He is aware of the genealogical history only through the help of narrative either written or oral. It is through the fusion of historical recollection with fiction that he becomes aware of summoning the power of myth.

Although all these critics examined this novel from multiple perspectives, none of them investigate the issue of symbolism. There are differences in the way the idea and the meaning of the symbolism are interpreted in recent times. Theory on symbol and its function in discursive and non-discursive representation is used to probe the proposed issue.

Symbol is usually supposed to be an object or a thing which gives half meaning and the perceiver is required to supply the half meaning. Thomas Carlyle's view on symbol is used along with Coleridge's theory on symbol. As per need, the researcher uses different perceptions and insights on the role and functions of symbols.

Symbolism is the use of specific objects, characters, colors, or images to represent abstract ideas. This term is commonly misused, describing any and all representational relationships, which in fact are more often metaphorical than symbolic. A symbol must be something tangible or visible, while the idea it symbolizes must be something abstract or universal. A symbol, then, is "an instrument of thought." They are, in Vygotsky's phrase, "tools for the mind." (23)

Symbols create those possibilities of thought that are uniquely human. Symbolic

systems provide the structuring matrices of human consciousness. Ernst Cassirer describes the difference between signs and symbols in this way. "Signals and symbols belong to two different universes of discourse: a signal is a part of the physical world of being; a symbol is a part of the human world of meaning. Signals are "operators"; symbols are designators" (25).

Signals, even when understood and used as such, have nevertheless a sort of "physical or substantial being; symbols have only a functional value" (Cassirer 32). Formal intellectual culture is built up from the intricate use of written symbols which serve to extend memory onto paper, and to provide a different dimension in which thought may be conducted. Practical mathematics, the counting of things or the measurement of space, is different from abstract mathematics because the one takes place in the physical realm while the other takes place in a purely symbolic realm. Symbols do not need to have any logical or natural connection to the thing they represent.

Although St. Coleridge left relatively few statements on the symbol, critics have generally paid special attention to his philosophy of symbolism. Undoubtedly, Coleridge gave the symbol privileged status in his writings, and regarded it not only as a literary trope, superior to allegory, but as an elevated means of attaining self-knowledge and moral values. For Coleridge the symbol made possible the fellowship between the sensible and the super-sensible world, man and nature, the self and other individuals. All this is evident in Coleridge's often-quoted definition of the symbol in *The Statesman's Manual*. In that precede *The Statesman's Manual* definition and reveal more clearly the psychological and philosophical underpinnings of Coleridge's emerging conception of symbolism. These entries show that the idea of the symbol grew out of Coleridge's experience of love and helped him work out personal

problems in his relationship with Sara Hutchinson. Moreover, they indicate that nature loses much of its importance for Coleridge the more he links the symbol with increasingly higher goals, such as the unity of consciousness and the mind's quest for an ideal model of perfection in the Absolute. For Coleridge the symbol ultimately requires a free activity of the mind that finds its sustenance in human agents rather than nature.

Joe Christmas is an ambiguous man. He appears suddenly at the mill one day in search of a job. After gaining employment, he soon joined at the mill by another man named Joe Brown. The two formed a partnership. They make and sell liquor illegally. He eventually quits this illegal transaction. He tells the town's disgraced former minister of his efforts to care for the girl. Soon, Lena comes to realize that the man she seeks is really Joe Brown. Upon Lena's arrival in town, Brown is being held in the town jail after the murder of a local woman, Joanna Burden. Joe Christmas, Miss Burden's occasional lover, is the chief suspect.

Reverend Gail Hightower's story is one of the three principal plot lines in *Light in August*. After seminary, he worked hard to secure the position of minister to the Presbyterian Church in Jefferson, the site where his grandfather had died in a Civil War raid twenty years before his own birth. A confederate cavalryman is killed in the town during the Civil War. Hightower's young wife is unfaithful. She deals with mental health problems. She eventually dies in a fall from the window of a Memphis hotel room. She stays with another man. A scandal ensues.

Joe Christmas is left on the steps of an orphanage. He has overheard Jesebele (a lady worked as keeper in orphanage) having sex with a young doctor Charles in her

room. She worries she will lose her job. To eliminate this risk, she threatens to expose young Joe's biracial background. She has him transferred to an orphanage for black children. She discusses the plan with the orphanage's janitor. He kidnaps Joe and takes him to Little Rock. He is found and returned, only to be adopted two weeks later by Mr. McEachern, and his wife.

