

ARCHETYPAL SYMBOLISM

IN

WILLIAM FAULKNER'S

LIGHT IN AUGUST

A Thesis

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## ABSTRACT

The following paper is an investigation of the extent of the archetypal symbolism in one of William Faulkner's greatest novels, Light in August. It proceeds from a definition of archetypal symbolism combining major literary, psychological and philosophical points of view to an application of the definition to the novel in order to develop the theme of community. Joe Christmas is discussed as the god who is sacrificed for the rebirth of the spiritually starved community. He is Northrop Frye's pharmakos trying to escape a demonic world and find his proper destiny. The Reverend Gail Hightower is treated as a community member who achieves awareness of his failure to understand himself as part of the community in an apocalyptic vision following Christmas' sacrifice. In the last section, Lena Grove is seen in an innocent, timeless world as an embodiment of the values and possibilities for the endurance of mankind in community.

## INTRODUCTION

### A DEFINITION OF ARCHETYPAL SYMBOLISM

In the past few decades, there has been a small amount of critical interest in the archetypal symbolism in William Faulkner's Light in August. Major interest has centred around the symbols of timelessness and discussions of Joe Christmas as a god figure. The following paper will attempt a comprehensive examination of all forms of archetypal symbolism in the novel as they relate to the story of the dying god myth. The theme of community which Cleanth Brooks and one or two other critics have discussed will be further developed in the attempt. It may be best to begin with one or two general definitions of symbolism. 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, trade marks, 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 "unconscious" 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.<sup>1</sup>

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."<sup>2</sup> Kahler says that, in art, symbolism goes beyond mere representation and moves toward the unknown, or previously unseen and unexpressed. "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, indeed identity, of the artistic and the human act, is the supreme reach of the symbol." "Kahler, p. 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 imaginize 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.

This coming into its own of the symbol is the final stage that Northrop Frye describes in his five levels of symbolism in Anatomy of Criticism. On the first or literal level of meaning where words themselves are signs, metaphor appears in its literal shape which occurs with the simple juxtaposition of words, as in Ezra Pound's poem "In a Station of the Metro". The descriptive level gives us the double perspective of the verbal structure and the phenomena to which it is related. At this point, all metaphors are similes because we say one thing is like another in certain aspects. Frye's third level, which he calls the formal phase, is concerned with symbols as images or natural phenomena conceived

as matter or content. An analogy of natural proportion is set up containing four terms, of which two have a common factor. Thus "the hero was a lion" means, according to Frye, that the hero is to human courage as the lion is to animal courage, courage being the factor common to the third and fourth terms. On the archetypal level, where the symbol is an associative cluster, the metaphor unites two images, each of which is a specific representative of a class or genus. Archetypal metaphor thus involves the use of what has been called the concrete universal, the individual identified with its class. Frye points out here that the universals in poetry are poetic ones and not real ones. Finally, we come to the anagogic level which relates to Kahler's idea of the true symbol. Metaphor now takes the radical form "A is B" or "the sun is god," and the literary universe becomes a universe in which everything is potentially identical with everything else. Identity here means not similarity or likeness but a unity of various and diversified things. All poetry then proceeds as though all poetic images were contained within a single universal body. We see here the relation to the idea of both Jung and Kahler that symbols have an independent status in a world of their own.

Frye thinks that there are two extremes of literary design. Myth is one extreme. Realism as it evolves into

naturalism is the other extreme and in between is romance. The world of mythical imagery is akin to the world of heaven or Paradise in religion and it works by way of metaphorical identity. The tendency of romance is to displace myth in a human direction and conventionalize content in an idealized direction. The central principle of displacement is that what can be metaphorically identified in a myth can only be linked in romance by some form of simile: analogy, significant association, incidental accompanying imagery and the like. In realism, we have a work that is similar to what we know and it is an art of extended or implied simile. Displacement is used again to present myth in realistic fiction. However, the association becomes less significant than in romance. It is more a matter of incidental, even coincidental or accidental, imagery.

Thus three organizations of myth and archetypal symbols appear in literature. First, there is undisplaced myth, generally concerned with gods or demons, and which takes the form of two contrasting worlds of total metaphorical identification, one desirable and the other undesirable. Their two groups of symbolism Frye calls the apocalyptic and demonic respectively. Second is romance, the area of displacement, where mythical patterns are implied in a world more closely associated with human experience. Third, we have the tendency

of realism to throw the emphasis on content and representation rather than on the shape of the story. The lower end of realism becomes ironic literature in which Frye notes that the re-appearance of such patterns as ritual and sacrifice pull the work toward myth again. The mythical patterns in it are usually demonic rather than apocalyptic.

We will now turn to what Frye considers to be the importance of archetypal symbols. In the section "Mythical Phase: Symbol as Archetype", he points out that in the third or formal phase the poem is a unique structure to be studied on its own; but it is also one of a class of similar forms. Once a poem is thought of as related to other poems, the consideration of convention and genre become important. In convention, a poem is seen as an imitation of other poems and, in genre, analogies in form are studied. Frye concludes, therefore, that the study of genres has to be founded on the study of convention. In view of this, Frye says, "The criticism which can deal with such matters will have to be based on that aspect of symbolism which relates poems to one another, and it will choose, as its main field of operations, the symbols that link poems together. Its ultimate object is to consider, not simply a poem as an imitation of nature, but the order of nature as a whole as imitated by a corresponding order of words."<sup>3</sup>

The linking symbols which Frye refers to here are the archetypes. He thinks of them as typical or recurring images which connect one poem with another and help to unify and integrate the literary experience. Poetry now is seen as a whole and, as such, it becomes a mode of communication and an activity of human artifice that forms part of the larger whole of civilization. Frye now sees the archetypal phase as concerned with the social aspect of poetry and archetypal criticism as dealing with poetry as the focus of a community.

Frye suggests through his use of the term "associative clusters" that archetypes are complex variables. They are able to communicate certain learned specific associations to us because we are familiar with them through our cultural background. At a later point, we will refer to Jung again to see the origin of these archetypes and the source of their power over our minds. Frye says that some archetypes, such as the cross, are so deeply rooted in conventional association that they can hardly avoid suggesting that association. He is therefore careful to make it clear that this kind of phenomenon carried to an extreme would produce art in which the communicable units would be nothing more than a set of esoteric signs. There are no necessary and invariable associations for an archetype and the modern writer tries to keep his art from becoming conventionalized by making his

archetypes as versatile as possible. But, as Frye says, the poet who uses the expected associations will communicate more rapidly. It would seem that the best writers are those who are able to strike the balance between disguise and transparency.

Referring again to the phase before the archetypal level, that is the formal phase, Frye says that poetry exists between the example and the precept. The example often becomes a recurrent phenomenon, and the precept, or statement about what ought to be, involves a strong element of desire or wish. Recurrence and desire become very important in archetypal criticism. In it, the narrative aspect becomes a recurrent act of symbolic communication or what may be termed ritual. Narrative is studied by the archetypal critic as ritual or imitation of human action as a whole. Desire forms the content of archetypal criticism in its conflict with reality in which it resembles the process of the dream. Thus Frye concludes that ritual and dream are the narrative and significant content respectively of literature in its archetypal aspect. Therefore the archetypal analysis of the plot of a novel will deal with it in terms of actions which show analogies to rituals such as weddings, funerals, initiations, executions and so on. The archetypal analysis of the meaning or significance of such a work will be concerned with questions of mood

and resolution, whether tragic, comic, ironic, etc., in which the relationship of desire and experience is expressed.

Frye continues his argument with an intricate account of the way in which recurrence and desire interpenetrate and become equally important in both ritual and dream. It might be best to follow his explanation very closely in order to gain the full benefit of it. To begin, the principle of recurrence in the rhythm of art rests on the repetitions in nature that make time intelligible to us. Because of this, rituals cluster around the cyclical movements of the sun, the moon, the seasons, and human life. The poetry which reflects these rituals is part of the total human imitation of nature that we call civilization. However civilization is not merely an imitation of nature, but the process of making a total human form out of nature, and it is impelled by the force of desire. Ernst Cassirer says, "The first energy by which man places himself as an independent being in opposition to things is that of desire. In desire he no longer simply accepts the world and the reality of things but builds them up for himself. This is man's first and most primitive consciousness of his ability to give form to reality."<sup>4</sup> Therefore, as Frye says, desire is the energy that leads human society to develop its own form. But, as Frye also says, there is a moral dialectic in desire, e.g., the conception

of a garden develops the conception "weed". Poetry in its social or archetypal aspect not only tries to illustrate the fulfillment of desire, but to define the obstacles to it. Ritual is not only a recurrent act, but an act expressive of a dialectic of desire and repugnance, desire for futility or victory, repugnance to drought or to enemies. In dream there is both the wish-fulfillment dream and the anxiety or nightmare dream of repugnance. If we can accept the validity of these connections delineated by Frye, we can also accept his conclusion that archetypal criticism rests on two organizing rhythms or patterns, one cyclical, the other dialectic.

We come now to what is probably Frye's greatest insight regarding literature: the fact that the union of ritual and dream in a form of verbal communication is myth. This is using the term myth in a somewhat different sense than the common one of a story about a god, but, as we will see later, the two senses are related in a certain way.

The function of myth in literature in Frye's view is to account for and make communicable the ritual and the dream. Ritual cannot account for itself because its origins are pre-logical, pre-verbal and almost pre-human when we think of the attachment to the calendar of the natural cycle that plants and some animals still have. But the stories of myth give the human being some explanation for his rituals. Also,

in the case of dreams, their meaning is not fully comprehensible to us. But they have a mythical element which has a power of independent communication that helps us to understand the "story" behind their systems of allusions.

If we call this mythical element we have just mentioned the archetype, the question then becomes: What is the power of independent communication that archetypes as manifestations of myth have? Frye mentions that this emphasis on impersonal content in dream has been developed by Jung in his theory of a collective unconscious. Frye thinks that this emphasis is an unnecessary hypothesis for literary criticism, but it would seem that an understanding of how symbols in literature affect us psychologically would be essential to any investigation of the literary experience.

