



**IRONY AND SYMBOLISM:
THE UNLAWFUL DISCRIMINATION IN RACE TREATMENT APPLIED TO THE
CHARACTER JOE CHRISTMAS, AS DESCRIBED BY WILLIAM FAULKNER,
IN THE NOVEL: *LIGHT IN AUGUST***

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*I dedicate this dissertation
to my husband Murillo Canellas,
who shared so much.*

*Maria Isabel
Brazil- Bauru/SP*

The United States Constitution was approved in Philadelphia's Convention, in September 17, 1787, but the Amendments only came on the future legislatures.

The Amendment XXVII was one of the first 12 amendments proposed in the First Congress. At that time nine states would have had to ratify it for it to become part of the Constitution. It was ratified by seven states during the 1700s, one state during the 1800s, and the remaining required states between the years 1978 and 1992.

By the Amendments XIII, XIV and XV, The United States of America Constitution, recognized the equality among men, and the protection of their rights, prohibiting segregation and unjust discrimination in that country.

Amendment XIII

Section 1. Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.

Section 2. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

ABSTRACT

*The aim of the present dissertation is exactly to show the unlawful discrimination in race treatment applied to the character Joe Christmas, as described by William Faulkner in the novel: **Light in August**.*

This novel is narrated since the beginning until the end through an ironical and symbolical way because it is deeply involved with the great tragic force of Joe Christmas, struggling within his inner world and the world outside. Among the variety of ideas his behavior suggests we find to be outstanding his lonely and dark tragic determinism in regard to society's discrimination of blood. "Since his childhood he is only a thought in other people's minds." More than this, he is looked at always from a distance, as if he were not quite human.

He is the victim of everything that racial problem has done to America. Though the ambiguity of his having or not having Negro blood is never revealed to Christmas, nor to the reader. The character's own name recalls in an ironical way Jesus Christ (Joe Christmas) who payed for all the wrongs of human beings. This curious metaphorical relationship identifies the moral pattern of the character in a deeper sense. He wants to know the truth. He insists on knowing who he is. However, there is something else with Joe Christmas. He is the cause to his father's getting killed. He is the cause of death to his real mother. Joe Christmas, as Oedipus, in the beginning, could choose between running away or seeking his own definition since.

Finally, we may compare Joe Christmas to Jesus Christ (both are "J.C.") and to Oedipus, although it seems like a paradox, but it is not. It is an ironical symbolism. We have Jesus Christ's death as the symbol of redemption of humanity; on the other hand we have Oedipus' death as the symbol of the Classical-pagan hero which implies a contrast with the Christian hero, and finally we have Joe Christmas' death as the symbol of the modern hero. By the sequence of the story we see him as an alien, in the beginning. Later on the author reveals him as a brutal murderer of Joanna Burden: "it is only as the flashbacks begin to unfold and we see him as a child and youth that we are made aware of his simple humanity".

Light in August is deeply involved with the great tragic force of Joe Christmas struggling within his inner world and the world outside. Among the variety of ideas his behavior suggests we find to be outstanding his lonely and dark tragic determinism in regard to society. Society gives him no name to begin with, because he is, in fiction the most extreme face conceivable in American loneliness. Loneliness detaches him from his world and leads him into violence, though he lives in a chaotic and absurd modern world. This world gives him no identity and no free will of his own because of its moral patterns. It does not accept his reconciliation and judges him in ambiguous terms of blood. The ambiguity of dark or white blood (there is never an evidence of black blood) makes him play the spontaneous role of a martyr, a dark scapegoat, the perverted figure of Jesus Christ. Therefore the whole series of causality and violence that appears in the novel is caused by a primary background which is the obsessed tendency of humanity summed up in the fate of Joe Christmas.

On the one hand is Joe Christmas, who is trying to become someone, a human being, the integrity that is presented by Lena Grove; though he is the man things are done to because "he is an abstraction created by the racist mania of his grandfather, a former preacher whose tormented life is spent insisting that Negroes are guilty in the eyes of God and must serve white men."¹ On the other hand are some analogous characters that mold Joe into the tragic figure he becomes, because of their peculiar obsessions and whose ironic assumptions are "that any action may be justified or excused if it can be seen as inspired by the will of God."² Between Joe Christmas'

¹ Alfred Kazin, "The Stillness of Light in August" in Faulkner A Collection of Critical Essays ed. by Robert Penn Warren, New Jersey: Prentice - Hall, Inc. Englewood Cliffs, 1966, p. 150.