Similarly, Thomas Carlyle propounds a theory of idolatry based upon the enduring distance between what is seen, the Symbol and what is. Carlyle claims that all worship "must proceed by Symbols," all worship is, in some sense, idolatrous (121). He makes this argument in order to excuse idolatry, stating that the practice of worshipping a Symbol (or worshipping through a Symbol) is not wrong in and of itself; only "insincere Idolatry" is "condemnable" (122). Thus Carlyle makes two arguments: first, a symbol is separable, and separated, from the thing it signifies, and second, value still exists in symbols, despite this dissociation. He perceives:

Idol is *Eidolon*, a thing seen, a symbol. It is not God, but a Symbol of God; and perhaps one may question whether any the most benighted mortal ever took it for more than a Symbol. I fancy, he did not think that the poor image his own hands had made was God; but that God was emblemed by it, that God was in it some way or other. It is still a Thing Seen, significant of a Godhead; an Idol. (121)

The most rigorous Puritan has his Confession of Faith, and intellectual Representation of Divine things, and worships thereby; thereby is worship first made possible for him.

Christmas sees he is unable to do anything but bear witness to Miss Burden's physical and emotional trials. As Joe gets to know his lover more intimately, he sees "a stranger he would leave her after having sat with her in the dark bedroom, as

though they were married” (198). Moreover, a spiritual and physical struggle splits Miss Burden. By accounts contained and invulnerable, “the end of this phase was not sharp, not a climax, like the first. It merged into the third phase so gradually that he could not have said where one stopped and the other began. It was summer becoming fall” (196). He struggles not only against community, society, and the past but also against himself and racially ruined history of his birth.

Joe Christmas a man who came to Jefferson three years prior to the events in the novel. He lives in a cabin on the property of Joanna Burden and has a secret sexual relationship with her. And Joanna Burden the sole survivor in Jefferson of a family of abolitionists from New England who came to Jefferson after the Civil War.

She is unmarried, lives alone in a manor house outside of Jefferson, and is secretly engaged in a sexual relationship with Joe Christmas. She is murdered, presumably by Christmas, at the start of the novel, and her house is burned down. Joanna and Joe seem to be alike. Both have no bonds with the community where they live. She is white but works for the sake of Afro-Americans which automatically excludes her from the society where she belongs. He is not sure of his family background and does not want to be assimilated because of his personal fight for his place in the split society. This makes them both outcasts. The motive behind Joanna's work for the black community portrays fully the white Southerners' attitude towards racial differences.

African Americans and their plight are enough to show how biracial people fall victims to unexpected consequence. There is division in their psychic condition. According to S. T. Cloridge Symbolism means:

On the one hand the symbol was supposed to be the point of contact between the contingent and the absolute, the finite and the infinite, the sensuous and the

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super- sensuous, the temporal and the eternal, the individual and the universal. On the other hand it was supposed to refer to nothing but itself, so that image and idea were inherently and inseparably connected in it. In short, it was supposed to be at once infinitely meaningful and incapable of being reduced to any particular meaning. (2)

Symbol is something which presents the eternal in the temporal, and the universal in the particular. It is through the use of symbols that a poet conveys universal truth. The physical universe as analogous to, but not identical with, the spiritual, but at the same time he believed in the organic unity of all life. His reconciliation of these opposing beliefs sheds light on his concept of the symbol.

Joe's new foster father subjects him to regular beatings. As Joe grows and enters puberty, he passionately loves Bobbie. Bobbie is a prostitute. She works as a waitress in the nearby town. When Mr. McEachern catches his son at a dance with Bobbie, a fight occurs. Joe kills his foster father by smashing a chair over his head. Contrary to his expectation, Joe is abandoned by Bobbie. Joe embraces a life on the run. He wanders for more than fifteen years.

Joe Christmas stays in the cabin on Joanna Burden's property. The two quickly become lovers. Their relationship is marked by passion, violence, and long periods. They ignore each other. Miss Burden wants a child and claims to be pregnant. But Joe is strongly opposed to the idea. After a time, Joe Brown comes to live with Joe Christmas in his cabin. Miss Burden tries to help Joe Christmas financially. He insisted him to kneel down and pray. Her meddling only provokes his ire. One night, he savagely attacks and kills her with a razor after she tries to fire a pistol at him. Miss Burden attempts to save Joe from every hazard. His inability to realize it generates conflict. The following extract makes reality about this complication clear:

They looked at one another. 'Joe', she said, 'for the last time. I don't ask it.

