Light in August: Violence and Excommunity

From the earliest formation of communities in America, religion served as a principle of exclusion. The elect defined themselves by excommunicating the damned, as in *The Scarlet Letter*. In southern culture and in Faulkner's narratives, Puritanism survived in the form of Calvinist fundamentalism. The community no longer defined itself in strictly religious terms, but its need for definition by exclusion, expressed in "Red Leaves" by the Indians' attempts to define things by what they are not, remained. Melville translates social isolation into a metaphysical quest; Faulkner studies the way in which social exclusion results from metaphysical isolation. The Salem witch trials were over, but they were replaced, in the postwar South, with Negro lynchings.

In the Puritan community, as I have discussed in my reading of *The Scarlet Letter*, the worst social transgression was spiritual. As part of the doctrine of predestination, souls were born either saved or damned; and it was the spiritual task of every good Puritan to engage in "meditation," to search his soul for an indication of his own salvation. But for the arbitrary grace of God, any man would certainly find himself in hell. Jonathan Edwards's famous sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" (1741) reminded the Puritans:

> How dreadful is the state of those that are daily and hourly in danger of this great wrath and infinite misery! But this is the dismal case of every soul in this congregation that has not been born again. . . . If we knew that there was one person, and but one, in the whole congregation, that was to be the subject of this misery, what an awful thing it would be to think of! If we knew who it was, what an awful sight would it be to see such a person! How might all the rest of the congregation lift up a lamentable and bitter cry over him! . . . And it would
be no wonder if some persons, that now sit here, in some seats of this meeting-house, in health, quiet and secure, should be there before to-morrow morning.¹

The "mark" in the Puritan community referred to a physical manifestation of God's will, reflecting the belief of the early Christians that, as Erving Goffman points out, stigma referred to "bodily signs of holy grace that took the form of eruptive blossoms on the skin."² However, the judgment concerning the usually ambiguous implications of the bodily signs lay in the province of the observers, not the afflicted individual. Any doubt that the Puritans could not resolve concerning the good or evil nature of the physical mark or moral irregularity led them to interpret the bearer as marked by Satan himself, and each Puritan citizen became the instrument of divine retribution.

The community's desire to reflect divine will in its social rituals was analogous to the individual's continual soul searching. It is not inconceivable that much of the social wrath exercised by Puritan communities was in fact generated by individual frustration; the inability of the individual to absolutely detect inner good, accompanied by his secret reluctance to probe too deeply, must certainly have led him to externalize his soul's search in the process of communal exclusion. Casting out devils was analogous to defining those who are saved: namely, those who successfully participate in the eradication of evil.

Olga Vickery's analysis of the relation between the individual and the community in *Light in August* is enlightening in this context and worth quoting at length:

> no matter how isolated and impenetrable the private world of an individual, he still has a physical and social existence in the public world which makes its demands of him. His comfort, if not his life, depends on his accepting and exemplifying in his own life those stereotypes which represent society's vision of itself and its past. And since withdrawal or rebellion are as much public acts as is affirmation, no-one can escape. Society has myths not only of the hero but also of the antagonist, and it has evolved rituals to deal with each. Collectively, Jefferson is Southern, White, and Elect, qualities which have meaning only within a context which recognizes something or someone as Northern or Black or Damned. This antithesis is periodically affirmed through the sacrifice of a scapegoat who represents, in fact or popular conviction, those qualities which must be rejected if Jefferson is to maintain its self-defined character.³

Man creates categories that give an individual social identification. "The sheer weight of generations," Vickery writes, "each in its turn
conforming to and therefore affirming this process of public labelling, establishes the labels not only as a matter of tradition but as a kind of revealed truth."\(^4\)

The antithesis and the process of public labeling that Vickery describes in Faulkner may also be viewed in Hawthorne, as my study of *The Scarlet Letter* indicates. By pointing out these concerns, Vickery implicitly allows us to compare Faulkner's fictional world with Hawthorne's. Joanna's ancestors originated in Exeter, New Hampshire, and as Peter Swiggart writes, Calvin Burden "stands for a tradition of New England Puritanism that is related in both spirit and doctrinal roots to the more evangelical Presbyterian sects dominating the American Midwest and Deep South."\(^5\) Historically, Jefferson, Mississippi, is a direct descendant of Boston and Salem, Massachusetts.

However, many critics incorrectly interpret the significance of Calvinism in *Light in August*. They see its heritage in the community's attitudes toward sin and the punishment of sin\(^6\) as what one critic terms "punitive religious moralism."\(^7\) Therefore for these critics Christmas becomes a "victim" of Calvinism. In light of Vickery's analysis and my own, *Light in August* demonstrates not the simple consequences of Puritan moralism but rather the way the Puritans' habit of mind has determined the quality of community life in America. Francois Pitavy writes about Christmas: "While rejecting Calvinism as a religion, he does retain its modes of thought."\(^8\) What I take Pitavy to mean here is that Christmas "becomes" a Calvinist—but not a "religious moralist." He does "become" a Puritan, in my analysis, not only because he is the object of the Jefferson community's "periodic affirmation" of its "self-defined character," but also because he "volunteers" to become its sacrificial victim. He seems to believe in the very antithesis by which Vickery characterizes his community.

In such a world, where an individual's relation to the community receives the support of dogma, social definition can seem to ease metaphysical isolation, can provide one cure for the "hypos." In *Light in August*, as I will demonstrate in this chapter, Joe Christmas focuses on stigma as surely as Hester Prynne or Arthur Dimmesdale, as Ahab or Ishmael, in his search for an identity. The stigma he chooses as a vehicle, unlike the scarlet letter, cannot be removed once he embraces it; and unlike the whale, cannot be destroyed without destroying himself. Yet Christmas discovers, ironically, that he can only achieve social identity by allowing himself to be discredited. As Cleanth Brooks writes, "Faulkner's story of Joe
Christmas can thus be read as an account of a thoroughly alienated individual, a modern Ishmael who lives in chronic revolt against every kind of community. . . .”9 It is society’s fault that Christmas has no identity of his own; by pursuing discredibility, he forces society to yield him one. The most we can definitively say about Christmas is that he achieves the status of a marked man in Jefferson and that this allows him to transcend his metaphysical isolation. Like the body servant in "Red Leaves," he has no choice but to run his life’s race. And like the body servant, he has nowhere to run but into the hands of his pursuers.

I

No character in American fiction emerges as tragically marked as Joe Christmas. Unlike Hester or Dimmesdale, Christmas neither stands accused nor recognizes his accusers. And unlike Ishmael, who defines his condition in metaphysical terms, Christmas cannot even understand his crime. His very name a travesty of redemption and rebirth, the burden of transcending social, moral, and ontological isolation seems to fall to the survivors—Lena, Byron, and Hightower. As Ilse Dusoir Lind interprets Christmas’s role in the novel, "Its relation to the remaining narratives may be schematically indicated as follows: the Christmas tragedy, a tale of personal and social violence, poses the problem which the remaining narratives must resolve."10

The relationship between the Christmas story and the remaining narratives emphasizes the separation that exists between Christmas’s social position and that of the other major characters. Yet although the novel concentrates on Christmas’s struggle, we might describe Light in August as a spectrum of excommunication, of exclusion from community.11 Though each is marked and isolated for different reasons, Byron, Lena, Joanna, and Hightower share the security Hester Prynne experienced as a result of her well-defined social position as an outcast. Their isolation has enabled them to achieve social invisibility and a stable anonymity.

Byron Bunch, self-isolated, stands at one extreme. Byron chooses not to participate in the community, keeps his own time on Saturdays, and does not reveal the details of his intensely private life to his fellow workers. "Hightower alone knows where he goes and what he does."12 Byron pays no price within the community for his anonymity; he occupies the safest position on the spectrum of individual isolates.13 Unlike Byron’s, Lena Grove’s physical appearance makes visible the most intimate details of her private life. She
senses her own alienation at the same time as she accepts Armstid's aid. 

"It's a strange thing," she says.

"How folks can look at a strange young gal walking the road in your shape and know that her husband has left her?" (p. 10)

Her pregnancy marks her violation of the community's social and moral code. Armstid knows "exactly" what his wife will say, and thinks, "'But that's the woman of it. Her own self one of the first ones to cut the ground from under a sister woman, she'll walk the public country herself without shame because she knows that folks, menfolks, will take care of her. She don't care nothing about womenfolks. It wasn't any woman that got her into what she don't even call trouble. Yes, sir. You just let one of them get married or get into trouble without being married, and right then and there is where she secedes from the woman race and species and spends the balance of her life trying to get joined up with the man race. That's why they dip snuff and smoke and want to vote'" (p. 12). Lena's transgression is social and her exclusion is social—she is forced to choose between shame and "secession from the woman race."14

Joanna and Hightower both hold positions in the community that are considerably less secure than those held by Byron and Lena, yet do not approach the degree of instability nor evoke the level of violence that Christmas's does. Joanna is shunned and ignored because the town's remembrance of her ancestors has survived sixty years: "But it still lingers about her and about the place: something dark and outlandish and threatful, even though she is but a woman and but the descendant of them whom the ancestors of the town had reason (or thought that they had) to hate and dread. But it is there: the descendants of both in their relationship to one another ghosts, with between them the phantom of the old spilled blood and the old horror and anger and fear" (p. 42). But Joanna has achieved an agreement of sorts with the community; she pays for her anonymity with isolation and spinsterdom. Even after her death, she pays, Faulkner suggests—or she would pay if they could make her pay: "They would never forgive her and let her be dead in peace and quiet. Not that. Peace is not that often" (p. 273).15