Jung says in the section of Man and His Symbols entitled "The Archetype in Dream Symbolism" that there are many symbols that are not individual but collective in their nature and origin. They often seem to have some kind of religious connotation, and Jung finds that the believer assumes they have been revealed to man from a divine source while the skeptic thinks they have been invented. However, Jung feels that both are wrong. He concedes to the skeptic that these kinds of symbols have been consciously and carefully elaborated for centuries. He also agrees with the believer that their

origin is so far buried in the past that they seem to have no human source. But he says they are actually "collective representations" arising from primeval dreams and creative fantasies. As such, they are involuntary, spontaneous manifestations and by no means intentional inventions.

In such a case, says Jung, we must consider the fact, first noted by Freud, that elements often occur in a dream that are not individual and cannot be derived from the dreamer's personal experience. Jung looks at the history of the human mind to help explain the presence of these elements which he calls the archetypes. He says that the mind has an evolutionary history like any one of the organs of the body. By "history" of the mind Jung does not mean the mind building itself up by conscious reference to the past through language and other cultural traditions. He is referring to the biological, prehistoric, and unconscious development of the mind in archaic man, whose psyche was still close to that of the animal. Just as the anatomist or biologist can find traces of our original form in our bodies today, the investigator of the mind can see analogies between the dream pictures of modern man and the products of the primitive mind, its "collective images" and its mythological motifs. The archetypes are still functioning, as Freud discovered, and they are especially valuable because of their "historical" nature.

Jung says that the term "archetype" is often misunderstood as meaning certain definite mythological images or motifs. But the mythological motifs are conscious representations which can be quite variable. Therefore, it would be absurd to assume that the motifs themselves are inherited. It is the tendency to form various representations of such motifs that is inherited. This tendency is the archetype and it is an instinctual trend of the human mind. In an effort to distinguish between instincts and archetypes, Jung says: "What we properly call instincts are physiological urges, and are perceived by the senses. But at the same time, they also manifest themselves in fantasies and often reveal their presence only by symbolic images. These manifestations are what I call the archetypes. They are without known origin; and they 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. "Jung, p. 58."

By their nature, archetypes, are, at the same time, both images and emotions. The emotion must be present or the image is simply a word picture, says Jung. With the addition of emotion, the image gains numinosity (or psychic energy). It becomes dynamic and definite consequences must come from it. Such is the power of archetypes, according to Jung, that

they create myths, religions and philosophies that influence and characterize whole nations and epochs of history. If we can grasp the significance of the power of archetypes that Jung discovered in his work, we can appreciate the fact that archetypal symbols in literature can evoke extensive associations and deep-seated emotions in the reader.

We will return to Frye at this point to discover the way in which the archetypal level of criticism becomes a more specialized phase of itself in his fifth or anagogic level. As we have already suggested, literature on the fourth level is a part of civilization and civilization is the process of making a human form out of nature. The shape of this human form, says Frye, is revealed by civilization itself as it develops: its major components are the city, the garden, the farm, the sheepfold and the like, as well as human society itself. An archetypal symbol is usually a natural object with a human meaning, and it forms part of the critical view of art as a civilized product, a vision of the goals of human work. But human endeavour implies social, moral and aesthetic standards and Frye gives extensive arguments to prove that none of these standards can, in the long run, be externally determinative of the value of art. Therefore, there must be a higher phase where literature passes from

civilization, in which it is still useful and functional, to culture, where it is disinterested and liberal and stands by itself. Again we will follow Frye's account of this phase very closely for the sake of greater understanding.

He says that the last phase of symbolism will be concerned, as the previous one was, with the mythopoeic aspect of literature, but with myth in its narrower and more technical sense of fictions and themes relating to divine or quasi-divine beings and powers. He points out that learned mythopoeia may be full of complexities but they are designed to reveal and not disguise the myth. One can infer that both it as well as primitive and popular literature tend toward a center of imaginative experience.

Frye notes that in the greatest moments of writers such as Dante and Shakespeare we have a feeling of converging significance, the feeling that here we are close to seeing what our whole literary experience has been about, the feeling that we have moved into the still center of the order of words. Valid criticism recognizes that, unless there is such a center, there is nothing to prevent the analogies supplied by convention and genre from being an endless series of free associations, perhaps suggestive, perhaps even tantalizing, but never creating a real structure. The study of archetypes

is the study of literary symbols as parts of a whole. Frye thinks that if we accept the idea of archetypes, then we must take another step and conceive the possibility of a self-contained literary universe. We have now come back to the conclusion we drew from Jung, Kahler and Frye himself early in the discussion: the idea that there is an independent world of the symbol.

Frye goes on to posit that if archetypal symbols are communicable symbols, we can expect to find at the center of archetypes a group of universal symbols. These symbols would be images of things that are common to all men, the ones that Jung says can be reproduced in any place at any time. Such symbols would be universally comprehensible with no limits to their communicable power and they would include images of food and drink, the quest or journey, light and darkness, and sexual fulfillment, usually in the form of marriage.

Having given the general tendency of anagogic poetry and having specified its major symbols, Frye goes on to describe its particular manifestation of dream, desire, and ritual, and to define the ultimate nature of its symbols.

As we have already noted, the work of literary art in the archetypal phase is a myth and unites the ritual and the dream. Frye says that by doing so it limits the dream: it

makes it plausible and acceptable to a social waking consciousness. But when we look at the dream as a whole or unlimited, we notice three things about it. First, its limits are not the real, but the conceivable. Second, the limit of the conceivable is the world of fulfilled desire emancipated from all anxieties and frustrations. Third, the universe of the dream is entirely within the mind of the dreamer.

Therefore, in the anagogic phase, says Frye, literature imitates the total dream of man, and so imitates the thought of a human mind which is at the circumference and not at the center of its reality. In the archetypal phase, the whole of poetry is still contained within the limits of the natural, or plausible. When we pass into anagogy, nature becomes not the container, but the thing contained, and the archetypal universal symbols, the city, the garden, the quest, the marriage, are no longer the desirable forms that man constructs inside nature, but are themselves the forms of nature. Nature is now inside the mind of an infinite man who builds his cities out of the Milky Way. Frye points out that this is not reality, but it is the conceivable or imaginative limit of desire. This then would be the creation of the new form of reality that Kahler called the supreme reach of the symbol.

In the case of ritual in the anagogic phase, Frye sees an imitation of nature which has a strong element of magic in it. The impetus of the magical element in ritual is toward a universe in which a stupid and indifferent nature is no longer the container of human society, but is contained by that society and must rain or shine at the pleasure of man. In its anagogic phase, then, poetry imitates human action as total ritual and so imitates the action of an omnipotent human society that contains all the powers of nature within itself.

To sum up the form anagogy takes, Frye says that in it, poetry unites total ritual, or unlimited social action, with total dream, or unlimited individual thought. Its universe is infinite and boundless hypothesis: it cannot be contained within any actual civilization or set of moral values. The ethos or setting of art is no longer a group of characters within a natural setting, but a universal man who is also a divine being, or a divine being conceived in anthropomorphic terms.

We have now reached the point where we can see that myth at the anagogic level does take on its common meaning of a story about a god as Frye had said it would. It seems that the approach man makes to the divine through the passage from nature to the universal in poetry parallels the approach

that man has made to the divine through myth conceived as a theogonic process. To illustrate the possibility of the conjunction of these processes we will quote from a discussion of Schelling by Cassirer in which Cassirer paraphrases Schelling to say that myth has both a universal and a religious significance:

Myth has attained its essential truth when it is conceived as a necessary factor in the self-development of the absolute. It has no relation to the "things" of naive realism and represents solely a reality, a potency of the spirit; but this does not argue against its objectivity, essentiality, and truth, for nature itself has no other or higher truth than this. Nature itself is nothing other than a stage in the development and self-unfolding of the spirit - and the task of a philosophy consists precisely in understanding it and elucidating it as such. What we call nature - and this is already stated in the system of transcendental idealism - is a poem hidden behind a wonderful secret writing; if we could decipher the puzzle, we should recognize in it the odyssey of the human spirit, which in astonishing delusion flees from itself while seeking itself. This secret writing of nature is now explained from a new angle by the study of myth and its necessary phases of development. The "odyssey of the spirit" has here reached a stage in which we no longer, as in the world of the senses, perceive its ultimate goal through a semi-transparent mist, but see it before us in configurations familiar to the spirit though not yet fully permeated by it. Myth is the odyssey of the pure consciousness of God, whose unfolding is determined and mediated in equal measure by our consciousness of nature and the world and by our consciousness of the I. "Cassirer, pp. 8-9."

This last statement seems to suggest that our apprehension

of man and the universal in literature can bring us into contact with the spiritual.

If this is the case, Frye is not stretching a point when he says that on the anagogic level, the symbol is a monad, all symbols being united in a single, infinite and eternal verbal symbol which is, as meaning, the Logos, and, as narrative, total creative act.

At this point, Cassirer may be helpful in defining this relation of the symbolic and the spiritual. He says that although myth spiritually rises above the world of things, in the figures and images with which it replaces this world, it merely substitutes for things another form of materiality and bondage to things. What seemed to free the spirit from the fetters of things becomes a new fetter which is all the stronger since it is not a mere physical force but a spiritual one. However, a force of this sort already contains within it the immanent condition for its own future dissolution; it contains the potentiality of a spiritual process of liberation which is indeed effected in the progress from the magical - mythical world view to the truly religious view. The condition for this development is that the spirit place itself in a new relation to the world of images and signs - that while still living in them and making use of them it achieve a greater understanding of them and thus

rise above them. In comparing myth with other spheres of symbolic expression we find that as the world of language moves away from the equivalence of word and thing, its independent spiritual form, the force of the logos, comes to the fore. The word emerges in its own specificity, in its purely ideal, signifiatory function, and art leads to still another stage of detachment. In art, the image world acquires for the first time a purely immanent validity and truth. It does not aim at something else or refer to something else; it simply "is" and consists in itself. Thus the world of the image becomes a self-contained cosmos with its own center of gravity and the spirit can enter into a truly free relation with it. Myth, language and art interpenetrate one another in an ideal progression toward a point where the spirit not only is and lives in its own creations, its self-created symbols, but also knows them for what they are.