Remember that. Kneel with me. 'No' he said. Then he saw her arms unfold and her right hand come forth from beneath the shawl. It held an old style, single action, cap and ball revolver almost heavier than a small rifle. But the shadow of it and of her arm and hand on the wall did not waver at all, the shadow of both monstrous, the cocked hammer monstrous, back hood and viciously poised like the arched head of snake; it did not waver at all. (212)

Joe Christmas is apprehended on the streets of nearby Mottstown. His biological maternal grandfather, Uncle Doc Hines, makes his way through the crowd to curse Joe. He calls for his death. When the officials from Jefferson arrive to take charge of the prisoner, Mrs. Hines breaks through the crowd as well. She hopes to see the face of the grandson who is supposed to have died as a child. The Hineses then take the train to Jefferson together.

Byron and the Hineses arrive at Hightower's house. They reveal that Joe Christmas's father is a circus worker. His father had tried to run off with the Hineses' daughter before Uncle Doc shot and killed him. Eventually, Uncle Doc placed the baby in the orphanage in Memphis. He works as a janitor. Byron wants Hightower to lie and claim that Joe Christmas is with him on the night of Joanna Burden's murder. Hightower becomes angry and asks them to leave.

Lena goes into labor. By the time Byron arrives with the doctor, Hightower has already delivered the baby. Mrs. Hines mistakenly believes that "Mrs. Beard watched him now. He thought that she was still trying to get his meaning. But what she was doing was watching him grope"(65). Byron arranges to have Joe Brown sent to Lena's cabin; upon arriving.

Byron Bunch a bachelor who works at the planing mill in Jefferson, who

meets and falls in love with Lena when she arrives in town. She has been told that a man named Bunch works at the mill and assumes it is Lucas Burch, because the name sounds similar. And Joe Brown the young man who fathered Lena's child in Alabama and ran away when she told him she was pregnant. He has been living in Jefferson with Joe Christmas in a cabin on Joanna Burden's property under the name Joe Brown and working with Christmas and Byron at the planing mill. He is also a bootlegger. Byron sees Brown escape and tries to stop him. Unfortunately, the much larger man beats Byron soundly. He escapes on a passing train. Joe Christmas, meanwhile, escapes from his captors as well. He is being led across the town square. Before long, he is tracked down, shot, killed, and castrated in Hightower's kitchen. Afterward, the aging Hightower muses on his past. He has no option other than preparing for his own death.

Only the conflict and chaos prevail in the society. Joe and his friend live with the expectation that their innocence and noninvolvement will be proved. Joe is haunted by the racially motivated remarks of his neighbors since his childhood to his adulthood. He wants to get involved in the social activities and wants to be a valuable part of the society but alienating and humiliating remarks make him feel inferior. When he was in orphanage he other children did not play with him they tease him calling him Negro. Even a lady work in it thought "He will look just like a pea in a pan full of a coffee bean."(99) His aimless life is made uncomfortable by plenty of unjust remarks.

Likewise, Carl Jung, who studied the dream as the main source for the investigation of man's symbolizing faculty, distinguished between sign and symbol in *Man and His Symbols*. He says that in verbal or written communication man uses certain signs or images such as abbreviations, trademarks, badges or insignia. He

continues:

Although these are meaningless in themselves, they have acquired a recognizable meaning through common usage or deliberate intent. Such things are not symbols. They are signs, and they do no more than denote the objects to which they are attached. What we call a symbol is a term, a name, or even a picture that may be familiar in daily life, yet that possesses specific connotations in addition to its conventional and obvious meaning. It implies something vague, unknown, or hidden from us. It has a wider "unconsciously aspect that is never precisely defined or fully explained. Nor can one hope to define or explain it. As the mind explores the symbol, it is led to ideas that lie beyond the grasp of reason. (23)

Another fundamental conclusion that Jung draws from his extensive study of symbols is the fact that symbols are natural and spontaneous rather than contrived or invented. No one can take a more or less rational thought and then give it "symbolic form". The result will still be a sign linked to the conscious thought behind it or what, in literary terms, is called allegory. A symbol must hint at something not yet known.

Erich Kahler remarks in his chapter in Symbolism in "Religion and Literature," The symbol originates in the split of existence, the confrontation and communication of an inner with an outer reality, whereby a meaning detaches itself from sheer existence. Kahler says that, in art, symbolism goes beyond mere representation and moves toward the unknown, or previously unseen and unexpressed. Kahler mentions:

Inasmuch as artistic representation is not just mimesis, the rendering of an already patent reality, but rather an evocation of a latent, heretofore unseen reality, it carries out in its artistic performance a supra-artistic, a human deed

of the greatest consequence the creation of a new form of reality. Such coincidence I indeed identity, of the artistic and the human act is the supreme reach of the symbol. (70)

Kahler also distinguishes the symbol from two other forms of representational imagery: allegory and metaphor. Rather than modern writers relying on these two methods, Kahler says they try to imagine the experience of man through what he calls immediate transmutation or what might be termed identification. An interaction takes place between the image and the experience that makes the image capable of creating new experience. At this point, metaphor and symbol merge and symbolism comes into its own.