Hightower's offense involved moral transgression—his wife's adultery and suicide—and indirectly the "sacrilege" he preached in church. First the community forces him to resign from the pulpit. "Then the town was sorry with being glad, as people sometimes are sorry for those whom they have at last forced to do as they wanted them to" (p. 64). Later, a rumor circulates that Hightower, himself
unfaithful with his Negro cook, was responsible for his wife's infidelity. "And that's all it took; all that was lacking. Byron listened quietly, thinking to himself how people everywhere are about the same, but that it did seem that in a small town, where evil is harder to accomplish, where opportunities for privacy are scarcer, that people can invent more of it in other people's names. Because that was all it required: that idea, that single idle word blown from mind to mind" (p. 66). The rumor leads the Klan to lynch Hightower, and they almost succeed; they leave him tied to a tree, unconscious. Hightower escapes the fate of Christmas—"then all of a sudden the whole thing seemed to blow away, like an evil wind" (p. 67). Both a white man and a minister, Hightower avoids the wrath of the lynch mob, but he is simply and virtually excommunicated—first from his church, then from his community.\textsuperscript{16}

It is finally Christmas who poses the severest threat to the group's collective identity. As Frank Baldanza writes, contrasting Lena's "indisguisably pregnant condition" with Christmas's plight, Christmas "could easily disguise his problem" but "chooses not to take advantage of the disguise, and he is also not oblivious to the social disapproval, but purposely stimulates the prejudices of whites and Negroes alike."\textsuperscript{17} "Inescapably," therefore, "Joe is forced into the ritual of pursuit and lynching performed almost casually by a society which has been elaborating it for generations."\textsuperscript{18} The novel considers Christmas's struggle as an ongoing process, as an unstable, ill-defined, but dynamic and inevitable and even desirable movement towards stigmatization, community exclusion, and concomitant crucifixion. Precisely the reverse of Lind's formulation of the relationship among the several narratives of \textit{Light in August}, the chronology of the novel and the separation the novel creates between present and past indicate that Christmas works out the personal and social struggles of the other major characters.

The novel's past includes the history of Joe's childhood and his relationship with Joanna. The present time of narration includes only the ten days just following the murder of Joanna (the distant view of the burning house introduces the reader to the Christmas story). The novel suspends resolution of the "present" situation, in which Lena is pregnant, Byron alone, and Hightower excommunicated, until Christmas's story can be told. And it does not dramatize the isolation or excommunication that the other characters experience (with the possible exception of Lena). Hightower's confrontation with the Klan, for example, is reported rather than enacted. Only in Christmas's case does Faulkner narrate the drama of social exclusion. Redemption exists in the Christmas story, Faulkner
seems to be saying, only as representation; Christmas reenacts the social and metaphysical isolation of every individual cast out from community.

The exposition of Christmas's story does not become dramatic until it is placed within a local context. Christmas commits many acts of violence and murder that are either dramatized (as with McEachern) or reported to us (as with the Northern prostitute Christmas almost kills, p. 212). But Christmas's "past" does not become "present" until, as Faulkner expresses it, "one afternoon the street had become a Mississippi country road" (p. 213). Faulkner explores for the space of a novel Christmas's murder of Joanna rather than his murder of McEachern because the later murder possesses symbolic significance that McEachern's does not. As a judge might say, Christmas committed an unpremeditated crime, an act of passion. But because striking McEachern is an isolated, personal act (a family matter), it is an act of violence that society, composed of institutions rather than individuals, absorbs unaffected. Thus, although we may trace Christmas's act of rage to the institutional religious and family pressures that McEachern represents, the fictional society does not, cannot, interpret it this way. Once Christmas enters a community for the first time in his life, his actions acquire potential social significance. Joanna becomes a symbolic victim of social injustice.

*Light in August* emphasizes a distinction between society and community. Cleanth Brooks writes, "W. H. Auden has provided us with a helpful definition [of community]. It is more than a crowd—a crowd is a group of individuals who come together purely at random. . . . A community is also more than a society. A society is a group of individuals related by function. . . . [A community] is a group of people held together by common likes and dislikes, loves and hates held in common, shared values. Where there is a loss of shared values, communities may break down into mere societies or even be reduced to mobs." The orphanage in which Christmas lives for his first five years (an institution, not a home), introduces him to society's demands and expectations before he ever learns his place within a family or kin (community) group context. He learns that he is different from the other children (they call him "nigger" and Doc Hines constantly watches him) but at the same time he cannot achieve separation from them. His identity derives from his functional position in the orphanage, and he is therefore not surprised when Doc Hines takes him away by night—it has happened before to other children. When he mutely agrees to accompany McEachern, he trades one institution for another. McEachern would have him
devout and obedient, but creates only rebellion in Christmas. As an individual, Christmas has no place in the McEachern household and he constantly tries to achieve separation from it—by cruelty to Mrs. McEachern and disobedience to McEachern. As if he can find out who he is only by achieving this separation, he is a man ever isolated from community but never separated from those institutional forces already set in motion at his birth that marked him out, isolated him, before he could ever have become aware of them. As a result, he cannot escape mirroring the internal conflicts in his social world.

Goffman's sociological model of stigma, as I summarized it briefly in my discussion of Hawthorne, is useful in understanding the conflict of identity in Christmas. Born a discreditable individual, he looks like a white man (Byron calls him "foreign") but is really (or thinks he may be) black. If we compare Christmas's motives before he reaches Jefferson, and specifically those before he murders Joanna, with his motives after he has committed the murder, we find that his basic desire, wherever he goes, is to discredit himself. Until he murders Joanna, the attempt is always either temporary or unsuccessful.

While he travels in the South he uses white prostitutes, then tells them he is a Negro to avoid paying. In the North this ruse does not work. When he meets a woman who does not mind that he is black (in effect, does not respond to him as outside her "caste" when he discredits himself), he almost kills her.

He was sick after that. He did not know until then that there were white women who would take a man with a black skin. He stayed sick for two years. Sometimes he would remember how he had once tricked or teased white men into calling him a negro in order to fight them, to beat them or be beaten; now he fought the negro who called him white. He was in the north now, in Chicago and then Detroit. He lived with negroes, shunning white people. He ate with them, slept with them, belligerent, unpredictable, uncommunicative. He now lived as man and wife with a woman who resembled an ebony carving. At night he would lie in bed beside her, sleepless, beginning to breathe deep and hard. He would do it deliberately, feeling, even watching, his white chest arch deeper and deeper within his ribcage, trying to breathe into himself the dark odor, the dark and inscrutable thinking and being of negroes, with each suspiration trying to expel from himself the white blood and the white thinking and being. (p. 212)

This passage points out the various ways Christmas attempted to achieve isolation from his fellows, in effect to externalize the inner isolation he felt by separating himself from the society that created him. He had once "tricked or teased" white men into fighting with
him—as if even the act of fighting, of finding himself being beaten, earned him more of a place among them than he felt while simply discreditable. For awhile, the name "Negro" is not enough to discredit him, especially in the North—so that he tries to assimilate blackness by living with the woman "who resembled an ebony carving." He wants to make his own situation more visible, to expel from himself "the white blood and the white thinking and being" in order to achieve permanent discredit. But he is not successful. He is forced to fight "the negro who called him white." Later in his life, when he walks through Freedman Town in the hours just prior to the murder, he is also "mistaken" for a white man by some Negro men.

It is not until Christmas enters Jefferson that the nebulous social forces at work in him "on the street which was to run for fifteen years" manifest themselves. As Peter Swiggart writes, "In her inverted religious feeling, in her obsession with the Negro race, and in her sexual masochism, Joanna Burden mirrors the important features of Joe Christmas's destiny."24 The narrative telescopes from the small town of Jefferson to the Burden house to Joanna's kitchen and finally to Christmas climbing in the window: "a shadow returning without a sound and without locomotion to the allmother of obscurity and darkness" (p. 216). Joanna is the phantom that "looms" on Christmas's horizon. The language here ("returning" and "allmother") suggests that Christmas finds himself in a familiar context, and as he becomes aware of the associations that the kitchen generates, he finds himself led "twentyfive years back down the street" to Mrs. McEachern. "He ate something from an invisible dish, with invisible fingers: invisible food. . . . 'It's peas,' he said aloud. 'For sweet Jesus. Field peas cooked with molasses'" (pp. 216–17).

Joanna Burden carries the "burden" of southern history—the cross of the Negro—and the novel also portrays her as Joe's particular burden. All of the separate conflicts in his early life—women and sex, racial identity and institutional pressures, religion and violence—coalesce in his three years with Joanna. Ilse Dusoir Lind comments, "That Faulkner intends to equate Joanna and Joe as victims of analogous cultural neuroses is suggested in his designation of them as name-twins (Joe and Joanna) and in his care to supply each with a genealogy covering three generations. . . . An astonishing symmetry emerges when the biographical and psychological data contained in the accounts of Joanna and Joe are assembled. The forces which shaped Christmas are identical with those which shaped Joanna."25 The connection is an obvious one: Faulkner does not need to stylize Joanna in order to make the reader
aware of the combination of influences she represents for Joe. There are moments in the narrative when the connection is made—when "invisible food" becomes field peas, for example; or when Christmas keeps his bootlegging a secret from Joanna. "Very likely she would not have objected. But neither would Mrs McEachern have objected to the hidden rope; perhaps he did not tell her for the same reason that he did not tell Mrs McEachern. Thinking of Mrs McEachern and the rope, and of the waitress whom he had never told where the money came from which he gave to her, and now of his present mistress and the whiskey, he could almost believe that it was not to make money that he sold the whiskey but because he was doom to conceal always something from the women who surrounded him" (p. 247). Mrs. McEachern in particular prefigures Joe's relationship with Joanna, and he throws Joanna's food on the floor just as he did when he was a foster child.