In the following treatment of William Faulkner's Light in August, we will discuss Joe Christmas as an ironic hero whose sacrifice transforms the community. The basic symbol patterns studied in his story will be those of light and dark and the demonic. Reverend Hightower will be seen as affected by Joe Christmas' sacrifice as the minister searches for spiritual wholeness and gains consciousness of himself

as a member of the community. The major symbols looked at in the study will be images of totality and apocalyptic imagery. The comic romantic figure of Lena Grove will present the integration in the community that Hightower moves toward after Christmas' death. This will help make intelligible Faulkner's shifting from tragedy to comedy in the novel. If, as Frye says, the examination of mood and resolution in archetypal criticism can give us the meaning or significance of a work, it may be possible to prove that the endurance of mankind through a communal existence is the point of this novel. To study Lena as a community representative, we will examine the displacement imagery of the analogy of innocence found in her story. The symbols of timelessness connected with her will be examined as a guide to the theme of endurance.

## CHAPTER I

### JOE CHRISTMAS: THE SACRIFICED GOD

There has been much discussion among the critics as to whether Joe Christmas is a tragic hero with free will or a victim of circumstances and social and religious forces. This discussion will take the latter view and attempt to show that Christmas is a victim whose quest for identity and freedom is futile because of the social role he is doomed to play - that of the scapegoat.

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." "Frye, p. 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." "Frye, p. 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. We may call this typical victim the pharmakos or scapegoat. We meet a pharmakos figure in Hawthorne's Hester Prynne, in Melville's Billy Budd, in Hardy's Tess, in the Septimus of Mrs. Dalloway, in stories of persecuted Jews and Negroes, in stories of artists whose genius makes them Ishmaels of a bourgeois society. The pharmakos is neither innocent nor guilty. 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... 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. "Frye, p. 41-42."

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. Slahey, 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".<sup>5</sup> 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 imagery used to symbolize Joe Christmas' world of the scapegoat is that which Frye calls demonic and which, in its extreme form, presents, "the world that desire totally rejects: the world of the nightmare and the scapegoat, of bondage and pain and confusion; the world as it is before the human imagination begins to work on it and before any image of human desire, such as the city or the

garden, has been solidly established; the world also of perverted or wasted work, ruins and catacombs, instruments of torture and monuments of folly." "Frye, p. 147."

Frye feels that the patterns of demonic, apocalyptic and analogical imagery in literature can be organized around seven basic categories: the divine, human, animal, vegetable and mineral worlds, and also, fire and water.

The divine world of demonic imagery evokes the central idea of inscrutable fate or external necessity and emphasizes a sense of human remoteness and futility in relation to the divine order. The symbol best representing the divine power in Joe Christmas' world is that of the Player who moves the characters about according to whim. Faulkner has Lucas Burch give the clearest description of it during his flight from the cabin where he has seen Lena and the baby. He thinks, "It seemed to him now that they were all just shapes like chessmen - the negro, the sheriff, the money, all - unpredictable and without reason moved here and there by an Opponent who could read his moves before he made them and who created spontaneous rules which he and not the Opponent, must follow."<sup>6</sup> As Percy Grimm pursues Christmas, he moves, "with that lean, swift, blind obedience to whatever Player moved him on the Board," "Faulkner, p. 437."

and again, "He seemed indefatigable, not flesh and blood, as if the Player who moved him for pawn likewise found him breath." "Faulkner, p. 437."

Alfred Kazin feels that the Player represents the spirit of the past, "a god-like force that confronts man at every turn with everything he has been, and so seems to mock and to oppose him.... All things are fated; man is in any place because the Player moved him there. Our past sets up the positions into which we fall."<sup>7</sup> But the divine world in Joe Christmas' section of the novel is projected by the characters as more than the influence of their past. The Player or the diety represents all their hates, fears, frustrations and prejudices. In discussing the various forms of southern Protestantism that Faulkner's people adhere to in the novel, Cleanth Brooks points out that certain kinds of Protestantism are part of the larger religious phenomenon of the millennial movements, including the revolutionary movements of the West which, "share in this tendency to attribute the desires and hates of an individual or a group to God or the dialectic of history or to the nature of reality."<sup>8</sup> The people in Christmas' world lack the comfort and protection of a true religious faith and a loving God. Christmas, Burch and Grimm feel

themselves helpless before some kind of fate or necessity. Doc Hines, McEachern and Joanna Burden feel they are subject to a wrathful and punitive God. Hines lives under the weight of what he calls the Lord's remorseful hand and he thinks God has placed him in the world to punish woman-sinning and bitchery. As Joe Christmas is raised by his foster father, he is oppressed and mistreated by McEachern in the name of God. Along with work, the fear of God is one of the two great virtues. As McEachern descends on Joe and Bobbie Allen at the country dance, he feels himself to be guided by some militant Michael himself and to be "the actual representative of the wrathful and retributive Throne." "Faulkner, p. 191." McEachern's kingdom is not divine but corrupt and earthly. Joanna Burden too believes in a wrathful God who punishes and damns those who are disobedient to Him. Her answer to the racial question is that God has cursed the black race and condemned it to be the white race's doom and curse for its sins. She feels she is damning herself to hell by living in sin with Joe and begs God to let her be damned a while longer as she senses the approach of the affair's end.

The people in Joe's world do indeed feel themselves to be remote from the divine world. They must look for their

solace and redemption in the imperfection, violence and suffering of their own human world. Frye sums up this world by saying:

In the sinister human world one individual pole is the tyrant-leader, inscrutable, ruthless, melancholy, and with an insatiable will, who commands loyalty only if he is egocentric enough to represent the collective ego of his followers. The other pole is represented by the pharmakos or sacrificed victim, who has to be killed to strengthen the others. In the most concentrated form of the demonic parody, the two become the same.... The social relation is that of the mob, which is essentially human society looking for a pharmakos, and the mob is often identified with some sinister animal image such as the hydra, Virgil's Fama, or its development in Spenser's Blatant Beast. "Frye, p. 148-49."

We will follow the story of Joe Christmas' early life, later career and death in the light of this description of the world he moves in.

A great many of the scenes of the novel dealing with Joe's life concern his relationships with women. In her study entitled "William Faulkner and the Myth of Woman", Dolores E. Brien notes, "Joe Christmas was in desperate flight all his life from women who by kindness, contempt, or by sexual passion - it did not matter which - threatened his freedom and masculine integrity. Only his castration at the hands of Percy Grimm brought him some peace and

release from the terrible spectre of the woman."<sup>9</sup>

Beginning with the opening scene of his story, Joe associates the threatening female principle with food, a symbol from the animal and vegetable worlds. In the orphanage where he spends his early years, he is discovered by the dietitian behind the closet curtain where he has eaten a tube of her toothpaste. Until this time, the dietitian had been nothing to him except a smooth, pink-and-white mechanical adjunct to the ritual of eating food in the dining room. Now she becomes the source of the trauma that comes with waiting for punishment that is never meted out. Instead, she tries to bribe him with money and kindness. The beginning of the identification of women and food begins with this equivocal relationship with the dietitian. Significantly, during his kidnapping by Hines and his trip to his new home on McEachern's farm, he is fed by Doc Hines, the policeman and McEachern and each time he seems to accept it with unquestioning calm.

Joe always regards Mrs. McEachern's efforts at kindness as weakness and meddling compared to the hard, ruthless justice of her husband. He can never accept her overtures and, after his day long ordeal with McEachern and the catechism book, he throws the food she brings him against

the wall.

Years later, Joe's affair with the prostitute, Bobbie Allen, begins in a restaurant where he is embarrassed at not having enough money to pay for the pie and coffee he has ordered. He is then humiliated even more when he returns to give Bobbie the money. Finally, whenever he is enraged with Joanna Burden, he smashes the dishes of food she leaves him in the kitchen.

As we have said, Joe associates food with the female. And the female represents for him all that is uncertain, threatening and hurtful in life. Edwin E. Moseley has written, "The innumerable references to the denial of food suggest the refusals of communion in its literal which is its symbolic sense or the unconsummated approach to meaningful love, in contrast of course to Christ's recurrent sincere communions and to Lena's unquestioned ones."<sup>10</sup>

It is only during his final flight that Joe comes to terms with his need for food or, in reality, his need for and yet rejection of involvement in life. Moseley says the need becomes mystical. After a period of excruciating hunger, Joe finds he has transcended hunger. This actually signals the beginning of his preparation for death, although he continues to eat because he thinks he should. The

necessity to eat becomes his obsession rather than food itself. But he finds that life is not what he desires any longer. He decides to turn himself in and accept his fate which is death and a very special kind of death. The ultimate benefit of his decision, he thinks, is that he will not have to bother to eat any more. The decision to accept death brings a certain kind of freedom, the only kind ever allowed him as we will see later when we discuss his search for it.

When Joe is eight years old, he endures a whole day of beatings at the hands of McEachern who is trying to make him learn the Presbyterian catechism. Joe recalls it later as the day on which he became a man. And we may rightly say that Faulkner intends the passage in the novel to be a description of Joe's initiation into young manhood. Writing in Man and His Symbols, Joseph L. Henderson gives this summation of this ritual act:

Ancient history and the rituals of contemporary primitive societies have provided us with a wealth of material about myths and rites of initiation, whereby young men and women are weaned away from their parents and forcibly made members of their clan or tribe. But in making this break with the childhood world, the original parent archetype will be injured, and the damage must be made good by a healing process of assimilation into the life of the group. (The identity of the

group and the individual is often symbolized by a totem animal.) Thus the group fulfills the claims of the injured archetype and becomes a kind of second parent to which the young are first symbolically sacrificed, only to re-emerge into a new life."