In the opening of *Anatomy of Criticism* Frye suggests five classifications for the hero of fiction according to his powers of action. The fifth category would best describe Joe Christmas. Frye writes "If inferior in power or intelligence to ourselves, so that we have the sense of looking down on a scene of bondage, frustration, or absurdity, the hero belongs to the ironic mode (34)." Irony which is tragic rather than comic concerns the study of tragic isolation, according to Frye. He says, "Its hero does not necessarily have any tragic hamartia or pathetic obsession: he is only somebody who gets isolated from his society (41)." The question of isolation from versus integration into the community has already become important here. Frye goes on to say:

Irony isolates from the tragic situation the sense of arbitrariness of the victim's having been unlucky, selected at random or by lot, and no more deserving of what happens to him than anyone else would be. Thus the figure of a typical or random victim begins to crystallize in domestic tragedy as it deepens in ironic tone. . . . The pharmakos is neither innocent nor guilty. Thus the incongruous

and the inevitable, which are combined in tragedy, separate into opposite poles of irony... The incongruously ironic is Christ, the perfectly innocent victim excluded from human society. (41-42)

He is innocent in the sense that what happens to him is far greater than anything he has done provokes, like the mountaineer whose shout brings down an avalanche. He is guilty in the sense that he is a member of a guilty society, or living in a world where such injustices are an inescapable part of existence.

Faulkner deliberately portrays Joe Christmas as a Christ figure in *Light in August*. The type of Christ figure he is and the symbolism connected with it will be discussed in more detail later. But here we may say that Faulkner is using the Christian myth as a form of the ancient myth of the dying god. Robert M. Slaney, in his article *Myth and Ritual in Light in August*, notes, "The life cycle and personal problems of Joe Christmas are less directly related to those of Christ than they are to the archetypal story of the dying god and his resurrection, which symbolized the seasonal death and reappearance of vegetation" (5). Although Joe is not physically resurrected in the novel, Faulkner says his memory will never be forgotten by those who witness his execution. In addition, Hightower experiences a renewal, when he re-enters the community with his effort to save Joe, and his assistance at the birth of Lena's baby.

In this way, Joe's story fits into the pattern of tragic irony which Frye says begins in realism and dispassionate observation and moves steadily toward myth in which dim outlines of sacrificial rituals and dying gods begin to reappear. The central idea in Carlyle may well be that of the symbol as engine of social progress, particularly in Sartor Resartus and French Revolution. The locus classics for this idea are the chapter "Symbols" from Sartor:

Have not I myself known five hundred living soldiers sabred into crows -meat for a piece of glazed cotton, which they called their Flag; which, had you sold it at any market-cross, would not have brought above three groschen? Did not the whole Hungarian Nation rise, like some tumultuous moon-stirred Atlantic, when Kaiser Joseph pocketed their Iron Crown; an implement, as was sagaciously observed, in size and commercial value little differing from a horse-shoe? It is in and through Symbols that man, consciously or unconsciously, lives, works, and has his being: those ages, moreover, are accounted the noblest which can the best recognize symbolical worth, and prize it the highest. (3)

Man works through symbols, Carlyle said. This is not wholly implausible, as any attempt to apply a rational basis to the description of human activity falls slightly short. The unlighted self-interest that Adam Smith saw as being the basis in humans on which the capitalist system was built doesn't account for much of the behaviour of actual capitalists. So if we realize that a supra-national symbol must always be at play we can bring in religion (source of some of Carlyle's favorite dynamic symbols dynamic referring here to the fact that these symbols produce an effect unpredictable, irrational and of potentially great force) as well as culture, the arts, political movements and so on.

The choice to not explain Hightower's obsession with his grandfather until the end of the book affects the way the reader views him as he is near death. Although it is mentioned early in chapter three:

But they could not tell whether he himself believed or not what he told them, if he cared or not, with his religion and his grandfather being shot from the galloping horse all mixed up, as though the seed which his grandfather had

transmitted to him had been on that horse too. (64)

It is difficult to understand, as Hightower thinks about it, near his death, his grandfather's history finally seems to be important, as it is explained. As Faulkner develops the effect Reverend Hightower's heritage had on him, the reader understands why it is not added until the book's end. If his grandfather would have been discussed before his death, the importance would have been lost, especially when he passes away, it seems to him that he still hears them, the wild bugles and the clashing sabers and the dying thunder of hooves.