II

The narrative design rather than an actual narrator (conspicuously absent in Light in August except as the embodiment of a "force" in the final third), directs the reader's interpretation of Joe Christmas's actions. A summary of the events that take place at the beginning of the novel illustrate Faulkner's exploitation of narrative technique—in particular the flashback—to focus the reader's attention on the significance of the past as it relates to one particular event in the present—Joanna's murder.

Chapter 2 introduces Joe Christmas as an isolate. Byron Bunch describes his first appearance at the planing mill and his association with the other stranger, Brown. During the next two chapters, Hightower sits alone, then with Byron, who mentions the murder. At this point the novel still focuses on Byron's encounter with Lena. Chapter 5 initiates the abrupt narrative shift to the Christmas story. "It was after midnight. Though Christmas had been in bed for two hours, he was not yet asleep" (p. 95). This chapter dramatizes the few hours just prior to the murder when Christmas both experiences the fatality precedent to an action ("Something is going to happen to me. I am going to do something," p. 97) and explains in advance his motives ("She ought not to started praying over me"). Chapter 6, with equal abruptness, begins the retrospective chronological narration of Christmas's life, and throughout this section of the novel, Lena and Hightower do not appear. The narration of Christmas's past ends with chapter 12 and the last scenes in this chapter build up to the moment of the murder, then shift to Christ-
mas's actions immediately following the murder out on the road—the narrative omits the murder itself. It also omits the hours just prior to the murder—because these have already been dramatized back in chapter 5.

Both in its content and in its position in the narrative, chapter five thus indicates that the murder of Joanna is the central dramatic event prior to Christmas's death, the particular action toward which the narration of Christmas's past builds, and it stresses Christmas's motivation and psychological struggle just prior to the murder.26 His walk through Jefferson in the few hours before going back to the house leads him through Freedman Town and represents in small that longer walk on the lonely street that becomes the symbol of Christmas's life. "Nothing can look quite as lonely as a big man going along an empty street. Yet though he was not large, not tall, he contrived somehow to look more lonely than a lone telephone pole in the middle of a desert. In the wide, empty, shadow-brooded street he looked like a phantom, a spirit, strayed out of its own world, and lost" (p. 106). When Christmas entered Freedman Town, however, "then he found himself." "On all sides, even within him, the bodiless fecund-mellow voices of negro women murmured. It was as though he and all other manshaped life about him had been returned to the lightless hot wet primogenitive Female" (p. 107). He associates blackness with femaleness, and subsequently runs from both. In a moment, he associates all the streets of his betrayals (and implicitly the street corner where he met Bobbie) with his present actions: "He could see the street down which he had come, and the other street, the one which had almost betrayed him; and further away and at right angles, the far bright rampart of the town itself, and in the angle between the black pit from which he had fled with drumming heart and glaring lips. No light came from it, from here no breath, no odor. It just lay there, black, impenetrable, in its garland of Augusttremulous lights. It might have been the original quarry, abyss itself" (p. 108). The meanings of "quarry"—source, bottomless pit, and object of the hunt—all connote Christmas's dilemma in these hours prior to the murder: he too contains within himself the source of his conflict, yet he has been forced into it by a paradox outside his individual control, and is both his own victim and society's. He certainly premeditates some kind of action, if not actual murder, in these hours: "His way was sure" (p. 108). Joanna is the single embodiment of the abyss within Joe's reach.

In the final outcome of the novel, Joanna's murder is subsidiary to Christmas's lynching. After Joanna's murder, however, the townspeople emerge as a community acting in concert. Light in Au-
gust examines the murder from the point of view of the townspeople as a necessary prelude to exploring why they lynch Christmas. Unlike "Dry September" or "Red Leaves," in which the fictional worlds are limited to an essentially closed system of townspeople (the traveling drummers do not live in Jefferson, but none of them either enters the town or leaves it within the span of the story), Light in August focuses on a man who has never been a member of a community—and community, after chapter 12, becomes an obtrusive presence for the first time, both in the novel and in Christmas's life.

The first seven pages of chapter 13 recall in detail the language, situation, and source of conflict in "Dry September." The short story opens with a simile comparing the spread of rumor to "a fire in dry grass." Chapter 13 opens with a real fire: "Within five minutes after the countrymen found the fire, the people began to gather" (p. 271). The people emerge "as though out of thin air"—and begin to function as a community. Later, in a decided echo of the short story, they gather in front of the jail—"the clerks, the idle, the countrymen in overalls; the talk. It went here and there about the town, dying and borning again like a wind or a fire" (p. 330). The narrative summarizes their initial reaction: "Among them the casual Yankees and the poor whites and even the southerners who had lived for a while in the north, who believed aloud that it was an anonymous negro crime committed not by a negro but by Negro and who knew, believed, and hoped that she had been ravished too: at least once before her throat was cut and at least once afterward" (p. 272). The community's reaction lacks a focus at its inception in the novel; nor have they found a leader. As yet the men remain anonymous who, "with pistols already in their pockets began to canvass about for someone to crucify" (p. 272).

As a result of her murder, Joanna Burden becomes the symbol of a threat to community identity in much the same way as Minnie Cooper's rumored rape threatened the identity and security of the townspeople in "Dry September." The language Faulkner uses echoes the short story almost word for word: "And the women came too, the idle ones in bright and sometimes hurried garments, with secret and passionate and glittering looks and with secret frustrated breasts" (p. 273). They rally around Joanna as if she were a battle standard ("Murdering a white woman the black son of a," p. 275) in spite of the fact that "none of them had ever entered the house. While she was alive they would not have allowed their wives to call on her" (p. 275). She had been "a foreigner, an outlander" (p. 272), although she was born and died in Jefferson.
When the sheriff arrives at the scene of the crime, he seizes a Negro and begins to question him. The deputy strikes the Negro twice with a strap and forces him to reveal that Brown and Christmas lived alone in a cabin in back of the house. The information saves the Negro from being lynched himself, but forces within the community become manifest and lead shortly to Brown's confession that Christmas is a Negro and Joanna's murderer. Faulkner's phrase for the unleashing of these forces is "an emotional barbecue" (p. 273).

The same sentiments that reverberate through the barbershop in "Dry September" permeate *Light in August* as well. "It was as if the very initial outrage of the murder carried in its wake and made of all subsequent actions something monstrous and paradoxical and wrong, in themselves against both reason and nature" (p. 280). The atmosphere of McLendon's military defense, preventing the murder and violation of "mothers and wives and sisters" in "Dry September," becomes expanded in *Light in August* in Faulkner's characterization of Percy Grimm. Born too late to fight in World War I, until he discovered the "civilian-military act," Grimm was "like a man who had been for a long time in a swamp, in the dark. It was as though he not only could see no path ahead of him, he knew that there was none" (p. 426). It is not Christmas per se who gives Grimm's life new direction, but rather his crime that has enabled Grimm to achieve at last his position in the community as its civilian defender:

Then suddenly his life opened definite and clear. ... *He could now see his life opening before him, uncomplex and inescapable as a barren corridor, completely freed now of ever again having to think or decide, the burden* which he now assumed and carried as bright and weightless and martial as his insignatory brass: a sublime and implicit faith in physical courage and blind obedience, and a belief that the white race is superior to any and all other races and that the American uniform is superior to all men, and that all that would ever be required of him in payment for this belief, this privilege, would be his own life (p. 247, my italics)

As Cleanth Brooks writes, ". . . Percy Grimm is a man who needs desperately to be felt a part of the community. He needs it so much that he attempts to seize the community values by violence. He yearns to wear a uniform *marking* him as the community's representative and defender . . ." (my italics).

Curiously, Faulkner uses comparable language to describe Percy Grimm's effect on Christmas. The two passages show that what Grimm and Christmas have in common is a desperate desire for an
acknowledged position in the community. Chapter 14 dramatizes the
beginning of the chase, then shifts to Christmas and the perspec-
tive of the fleeing scapegoat. He knows that they are hunting him
with dogs, and he hears his pursuers track him to the cottonhouse
where he exchanged his own shoes for a pair of brogans—"the black
shoes, the black shoes smelling of negro" (p. 313).

Looking down at the harsh, crude, clumsy shapelessness of them, he
said "Hah" through his teeth. It seemed to him that he could see him-
self being hunted by white men at last into the black abyss which had
been waiting, trying, for thirty years to drown him and into which
now and at last he had actually entered, bearing now upon his ankles
the definite and ineradicable gauge of its upward moving. . . . He
breathes deep and slow, feeling with each breath himself diffuse in the
neutral grayness, becoming one with loneliness and quiet that has
never known fury or despair. "That was all I wanted," he thinks, in a
quiet and slow amazement. "That was all, for thirty years. That didn't
seem to be a whole lot to ask in thirty years." (p. 313, my italics)

The passage recalls, and seems to contradict, the earlier moment in
chapter 5, when Christmas leaves Freedman Town and finds him-
self among white people. He sees "the white faces intent and sharp,"
four people sitting around a card table, and thinks, also, ""That's all
I wanted. That don't seem like a whole lot to ask"" (p. 108). It is the
peace, sense of security, of "becoming one with loneliness" that the
moments share in Christmas's longings, and yet, in chapter 14, the
peace seems to result from Christmas's knowledge that he has be-
come a quarry.