Several times during Joe's ordeal, McEachern's face is described as rocklike or granitelike. Henderson mentions that according to Jung an individual originally has a feeling of wholeness and complete sense of the Self. However, in order to relate as an individual in a society the individual's ego must emerge as he grows up. The break from the parent achieved at initiation begins this process. Faulkner's imagizing of McEachern as rocklike is therefore acutely accurate symbolism because rocks traditionally symbolize wholeness in general and the Self in particular in Jungian archetypes.

McEachern uses a leather strap to administer the beatings to Joe. Faulkner says, "It was clean, like the shoes, and it smelled like the man smelled: an odor of clean hard virile living leather." "Faulkner, p. 139." Many of the initiation rites of tribal societies involve the encounter of a youth with a wild animal such as a wolf or a boar. This is meant to depict the struggle between man and the dark, savage side of life. Faulkner here is using a symbol from the animal world and associating it with the

darkness and evil of the world which is represented by McEachern. Henderson goes on in Man and His Symbols to describe the pattern that the initiation process takes:

The ritual takes the novice back to the deepest level of original mother-child identity or ego-self identity, thus forcing him to experience a symbolic death. In other words, his identity is temporarily dismembered or dissolved in the collective unconscious. From this state he is then ceremonially rescued by the rite of the new birth. This is the first act of true consolidation of the ego with the larger group, expressed as totem, clan, or tribe, or all three combined.

The ritual, whether it is found in tribal groups or in more complex societies, invariably insists upon this rite of death and rebirth, which provides the novice with a "rite of passage" from one stage of life to the next, whether it is from early childhood or from early to late adolescence and from then to maturity. "Henderson, p. 123."

Joe courageously submits to McEachern's brutality until he finally loses consciousness and falls to the floor unable to move again. When he awakes in his room, McEachern is there to pray and complete the process of learning the catechism. Joe is still lying on his bed with "his hands crossed on his breast like a tomb effigy," "Faulkner, p. 144," when Mrs. McEachern enters the room later. Joe has clearly passed through a symbolic death as a result of McEachern's beatings and, after McEachern finishes praying, his hand appears as if it had been dipped in blood as it holds the

oil lamp. It is as if the fire which he lights in the lamp destroys the final link between Joe and his father figure. The bloody appearance of McEachern's hand suggests the injury to the parent archetype that Henderson mentions. Joe has now to be reborn and join the community around him. Mrs. McEachern comes into the room and offers him food. Joe has been lying weak and peaceful not even realizing that he is hungry, and he is immediately threatened by the offering which he violently rejects. However, later he smells and feels "the darkness, spring, the earth," outside the window and goes and eats the food "like a savage, like a dog." "Faulkner, pp. 145-46." If Faulkner here is symbolizing the identity of Joe and his society through an animal image as Henderson says often happens, then he is successful because Joe's relation to his community is always savage and fierce and it ends with his being hunted down by a mob led by vicious dogs.

The next crucial moment in Joe's life that Faulkner gives us is his refusal of sexual initiation with the black girl in the barn. Karl Zink is probably accurate when he remarks, "He refuses the girl in the shed not because she is Negro but because she is female."<sup>12</sup> Looking at her, Joe has the impression of looking into a black well with

two dead stars at the bottom. The female principle is being symbolized here by water and Joe feels enclosed by it and panicky as if he were drowning. To fall into the well would be to be overcome by the dark forces represented by the dead stars. Zink notes that dying star imagery in Faulkner's novel Sanctuary symbolizes the apparent triumph of evil and sterility and death. Once the frightened girl has fled from Joe's beating, the other boys descend on him and the male principle dominates Joe's world again. The passage says, "it was as if a wind had blown among them, hard and clean." "Faulkner, p. 147." Life has returned to the astral world after the fight with the boys. "The evening star was rich and heavy as a jasmine bloom."

"Faulkner, p. 148." When Joe arrives home, McEachern beats him as if he had accepted the black girl. The male world is as cruel as the female one is dangerous in Joe's life, and although he later felt like an eagle who could run away and escape the tyranny, Faulkner says he will always resemble an eagle in that he will be a prisoner of his own flesh and all of space. He tried to establish his freedom by refusing the black girl, but it will never be possible for him.

Joe again experiences a crisis vis-a-vis reality when he is confronted with the fact of the menstrual cycle in

women and his first distraught reaction is to kill a sheep and examine it. Slabey's observations on the significance of this act are the most acute to be found. He says:

Joe's killing the sheep is a rite de passage (a rite of transition which ushers an individual into a new way of life or a new status) - here like a ritual initiation to puberty, an advance to new knowledge of existence. For Joe, however, it is not an advance to a new stage of development in masculinity, leaving the attitudes and emotions of the previous stage, but a denial of the existence, and an immunization against an unpleasant fact of life, by blood cleansing blood; thus Joe struggles against growth and in another way removes himself from the common inheritance of man. "Slabey, p. 345."

Both Slabey and C. Hugh Holman point out that this blood sacrifice is a foreshadowing of Joe's own execution which serves to rid the community of what it sees as an unclean element in the form of his 'tainted' blood.

Joe's first rendez-vous with Bobbie Allen ends with his vision of the cracked urns in the moonlight when she tells him she is sick. It is evident that he has not assimilated the knowledge of menstruation. The figure of the urn elsewhere in the novel represents the wholeness and perfection of circularity. In Joe's vision, the urns are imperfect, cracked, and the blood of death rather than of life escapes through the cracks. In order to reach the woods where he has the vision, Joe passes through a plowed field in which

something is growing. However, he passes through an area which symbolizes the ultimate meaning of the menstrual cycle-fertility and life, and he enters the woods where he feels protected by the "hardfeeling, hardsmelling" trees as though they were men. The urns, which represent women, are illumined by moonlight. The association of the menstrual cycle with the lunar cycle is very important because women do mean lunacy to Joe - the loss of consciousness and existence of individual self.

After such an inauspicious beginning, the affair Joe finally has with Bobbie Allen only serves to heighten his alienation from the normal course of life in community. As Darrel Abel says, it is "an episode grotesquely caricaturing love's young dream."<sup>13</sup>

Joe gives all his youthful love to a woman who seems incapable of emotion of any kind. The crisis occurs the night he takes her to the country dance and McEachern arrives. McEachern approaches the dance as if he were Fate or God Himself. He and his old, strong white horse are identified as taking this pose together. The old man approaches Joe and Bobbie Allen as if he had the right and the power to eradicate sin and evil from the world and Joe brings a chair down on his head. Melvin Backman says this may be viewed

as Joe as the liberator - the new god killing the old god, the son killing the father.<sup>14</sup> Whatever it is, Joe does not succeed in gaining any freedom from it. His attempt to take the prostitute away and marry her is laughingly rejected and he is brutally beaten by her friends. Whether Joe actually sacrificed McEachern is never revealed in the novel. However the answer is given through the symbolism. Joe tries to ride the old, white horse identified with McEachern to the house where Bobbie lives to ask her to marry him, but the horse stops exhausted a mile or so from their destination. Joe's attempts to beat the horse into movement are absolutely futile. The horse does not even feel any pain from the blows. Realizing he can never gain any mastery over the horse, he simply runs out of its life as he does McEachern's.

As Bobbie Allen's friends beat Joe, they raise the question of whether or not his blood is black. From this point on, the question of the conflict of opposites-- male and female, good and evil and light and dark--in Joe takes the form of his and others' reaction to his supposed mixture of white and black blood. Backman again says, "But after Joe is discarded by his woman and abandons the farm, the racial problem moves to the fore - and Joe becomes the embodiment of the racial conflict itself. His life becomes

flight through unending merging "spaces of light" - flight from the white within the black blood and from the black within the white". "Backman, p. 67."

In The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Cassirer attempts to explain the origin and force of the symbolism of light and dark in mythical thought. He mentions that all reality and events in myth are projected into the fundamental opposition of the sacred and the profane and that it is this opposition that provides the only value accent found in the structural space of myth. Cassirer explains the process of the hallowing of the sacred as opposed to the profane by saying:

Wherever mythical thinking and mythical feeling endow a content with particular value, wherever they distinguish it from others and lend it a special significance, this qualitative distinction tends to be represented in the image of spatial separation. Every mythically significant content, every circumstance of life that is raised out of the sphere of the indifferent and commonplace, forms its own ring of existence, a walled-in zone separated from its surroundings by fixed limits, and only in this separation does it achieve an individual religious form. "Cassirer, p. 103-04."

Cassirer says the development of the mythical feeling of space always starts from the opposition of day and night, light and darkness and they are therefore closely related to the sacred and profane. Regarding light and darkness,

Cassirer refers to Troels-Lund who says, "sense of place and receptivity to impressions of light are the two most fundamental and deep-seated manifestations of the human intelligence." In addition, Troels-Lund states that, "The progressive view of the difference between day and night, light and darkness is the innermost nerve of all human cultural development."<sup>15</sup>

Cassirer also refers to Usener who notes, "As early as the Homeric epics the light represents salvation."<sup>16</sup> The pagan cults of the sun and the light made these things their godheads and Christianity assimilated some of their basic conceptions to the extent that sun and light are still symbolic of the divine, according to Cassirer. Thus the mythic opposition of the light and dark operates in the modern Christian world. This may be seen in Slabey's discussion of the passage in Light in August in which Gavin Stevens gives his view of Joe Christmas' internal conflict between his supposed white and black blood. Slabey writes, "Gavin associates the Black blood with primitivism, passion, violence, hatred, with mechanical, compulsive action, with death— seeking motives; the White with reason, peace love, with 'natural,' free acts, with life-affirming motives." "Slabey, p. 337." Slabey continues,

"The interior struggle between planes of being in the novel is similar to the Oriental concept of Yin and Yang. Yin is dark, female, night, earth, the unconscious, anonymity; Yang is white, male, dry, heaven, consciousness, identity." "Slabey, p. 337."