² Lawrence Thompson, William Faulkner An Introduction and Interpretation, New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., p, 68.

struggle and the religious, political and psychological obsessions of these characters the conflict raises up. As a result, the total action of Joe Christmas is very hardly and strongly determined by these five characters: Doc Hines, Mr. McEachern, Miss Joanna Burden, Rev. Mr. Gail Hightower, Percy Grimm. These characters are the symbol of an apparently strict and deeply moralized society that encircles Joe Christmas, so that he "might seem to be a character completely conditioned and determined and victimized by this heritage and his environment."³ This occurs in a sense, then, that Joe Christmas is the protagonist who undergoes very deeply into various phases of man's calculated injustice. He goes throughout all inhumanities that obsessed people can do to a man, throughout the entire human family, Therefore we must consider each one of these characters in their abominable relationship with Christmas in such a way that we understand

it is this intensity of conception that makes the portrait of Joe Christmas so compelling rather than believable, that makes him a source of wonder, of horror, yet above all of pity, rather than of pleasure⁴ in the creation of a real human being.

Since his childhood and throughout the novel Joe Christmas is observed as a caged beast by his grandfather Doc Hines; because to this obsessed Calvinist Joe Christmas is the incarnation of sin, the agent of Satan. So he tempts the children in the orphanage to call him a Nigger. Hines thinks that Joe Christmas has Negro blood because of his father's dark skin. Hines knows that Joe's father is a Mexican man but he has no certainty whether he has Negro blood or not. However Hines keeps insisting that Joe's heritage is half Negro. For him white people are Jesus Christ's elected ones

³ Ibid., p. 74.

⁴ Kazin, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

and so he takes Joe as a sign of damnation,

'A walking pollution in God's own face I made it. Out of the mouths of little children He never concealed it. You have heard them. I never told them to say it, to call him in his rightful nature, by the name of his damnation. I never told them. They knowed. They was told, but it wasn't by me: I just waited, on His own good time, when He would see fitten to reveal it to His living world. And it's come now. This is the sign, wrote again in woman sinning and bitchery.'⁵

So from the moment Joe Christmas appears in the novel the reader knows the opinions of other characters about him, especially the one Doc Hines says about him.

Since his childhood "he is only a thought in other people's minds. More than this, he is looked at always from a distance, as if he were not quite human, which in many ways he is not"⁶ because Christmas represents the incarnation not only of the race problem in America, but of the condition of man. He always feels lonely as he is searching other people but he does not know why; "perhaps memory knowing, knowing beginning to remember; perhaps even desire, since five is still too young to have learned enough despair to hope" (p. 123).

⁵ William Faulkner, Light in August, New York: Rondon House, Inc., 1932, p. 112: All subsequent references from this book will be taken from this edition and inserted in the text of this paper between parenthesis.

⁶ Kazin, op. cit., p. 150.

The very fact of this lonely feeling is also a result of the role he plays in the novel as a victim. Before going to the orphanage, when he still is a baby, he is kidnapped by his grandfather, old Doc Hines and left anonymously on the door-step of the orphanage on Christmas Eve, hence the choice of the surname, for the child, by the orphanage. So we know Joe Christmas is innocent but he tries to escape from guilt since the time when we see him as a little kid, eating toothpaste: " 'You little rat: 'the thin, furious voice hissed; 'You little rat: Spying on me! You little nigger bastard' " (p.-107). Then besides being an illegitimate and hated child, he is taught by Doc Hines to have inner conflicts, to suffer the darkness of what it means to be cursed with Negro blood. That is why Joe is the scapegoat from all the wrongs of his society since childhood. He is the victim of everything that racial problem has done to America, Though the ambiguity of his having or not having Negro blood is never revealed to Christmas, nor to the reader, The character's own name recalls in an ironical way Jesus Christ (Joe Christmas) who payed for all the wrongs of human beings. This curious metaphorical relationship identifies the moral pattern of the character in a deeper sense; though

there is only one truly significant sense in which Joe Christmas is "Christ-like", and it is, with obvious irony, this: he is misused as a scapegoat by those elements of his society who have first made him in their own image and have then dodged their own moral responsibilities by attempting to heap their own sins on him, as they crucify him, so that they may obtain the illusion of having thus achieved some form of purification and redemption.⁷