The days after the murder, and after Christmas has given direc-
tion to the chase by appearing in the Negro church, produce a period
of clarity for him. He feels a sense of peace now that they are hunt-
ing him at last, now that, by running, he has externalized his inner
sense of being isolated (his discreditability has become discredit,
social stigma). The chase becomes for him a ritual similar to the race
the body servant runs in "Red Leaves." He knows this, and he knows
that his pursuers know it intuitively, because several people recog-
nize him in broad daylight along the road outside of Jefferson, and
do not capture him.

"They recognized me too," he thinks. "Them, and that white woman.
And the negroes where I ate that day. Any of them could have cap-
tured me, if that's what they want. Since that's what they all want: for
me to be captured. But they all run first. They all want me to be
captured, and then when I come up ready to say Here I am Yes I would
say Here I am I am tired I am tired of running of having to carry my life
like it was a basket of eggs they all run away. Like there is a rule to
catch me by, and to capture me that way would not be like the rule
says." (p. 319, Faulkner's italics).
Just as he knew his direction on the road from Freedman Town on his way to his confrontation with Joanna, he knows the rules for his capture. "Again his direction is straight as a surveyor's line, disregarding hill and valley and bog. Yet he is not hurrying. 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" (p. 320). Such a description of Christmas suggests a complete revolution in his thinking about himself as a result of the previous few days. No longer is he a man without direction, without identity. He has become the hunted, the victim, and he "is like a man who knows where he is" (p. 320). Christmas, like Grimm, has been "completely freed now of ever again having to think or decide" (p. 426).

The novel dramatizes the lynching as a chess game, in which both Grimm and Christmas act as pawns for some Player (pp. 437–39). In an echo of the chase in "Red Leaves," the two men look at one another, "almost face to face": "For an instant they glared at one another, the one stopped in the act of crouching from the leap, the other in midstride of running, before Grimm's momentum carried him past the corner" (p. 437). Even Grimm's emotional participation in his own action is suspended for a moment when he comes upon the cabin where he expects to find Christmas: "He knew now that he had lost a point. That Christmas had been watching his legs all the time beneath the house. He said, 'Good man'" (p. 437). The lynching, then, for Grimm and the townspeople, as well as for Christmas, partakes of a certain quality of ritual. As Pitavy writes, "Once they believe it, he [Christmas] becomes a Negro in their eyes, and they treat him as such. The community needs a scapegoat, and that this should be a Negro is reassuring: the ritual punishment purges the white community after the threat to its integrity, and confirms the code for and by which it lives. To doubt the justice of the code would be to doubt the identity of the community. . . ."30

Christmas and Grimm are individual manifestations of forces that forever conflict beneath the social surface and that, from time to time, emerge in moments of dramatic action, unpredictable in advance, yet, as well, completely and absolutely predetermined. The predetermined nature of these two men as forces that have erupted within the community suggests the way the Calvinist sensibility has informed Faulkner's narrative as well as his fictional community. The novel becomes "holistic," in the way Harry Henderson uses the term in his discussion of *The Scarlet Letter*.31 As Peter Swiggart writes, "The two characters are driven by the same excess of puritan zeal even though the one figure is consistently self-righteous and the other marks himself as a deserving victim. . . . Together they
act out the drama of the Southern puritan mind and its tragic dilemma. . . . Thus Joe Christmas becomes his own pursuer and Percy Grimm his own victim.”

Both murderer and Negro, Christmas has committed social transgressions that sufficiently motivate his lynching, but Faulkner suggests an additional explanation for the excessive violence Christmas ultimately receives. The townspeople speculate: “He don't look any more like a nigger than I do. But it must have been the nigger blood in him. It looked like he had set out to get himself caught like a man might set out to get married. . . . If he had not set fire to the house, they might not have found out about the murder for a month.” Part of this speaker's incredulity centers on the fact that Christmas could easily have escaped. But Christmas wanted to be caught, or, like the body servant, recognized the inevitability of his capture—and the morning he comes into Mottstown, he spends his time going to the barbershop, buying some new clothes, and walking up and down the street, waiting for people to recognize him. The talk continues:

“... Halliday saw him and ran up and grabbed him and said, 'Aint your name Christmas?' and the nigger said that it was. He never denied it. He never did anything. He never acted like either a nigger or a white man. That was it. That was what made the folks so mad. For him to be a murderer and all dressed up and walking the town like he dared them to touch him, when he ought to have been skulking and hiding in the woods, muddy and dirty and running. It was like he never even knew he was a murderer, let alone a nigger too.” (p. 331)

The speaker cannot tolerate the ambiguity of either Christmas's behavior or the clothes he wears—the new white man's clothes and the second-hand Negro brogans too big for him—which suggest the conflict he has struggled with throughout his life. “He never acted like either a nigger or a white man. That was it. That was what made the folks so mad.” Christmas does not markedly manifest either his race or his crime, and it is this that increases the people's anger.

The passage supports the novel's interpretation of Christmas. Because he is only discreditable instead of visibly discredited, he needs to threaten the community severely before they can recognize him as an alien, before they will recognize him at all; and because the members of the community do not, cannot recognize him for what they think he is (black) even after they capture him, the threat to them is greater (it seems to come from inside, since Christmas seems to be white) and they react violently. Thus Percy Grimm not only murders Christmas; he castrates him too (“'Now you'll let white
women alone, even in hell," p. 439). As Swiggart writes, "The crucifixion image which dominates this climactic scene derives its meaning less from Joe’s martyrdom than from the violence of society’s retribution. The men who watch the scene are confronted with their own need for violent expiation. . . ." Yet as Vickery, who calls Grimm the "young priest" of the occasion, points out, "the elect and white of Jefferson castrate and slay the Negro according to ancient custom, but instead of purification, they are left with a sense of their own guilt and self-doubt." We don’t see much of the community after their catharsis, but "Dry September" teaches us that Vickery’s conclusion must be accurate. Certainly McLendon in the short story is left with a sense of his own guilt and self-doubt.

Christmas has learned to expect victimization and crucifixion almost from birth. When as a boy he is beaten by McEachern in the stable, he faces the man like "a post or tower upon which the sentient part of him mused like a hermit, contemplative and remote with ecstasy and selfcrucifixion" (p. 150). But he does not free himself of the inward-impelling desire for movement and discredit, to achieve a permanent position, even of outcast, in the social framework, until the town of Jefferson, aiding in his search for self-realization, recognizes him as murderer and Negro and hunts him with dogs. As Alfred Kazin puts it, "this man is born an abstraction and is seeking to become a person. . . ." Christmas "attains in this first moment of selfhood, the martyrdom that ends it.” Faulkner himself said about Christmas that “He knew that he would never know what he was, and his only salvation in order to live with himself was to repudiate mankind, to live outside the human race. And he tried to do that but nobody would let him. . . .” Nobody would let him because in this very act of trying "to live outside the human race," Christmas embodies the divided conscience of his society. From the viewpoint of the community as well as the individual, discreditability is the worst stigma of all.

III

We see Christmas for the last time in the moment of his death. "He just lay there, with his eyes open and empty of everything save consciousness" (p. 439), and in that consciousness he finds peace. "For a long moment he looked up at them with peaceful and unfathomable and unbearable eyes." The imagery connotes resurrection, and the vision of Christmas that remains "will be there, musing, quiet, steadfast, not fading and not particularly threatful, but of itself alone serene, of itself alone triumphant" (p. 440). If Joanna’s
murder is the most significant dramatic event in the novel, Christmas's lynching is certainly the most significant symbolic event. Yet Faulkner's very emphasis on the quasi-spiritual significance of Christmas's death raises the much-debated critical problem of the novel's unity. In particular, what is Gail Hightower's function in the novel, and why does Faulkner place the details of Christmas's death (chap. 19) before Hightower's history (chap. 20)? Again the novel's design aids our understanding. After Joanna's death, Faulkner explores the community's reaction; after Christmas's lynching, he explores Hightower's reaction. Faulkner's study of Grimm preceding the lynching articulates his examination of the communal impulse to violent action; his subsequent exploration of Hightower is a study of enlightened reaction, where Hightower, even in his name, becomes a register of symbolic significance for the reader.

Hightower's narrative of position contrasts with Christmas's narrative of process. We see Hightower mainly, although not exclusively, sitting in his study window looking down on the street. Even the sign in front of his house, Hightower himself refers to as "his monument" (p. 52). He indicates that he has long ago accepted what the townspeople did to him, telling Byron, "They are good people. They must believe what they must believe, especially as it was I who was at one time both master and servant of their believing. And so it is not for me to outrage their believing nor for Byron Bunch to say that they are wrong. Because all that any man can hope for is to be permitted to live quietly among his fellows" (p. 69). When Byron indirectly narrates Hightower's history in the opening chapters, it is as history that we are aware of it—because nothing in the novel's present moment interferes with Hightower's tranquillity until he hears about Joe Christmas.