Joe's attempts to reconcile these opposing forces within himself and to discover his true self form the motivation for many of his actions as he travels the road from city to city and state to state for fifteen years after the end of his affair with Bobbie Allen. He lives both as a white man and a black man as he tries to find out who and what he is, all in an effort to find, as he says, a little peace. But Joe faces a double problem in that he can never isolate the dark side of his own nature from the stereotype of the black man that the white society he is born into and tries to live in forces onto him. His supposed black blood leads him to become what others see him as-- a repository of darkness and evil-- rather than allowing him to find the negative elements really belonging to him and translating these elements to forces for the positive.

Jung considers the union of the opposites to be necessary for the integration of the personality and the

determination of the true self. The negative elements are usually hidden in the unconscious and are usually presented to consciousness in the archetypal dream symbol of the dark figure that Jung calls the Shadow. The Shadow represents the opposites of the ego or conscious personality. It is usually the things we dislike in others and aren't aware of in ourselves.

Joe Christmas' struggle to meet his Shadow and accept it is hampered by the fact that he is treated by white people who believe his blood to be black as if he were a living, breathing Shadow. What they can't or won't accept in themselves, they project onto him. As a scapegoat figure, he encounters only opposition and hostility from outside himself as he tries to achieve identity.

Joe's journey in search of his Self takes place on the spatial plane of the novel, in the cities and countryside which he travels. Frye calls this the category of inorganic symbolism. He describes some of its symbols in the demonic world as they stand in opposition to the apocalyptic worlds, "Here too are the sinister counterparts of geometrical images: the sinister spiral (the maelstrom, whirlpool, or Charybdis), the sinister cross, and the sinister circle, the wheel of fate or fortune....

Corresponding to the apocalyptic way or straight road, the highway in the desert for God prophesied by Isaiah, we have in this world the labyrinth or image, the image of lost direction often with a monster at its heart like the Minotaur." "Frye, p. 150."

The symbol in Light in August representing Joe's journey through the darkness in search of the centre and the illumination of his Self is the road that runs for fifteen years. Slabey again may be relied on for the best description of Joe's road as symbol:

Joe is travelling not to any outside destination but to the center of his own existence. He passes through dark, treacherous, empty, and devious ways before arriving on his last day of freedom at the threshold to the quiet safe, clean, and straight highway to peace and fulfillment and eventual human community. It should be clear that this road is not that of the Canterbury Pilgrims to the Heavenly Jerusalem nor of Bunyan's Christian to the Celestial City; neither is it the picaresque hero's road to adventure nor the Romantic's avenue to union with the infinite dynamism of Nature, nor the Shropshire Lad's endless road in which "There's nothing but the night." It is the path to self-revelation as it is described by Hermann Hesse: "The life of everybody is a road to himself." The road as image in Light in August is similar to the road in Jude the Obscure, also a Bildungsroman, a novel of "education" recording the development of the hero's ideas through his reactions to experience, although

Jude's impossible aims are unfulfilled and although this book concludes with his failure and despair. This universal human journey, man's constant process of becoming; was expressed in Kierkegaard's concept of the "Stages on Life's Road"; it is the existential view of man that sees him as a wayfarer (the homo viator of Marcel), always on the road, never at its terminus. This idea is related to the "Road of Trials" of many myths (this road, however, usually has a successful conclusion).<sup>17</sup>

Slabey then continues by quoting Mircea Eliade who says:

The road leading to the center is a difficult road" (durohana), and this is verified at every level of reality; ... pilgrimage to sacred places (Mecca, Hardwar, Jerusalem); danger-ridden voyages of the heroic expeditions in search of the Golden Fleece, the Golden Apples, the Herb of Life; wanderings in the labyrinths; difficulties of the seeker for the road to the self, to the "center" of his being, and so on. The road is arduous, fraught with perils, because it is, in fact, a rite of passage from the profane to the sacred, from the ephemeral and illusory to reality and eternity, from death to life, from man to the divinity. Attaining the center is equivalent to a consecration, an initiation; yesterday's profane and illusory existence gives place to a new, to a life that is real, enduring and effective.<sup>18</sup>

Unfortunately for Joe Christmas, the road he is travelling ends in a circle, a circle similar to the sinister circle mentioned by Frye. Not only does Joe's road end in a circular manner as he flees from the

sheriff's men and their dogs; he realizes the road has always been a circle he has been trapped within because of his society. Carl Benson writes:

This Christmas story is of a man who has no choice in any meaningful sense of the word. His responses are entirely conditioned by exterior forces; though he tries to attain selfhood as a moral agent, he is doomed to failure, because he cannot break out of the circle of conventional attitudes towards his being the son of a white mother and a mulatto father. The fact that he may have no Negro blood (Doc Hines is not exactly a reliable witness) only intensifies the moral nature of his struggle. He is convinced he has, and it is his consciousness of being a misfit between two worlds, of being unable to attain true human status in either that is determining.<sup>19</sup>

During his flight, Joe exchanges his shoes for the shoes of the husband of a black woman he meets. As he rides in a farmer's wagon on his way to give himself up, it seems to him that the black mark the shoes leave on his ankle is moving up his legs like the tide of death. The dark side that Joe has never been able to assimilate must eventually take over. The symbol of the shoes helps reinforce the meaning of the circle. In a rather unique article entitled "The Stone and the Crucifixion," Richard Chase describes the spatial imagery of the road and the circle in the following way:

The linear discrete image stands for "modernism": abstraction, nationalism, applied science, capitalism, progressivism, emasculation, the atomized consciousness and its pathological extensions. The curve image stands for holistic consciousness, a containing culture and tradition, the cyclical life and death of all the creatures of earth. Throughout the novel, Lena retains her holistic consciousness and she is strong, enduring, hopeful. All the other characters in one way or another are victims of the linear delusion. For Joe Christmas, in whom the linear consciousness becomes pathological, the curve image is a "cage" or "poison" to be broken out of. Or it is something to be gashed from the outside so that whatever it contains will be spilled meaninglessly out.... At the end, when Joe can no longer perform this symbolic act of even smashing, the curve image becomes the fateful circle of repetition which he has never really either escaped or broken and which is the only path to the only kind of holism he will ever find: death. "I have never broken out of the ring of what I have already done and cannot ever undo." The tragic irony of the linear consciousness, Faulkner seems to say, is that it is an illusion; all consciousness is holistic, but it may be the holism of life (Lena) or of death (Joe).<sup>20</sup>

Thus, the circle of Joe's life and the manner of his death seem to be almost inevitable. It may be possible to view his affair with Joanna Burden as his last effort to save himself from his fate and, at the same time, as the cause of the act that seals it completely: Joanna's murder at his hands.

The course of Joe's relationship with Joanna represents his experience of adult passion and marriage. Frye discusses their occurrence in the demonic world, "The demonic erotic relation becomes a fierce destructive passion that works against loyalty or frustrates the one who possesses it. It is generally symbolized by a harlot, witch, siren, or other tantalizing female, a physical object of desire which is sought as a possession and therefore can never be possessed. The demonic parody of marriage, or the union of two souls in one flesh, may take the form of hermaphroditism, incest (the most common form), or homosexuality." "Frye, p. 149."

We may note that Joe's relationship with Joanna exhibits the pattern Frye outlines and that the possibility of hermaphroditism is hinted at by the fact that Joanna's name is a feminized version of Joe's. Faulkner's naming of Joanna suggests that she may in fact be an anima figure for Joe. M. L. von Franz writes about the anima figure in Man and His Symbols, "The anima is a personification of all feminine psychological tendencies in a man's psyche, such as vague feelings and moods, prophetic hunches, receptiveness to the irrational, capacity for

personal love, feeling for nature, and last but not least - his relation to the unconscious."<sup>21</sup>

A man's relationship with his mother or mother figures and subsequent female influence in his life can help determine whether his anima will have more negative or more positive characteristics and what the women he falls in love with will be like. In Joe's case, Joanna embodies all the darkness in his own soul brought about by his experiences with women and society in general. The affair with Joanna represents his last descent into the struggle with the dark forces. Faulkner says, "But he began to see himself as from a distance, like a man being sucked down into a bottomless morass." "Faulkner, p. 246."

The lovers' passion does become destructive and injurious to their mental and emotional wellbeing as Frye would have it and Joanna becomes the siren or castrating female. Slabey likens Joanna to the Medusa in the following, "The detail of Joanna's gorgonlike features ('her wild hair, each strand of which would seem to come alive like octopus tentacles,') reveals the dark side of woman - night, evil, and sin. The numinous heads of the Gorgon and the Medusa are symbols of the devouring and the destructive; the serpents are aggressive phallic elements

characterizing the fearful aspects of the goddess about whom there is a suggestion of erotic perversion."

"Slabey, p. 331."

Several good insights into Joe's relationship with women in general and Joanna in particular are given by Samuel Yorks in 'Faulkner's Woman: The Perils of Man-kind.' He writes:

Women in Light in August are presented sometimes as active agents of evil whereas men are redeemed, no matter how cruel or violent, because their actions contribute to the necessary rituals of sin and atonement. Ironically, women are shown as most evil when offering the balm of tenderness, when seeking only to alleviate distress and pain.... The male is ensnared in the female's flesh and those dreams arising from the union. Joe kills to save himself from this fleshly corruption, from the woman who is finally in the throes of nymphomania. Too, he is the primitive male who must free his being from a female who violates all the stereotypes assigned her by the rigid male code.<sup>22</sup>

Moseley has pointed out that Joe and Joanna's affair is described as if it were a cycle of the seasons in which the spring is missing. He quotes from the novel; "During the first phase it had been as though he were outside a house where snow was on the ground, trying to get into the house; during the second phase he was

at the bottom of a pit in the hot wild darkness; now he was in the middle of a plain where there was no house, not even snow, not even wind." "Moseley, p. 146." The novel continues shortly thereafter, "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, with already, like shadows before a westering sun, the chill and implacable import of autumn cast ahead upon summer; something of dying summer spurting again like a dying coal, in the fall." "Faulkner, p. 247."