⁷ Thompson, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

As we have seen so far, since childhood Joe Christmas is determined to suffer for things that he himself has not done yet. Since a kid he is conducted to be crucified. Yet through his entire life we notice Joe's search to find out his own identity too. This fact recalls the reader of Oedipus' search to find out his identity. In that Greek play Oedipus has done nothing to deserve his suffering. But he wants to know the truth. He insists on knowing who he is. The same with Joe Christmas. He is the cause to his father's getting killed. He is the cause of death to his real mother, Joe Christmas, as Oedipus in the beginning could choose between running away or seeking his own definition since

early in life he was given a free-choice of two lines of conduct, one of which will remove him from all danger to himself. He persists in the other because it is necessary to the terms of his own definition of himself.⁸

These comparisons create in the novel the ambiguity that we have analyzed in Christmas' life, how-ever within a new connotation: a connotation of determinism besides the one of the free-choice. Christ makes a free choice and extended into a peculiar way we may say that Christmas himself also makes a free-choice. It really seems like a paradox but we know that as a result of this "limited free-choice" we have three deaths: these three deaths are implicitly related to one another. We have Jesus Christ's death as the symbol of the redemption of humanity; on the other hand we have Oedipus' death as the symbol of the Classical-pagan hero which implies a contrast with the Christian hero and finally we have Joe Christmas' death as the symbol of the modern hero. Christ, Oedipus and Joe choose what is predicted for

⁸ John L. Longley, Jr., "Joe Christmas: The Hero in the Modern World" in Faulkner A Collection of Critical Essays ed. by Robert Penn Warren, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, 1966, p. 165.

them to do; "it was all "decided" before they were born."⁹ However Christmas is different from Oedipus because of his strong, proud, ruthless, arrogant, cold self-sufficiency and rigidity.

The very fact of his complex and lonely personality associated with the structure of the book makes Christmas very difficult to be understood some-times. By the sequence of the story we see him as an alien, in the beginning. Later on the author reveals him as a brutal murderer of Joanna Burden; "it is only as the flashbacks begin to unfold and we see him as a child and youth that we are made aware of his simple humanity."¹⁰

Christmas does not reveal himself. Though there are few revealing flashes in the story that helps us to understand; for example when his name is going to be changed:

'He will eat my bread and he will observe my religion,' the stranger said. 'Why should he not bear my name?' The child was not listening. He was not bothered. He did not especially care any more than if the man had said the day was hot when it was not hot. He didn't even bother to say to himself 'My name aint Mc Eachern, My name is Christmas'. There was no need to bother about that yet. There was plenty of time (p. 127).

This example also shows the beginning of an inner conflicted loneliness that is going to follow Christmas through his entire life. This is one of the most crucial points in the novel because Christmas is in ambiguous terms again. There is a certain terra of determinism because he can not even have his name the way it is. Though there still is free-choice because he analyses the situation he is in, and finds out that there is a lot of time for him to be what he wants to be. Precisely as Oedipus he has

⁹ *Ibid.*,

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

the rest of his life to find out who and what he is. One remembers a scene in the orphanage: Old Doc Hines recalls how the five year old Christmas begins following the Negro yard-boy around and then the child thinks (actually he may have thought):

'He hates me and fears me. So much so, that he cannot let me out of his sight'. With more vocabulary but no more age he might have thought 'That is why I am different from the others: because he is watching me all the time' (p. 120).

Once more we have the boy's own struggle in this flashback, represented and reinforced by the Calvinist obsession of an inhuman man who bates him. Through the above mentioned facts, Faulkner presents Christmas as the ultimate personification of modern loneliness that frames the book. In fact Christmas shows the ambiguity of darkness of Light is August in one of the sharpest criticisms of Calvinism ever written. Then Christmas is adopted by a God-fearing farmer named McEachern, whose sadistic brutalities reveal the same distorted religious obsession of Doc Hines. Here at least the equilibrium is maintained in the novel because in spite of the fact he hates him, Christmas feels pleasure when he is punished for faults that he is really to be blamed for. In the orphanage the dietitian has called Christmas as "little nigger bastard" (p. 107); to this discovering McEachern adds his doctrine of Calvinistic predestination, the elected and the condemned ones; in a sense that he mixtures the problem of Calvinistic predestination with the problem of race and blood. This is responsible for Christmas' psychological disintegrations: McEachern's religious experience tries to suffocate Joe's own personality keeping a chain of strict but pharisaical rules. There Christmas feels lack of love; lack of understanding; lack of everything that he really needed to find his own self. He also feels hungry and he longs for love;

he was just eight then. It was years later that memory knew that he was remembering; years after that night when, an hour later, he rose from the bed and went and knelt in the corner as he had not knelt on the rug, and above the outraged good kneeling, with his hands ate, like a savage; like a dog (p.136).