But Thomas Carlyle will only take us so far in his analysis of symbols. As is well known, he wasn't always the most systematic of thinkers. In trying to work with symbols in a 21st-century context, one has to trace the evolution of the concept post Carlyle. While Carlyle tended to talk of symbols in their socio-political roles, Jung's analyses started from the point of view of the individual psyche – he was a psychologist, after all. But for Jung, the individual psyche has elements of the collective unconscious, so there isn't an absolute divide between individual and group, in any case.

In *Man and his Symbols*, Jung states, “a word or an image is symbolic when it implies something more than its obvious and immediate meaning” (4). What this “more” consists of cannot be stated without reference to the particularities of the case. A symbol means something different to each individual whose psyche brings it forth in a dream or otherwise. Jung is rather different from his erstwhile mentor Freud in this: he's a lot more ready to acknowledge the limitations of systematization or scientization in psychology. Essentially, it depends a great deal on the individual and not only the individual patient but also the individual analyst, “(Dream analysis) is not so much a technique that can be learned and applied according to the rules as it is a

dialectical exchange between two personalities" (44).

This is the type of admission Freud, insistent on seeing the analyst as a vessel of pure science, one who can hardly be controverted, would never have made. Indeed, Jung mentions Freud in this passage, and it is clear how the more moderate theory of Jung would not have been amenable to Freud's visions of psychoanalysis. This passage is interesting as it shows Jung as a less totalizing and more flexible thinker than Freud.

Joe is teased by white for being a part nigger and hatred by black for being white skin. He is neither become a white nor live a peaceful life as black. He got lost by searching his dignity and identity in his whole life. From his childhood he is rejected by both groups. The following extract makes it clear:

Old Doc Hines found out how he was watching the nigger working in the yard, following him around the yard while he worked, until at last the nigger said, "what you watching me for, boy?" and he said, "how come you are a nigger?" and the nigger said, "who told you I am a nigger, you little white trash bastard?" and he said, " I aint a nigger," and the nigger said, " you are worse than that. You don't know what you are. (288)

Even the stranger on the way begins asking question regarding how Joe came to be regarded as Christmas. He lives in a run-down cottage on the estate of a middle-aged spinster named Miss Burden. He makes and sells illegal whiskey for a few customers.

To integrate Jung with Carlyle's approach to dynamic socio-political symbols, we have to see how they work on the wider scale, not on the individual level. Here we come up against Jung's archetypes:

The archetype is a tendency to form [...] representations of a motif-
representations that can vary a great deal in detail without losing their basic

pattern. [Archetypes) reproduce themselves in any time or in any part of the world - even where transmission by direct descent or "cross fertilization through migration must be ruled out. (58)

So the archetype is very vaguely conceptualized, having no formal characteristic that crosses representations; all that is common is the tendency. Jung's actual example illustrates this vagueness. It is, simply, the Hero. This seems inarguable: surely the Hero does cross cultural borders even where direct descent can be ruled out. Therefore a study of its place in the psyche is clearly warranted. And it is another point of accord with Carlyle, who, in his later career, was interested in the Hero, too: not as archetype, though, but as agent of social change and social cohesion. As the prime mover of history, essentially.

Stream-of-consciousness also assists the reader in making a connection between Joe's determination and his history. After seeing Mottstown, he thinks, "And yet I have been further in these seven days than in all the thirty years, . . . 'But I have never got outside that circle. I have never broken out of the rings of what I have already done and cannot ever undo"(128).

Joe's circle is his history. It begins when he is originally ridiculed at his orphanage for appearing to have black heritage, and ends at his death when he passively lets a racist man kill him. What has happened in the past influences the present, because Joe is still attempting to evade his problems. He openly admits that he cannot undo what he has done, which causes a weakness in him, and affects his moral decisions. Seeing Ms. Burden as a threat, he just gave in and killed her because he felt that was what he had to do, based on what he had done in other similar situations.

American literature written in the 1920s and early 1930s was dominated by a

group of writers who were disillusioned by World War I (1914 - 1918). This group, which would come to be known as the modernists, reflected the *Zeitgeist*, or spirit of their age - a time when, in the aftermath of war, many Americans had lost faith in traditional institutions such as the government, social institutions, established religions, and even in humanity itself.