Before the flashback to Christmas's childhood interrupts the Hightower narrative, it is clear (chaps. 3 and 4) that Hightower feels affected in some way by Christmas's ontological situation, before he even knows what Christmas has done. As Byron begins to report the fire and his encounter with Lena, one detail in his story moves Hightower. "'Part negro,' Hightower says. His voice sounds light, trivial, like a thistle bloom falling into silence without a sound, without any weight. He does not move. For a moment longer he does not move. Then there seems to come over his whole body, as if its parts were mobile like face features, that shrinking and denial, and Byron sees that the still, flaccid, big face is suddenly slick with sweat. But his voice is light and calm. 'What about Christmas and Brown and yesterday?' he says." (p. 83) When Byron finishes relating the event of "yesterday," Hightower is deeply affected. Byron
sits, "watching across the desk the man who sits there with his eyes closed and the sweat running down his face like tears. Hightower speaks: 'Is it certain, proved, that he has negro blood? Think, Byron; what it will mean when the people—if they catch. . . . Poor man. Poor mankind" (p. 93). Among all the outcast characters in Light in August, it is Hightower who speaks, Hightower who is deeply touched, because Hightower has confronted the lynch mob. His position, more than any of the others, approaches the Negro's on the spectrum of social exclusion. Neither his sacrilege nor his moral failings incensed the town as much as the suggestion that he has committed a crime against society—that "he was not a natural husband, a natural man, and that the negro woman was the reason" (p. 65). Hightower has experienced the power of social rumor, and his sweat indicates that his concern for Christmas goes deeper than empathy—as deep as fear.

When the narrative returns to Hightower after Joanna's murder, it finds him engaged in internal conflict. The tranquillity he possessed before he heard about Christmas is gone. When he goes to the market, the earth seems to rock beneath him, and he thinks, "I wont! I wont! I have bought immunity. I have paid. I have paid!" (p. 292). Later, approaching "his sanctuary," his house, he repeats, "I paid for it. I didn't quibble about the price. No man can say that. I just wanted peace; I paid them their price without quibbling!" (p. 293). Hightower feels involved with Joe Christmas before Byron ever approaches him with Mrs. Hines's appeal. The language of his denial, before meeting the Hineses and afterwards (""It's not because I cant, dont dare to . . . it's because I wont! I wont! do you hear?!,"" p. 370), suggests that Hightower is at some level reexperiencing his own excommunication as he witnesses Christmas's struggle, and that his refusal to take any part is an inability to understand his own past.

Not until Christmas dies does Hightower experience a clearer understanding. Hightower's own involvement in the lynching recalls Hawkshaw's attempt to stop McLendon in "Dry September." In the short story, Hawkshaw finds himself among the lynch mob (although not with them in principle) when they pick up Will Mayes. When Mayes strikes the members of the group, he strikes Hawkshaw, and Hawkshaw strikes him back. The ineffectiveness of his attempts to stop the lynching and his contradictory act of striking Mayes both lead Hawkshaw to jump out of the car. He is aware of the futility of his actions, and he retches beneath the moon. In Light in August, Hightower also finds himself among the lynchers, but when Christmas strikes him, he does not strike back. Instead,
too late, he tries to protect him. The time when he might have been effective has passed, however, and he is permitted to make no sacrifices for Christmas. At the same time, his attempt suggests that he participates emotionally in Christmas's conflict.

Faulkner does not stress the act of Christmas's death as much as the necessity for Hightower to vicariously participate in it by witnessing. This explains why the description of Joe's death cannot be omitted as Joanna's is. Hightower stands with Percy Grimm at the crucifixion; and later in the evening, once again sitting at his study window, he begins to imaginatively relive his past. Because he has participated in crucifixion, first as victim, and now as implicated bystander, he begins to see how much guilt and responsibility he must bear for his own martyrdom. As he waits for the moment of sunset, when he expects to hear the galloping hooves, he watches the faces from his past moving before him on a wheel. The "wheel of thinking" begins to slow for him, "the power which propels it not yet aware" (p. 462), and Hightower begins to face his own unworthiness.

He sees himself offer as a sop fortitude and forbearance and dignity, making it appear that he resigned his pulpit for a martyr's reasons. . . . making it appear that he was being driven, uncomplaining, into that which he did not even then admit had been his desire since before he entered the seminary . . . allowing himself to be persecuted, to be dragged from his bed at night and carried into the woods and beaten with sticks, he all the while bearing in the town's sight and hearing, without shame, with that patient and voluptuous ego of the martyr, the air, the behavior, the How long, O Lord until, inside his house again and the door locked, he lifted the mask with voluptuous and triumphant glee: Ah. That's done now. That's past now. That's bought and paid for now (p. 464) 

Hightower's single desire, that which led him to the seminary, into marriage, and finally to Jefferson, is for detachment and suspension, or a "high tower": "That was what the word seminary meant: quiet and safe walls within which the hampered and garmentworried spirit could learn anew serenity to contemplate without horror or alarm its own nakedness" (p. 453). Participating in Christmas's crucifixion by witnessing it catalyzes his contemplation of the self-horror and leads him into a kind of meditation.

Hightower's final catharsis occurs when he sees Christmas's face, and then one which he recognizes, finally, as Percy Grimm's—"Then it seems to him that some ultimate dammed flood within him breaks and rushes away" (p. 466). Hightower recognizes that he is both Christmas and Percy Grimm, both victim and accuser, and his realization leaves him "empty and lighter than a forgotten leaf and
even more trivial than flotsam lying spent and still upon the win-
dow ledge which has no solidity beneath hands that have no weight”
(p. 466).

It is necessary for Hightower to have witnessed before he gains
understanding; Christmas's conflict becomes Hightower's (and the
community's) vehicle for working out the meaning of communal
exclusion. Christmas's death is justifiable because it leads High-
tower to the moment of apocalyptic vision he has been waiting to
have his entire life. Hightower has sat at his window before and
seen his grandfather's cavalry rush by: "They have thundered past
now and crashed silently on into the dusk; night has fully come” (p.
70). Earlier in the novel, the moment is not accompanied by vision.
However, after Christmas's death, Hightower experiences a delay
before he hears the hooves. “It is as though they had merely waited
until he could find something to pant with, to be reaffirmed in
triumph and desire with. . . .” (p. 466). Once he does hear them,
they do not dissipate; "it seems to him that he still hears them: the
wild bugles and the clashing sabres and the dying thunder of
hooves” (p. 467).

In terms of the Hightower narrative, then, the significance of
placing Christmas's death prior to Hightower's vision is clear. In
order to understand fully the implications of the novel's design, we
need to phrase the same question differently: why does Hightower's
vision succeed Christmas's death? I have shown what meaning
Christmas's crucifixion has for Hightower; what clarification, re-
trospectively, does Hightower's vision provide for understanding
Christmas's death?

The relationship of meaning between the two narratives operates
tautologically. Consider at least one other alternative Faulkner
might have adopted: he might have reversed the order of chapters 19
and 20. Hightower's vision might have preceded Christmas's
crucifixion in the narrative. Such an order, although it would retain
the symbolic significance of the crucifixion for Hightower, would fail
to stress the reciprocal significance of Hightower's vision for
Christmas's death. Faulkner, then, risks anticlimax but with the
effect of enlarging meaning, in spite of the fact that, as a result,
critics in the past have failed to apprehend fully Hightower's func-
tion in the novel.

For Hightower demythologizes Christmas's crucifixion. High-
tower's vision at the end of chapter 20 is not a religious revelation,
what Beach Langston calls "his own limited 'imitation of Christ,'” but rather an intense reliving of his grandfather's galloping hooves.
In spite of the fact that Hightower is excommunicated from his
church, he is still presented as the most orthodox religious figure in *Light in August*, and if any character is theologically and spiritually prepared for a Christological vision, that person is Hightower. Of a different nature entirely, his revelation acts as a corrective to a merely symbolic Christian interpretation of Christmas's death. I do not mean to imply that Faulkner avoids Christ-symbolism—this is certainly not the case—but rather that his broader interpretation of the Christian passion provide the framework for an exploration of religion as a community tool. It is not enough to state, as Hugh Holman does, that the unity of *Light in August* is a product of "Faulkner's uses of the Christ story." It is not Faulkner who "uses" the Christ story but the tradition of American community ritual since the Puritans—whose "use" or "misuse" amounted to investing social sanctions with religious significance. Part of Hightower's function in the novel is to expose the community's use of religion to provoke and excuse its own violent social fanaticism.

The Presbyterian church originated theories for the divine sanction of slavery during the religious controversies just prior to the war, and, as William Cash points out in *The Mind of the South*, certain issues took on religious significance for the southerner—before and during the war, social symbols were made sacred. The southern woman became one source of spiritual inspiration (consider McLendon's call to "war" in "Dry September"). As Cash expresses it, in the wake of northern accusations of southern miscegenation, the southern white woman became "the South's Palladium"—"the standard for its rallying, the mystic symbol of its nationality in the face of the foe. . . . And—she was the pitiful Mother of God. Merely to mention her was to send strong men into tears—or shouts. There was hardly a sermon that did not begin and end with tributes in her honor, hardly a brave speech that did not open and close with the clashing of shields and the flourishing of swords for her glory. At the last, I verily believe, the ranks of the Confederacy went rolling into battle in the misty conviction that it was wholly for her that they fought." Furthermore, when the war was over, these sacred symbols continued to be catalysts for intense emotional patriotism.