The gloomy view of life of McEachern's rules has such a power of torturing the boy's mind to the point of making him feel displaced and homeless outward and inwardly. That is why Christmas feels in love with the prostitute. However his choice is not easy and it is followed by visions of dirtiness but the boy grows mature. Soon after that his illusion is broken up, and Christmas gets as a result of his affair the most afflicted experiences and he understands why.

This "why" is explained in, Mosquitoes, Faulkner's second novel. Quoting Gordon, one of the main characters in this novel, Michael Millgate says that "only an idiot has no grief; only a fool would forget it. What else is there in this world sharp enough to stick to your guts?"¹¹ His affair with the prostitute shows some kind of a revenge but at least in the beginning it is truly because he seeks for the discovery of love. He shows in a very curious way his humanity when he wants to get married with her. But soon the doubt of his white or dark blood is thrown against his face and leads him into violence. He may have killed McEachern, his foster-father, because of his fear and then he feels completely disgusted of everything. He is again terribly alone, engaged in a desperate life-long search for a place to rest in society and a sense of his own self;

¹¹ Michel Millgate, William Faulkner, New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1961, p. 21.

his body was acquiescing better, becoming docile. He stepped from the dark porch, into the moonlight, and 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 (p. 195).

The two main lessons of his experience are got together now: affirmation is a brutal experience, violently deduced, compared to the bitter obsessions of religious rules; love is a weakness and a deception for Christmas. Consequently Christmas runs the street "which was to run for fifteen years" (p. 195)s forcing his experience; requiring his own identity; pricking and hurting, and being a cause of violence to other persons, the ones who are vulnerable, weak and contradictory persons. Eventually the street runs to Jefferson and to the house of Joanna Burden.

"He thought that it was loneliness which he was trying to escape and not himself" (p. 197). Again he feels very lonely and very hungry: He longs for friendship, love and he wants food; "but he could tell that it was inhabited, and he had not eaten in twentyfour hours" (p. 198). So we see that Christmas is not a "Christ-figure" in unnecessarily portentous term - but we may say that he is Christ-image in his role as a sacrificial victim. During all his life he bears the crucial doubt of his heritage, of his not-knowing, and of his loneliness:

He went directly to the table where she set out his food. He did not need to see. His hands saw the dishes were still a little warms, thinking 'Set out for the nigger. For the nigger' (p. 208).

Joanna Burden is also an isolated character, not merely alone but also lonely. She is descended from Yankee abolitionists and feels the obsession that she must love the Negroes even though she is afraid of them. Each one of them, Joanna and Joe, is tormented by a responsibility, a supposed torture; each one of them is rough, violent, and tortured by an inner fear of corruption. Like him, she is obsessed for her responsibility of the Negro race: Christmas as the imaginary victim; Joanna as the imaginary heir of a culpability complex. "The analogies between Miss Joanna Burden and Hines and McEachern are implicitly established as she tells Joe about her heritage."¹² Calvin, her uncle is similar to Mr. McEachern; as a result Miss Burden has a missionary zeal in trying to love the Negroes, even though she fears them:

'I'll learn you to hate two things,' he would say, 'or I'll fraid the tar out of you. And those things are hell and slaveholders. Do You Hear me? 'Yes, ' the boy would say. 'I cant help but hear you; get on to bed and let me sleep.' He was no proselyter, missionary. Save for an occasional minor episode with pistols none of which resulted fatally he confined himself to his own blood (p. 212).