Faulkner must have been parodying marriage as he created the story of this abortive affair. It begins in the season of death, skips the season of rebirth and fertility, passes the season of fruitfulness without producing anything and ends with Joanna's delusion that she is pregnant during the season of dying.

The course of this fruitless affair resembles the course of Joe's entire life and the involvement with Joanna is his last attempt to find his Self and define his own role in society. C. Hugh Holman refers to Joe's time in Jefferson as a ministry during which he

brings sexuality and thus life to Joanna. But he describes Joe's ultimate failure in the following, "Having prevented his 'ministry', she finally denies it and attempts to force him into her sterile religious patterns. It is then that he kills her in an act of self-defense, for she had tried to shoot him; and in an act of spiritual self-preservation, for he could live only by refusing to pray with her; but in an act of suicide for he could not himself long survive her killing."<sup>23</sup>

Joanna's house stands as a very significant symbol in the novel. As Joanna's habitation, given her role as Joe's anima figure, the house becomes the final repository of Joe's individuated Self, the Self which he can never fully attain. Slabey makes mention of the fact that Joanna's house is described as the hub of a wheel with roads radiating from it like wheel spokes. He elaborates the image in these words, "It is the center of the action of the novel, the axis mundi or the mythological "world navel," the place of death and of birth, around which the world revolves in time and space. The destruction of the old house in

the flames is like a solemn cleansing ceremony; everything of the old order must be removed in preparation for the new." "Slabey, p. 345."

Taking the generality away from the last statement and referring to Joe in particular, we may say that the murder and the fire signal the end of Joe's efforts to gain entry to his Soul. Moseley alludes to this and also the fact that Joanna's sacrifice makes Joe's own sacrifice inevitable as he discusses Joe's role as scapegoat; "It is as if in sacrificing her and the house in which she lives, Faulkner has cleansed Christmas to take on at last the function of scapegoat that he has refused but been attracted to throughout the book.... So long as he acted from motives of hate, Christmas appears as an Antichrist perverting and misusing his scapegoat function in a peculiarly self-pious way. The death of Miss Burden leads Christmas to accept and to play out the role for which he is destined." "Moseley, pp. 147-48."

The role Joe is destined for is that of scapegoat and this role implies the existence of a community in need of a figure to suffer for its collective ills.

Cleanth Brooks discusses the community in Faulkner's fiction in The Community and the Pariah, "The community demands special consideration at this point, for the community is the powerful though invisible force that quietly exerts itself in so much of Faulkner's work. It is the circumambient atmosphere, the essential ether of Faulkner's fiction." "Brooks, p. 52." Brooks also says, "In Light in August, Faulkner's emphasis is primarily on the distortion and perversion and sterility which isolation from the community entails, though even here there is a clear recognition of a heroic element in Hightower, Joanna Burden, and Joe Christmas." "Brooks, p. 70."

Carl Benson also emphasizes the importance of the community in the novel, "The community, we may safely say, is not an unqualified good. But in spite of its suspicions, bad habits, mixed good and bad conventions, it is the arena in which moral battles are to be fought." "Benson, p. 554."

It is clear from characters such as Hines, McEachern, Joanna Burden and Hightower that the community is suffering from an insidious spiritual illness evidenced as

an inability to act out the Christian ideals of love and kindness. Benson again says, "As we have already seen, the church, the spiritual community, has in Hightower's view failed of its essential mission by being reduced to the doctrinaire tenets of some of its members, and simple human pity can largely be abandoned if conventional attitudes towards miscegenation and white supremacy are questioned." "Benson, p. 553."

The lack of true religious meaning or transcendence in the lives of the people of Jefferson is a major cause of the insecurity and sterility that breeds its social, racial and religious intolerance. Characters such as Joanna Burden, Joe Christmas and Hightower pose a threat to the community which feels itself bound together by local institutions rather than by the real, universal, spiritual values of humanity in general. The townspeople in the novel are in the position of winter anticipating spring, of the Dead awaiting Awakening. They need to have the horizons of their humanity expanded and, at the same time, redefined and limited in terms of their relation to the Divine and the Eternal. They are thus in need of a god figure who will die and yet provide

rebirth and regeneration. Not only is sacrifice and propitiation required for the evils that beset the community, but sacrifice of the highest order as described by Cassirer is needed:

The meaning of sacrifice is not exhausted by the sacrifice to the god: rather it seems to stand out fully and reveal itself in its true religious and speculative depth where the god himself is sacrificed or sacrifices himself. Through the suffering and death of the god, through his entrance into physical finite existence in which he is dedicated to death, this existence is raised to the level of the divine and freed from death. All the great mystery cults revolve around the primordial mystery of this liberation and rebirth, brought about by the death of the god.

That Joe Christmas is meant to fulfill the symbolic role of the sacrificed god in the novel is apparent in the abundant similarities drawn between him and Christ. His very name is derived from Christ's. He is thirty-three at the time of his death. These are but two examples of those that may be cited. C. Hugh Holman has pointed out that Christmas is depicted as Christ only in a particular way. Rather than representing the theological Saviour or Messiah, Faulkner's character is more similar to the human side of Christ, the Christ that Faulkner has called, "a matchless example of suffering

and sacrifice and the promise of hope." "Holman, p. 158."

Holman makes the acute observation that Christmas' career parallels that of the Christ of Isaiah as he gives the following extract from Isaiah:

he hath no form nor comeliness; and  
when we shall see him, there is no  
beauty that we should desire him.  
He is despised and rejected of men;  
a man of sorrows, and acquainted with  
grief: and we hid as it were our  
faces from him; he was despised and  
we esteemed him not....  
He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,  
yet he opened not his mouth: he is  
brought as a lamb to the slaughter,  
and as a sheep before her shearers  
is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.  
He has taken from prison and from  
judgment: and who shall declare his  
generation: for he was cut off out of  
the land of the living: for the trans-  
gression of my people was he stricken.  
"Holman, p. 158."

Faulkner's emphasis on his Christ character as a sacrificial figure gives a probable justification to Slabey's observation that the Christian symbolism in the novel is part of a more generalized theme of death and rebirth. In fact, as Slabey suggests, Joe's story bears more resemblance to that of the gods who die and bring about a rebirth in the older pagan myths. Slabey concludes that Faulkner is enriching his work by utilizing

the Christian myth in conjunction with the myth of Adonis and making use of a parallel that had been discussed by certain writers such as Frazer, Freud and Eliot with whom Faulkner was acquainted. There are several likenesses between the Adonis myth and the course of Joe Christmas' life that Slabey mentions that are worth noting:

The circumstances of conception and birth are unusual. The child (Adonis, Joe) is conceived at a secret rendezvous; when the sin of the child's mother (Myrnha, Milly) is discovered, her father (Cinyras, Doc Hines) seeks vengeance, attempting to kill both mother and unborn child. In spite of his wrath, the child is born, although his mother dies after a difficult, unaided labor. The baby is spirited away and reared by foster parents. As a man, there is a conflict between a light and a dark side. And he is killed as a result of his amorous entanglements; at the end of a chase he dies after having been castrated in a particularly horrible fashion. (The wound of Adonis is always a symbolic castration if not an anatomical one.)" "Slabey, p. 330."

Slabey further remarks that:

Percy Grimm's pursuit of Christmas is enacted with some of the ritualistic details of the hunt.... In some Adonis rites the boar is sacrificed to the god as his enemy and in some cults Adonis is identified with the beast that goared him: in Hightower's vision of the wheel Grimm's face is fused with Joe's....

The slayer of the god in the sacred precincts (the sacred wood of Nemi) was always a young priest; in the sanctuary of the minister's house, Grimm's voice is described as "clear and outraged like that of a young priest." "Slabey, p. 332."

Slabey also goes on to mention that mythographers have given different interpretations to the Adonis myth - the myth of the dying god. The possibilities range from a vegetation myth to a solar myth to a myth of sexual impotence and resurgence or a combination of any of these. As Slabey says, each of these possibilities fits the novel to some extent but the major occurrence of death and rebirth in the novel is a spiritual one. Joe Christmas becomes the scapegoat of a community looking for spiritual rejuvenation.

At the time that Joe appears, the community is in the position of a cult looking for a redefinition of its relation to the divine. Cassirer describes the kind of action and meaning involved in the cultic process in the following manner, "For though in cult to be sure, God appears on the one side and I, the religious subject, on the other, still its meaning is at once the concrete unity of both, through which the I becomes conscious in

God and God in me." "Cassirer, p. 220."

Cassirer also gives a remark from Hegel regarding the purpose of cult, "To realize this unity, the reconciliation, the restoration of the subject, and his self-consciousness, to bring about a positive feeling of participation in that absolute and a unity with it - this transcendence of the separation constitutes the sphere of the cult."<sup>24</sup> The more highly developed cult and religious ritual become, the greater the part that sacrifice plays in it. Cassirer says of sacrifice that, "It may take the most diverse forms, it may appear as a gift offering, as an offering of intercession, thanks or atonement; but in all these forms it constitutes a solid core around which the cult action clusters. Here religious faith attains its true visible guise; here it is transposed directly into action." "Cassirer, p. 221."

An important factor in the practice of sacrifice that is emphasized during Joe Christmas' flight from his pursuers is self-renunciation. Cassirer considers the power of sacrifice to be rooted in this factor:

The ascetism which usually comprises a fundamental part of primitive religious faith and activity is grounded in the

intuition that any extension and intensification of the powers of the I involves a corresponding limitation. Every important undertaking must be preceded by abstinence from the satisfaction of certain natural drives.... A man's sensory wishes and desires do not flow equally in all directions; he no longer seeks to transpose them immediately and unrestrictedly into reality; rather he limits them at certain points in order to make the withheld and, one might say, stored-up power free for other purposes. Through this narrowing of the scope of desire, expressed in the negative acts of asceticism and sacrifice, the content of the desire is raised to its highest concentration and thus to a new form of consciousness. "Cassirer, pp. 222-23."