With Carlyle there is perhaps some confusion about the Hero. Is the Hero a Hero because of what he is, or of what he symbolizes? It would be naive to think that they were the same thing, as people can often be misguided as to others' true natures: the difference is the difficult one between essence and perception. This is something that has to be dealt with carefully when discussing Carlyle, but I won't go into it for now. Jung, on the other hand, doesn't give any historical examples of Heroes at all in *Man and his Symbols*, just mythical ones, so his contention appears to be that we should tell stories about heroes, and try to embody their traits, but not identify actual empirical individuals with Heroes. The archetypes are "pieces of life"⁴ (87), but only pieces – as an empirical person you can't become absolutely identified with a single archetype, and you shouldn't identify others with one, either.

The question one might ask Jung is: can we divorce our way of thinking from our way of thinking about empirical others? If we centralize the concept of the Hero, won't we inevitably start applying it to someone (perhaps ourselves)? Here we should recall Carlyle: in the early *Sartor* he's a theorist of symbols; in *On Heroes* and all his work thereafter, he's invested in reading real historical people as symbols: a few heroes, the rest either loyal drudges or expendable layabouts or scoundrels. Once the practice of thinking symbolically becomes second nature to us, we cannot help but simplify our fellow humans into symbols. The problems of that approach can be serious, and some of Carlyle's writings illustrate them quite starkly. But by illustrating

these dangers, Carlyle exemplifies the fact that ~~symbolical~~symbolic thinking is central to how people see the world.

Joe Christmas does not know who he is. His uncertain racial identity affects every aspect of his life. Sometimes he claims to be white, sometimes black, but he rebels against both categories. Christmas roams the North and the South, the cities and the countryside, without ever settling into a fixed home or a long-lasting human relationship. By contrast, Lena Grove never doubts her identity. Even when wandering alone among strangers, she is confident of her purpose, her destination, and even of her relationship with the shiftless Lucas Burch. She reveals a moment of doubt only when old Mrs. Hines ~~confines~~confines Lena's baby with Joe Christmas. Gail Hightower and Joanna Burden are neither as sure of their identities as Lena, nor as doubtful as Joe. Joaima is a Northern abolitionist who feels homesick whenever she leaves Jefferson, Mississippi. For two years she is cool and rational by day, while wildly passionate by night. Then she veers from the extremes of sensuality to those of self-denial. On the other hand, Hightower wants to do good in the world, while he also wants to ignore the world and to live in solitude. He lives in the pa^ but often seems acutely concerned about the events of the present.

Faulkner uses symbolism throughout the entire novel. Ms. Burden is kind enough to house Joe on her own property, but she does it in an old slave cabin. The cabin historically symbolizes the division between slaves and their masters, which is not healthy for Joe, because of his problems with authority and racial identity. It makes Joe feel inferior to her, like he is an intruder, and gives him the urge to rape her. Also, Joanna acts like she is better than him when she leaves food out for him as if he is an animal, and continues to leave the door unlocked even though he raped her. The door being left unlocked only makes him angrier, "He was not yet raging. He

went to the kitchen door... When he found that it was not locked it was like an insult. It was as though some enemy upon whom he had wreaked his utmost of violence and contumely stood, unscathed and unscarred, and contemplated him with a musing and insufferable contempt" (237). Her action of leaving the door unlocked shows her contempt, causing him to be more violent and dangerous, and symbolizes her superior feelings towards him. To Joe, brushing aside his attempts to make someone fearful of him is a major insult ~~which~~ that explains his actions towards Joanna.

In Joe's final moment with Joanna, she pulls out an old Civil War gun, with which she plans on killing both of them. It is described as: "It held an ~~old-style~~ old-style, single action, cap-and-ball revolver almost as long as and heavier than a small rifle"(282). The fact that she wants to end his life with this gun furthermore symbolizes her feelings of superiority towards him and touches again on his problems with identity. It is ironic when Joanna who has always accepted black people in her home, tries to kill a black man with a gun made for the war over slavery. Faulkner's decision to make the gun historically linked to the civil war shows the importance of history to Joanna and Joe, as well as it shows how their history with one another affected them both. In addition, when Joe is stopped at the same Negro cabin of the family that did not turn him in, he traded his shoes for a pair of black ones. He then uses them throughout the rest of his journey away from Jefferson, letting them wear out. They are described as, "the black shoes smelling of negro: that mark on his ankles the gauge definite and ineradicable of the black tide creeping up his legs, moving from his feet as death moves" (339).