The very fact of Miss Burden supposed responsibility toward the Negro race carefully instills prejudices of guilt by association to her moral procedures and they are enough to poison the responses of Joe Christmas, in ways which help to ruin his life. That is why we may say that Miss Burden stands for darkness; she does not respect his personality. Besides there is an important symbolism about Joanna's darkness; she never talks to Christmas during the day but only at night, which stands for her conflicting and tyrannical soul. The same happens with Christmas "because he was doomed to conceal

¹² Thompson, *op. cit.*, p.71.

always something from the women who surrounded him, Meanwhile he would see her from a distance now and then in the daytime" (p. 229). Through the violent agony of the couple's masochistic affair, we notice that each one of them has the necessity to instill the other his conception of what a Negro is. She feels that she needs to change him into the adequate kind of Negro; this transformation stands for some kind of a liberation for her responsibilities towards the race. She forces his transformation because of her Calvinist obsessions; she says:

'They will take you. Any of them will. On my account: You can choose any one you want among them. We won't even have to pay.' 'To school,' his mouth said. 'A nigger school. Me' (p. 241).

Then she uses violence towards him in such a way that his responses to her are also of violence: the price for it is her death followed soon afterwards by Christmas' crucifixion. Here Christmas reaches a phase of "immolation". This immolation is presented in a very ironic extreme by the author because it is the result of a series of dramatic situations. One of these ironic extremes is the result of the "clash between her pleasure in sexual orgies with Joe Christmas and her guilty conviction that such love was a sin against God."¹³

Again they stood to talk, as they used to do two years ago: standing in the dusk while her voice repeated its tale: "... not to school, then, if you don't want to go... Do without that ... your soul. Expiation of..." (p. 241).

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.72.

The problem of Christmas is not the problem of wrong and right but the problem of right and right because he is rejected, feared, hated, but he is unable to accept the wrong of society with a lethargic passivity. After killing Miss Burden he escapes thought he is always trying a reconciliation with society, but he is always sent away. What he wants is just a place to rest, but what he does is to run into his last masochistic bid for torture,

he breathes deep and slow, feeling with each breath himself diffuse in the neutral grayness, becoming one with loneliness and quiet that has never known fury or despair. 'That was all I wanted, 'he thinks, in a quiet and slow amazement. That didn't seem to be a whole lot to ask in thirty years' (p. 289).

Christmas kills Miss Burden and escapes. He makes a choice and so he hides himself with the Negroes but he is rejected by Negroes as well as whites. He feels remorse for having killed Joanna so his act of hiding with the Negroes is another attempt of neglected reconciliation besides the one of a escape. He thinks now "with a kind of writhing and excruciating agony of regret and remorse and rage" (p.292). But peace is the one thing that his past and his environment do not permit him, He must run always in his terrible circle. Precisely that is what he does, he explodes again among the Negroes In a violent aversion against them. Then we get to another of the most crucial and important points in the novel. Christmas has to make a choice: either he has to continue running away or he has to come back to Jefferson. He knows that he has the possibility of escaping because he also knows that in Chicago and Detroit people may accept the mixture of blood he has in his veins. This choice represents in the novel the determination for the rest of his life: he has the possibility of escaping from his conditioning, which is also a connotation of free will in the novel (though it is very doubtful if Faulkner himself would have wanted to decide on that point). But at

last Joe thinks he chooses to circle back to the region which has helped to make him what he is. He thinks: " 'here I am Yes I would say Here I am I am tired I am tired of running of having to carry my life like it was a basket of eggs' " (p. 294). In fact Joe feels tired of searching his own identity, of running away from people. So at the end he chooses what he wants to be: neither a Negro, nor a white man - he simply chooses to be himself; "he has defined himself and has fought hard for the definition. The murder of Joanna Burden and his own death are the fruit of that insistence."¹⁴

Thinking about the whole complexity of the structure of the novel we observe that Joe Christmas can not run away because that means a break in the circle built around him and he feels that. He feels that he is determined to live within a circle and he has to pay a price to society. He knows that,

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... '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' (p. 296).

Hera Joe Christmas is in ambiguous terms again: he can not run away but he can not stop either. By an ironic awareness Faulkner shows that Joe Christmas can not stop because that would imply an end to the human history where man can not stop. So after he is captured in Mottstown he does not accept the laws of society and he escapes again. Now he hides himself in Rev. Gail Hightower's house, though the Reverend does not help Joe. The obsession in which he lives is a rejection of help to save Christmas' life. Hightower is also an obsessed character because since childhood

¹⁴ Longley, *op. cit.*, p.167.

he has taken the form of romantic hero worship of his fabulous grand-father. Besides that his congregation has repudiated him since his wife's scandal. So he refuses to help Christmas and as a consequence Christmas again uses violence towards Hightower. This is the final expression of Christmas' humanity: he has treated Joanna Burden with violence. Now his reaction proves the same violence towards persons that refuse him that same humanity she has denied Christmas. Here the concept of moral responsibility and free-choice keeps cropping up. In fact Hightower can and does pity his attitudes of Christian professionalism enough to excuse him. In fact "he lives dissociated from mechanical time. Yet for that reason he has never lost it" (p. 320). This example also shows that it becomes convenient to Hightower to lay his excuses on his own abstraction and "thus excuse himself from any moral responsibility which is inconvenient"¹⁵. Without any doubt Hightower's relationship with Christmas represents the symbol of a church that has lost its spiritual function.