It has already been noted that the value of sacrifice is increased when the god himself is sacrificed or sacrifices himself. Toward the end of the narration of Joe's seven day flight, Faulkner strongly suggests that Joe makes a conscious decision to give himself up almost as if he had some inkling of his ordained fate. He thinks how several people could have caught him during that week and yet didn't. "Like there is a rule to catch me by, and to capture me that way would not be like the rule says." "Faulkner, p. 319." It is as if he knows he must go to Mottstown and seek capture." He is like a man who knows where he is and where he wants

to go and how much time to the exact minute he has to get there in." "Faulkner, p. 320." It is as if he knows he must later escape from custody and provoke his lynching at the hands of Percy Grimm.

In seeming preparation for this self-sacrifice (the ultimate renunciation of self), Joe Christmas is forced to forego the satisfaction of his bodily needs during his week long flight. He is not able to sleep because he is constantly fleeing; he is not able to eat because food is unavailable. He is concerned with these things until he realizes that he is going to give himself up. Then he surpasses this state of deprivation and lays, "ready for sleep, without sleeping, without seeming to need the sleep, as he would place his stomach acquiescent for food which it did not seem to desire or need." "Faulkner, p. 317." Faulkner describes his new state as "peace and unhaste and quiet," - a feeling of being "dry and light." Faulkner, p. 320." It may be assumed that Joe has reached a higher form of consciousness, an acceptance of the fact that the purpose of his life can only be fulfilled in his death.

As is always the case in sacrifice, the instrument

of the sacrificial death is significant in the novel. In the Adonis rites, it was often a young priest who performed the ceremony. In Light in August, Grimm is described as a young priest as he stands in Hightower's house ready to kill Christmas. Frye describes the sacrificer and his relation to the sacrificed in the demonic literary world in the following way, "In the sinister human world one individual pole is the tyrant-leader, inscrutable, ruthless, melancholy, and with an insatiable will, who commands loyalty only if he is egocentric enough to represent the collective ego of his followers. The other pole is represented by the pharmakos or sacrificed victim who has to be killed to strengthen the others." "Frye, p. 148."

Cleanth Brooks points out that Grimm becomes such a tyrant-leader because he needs desperately to be a part of his community or, even more, to represent it in uniform. Because of his failure to be able to do so, Grimm is actually as alienated from the community as Christmas is. Brooks writes, "A lesser artist would have made of Grimm a kind of caricature, merely brutalized and bestial. It is a mark of Faulkner's insight that even in his

"Storm Trooper" he sees lurking beneath the fury and the brutality the emotionally starved, lonely, terrified little boy." "Brooks," p. 62."

This essential sameness of situation of the sacrificer and sacrificed is mentioned by Frye and used by Faulkner in the novel. Frye says, "In the most concentrated form of the demonic parody, the two become the same. The ritual of the killing of the divine king in Frazer, whatever it may be in anthropology, is in literary criticism the demonic or undisplaced radical form of tragic and ironic structures." "Frye, p. 148."

In the novel, Grimm becomes the embodiment of the spiritual illness that Christmas dies for. This is symbolized in Hightower's vision of the turning wheel in which the faces of Grimm and Christmas blur and blend together.

In the final scenes of Joe's life, the relation between him and the people Grimm represents is best described by Frye, "The social relation is that of the mob, which is essentially human society looking for a pharmakos, and the mob is often identified with some sinister animal image such as the hydra, Virgil's Fama, or its development

in Spenser's Blatant Beast." "Frye, p. 149."

The mob which chases Joe is identified with the fierce dogs that sniff out the direction and the members of the mob do indeed find their pharmakos. As Benson has noted, the last moments of Joe's life, his shooting and castration, are handled solely from the point of view of the onlookers. Joe's own thoughts and feelings are not described because he has become totally symbolic, an experience embodied in the sight of his black blood that the mob will never forget.

The letting of blood and the tearing apart of the sacrificial body are the culmination of the sacrificial experience according to Cassirer. He notes that, in cult, what originally connects man with the god is a bond of common blood. The effect of Joe's spurting blood on the memories of the witnesses of his death may be rooted in the power of the age old blood sacrifice that Cassirer writes of:

This common eating of the totem animal is looked upon as a means of confirming and renewing the blood kinship which unites the individual members of the clan with one another and with their totem. Particularly in times of distress, when the community is endangered and its existence seems threatened,

this renewal of its primordial physical - religious power is necessary. But the true accent of the sacral act is on performance by the community as a whole. In the eating of the flesh of the totem animal the unity of the clan, its relationship with its totemic ancestor, is restored as a sensuous and corporal unity; we may say that in this feast it is restored forever anew. "Cassirer, p. 227."

Frye views blood sacrifice as the opposite of the Eucharist symbolism, "... the Eucharist symbolism of the apocalyptic world, the metaphorical identification of vegetable, animal, human, and divine bodies, should have the imagery of cannibalism for its demonic parody.... The imagery of cannibalism usually includes, not only images of torture and mutilation, but of what is technically known as sparagmos or the tearing apart of the sacrificial body, an image found in the myths of Osiris, Orpheus, and Pentheus. "Frye, p. 148."

Thus Frye regards the death of the god as the final symbol, the bringing together of all the symbolic worlds. In Light in August Joe Christmas' death is the climactic moment, the culmination of the complications in the serious plot. It remains to be seen how Faulkner effectively resurrects Joe and provides resolution in both the serious and the comic plots.

## CHAPTER II

### HIGHTOWER: REBIRTH AND THE WHEEL OF INVOLVEMENT

The rebirth following the death of the god in Light in August is given its most dramatic representation in the character of Hightower. He, more than any other member of the community, gains new insight and renewed life after witnessing Joe Christmas' death.

Throughout the early chapter of the novel, Hightower is living a life isolated from the community that exists outside the walls of his house. Darrel Abel has said that, "Hightower's own story is an exaggerated rendering of the truth that all men are directed by ancestral ghosts and do not fully possess their own realities. He had chosen to withdraw into his ancestral ghost, rather than to let the human past summed up in him enter the present;. . . ." "Abel, p. 41."

Hightower has spent his life refusing to live in the reality of the present and refusing to let the people existing about him enter his private world. His desire to live in the past and his rejection of community led

to the degeneration and eventual suicide of his wife only a few years after he took up his post in Jefferson. This and his raving sermons caused the community to persecute and ostracize him. Having suffered these misfortunes and lived as an outcast for twenty-five years, Hightower feels he has brought immunity from the necessity of involving himself in the community.

The way Hightower has actually been living is directly counter to the religious profession he embarked on in his youth. He criticizes the established Church for its failure to promote spiritual community and yet, as Carl Benson and other critics point out, he uses his ministry in Jefferson as an excuse to continually relive the moment of his grandfather's foolish glory and neglect the needs he was trained to serve. He must therefore accept a measure of responsibility for the spiritual problems of the community as well as his own.

Benson again makes a convincing claim that Hightower is actually the moral hero of the novel. He writes in Thematic Design in Light in August:

What we have to deal with in Light in August is the peculiar collocation in Jefferson, Mississippi, of various lives

whose stories cannot be accounted for on the basis of narrative alone. If, however, we see that the thematic conflict is between rigid patterns of self-involvement on the one hand and commitment to a solidarity that transcends on the other, we must see that the chief character, the moral protagonist, because he alone can serve as an ethic slide rule by means of which we can compute the relative failures and successes of the other characters, is Gail Hightower, .... "Benson, p. 542."

Benson must be agreed with when he suggests that Hightower is the character who is capable both of observing the moral state and communal involvement of others and of correcting a deficiency in himself in these areas. Benson's view that Hightower is able to achieve moral and spiritual redemption because he is in a position to exercise free will coincides with the view taken in this study that Joe Christmas cannot attain Hightower's achievement because he is denied free will through circumstances. However, Hightower would probably never have made his discovery if the execution of Joe Christmas had not taken place in the house where he hides himself from the world. Christmas runs to Hightower's house and strikes Hightower's face like a vengeful god as if his sacrifice and its meaning were particularly meant for Hightower's

benefit and understanding. It is in the dazed and heightened state that follows these events that Hightower has his vision of Truth. Because of Christmas' role in Hightower's life, it is not anticlimactical that Hightower's story in Chapter Twenty follows the climactic moment of Joe's death in Chapter Nineteen as many critics have suggested. The history of Hightower's isolation should be told before he realizes after Joe's death that he will give up his selfish existence and become involved in life again.

The realization of his mistake really starts coming to Hightower in the critical moment in which he tries to save Joe's life. When he had the opportunity to rationally consider giving Joe an alibi for the time of Joanna's death, he refused to do it. However, when he is face to face with Joe in the agony of his flight, he reacts from the depths of his humanity and commits himself to action.

In Chapter Nineteen, Hightower sees the crisis of hatred and fear in the Jefferson community. He has been re-introduced to the value of community in Chapter Seventeen when he delivers Lena Grove's baby. Here Hightower has the chance to assist at what Faulkner sets up to be a

highly symbolic birth. The birth occurs the morning of the day of Joe Christmas' death. The cycle of birth, death and rebirth in Joe Christmas' story is continued in the implications that Lena's infant is Joe Christmas reborn. Christmas' own grandmother assists at the birth and is convinced the baby is 'little Joey.' Lena herself admits to moments of confusion in which she thinks Joe might have been the baby's father. In any case, the birth of the baby and the death of Christmas coincide in Hightower's experience, and the birth has a spiritually uplifting effect on him.