Local patriotism was far from being dead in them, but nobody remembered now that they had ever gone out to die merely for Virginia or Carolina or Georgia. In their years together, a hundred control phrases, struck from the eloquent lips of their captains in the smoke and heat of battle, had burned themselves into their brains—phrases which would ever after be to them as the sounding of trumpets and the rolling of drums, to set their blood to mounting, their muscles to tensing, their eyes to stinging, to call forth in them the highest loyal-
ties and the most active responses. And of these phrases the great master key was in every case the adjective Southern. 46

In *Light in August*, elements of community identity are similarly imbued with sacred meaning. Hence the profusion of "ministers" of various kinds: McEachern the fundamentalist who acts as Christmas's spiritual guardian, preaching self-sacrifice, unquestioning devotion, and obedience—to McEachern; Joanna's father, who made the Negro his religion and preached abolition; Doc Hines, the minister of white supremacy, seizing the pulpit in Negro churches, "himself his own exhibit A" (p. 325); Percy Grimm, who ad-ministers community justice; Christmas himself, preaching no particular message, disrupting a Negro church service with shouts and anathema; and certainly Hightower, descendant of an avatar of heroism and glory (his grandfather killed in a chicken coop) and a rabid abolitionist (his father), who chooses the pulpit because he believes in more than his grandfather's legend—"He had believed in the church too, in all that it ramified and evoked" (p. 453). Lena Grove, herself not a minister, is looking for one.

Without exception, religion for each of these so-called ministers acts as an effective social defense, a preserving or sanctifying force for whatever personal conflict produces a need for bolstering principle or self-image. The clearest examples of the use of religion as a preserving element may be seen in Doc Hines, Joanna, and Hightower. Mrs. Hines tells how her husband came to be in jail the night Milly was born: "'He said he had to fight because he is littler than most men and so folks would try to put on him. . . . But I told him it was because the devil was in him. . . . And so he took it to himself then, because it was a sign'" (p. 352). Joanna sees herself as a savior, burdened with a black cross. She tells Joe, "'Escape it you cannot. The curse of the black race is God's curse. But the curse of the white race is the black man who will be forever God's chosen own because He once cursed him'" (p. 240). In other words, for Joanna, whom Faulkner describes as "the New England glacier exposed suddenly to the fire of the New England biblical hell," 47 the black man's "curse" is his own humanity; the white man, attempting to deny his, is burdened with the black man as a symbol for the abnegation and denial. By installing herself as the spiritual advisor and private benefactress of the Negro colleges, Joanna protects herself from seeing her own "blackness," from recognizing her own repressed humanity. When it emerges, she ecstatically screams "'Negro! Negro!'" at Christmas—but she returns to prayer. Religion is her final defense: and significantly because she prays Christmas feels compelled to kill her. Hightower uses his pulpit to defend his calling to Jeffer-
son and refers to his compulsion to seek the bulwark of religion as the spirit's "nakedness" (p. 453). The further this "nakedness" is removed from theology, the more violent its defense becomes. And Doc Hines is a raving fanatic. His preaching in the Negro churches does not even pretend to be consistent with any theology whatsoever.

In this context, the etymological distinction between "religion" and "theology" is as significant for Hightower as it was for Ishmael. "Theology" derives from Greek words meaning "the word of God," and has come to signify particular doctrine of particular gods. "Religion" has a much less specific origin. It means "to tie back, to bind back," to some source, some roots. For the fanatics in *Light in August*, and for the community that adopts violence in the name of God, religion involves binding, constricting, and protecting their root identity, their self-image ("'He said he had to fight because he is littler than most men'"), or their moral position (on the Negro). The violence that accompanies the personal fundamentalism of Hines and McEachern is manifest at a social level as well. Religion, not theology, becomes the principle of social exclusion and hence of community definition.

At the same time, it becomes the *vehicle* for exclusion: it sanctions doing battle on the Lord's side—for McLendon and Percy Grimm. Religion becomes violence as well as the legal and political sanction for violence within the community that wishes to protect itself from internal conflict. Hightower is significant for Faulkner because he embraces theology rather than religion—he attempts to hide his nakedness behind his pulpit. However, it is not his sacrilege that provokes his excommunication but rather his reputed violation of "sacred" social code. When Hightower faces the Klan, theology yields to religious fanaticism. Hightower's significance for our understanding of community violence as it enacts Christmas's death is then clear: Hightower provides a vehicle by which Faulkner distinguishes between religion and theology, and religion becomes a social force.

Religion is the greatest barrier to Christmas's acceptance by society from his birth—because what the religious impulse refuses to tolerate more than anything else is ambiguity. When in doubt, society condemns. Anyone not clearly innocent is judged guilty. Salvation must be conclusively provided; damnation is inherent in the human condition. Thus, Christmas's moments of greatest violence are provoked by the religious impulse operating to sanction him: and he strikes McEachern, who would have him catechismically internalize the very forces that excommunicated him at birth; and
he kills Joanna, because she wants him to join those same forces in prayer. He joins once—when he disrupts the Negro church service—and thus ironically makes use of the forces of exclusion for his own ends: knowing that society will never recognize him as a person, he is satisfied with being a marked man and a martyr in a community.

Gail Hightower thinks his own martyrdom has bought him immunity from further suffering. When he hears about Christmas, he begins to realize it has not. Hightower is forced to emerge from his sanctuary to listen to Byron, to feel compassion for Mrs. Hines, to deliver Lena's baby, and finally to speak out for Christmas. Hightower sees himself as paying again. Several times, referring especially to demands Byron makes on him, he says, "Perhaps this too is reserved for me." Once he says it, and the narrator replies, "But it is not all. There is one thing more reserved for him" (p. 392), referring to the witness that will be required of him at Christmas's execution. Hightower, then, is not permitted to be a martyr—just as he is not "permitted to live quietly among his fellows."

The night before Christmas's death, Hightower sits in his study window listening to the organ music from three churches in Jefferson. The passage is crucial to understanding *Light in August*, and it anticipates Ellison's treatment of "social" religion in *Invisible Man*.

The organ strains come rich and resonant through the summer night, blended, sonorous, with that quality of abjectness and sublimation, as if the freed voices themselves were assuming the shapes and attitudes of crucifixions, ecstatic, solemn, and profound in gathering volume. Yet even then the music has still a quality stern and implacable, deliberate and without passion so much as immolation, pleading, asking, for not love, not life, forbidding it to others, demanding in sonorous tones death as though death were the boon, like all Protestant music. (p. 347)

The voices singing the music of the Protestant passion are "freed" by "assuming the shapes and attitudes of crucifixions." Each person in the congregation wants to be a martyr, hopes for crucifixion, because martyrdom ends quickly; it is only sainthood, absolute self-righteousness, that must be sustained for a lifetime. So they ask not for love, not for life, but for immolation, for death. Hightower listens: "he seems to hear within it the apotheosis of his own history, his own land, his own environed blood: that people from which he sprang and among which he lives who can never take either pleasure or catastrophe or escape from either, without brawling over it. Pleasure, ecstasy, they cannot seem to bear: their escape from it is in violence, in drinking and fighting and praying; catastrophe too,
violence identical and apparently inescapable” (p. 347). Hightower sees a society where the only pleasure is pain; where the only ecstasy is stasis; and where violence is therefore necessary to maintain these contradictions in oxymoronic equilibrium. Religion for the community of Jefferson becomes the point of balance; it is the only field of life where the pain and the stasis may be exalted, may be sung about, may be orgiastically and emotionally witnessed.

The epigraph to Flannery O'Connor's novel, *The Violent Bear It Away*, reads as follows:

"From the days of John the Baptist until now, the Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away." Matthew 11:12

Flannery O'Connor extends Faulkner's exploration of the reciprocal transmutation of religion to violence, and her epigraph clarifies Faulkner's own focus. The word *suffereth* has two Biblical senses: one certainly connotes the experience of pain; the other, however, means *to permit, or to encourage*. Violent is etymologically akin to two other English words, *to violate*, and the noun, *vim* (as in vim and vigor). These words derive from the Latin *vis*, meaning strength, and The Oxford English Dictionary also links the Greek *hiesthai*, to hurry, and the Old english *wáth*, pursuit. The Bible verse directly links violence with religious fervor, strength of feeling, and extreme or urgent expressions of that feeling. Matthew states that Heaven "suffereth" this violence, which I interpret to mean "permits" and "bears" violence within itself. "And the violent bear it away." It is the violent one, the individual possessed by religious fervor, who carries the Kingdom of Heaven with(in) him.

"'And so why should not their religion drive them to crucifixion of themselves and one another?' he thinks" (p. 348). Hightower hears within the music "the declaration and dedication of that which they know that on the morrow they will have to do." He thinks of Joe Christmas, seems to hear them saluting not any god but "the doomed man in the barred cell." He knows they will do it gladly. "'Since to pity him would be to admit selfdoubt and to hope for and need pity themselves. They will do it gladly, gladly. That's why it is so terrible, terrible, terrible’" (p. 348). The need for the transcendental Absolute is felt as absolutely in Faulkner’s South as it ever was in Puritan New England. Self-doubt cannot be admitted. And so the community will crucify gladly. It is "terrible" because they move farther away from the Absolute as they try to cling more closely to it.

Ilse Dusoir Lind states, "And yet Hightower's equation of Southern religion with Southern violence is not quite Faulkner's. . . . He
make this formulation early in his narrative; later he will progress to a better understanding of the Southern religious problem than this." Hightower's statement appears "early in the narrative" in the sense that it appears before the dramatization of Christmas's death; but within the chronology of Hightower's narrative, it is the last time we see him alone before we see him again as a witness (the intervening conversation with the Hineses prepares for Hightower's defense of Christmas in the execution scene). Whether or not we want to "equate" Hightower's formulation with Faulkner's, *Light in August* certainly implies that Hightower is the only character who not only understands the social function of religion in the community, but is also allowed to transcend his place as excommunicant—whether for a moment of vision or for a lifetime is uncertain, and indeterminable from the text.