Up to this point Joe Christmas has had very little freedom of choice as we have already noticed. Yet Faulkner manipulates more than ironies when he interweaves evidences to support society's doubt about Joe Christmas' heritage; "ha don't look any more like a nigger than I do" (p. 306), says a white character. This is probably the most crucial point in the book and the most ironic one. Once again we may remember the scene in the orphanage, to add more evidence to this point; Old Doc Hines is recalling at the end of the novel how the five year old Christmas has beginning to follow the Negro yard-boy around:

'I aint a nigger,' and the nigger says 'you are worse than that You dont know what you are. And more than that, you wont never know, you'll live and you'll die and you went never know' (p. 336).

¹⁵ Thompson, *op. cit.*, p.77.

There is no doubt that in the presentation of Joe Christmas Faulkner intends to show a fundamental and a tough criticism of the spiritual poverty and especially the inhumanity of Southern Protestantism. By the end Christmas is captured and murdered as a supposed Negro because we never know and people also never get to know whether he is white or black; "and finally, after being starved, betrayed flogged, beaten, pursued by bloodhounds, he is castrated"¹⁶ by Percy Grimm. Grimm is the last obsessed character in the novel and he is also the "obvious figure of the Roman soldier torturing Christ."¹⁷ Through the novel we observe that Grimm's whole life is ironically presented and he is also ironically represented as claiming God's action as the justification for his final action of castrating and killing Joe Christmas. His philosophical obsession is also represented by

a sublime and implicit faith in physical courage and blind obedience, and a belief that the white race is superior to any all other races and that the American is superior to all other white races and that the American uniform is superior to all men and that all would ever be required of him in payment for this belief, this privilege. would be his own life (p. 395)

The image of Christmas almost dying on the floor after his body has been castrated is a material for a ritual. People gather round to stare at his bleeding body which symbolizes the image of their own presumed self-redemption. Quoting Albert Camus, Alfred Kazin says he is the image of "a Saint without God."¹⁸ Actually Christmas represents their own self-cruxifixion and he knows that because he feels he is victim of that society, of his own name and blood. That is why we have said so far people feel redeemed by his death and this particular situation suggests Jesus Christ's words, He

¹⁶ Kazin, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

who died for the remission of sins. As the scriptures say: "For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." So another important comparison the novel suggests is Jesus Christ's death. Jesus Christ is killed on Friday, the sixth day of the week, and it is on Friday that Christmas appears in the story for the first time. On a day of Friday morning Christmas is already crucified by the judgment of the people in the mill because "he carried with him his own inescapable warning, like a flower its scent or a rattlesnake its rattle" (p. 29). Christmas dies and his death is serene and peaceful,

but the man on the floor had not moved. He just lay there, with his eyes open and empty of every thing save consciousness, and with something, a shadow, about his mouth. For a long moment he looked up at them with peaceful... not particularly threatful, but of itself alone serene, of itself alone triumphant (p. 407).

The serenity and the triumph of Christmas' face on the floor also suggests Christ's stillness on the Cross, therefore it is also important to notice the city in which Christmas is killed, or Jefferson. Jesus Christ is killed in Jerusalem. Both names begin with the "Je". As Jesus, who worked three years in his public life, Christmas also worked three years in the mill "it was one Friday morning three years ago" (p. 27) before everything happened and Byron Bunch knows "he quit one Saturday night without warning, after almost three years" (p. 36). So again, like Jesus Christy, Christmas has worked three years and has had a peaceful death; this death is an inverted crucifixion when compared to Christ's crucifixion. Unlike Joe Christmas, Oedipus does not suggest the feeling of peaceful and calm "immolation" at the time of his redemption, but a bitter feeling, as the result of his pagan symbolism. However Christmas has now his free power; actually the real one during his entire life - to stop running and to face his murderer. Consequently