The closer and closer Joe comes to getting caught, the more of his leg gets dyed black, and as time goes by, people hate him more and more for being part black. The shoes symbolize him entering the identity of a black person. They symbolize all

black people and how they were mistreated due to slavery in the past. Coleridge believed that a strong, active imagination could become a vehicle for transcending unpleasant circumstances. Many of his poems are powered exclusively by imaginative flights, wherein the speaker temporarily abandons his immediate surroundings, exchanging them for an entirely new and completely fabricated experience. Using the imagination in this way is both empowering and surprising because it encourages a total and complete disrespect for the confines of time and place. These mental and emotional jumps are often well rewarded. Perhaps Coleridge's most famous use of imagination occurs in "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" (1797), in which the speaker employs a keen poetic mind that allows him to take part in a journey that he cannot physically make. When he "returns to the bower, after having imagined himself on a fantastic stroll through the countryside, the speaker discovers, as a reward, plenty of things to enjoy from inside the bower itself, including the leaves, the trees, and the shadows. The power of imagination transforms the prison into a perfectly pleasant spot.

Coleridge used his poetry to explore conflicting issues in philosophy and religious piety. Some critics argue that Coleridge's interest in philosophy was simply his attempt to understand the imaginative and intellectual impulses that fueled his poetry. To support the claim that his imaginative and intellectual forces were, in fact, organic and derived from the natural world, Coleridge linked them to God, spirituality, and worship. In his work, however, poetry, philosophy, and piety clashed, creating friction and disorder for Coleridge, both on and off the page. In "The Eolian Harp" (1795), Coleridge struggles to reconcile the three forces. Here, the speaker's philosophical tendencies, particularly the belief that an intellectual breeze " (47) brushes by and inhabits all living things with consciousness, collide with those of his

orthodox wife, who disapproves of his unconventional ideas and urges him to Christ. While his wife lies untroubled, the speaker agonizes over his spiritual conflict, caught between Christianity and a unique, individual spirituality that equates nature with God. The poem ends by discounting the pantheist spirit, and the speaker concludes by privileging God and Christ over nature and praising them for having healed him from the spiritual wounds inflicted by these unorthodox views.

The kid accuses the Sheriff of being behind everything. He says that it should be him behind these bars. The judge leaves and the kid are released two days later. The kid finds a doctor. He asks him to remove the arrow that is still in his leg. It inflicts unendurable agony in him. The sheriff watches as the dead body and tries to mete out justice. The man enters a town the next day and goes to the tavern for a drink. There, he runs into the judge. The old west was a place where there was little law and order and murder was an everyday occurrence. Murder is not only a happenstance of the lack of law and order. It is the business of the gang with which the kid finds himself attached.

The misguided origin applies in Joe such corrupting and corroding evil that he cannot handle it. He is trapped in the vicious circle of his own vulnerability. Miss Burden tries her best to take out him from the cage of aggressive capitalism. But she is unsuccessful to achieve the purpose. Even though it was not have a punishable crime. But he seizes upon the chance to take away anything handy not only one time away but frequently in the course of time. He wants to use the money he gets from the catastrophic spot to boost his standing and status. His approach to use dreadful memory is thoroughly destructive. It is the punishable act. But there is nobody to check his unrestrained passion for social recognition. As a result, he becomes the target of public doubt and racial hatred.

Joe is on the lookout for a moment in which he gives expression to his racial fury and receive acceptance by people in his surroundings. Joe is detached from family root and the root of his racial background as well as origin. It is reasonable to question whether people are adequately aware of the scope of his allusions. Although slave trading ceased in 1807, slavery as a social system persisted in Britain despite the sizeable number of anti-slavery controversies.

An understanding of the civilized status of black people exists to counter the compromising trend of British society which accepted slavery. The moral [limitations](#) [limitations](#) of anti-slavery discourse are not exactly an ideological flaw but rather a matter of historical necessity. According S. T. [Coleeridge](#) symbolism [asis](#):

It could no longer be regarded as the means by which the transcendent is revealed to humanity, and the symbol eventually emerged to take its place in performing this function. The argument assumes exactly what I should now want to question, a functional continuity between allegory and the symbol. If they emphasized the disjunction of literal narrative and figurative meaning in allegory, it was not because they considered the meaning irrecoverably anterior to the narrative but, on the contrary, because they wanted the literal to be subordinated as completely as possible to the figurative. (8)

To be sure, however, the Romantics themselves encouraged this assumption by contrasting the two modes of representation as if one were simply an alternative to the other. And it is not difficult to pursue this line of reasoning to the conclusion that the Romantics developed their symbolist theory solely to mystify what in fact was allegorical practice, in which respect the theory constitutes a veil thrown over a light one no longer wishes to perceive the light being, in de Man's understanding, the inability of a sign to coincide with a meaning that is always anterior to it. But as will

become evident in a moment, the Romantics could not have suppressed that insight which de Man claimed to have recovered. Like the classical rhetoricians from whom they inherited the basic definition of allegory as a continuous metaphor or trope of sentences in which 'one thing is related, and another understood', Enlightenment critics postulated the simultaneous development of narrative and meaning.