Beach Langston discusses Lena Grove's delivery as the rebirth of the god, although in strictly Christian terms, in "The Meaning of Lena Grove and Hightower in Light in August": "When Byron comes back to challenge Hightower, this time not with commitment to Lena as woman or to Christmas as a suffering Christ, but to Lena's baby as life principle and reincarnation of the Christ figure,.... Awakened by Byron into answering the call of Lena the life goddess, Hightower assists at the birth of 'little Joey' to Lena the Mother of God. Through participating in the Incarnation, he has committed himself to life, and life returns to him...."<sup>25</sup>

Having assisted at the birth earlier, Hightower walks back to the scene in the afternoon and senses nature and the earth around him for the first time in years. The commitment to life returns to him not only on the natural and human levels but on the spiritual level also. He thinks of his walk in the woods: "'I should never have lost this habit too. But perhaps they will both come back to me, if this itself be not the same as prayer.'" "Faulkner, p. 384-85." A consciousness of what involvement can mean for a true spiritual life is growing in Hightower as the day progresses towards Joe Christmas' death.

The symbol which Faulkner employs to dramatise the apocalyptic revelation Hightower achieves after Joe's death is the wheel. The wheel in this case coincides with the circle as the emblem of eternity which Frye mentions in his description of the symbols of the apocalyptic as opposed to the demonic world. We may properly place Hightower's story in the former category because, whereas Joe Christmas cannot escape from his hell, Hightower's quest for heaven is successful even though it is misdirected for most of his life.

As Slabey and Langston note, Hightower's eternal wheel

is related to the symbol of the mandala. It is a favourite symbol of Jung who means by it concentric circular or fourfolded figures or objects. The circle or wheel, the sunwheel, the cross, the flower etc. may be possible mandalas. Structurally, its never ending line expresses eternity and continuity and psychologically, it is connected with self understanding and the attainment of consciousness. Langston quotes Jung discussing the import of the mandala: "Quite in accord with the Eastern conception, the mandala symbol is not only a means of expression, but works an effect. It reacts upon its maker.... By means of these concrete performances, the attention, or better said, the interest, is brought back to an inner, sacred domain, which is the source and goal of the soul. This inner domain contains the unity of life and consciousness, which, though once possessed, has been lost, and must be found again." "Langston, p. 59."

Once Hightower understands his own being more clearly, he can begin to define himself in relation to others. He has the vision of the turning wheel with its composite blend of all the faces he has ever known because he has come to understand and accept the concept of community which Frye pictures in his statements about human society

in the apocalyptic world. He says, "As for human society, the metaphor that we are all members of one body has organized most political theory from Plato to our own day. Milton's 'A Commonwealth ought to be but as one huge Christian personage, one mighty growth, and stature of an honest man' belongs to a Christianized version of this metaphor, in which, as in the doctrine of the Trinity, the full metaphorical statement 'Christ is God and Man' is orthodox, and the Asian and Docetic statements in terms of simile or likeness condemned as heretical." "Frye, p. 142-43." Hightower understands the eternalness of humanity as man constantly dying and being born again as he watches the wheel whirl through the falling darkness surrounded by the glow of its own light. Darrell Abel points out that the image of the lighted wheel as an archetypal symbol of eternity resembles the mixture of light and turning wheel imagery in Dante's Paradiso. Abel then views Hightower's experience in the following manner:

If Hightower, like Dante, is regarded as one who, while still in mortal life, is afforded a vision of eternity in all its phases, his experience exhibits something of hell, of purgatory, and of heaven. His inferno consists of his witnessing and participating in the complicated tragedy

of human evil and mortality which is consummated in the 'crucifixion' of Joe Christmas. His purgatory is the initial stage of his revery after Christmas' death, when finally, in "a consternation which is about to be actual horror," he admits his guilt as an "instrument of his wife's despair and shame,".... Purged by his abandonment of delusion, his admission of truth, he enters his paradise, his moment of perception of an eternal truth.... "Abel, p. 44."

At the final moment of his vision, Hightower sees the faces of Joe Christmas and Percy Grimm merge and blend as if they were one face. Langston puts the phenomenon in Christian terms when he writes, "Hightower realizes that under the aspect of eternity even the suffering Christ and his killer are of equal value as children of the Eternal." "Langston, p. 60." However, Longley gives the most cogent and eloquent statement of what Hightower learns from this image and what people like Lena Grove know all their lives without really knowing it. He says:

Hightower never saw either of them before the lynching, but their terrible failure and terrible guilt are somehow directly related to his own failure to live up to his humanity. Somewhere at the root of the secret cause of things as they are, we are all related: we are all involved. We are all responsible because we are all a part of mankind. So far as the rational

mind goes, the union with the secret cause is a moment of awareness, of realizing that grave and constant human suffering is truly constant. Once we achieve this awareness, the acceptance of the tragic human situation, with all its absurdity and irrationality, becomes possible, and with the acceptance come the emotions of peace and tranquility.<sup>26</sup>

### CHAPTER III

#### LENA GROVE AND BYRON BUNCH: COMEDY AND ENDURANCE

In order to complete a discussion of the archetypal symbols relating to the theme of community in Light in August, the story of Lena Grove and Byron Bunch must be considered, and it seems best to deal with their story as romantic comedy. Lena Grove may be thought of as having an instinctive communal sense, and more attention is given her in the criticism. However, it is Byron in his comic pursuit of her love who leaves an isolated existence and becomes involved in the world outside the planing mill. Frye says, "The theme of the comic is the integration of society, which usually takes the form of incorporating a central character into it." "Frye, p. 43."

Byron as the comic hero pursuing his maiden places the story in the mode of romantic comedy that is the counterpart of the elegiac mode in tragedy which deals with heroism untouched by irony. Frye calls this comic mode the idyllic and finds it best expressed in the

pastoral. The major action of Lena and Byron's story does indeed concern Lena travelling placidly about the countryside either alone or with Byron in her tow.

Frye suggests that the worlds of romance and romantic comedy fall somewhere between the apocalyptic and demonic worlds. The symbolism for the categories between these two extremes is achieved less by metaphor and more by analogy. The class of imagery which renders the idealized world of romance Frye calls the analogy of innocence. Its function is "to present the desirable in human, familiar, attainable and morally allowable terms." "Frye, p. 157." In Lena and Byron's story, the desirable is natural human relations and the familiar, attainable and morally allowable terms are love, marriage and family.

While Byron's story concerns a man who accepts these things after thirty-five years of solitude, Lena is a person who naturally relates to others and knows herself to be part of the human community. She embodies Faulkner's concept that the human race will endure because, as conscious beings, its members are capable of acting on the communal principles of love, honour, courage,

compassion and pity. The idea of endurance is conveyed by analogy through simple imagery that puts Lena in an innocent, pastoral world seemingly outside the passage of time.

The two major symbols of such timelessness in Lena's story are the wagon wheel and the urn, and they suggest timelessness through static, infinite, circular motion. All these qualities are indicated in an early description of Lena's journey across the South: "... she advanced in identical and anonymous and deliberate wagons as through a succession of creakwheeled and limpeared avatars, like something moving forever and without progress across an urn." "Faulkner, p. 5."

Karl Zink has placed the infinitely slow turning of the wheels of the wagons that approach or carry Lena at the beginning of the novel in a category of stasis that concerns motion that is so slow as to appear motionless. The wagons and Lena herself seem to be travelling outside the bounds of ordinary time and space. The image of the urn which Faulkner uses for the Mississippi countryside comes from his fascination with Keats' Grecian urn as a symbol of eternity. Lena moves without moving

through a world without beginning or end.

Zink holds that, for Faulkner, to escape the limitations of measured time and space and to experience life in pure time is to come to know the reality of the human condition. "Zink, pp. 299-300." Although Lena is a simple country girl, she appears to instinctively move in a world of pure consciousness or knowing. It appears that Faulkner believed that if one can understand that consciousness will prevail over individual death in time, then one can look outside his own chronological existence and know himself as part of an enduring whole.

## CONCLUSION

### THE CYCLE COMPLETED

Lena Grove naturally attains the divinity that Hightower struggles so hard to achieve. Therefore it is fitting that she transmit the divine principle through giving birth to a baby who is associated with Joe Christmas and about whom a family and a new community will group itself when Lena ceases her travels and marries Byron. The end of the novel thus implies both the resurrection of the old community in Hightower and the birth of a new one in Lena's baby. These events following the narration of the story of Joe Christmas' birth, life and death bring one cycle of the continuity of mankind to full circle in the novel.

## FOOTNOTES

- <sup>1</sup>Carl G. Jung, ed., Man and His Symbols (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1968), pp. 3-4.
- <sup>2</sup>Erich Kahler, "The Nature of the Symbol," in Symbolism in Religion and Literature, ed. Rollo May (New York: G. Braziller, 1961), p. 53.
- <sup>3</sup>Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957), p. 96.
- <sup>4</sup>Ernst Cassirer, The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, II Mythical Thought, (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1955), p. 157.
- <sup>5</sup>Robert M. Slabey, "Myth and Ritual in 'Light in August'," Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 2, Autumn (1960), 329.
- <sup>6</sup>William Faulkner, Light in August (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 414.
- <sup>7</sup>Alfred Kazin, "The Stillness of 'Light in August'," Partisan Review, 24, Autumn (1957), 536.
- <sup>8</sup>Cleanth Brooks, The Yoknapatawpha Country (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 63.
- <sup>9</sup>Dolores E. Brien, "William Faulkner and the Myth of Woman," Research Studies, 35, (1963), 137.
- <sup>10</sup>Edwin M. Moseley, Pseudonyms of Christ in the Modern Novel: Motifs and Methods (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1963), p. 145.
- <sup>11</sup>Joseph L. Henderson, "Ancient Myths and Modern Man," in Man and His Symbols, ed. Carl G. Jung (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1968), pp. 120-21.
- <sup>12</sup>Karl Zink, "Faulkner's Garden: Woman and the Immemorial Earth," Modern Fiction Studies, 2, Autumn (1956), 147.
- <sup>13</sup>Darrel Abel, "Frozen Movement in 'Light in August'," Boston University Studies in English, 3, Spring (1957), 39.
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