Joe Christmas becomes a microcosm of his immediate social-religious macrocosms, and a symbolic battleground wherein certain misconceptions clash, we may profitably juxtapose Faulkner's Handling of these five characters.¹⁹

The story of what has happened to Christmas is implicitly contrasted with the one of Lena Grove. As we have said in the beginning of this work, in this novel Christmas is trying to become the integrity that is presented by Lena Grove. The counterpoint is that both are social outcasts because her innocent attitudes have also violated certain moral conventions that are vulnerable to social criticisms. Lena sets the ideal behind the book because she is light at the same time that Christmas is observed as darkness by society. Though "Faulkner even leads up to a strange and tortured fantasy of Joe Christmas as Lena Grove's still unnamed son."²⁰ It is a tragic mask, but Christmas is a living being, only a little less lucky than ourselves. At this point we have the light-dark aspect of the novel which is the opposition that is in the blood and in the mind of all of us; the bright rationality associated with the darkness that leads to irrationality and death.

From everything that we have said we can conclude that through Light in August the reader feels pity and terror for the brutal mutilation that goes far beyond the earliest history of men. We feel pity for Joe Christmas because he is the symbol of the modern human sufferer. He is the symbol of each one of us. Any one of us can be in his place and become the victim of the stupidity of the modern world. It is simply the human condition in itself. So we notice that Faulkner is successful in making the symbolic comparison of his hero with the suffering of Christ and with the suffering of a

¹⁹ Thompson, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

²⁰ Kazin, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

hero of Classic Tragedy. Faulkner's hero is now dead but we feel safe. We are released now from the evil of the world. We feel pity for Joe Christmas and horror at the situation he finds himself in; but as the Greek authors of the tragedies would think:

we do not protest at what seems an unfair trick played by the gods- driving him to his downfall for some thing that we regard as not really his fault; instead, we accept the pattern of fate and, at the end of his story, feel resigned to the will of the gods rather than angry and resentful - we feel 'purged' of emotion, in a state that Milton describes as 'calm of mind, all passion spent.'²¹

That is precisely the emotion that Faulkner arises in the readers through Joe Christmas. It is by means of purgation that the Greek people feel released by Oedipus' death and they call it "catharsis". In an analogous way, Christ's believers feel redeemed by His crucifixion and we readers feel a tragic-relief because Joe Christmas is the victim and not ourselves. Finally we want to quote Thompson's opinion to corroborate and to express our final thoughts about "The Lonely and Dark Scapegoat in Light in August," or Joe Christmas:

the reader can sympathetically call him either a "fated" or a "predestinated" victim. Such an interpretation is intensified by the tragic irony of his being forced to serve as a scapegoat for that society which creates him in its own image,.. The reader may be left in doubt, at the end of the story, whether to call him a tragedy or a fate, or a tragedy which combines fate and choice, or finally a tragedy of character. But if the conclusion is reached that Joe Christmas can not be held morally responsible for what happens to him, we are not left in doubt about the guilt of that society which helped to shape

²¹ John Burgess Wilson, B. A., English Literature-A Survey for Students, London: Longmans, Green and Co LTD, p. 62.

him.²²

We believe that we have proved through this essay what we have said in the first paragraph of this work. In other words we think in , Light in August Faulkner is successful in his creation of a whole series of causality and violence in the novel caused by a primary background which is the obsessed tendency of humanity summed up in the fate of Joe Christmas. That is the reason for our choosing the title of this essay: "The Lonely and Dark Scapegoat in Light in August," or Joe Christmas since he is the man who struggles within his inner world and the word outside and he is also the man who pays the spontaneous role of a martyr because of his ambiguity of dark or white blood. In fact we think society shapes him, detaches him from his world and does not accept his reconciliation since Faulkner creates his image as the man who is predestinated to be crucified. Joe Christmas carries with him since his birth the wish of people who wanted him to pay for the errors of Southern persons, "his own inescapable warning" (p. 29) as Jesus Christ carried with him the wish of the Almighty Father. As the Scriptures say: "but now then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" So we notice by the creation of this great fictitious world around Joe Christmas, among many other reasons, the value for Faulkner's work of art in this novel; where he suggests an everlasting variety of new experiences and images in his way of expressing not only the value of the man but also the elaborated tricks, which he is guilty of using, to hide and to free from guilt this same man.

²² Thompson, op. cit., p. 170.

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