The question of dignity reflects romantic concern. Joe is devoid of dignity as he comes from divided racial origin. He comes across not social recognition but torturous denial. The legacy of that dignity and assertiveness are accordingly passed to future family generations till Joe's narrative present. The narrative of Joe is simply an assertion that freedom from slavery is what brings meaning in their lives. This is because Joe's life marks the beginning of horror and servitude. Various counter assertions have been made that undermine acceptance of the literal truth of the story.

From the white Southerners' angle, Afro-Americans are cursed by God. They are cursed because of their black color skin. Dark skin colour is associated with sin. The existing model of social structure in the American South is not favorable to the Blacks even long after the end of slavery. Joe is divided to the core. He believes that the black blood drove them first to the Negro cabin. And then the white blood drove him out of there. It is the black blood which snatched up the pistol. The white blood would not let him fire it. The white blood sends him to the minister for purgation. Joe moves from hither to thither. Aimlessly he searches from one pole of life to the other. Meeting no essence of life, he is thrown into misery and despair.

Social relations prevailing in the American South is [badlybad](#). They are invisible but ambiguous forces. These forces direct events in [the](#) novel. The social pattern in *Light in August* is illustrated by the character who seems to be an oddball. Joe Christmas wants to get adapted to the society he lives in. But his inner weakness

prevents him from doing so. His connection with a particular race is enforced by effective social stigma. Christmas does not fit into the existing model of ~~the~~ society. As a result, the relationship between social exclusion and suffering ~~seem~~ seems to be interrelated.

Man is a social being. He fully identifies himself with his immediate circle: family, neighbors, and nation. In the American South, the category of race is added. Race determines the way of thinking, speaking, and acting. People of uncertain origin could not be a part of ~~the~~ a society where everyone had a well-defined place.

The notion of "separate but ~~equal~~ equal" is just ~~the~~ a hoax to cheat Blacks. This notion is imposed by an organization called Jim Crow law. It became the ~~back~~ bonebackbone of the separation between black and white. The analysis of the protagonist's life shows that ~~on~~ at every stage his rights have been violated. The perpetrator of violence does not suffer any consequences of his action, because his victims rejected social conventions. In the case of people of uncertain origin, ~~a~~ gossip may lead to social exclusion. Finally, Christmas' portrays that African-Americans had no rights at all.

The main struggle of the protagonist is his conflict. Conflict arises from his attempt to know who he is and what he wants. The two factors are mutually exclusive. He beats a prostitute because she is a symbol of the system which humiliates ordinary people like him. Christmas wants to be treated like a white man. But his uncertain origin makes him socially maladjusted. He is trying to find his way through the racial division of the American South. He assimilates with one of the existing communities. However, his attempt to be a part of ~~a~~ black society is doomed to failure.

Like other Faulkner novels, *Light in August* is kind of hard on religion. McEachern's strict Calvinistic beliefs leave no room for joy or fun; and seem to stifle

individuality. The supposed gatekeeper of religion in the novel Reverend Hightower was defrocked due to his selfish, bombastic preaching style and his adulterous wife. Mr. Hines uses religion as an excuse to preach white supremacy. But, in contrast to these depictions, Byron Bunch doesn't advertise or preach, maintaining a quiet spirituality that sustains him throughout the novel.

Joe's actions after he slashes Joanna's throat are not those of a man trying to escape. He invites chase and capture by appearing in the Negro church, where he utters his final violent repudiation of the concepts of religion and race that molded and destroyed him. Joe's body retains its hold upon life longer than his spirit, but he finally goes passively to the boon he sought so long. Throughout the novel, many details evoke the story of Jesus. Faulkner's story dramatizes the excessive emphasis in the Southern brand of Protestantism upon suffering and death as the road to salvation. The parallels with the New Testament are ironic. Not salvation, but a continuation and strengthening of the fanaticism that produced it, ~~result~~resulting from the execution of Christmas. Death brings Joe the personal release he sought, but it in no way suggests the salvation inherent in the Christian crucifixion.

Christmas might have Negro blood in him so he could be black or he might be white. This gives him a character, which does not fit in with the other people; he is different. This is similar to Jesus Christ in that there was something different about him to separate him from the other people. That fact and the fact that his initials are the same as Jesus' can lead a person to believe that William Faulkner did this intentionally. If one looks at Joe Christmas' personality and his entire life and death, one will see that there are no parallels. If Faulkner says he did not put the parallels in intentionally, then it seems only ironic that there are some. In conclusion, Joe is a character in William Faulkner's novel, "Light in August", and nothing more.

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