Some critics, Hugh Holman among them, claim that Hightower actually dies at the end of chapter 20. Others, myself included, interpret the scene as a moment of vision instead. Faulkner certainly does not make it clear that Hightower dies; nevertheless it is conceivable that he is no longer alive, at least symbolically—he thinks he is dying, after all; his hands become weightless; "the dust swirls skyward sucking, fades away into the night which has fully come"; and his head leans forward, "huge and without depth," upon "the twin blobs of his hands" (p. 467). Without testing the patience and credulity of the reader by narratively raising Hightower straight to heaven, Faulkner at the same time implies that something of this nature has happened. Hightower has transcended; and whether the nature of his transcendance approaches that of the Eastern nirvana, its literary prototype in Ishmael's transcendent masthead consciousness, or the Christian resurrection into heaven, Faulkner suggests that if Christmas is a martyr, Hightower is some kind of social saint. But not the Christian kind, where "saint" may also mean "savior"; Hightower is a saint because, unlike Christmas, whose agony is over in a moment, he "suffers" at the hands of society throughout his life. As a student once mentioned to me, in a different context, it is easier to be a martyr than a saint—assured the same glory "over yonder," the price here is quicker paid.

V

In its total scope, *Light in August* is more than a community study. Joe Christmas, an individual who mirrors society's internal conflict, is balanced by Byron Bunch and Lena Grove, characters
who live outside of society, who transcend the relative flux and change of human institutions—individuals who exist in the realm of the absolute, in the realm of the beauty and truth of Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn." 

Byron Bunch, whose very name ironically suggests an aggregate, lives his life separate from the community. When we first see him in the novel, he is working alone on Saturday afternoon at the planing mill. For the townspeople, he is a "man of mystery" (p. 44). Yet although Byron does not participate in the community of Jefferson, he comes to be a catalyst for community in its larger, more spiritual sense, drawing together the lives of Lena Grove, Hightower, Mrs. Hines, and Joe Christmas. Faulkner states, referring to Byron's position in Jefferson, "Man knows so little about his fellows" (p. 43). There are depths to Byron that the townspeople cannot fathom.

Byron is not a marked man. He is described as being "nondescript" (p. 44), someone who does not manifest his character as characteristic. His habits are his own, and most significant among these habits are his late-night talks with Hightower and his weekend rides thirty miles into the country where he "spends Sunday leading the choir in a country church—a service which lasts all day long" (p. 43). Faulkner does not stress Byron's religion; and Byron himself hides it from the community of Jefferson. In light of the blatant presence of religious fanaticism in the town and in the novel, the lack of emphasis comes to have the effect of underlining its importance. For Byron, who "would injure no man" (p. 50), who states to Hightower, "It was a strange thing. I thought that if there ever was a place where a man would be where the chance to do harm could not have found him it would have been out there at the mill on a Saturday evening" (p. 71), the religious impulse leads him again and again to action that is noble and absolute and inevitable.

For Faulkner, Byron represents an alternative to violence as a means of resolving conflict. Hightower, in a tone of irony and bitterness, his voice "high and thin," calls Byron "the guardian of public weal and morality. The gainer, the inheritor of rewards" (p. 344). If Hightower is bitter, however, Faulkner is not—for Byron acts as a social and spiritual mediator for the reader. Alone among the townspeople, Byron does not excommunicate Hightower and he does not care whether Christmas is black or white. Byron not only exists outside his community, but beyond the social domain as well: he refuses to acknowledge or participate in social expectations and proscriptions.

In addition, Byron acts primarily out of compassion and love for Lena. Byron's stable and consistent and impelling attraction for
Lena is a cosmic force. Lena is literally one center of creation in the novel as a pregnant woman; but she also becomes the focus of Byron's creative energy that sustains his action. "'I done come too far now,' he says, 'I be dog if I'm going to quit now.' . . . 'Aint nobody never said for you to quit,' she says" (p. 479). Byron is a religious man in that special sense of the word I discussed earlier: he is trying, through his love for Lena, to "bind [or bunch] himself back" to the source of creation. Such a spiritual impulse evokes no violence within Byron; and unlike the other women in the novel, Lena is innocently capable of pleasure, of laughter, or wonder. Byron and Lena possess the power of spirituality that remains hidden, of religion that is not a manifest part of individual or social identity, that does not become a tool of social exclusion but rather a means of appropriating life.

*Light in August* remains a novel that focuses on Joe Christmas and explores the process by which the religious impulse becomes transformed into violence. Faulkner's narrative frame—Lena's slow advance, "like something moving forever and without progress across an urn" (p. 5)—is his "attic shape," his artistic container, the "silent form" of the Keats poem. The central narratives (of Christmas and Hightower) explore as explorations or interpretations of these lines from Keats:

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What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?
What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?
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Yet these questions are generated by the urn's surface only. The deeper paradox of the Keats poem is suggested by these lines:

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Bold lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
Though winning near the goal—yet do not grieve;
She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
Forever wilt thou love and she be fair.
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In the frozen circular tableau of the urn, Keats finds mad pursuit that will never gain the goal; struggle to escape that must always fail; yet beauty in the stasis of eternity—the goal and the struggle remain as life-supporting forces. Faulkner's novel contains no fair maidens, and is not concerned with the fading of female charm; but Faulkner derives the same level of truth from the stasis of struggle.54

Throughout *Light in August*, there are moments of conflict where time seems to stop momentarily and pursuer and pursued regard each other across a chasm. One such moment occurs when Byron
writes from a distance as Brown jumps the train: "They see one another at the same moment: the two faces, the mild, nondescript, bloody one and the lean, harried, desperate one contorted now in a soundless shouting above the noise of the train, passing one another as though on opposite orbits and with an effect as of phantoms or apparitions" (p. 417). Another occurs during Grimm's pursuit of Christmas: "For an instant they looked at one another almost face to face. . . . For an instant they glared at one another, the one stopped in the act of crouching for the leap, the other in midstride of running" (p. 437). The visual effect of these moments is like that produced by the urn, where pursuer and pursued seem to regard each other, or struggle with each other, without resolution. Then dramatic action begins again, and following these moments, conflict becomes externalized, actualized; and in imagination as well as in reality the pursuer and the pursued coalesce, in the same way that, for Hightower, Percy Grimm's and Joe Christmas's faces seem to blend into each other. The distance symbolized by the urn dissolves, the individuals become part of cosmic process, and in the juxtaposition of opposites, some release occurs.

Harold Kaplan writes,

The modern mind is dialectical to an extreme; it looks for division, it dramatizes opposition. For this emphasis, Faulkner's *Light in August* is a classic of the modern imagination as well as perhaps the most representative of his works. We have in it a series of oppositions which intensify drama to the point of freezing; hard blocks of force are held in arrest as if resolution could never come. The characters have almost allegorical simplicity of function in conflict, divided against each other and divided within themselves.55

The dynamic moments of the novel are Faulkner's attempts to explore the conflict between pursuer and pursued. This eternal struggle and conflict creates the effect of a closed circle for Christmas and Byron. Only in capture is the circle momentarily transcended on an individual basis. Thus violence acts to momentarily close the circle, as well as to creatively open it. At the surface, the pursuit is mighty and the resulting achievement is violence. At a greater distance, Lena keeps on moving across the urn, time is frozen, and the forces of birth and death, comedy and tragedy, become cosmic in scope. As Frank Baldanza points out, "Lena conducts the classic comic pursuit of her seducer just as relentlessly as nearly everyone else cooperates in the tragic pursuit of Joe. . . ."56 Thus the final resolution of the novel becomes bedtime entertainment for the furniture dealer's wife—and the situation is about to involve her more directly than she knows: "'I just showed you once. You aint ready to be showed again, are you?'" (p. 472).
In one sense, Hawthorne's marking and Melville's cetology have no technical analogues in *Light in August*; there is no single symbol or subject that a narrator pursues, mantra-like, to arrive at significance in the work. Byron Bunch comes close to narrating the novel, but there is always some other presence there to say "Byron Bunch knows this" (p. 27). Yet what Byron finally knows is no substitute for the omniscience of an Ishmael. Unlike Hawthorne's narrator of "The Custom-House," and unlike Ishmael, who both move towards narrative omniscience but who remain within the limits of allegorical and analogical method, Faulkner's narrator never emerges in *Light in August* as a force of control. The text itself in its narrative design bears the full burden of pointing meaning in the novel.

When Christmas accepts his position as a socially discredited individual, when he "floats on the margin" of the community, Faulkner demonstrates what happens when a society is unable to tolerate ambiguity. The absence of a conspicuous narrator in *Light in August* suggests Faulkner's view of the role of prose fiction in such a society: the novel must demonstrate what Keats termed "negative capability." Hawthorne's retreat into allegory and Melville's tragedy of temporary vision do not provide means for the individual to transcend social and metaphysical isolation. Only a novel such as *Light in August*, which can allow us never to know the truth of Christmas's identity, which can create a vision, Hightower's, which points no allegorical or analogical meaning, and which can set Byron and Lena in perpetual motion without bringing them to rest, can truly be said to have achieved that "negative capability," to have passed beyond the limits of marking or symbolizing in the creation of a fictional world.

Faulkner's subject, social stigma, is sociological; but it is true that, as some critics have stated, *Light in August* is not a sociological novel. Faulkner refuses to commit the crime he portrays. His very refusal to symbolize, to mark significance, to "stigmatize" his own characters, in effect, by making them carry allegorical burdens in addition to their historical and sociological ones, indicates the way in which American fiction can transcend its Puritan heritage. By refusing to insist on revealed meaning, the American narrator can counter our sociology with a vision of authentic community.

Notes

4. Ibid., p. 69.
6. See, for example, William Van O'Connor, *The Tangled Fire of William Faulkner* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1954), p. 72. Alwyn Berland, in "Light in August: The Calvinism of William Faulkner," *Modern Fiction Studies*, 8 (Summer 1962, pp. 159–70, writes that Calvinism "endures in Faulkner's style... . . . violent, tortured, doom-ridden, apocalyptic. It endures, more curiously, in Faulkner's treatment of time... . . . [It] is revealed in two other important ways in Light in August: first, in the recurring theme of vengeful and fatalistic pursuit; second, in the almost universal coupling of sex and love with sin and destruction" (pp. 167–68).
11. Cleanth Brooks supports this statement in "The Community and the Pariah," in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Light in August*, ed. David L. Minter (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969): "nearly all the characters in Light in August bear a special relation to the community. They are outcasts... . . . (p. 55). Pitavy writes, "In Light in August, the generally anonymous community is the background against which the essentially solitary people stand out... . . . (p. 113)."
12. William Faulkner, *Light in August* (New York: Random House, 1932), p. 44. All further references to this work in this chapter appear in the text.
13. Pitavy disagrees with this interpretation of Byron, stating: "nor is he cut off from community, since, although he lives alone, he leads the choir in a country church every week" (p. 36).
14. Concerning Lena's isolation from community, there are variant interpretations. Pitavy writes that "the community accepts Lena, who, in spite of her pregnancy, does not challenge the social order... . . ." (p. 109). Armstid's statement seems to contradict this. Cleanth Brooks states that Lena "leads a charmed life. Even the women who look upon her swollen body with evident disapproval press their small store of coins upon her, and the community in general rallies to help her" ("The Community and the Pariah," p. 57). Frank Baldanza, "The Structure of Light in August," *Modern Fiction Studies*, 113 (Spring 1967), to cite one example of the opposing view, writes: "Lena is isolated as a result of her indisguisably pregnant condition; but she is oblivious to the social disapproval of Mrs. Armstid and Mrs. Beard" (p. 70). My own view accords with Baldanza's.
15. Pitavy agrees here: "Joanna herself, devoted to the Negro cause, lives on the fringes of the community, just outside town, and the boys taunt her with the ultimate social insult: 'Nigger lover!'" (p. 108). John L. Longley, Jr., in *The Tragic Mask: A Study of Faulkner's Heroes* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1963), compares Hightower and Joanna Burden, interestingly, to Captain Ahab and Chillingworth as examples of "the tragedy of isolation" (p. 228). Olga Vickery's description of the two characters is most interesting of all. She says that they represent "the two remaining categories [Joe Christmas represents the first], one geographical and the other religious, in terms of which the South establishes its identity. The Negro, the Yankee, the Apostate—these are the key figures in a society which defines itself by exclusion" (The Novels of William Faulkner, p. 75).
16. Pitavy writes, "In the end, when they had done all that was expected of them in this closed society... . . . and Hightower still remained, they ignored him as a unit of society and, paradoxically, felt at liberty to offer charity to this pariah now living outside their order" (p. 109).
17. Baldanza, p. 70.
18. Vickery, p. 68.
19. Pitavy questions whether or not Joe actually killed his foster father (p. 26). He thinks he did, however; he implies as much to Mrs. McEachern and says to himself, while Bobbie watches Max beat him up, "Why, I committed murder for her" (Light in August, p. 204).
21. As Carl Benson writes, "we discover that he has been adopted by a sadistic Calvinist, whose rigorous exactions of religious duties seem to Joe but a continuation, in slightly different terms, of the harsh treatment of the orphanage" (p. 547).
22. Vickery writes: "In a sense, the individual and the community are obverse reflections of each other. Yet because the reflection is obverse, each fails to recognize himself, and so reacts with instinctive fear and anger which ultimately lead him to destroy his own image. In short, each is the victim of the other" (p. 67). And Irving Howe, William Faulkner (New York: Random House, 1962), comments: "Light in August is the most socially inflected of Faulkner's novels, sensitive to the limitations and distortions society imposes on human conduct. In none of his other books is there such a full rendering of the force of dead institutions and dead matter as they exact their tyranny upon men.... In Light in August, the limits of freedom are defined primarily through social co-ordinates, Christmas, in one important sense, being simply a function of his society ..." (pp. 211-12).
23. To recapitulate, Goffman defines stigma as the "situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance." He separates two characteristic and complementary patterns of stigma: "does the stigmatized individual assume his differentness is known about already or is evident on the spot, or does he assume it is neither known about by those present nor immediately perceivable by them? In the first case one deals with the plight of the discredited, in the second with that of the discreditable" (p. 4).
26. Pitavy says about the connections of chapter 5 with chapters 6 through 12: "it touches on the same themes and images as are expanded and loaded with significance in the following chapters, and second, ... it prepares the ground for the lengthy plunge into Christmas's past and explains its necessity" (p. 16).
27. Pitavy emphasizes that "Christmas is not lynched, but killed by Percy Grimm" (p. 2). However, Grimm acts as the symbol of the community; he acts so that they do not have to act. As Joseph W. Reed, Jr., Faulkner's Narrative (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), points out, "When community personality meets with the force of an abstract ideal in Percy Grimm, everyone can embrace it....—Grimm justifies their fears and at the same time can seem to represent a call to higher action, while still permitting them to retain their cherished modes of individual respectability and behavior. The macrocosm can become a whole by gaining in Grimm the will and force which they as individuals would never have known: with Grimm, the archetypal blind conscience, they can become as one for the pursuit of Christmas, the archetypal foe" (p. 134).
28. Referring to the entire passage in which this phrase appears, Reed comments interestingly, "The passage is a denunciation .... of the emptiness of man's usual workaday pursuits and the hypocritical excuse this emptiness provides for his madness in crowds. It is as bitter a reading of human motivation as is to be found in Faulkner, and it rules all of this book's prior references to community" (p. 137).
30. Pitavy, p. 94.
31. See chapter 2, note 25.
32. Swiggart, p. 145.
33. Ibid., p. 148.
34. Vickery, p. 74.
35. Swiggart writes: "Through his relation with the farmer, who is characterized by a Bible or catechism held in one hand and a strap in the other, Joe is given a taste of the expiating punishment for which he unconsciously yearns" (p. 132).


38. See Swiggart, p. 147.

39. Pitavy deals with this question in chapter 2 of Faulkner's Light in August and concludes, "the unity of the work and its meaning are the direct results of the much-maligned changeovers from plot to plot" (p. 45). Pitavy asserts that "Faulkner appears to be less able to show a character's evolution than to reveal gradually a character already complete in his imagination, and who only appears to grow because the reader gains deeper knowledge of him as time goes on" (p. 83). On the surface, this would seem to explain the effect Faulkner gains by waiting until chapter 20 to narrate much of Hightower's past. However, it becomes clear that Hightower himself does not understand his own past until after Christmas's death. Therefore, by narrating it in chapter 20, Faulkner implies that Hightower's understanding, itself, is part of the present narration and development of the character.

40. Vickery writes, concerning Hightower's aborted "lynching": "As if recognizing that he has no place in Jefferson, that indeed his dream-world is threatened by it, Hightower deliberately provokes the violence which will ensure his isolation" (p. 78). Swiggart emphasizes that Hightower accepted "with delight a mock 'crucifixion' at the hands of a town mob" (p. 142). However, the evidence in this quoted passage from the novel that might support the interpretation that Hightower incited his own mob does not appear until chapter 20, during Hightower's moments of self-confession and self-recognition. This suggests to me that Hightower's view of that past moment in the narrative present of chapter 20 accords with Swiggart's view, but I see no indication that Hightower knew then that he was enjoying his "mock crucifixion."


42. Faulkner said, "sooner or later any writer is going to use something that has been used. And that Christ story is one of the best stories that man has ever invented, assuming that he did invent that story, and of course it will recur. Everyone that has had the story of Christ and the Passion as a part of his Christian background will in time draw from that. There was no deliberate intent to repeat it. That to me the people come first. The symbolism comes second" (Faulkner in the University, p. 117).


45. Ibid., p. 104.

46. See Lind, p. 224.

47. Carl Benson, "Thematic Design in Light in August," South Atlantic Quarterly, 53 (October 1954), talks about "the use and abuse of religion as related to the maintenance of community solidarity" (p. 552). William Van O'Connor writes, "Certainly it is mark of his genius that Faulkner can develop the terrible irony that it is out of the religion itself that the lynching comes ..." (p. 86). And Pitavy states, "Light in August appears as a terrible denunciation of a religion which preaches the opposite of truth and the forgiveness of sins. ... In fact, religion as it is seen in Light in August becomes an incitement to kill" (p. 116).

49. Lind, p. 328.

50. In Faulkner in the University, Faulkner said that Hightower "didn't die... He had to endure, to live" and that he still had "the memory of his grandfather, who had been brave" (p. 75). On the question of whether Hightower dies, Pitavy writes in a footnote, "this is a vexed question. Ten or more critics agree that Hightower does in fact die. ... Faulkner said that Hightower did not die. ... However, does it really matter whether he dies or not? Neither supposition affects the character's conception or the overall impression of the book ..." (p. 162). Among the critics who state that he dies are Beach Langston, "The Meaning of Lena Grove and Gail Hightower," and Carl Benson, "Thematic Design in Light in August." Benson calls chapter 20 "the magnificent penultimate chapter—a chapter which, despite its strategic position and rhetorical splendor, has been generally neglected" (p. 543).
Dorothy Tuck, *Apollo Handbook of Faulkner* (New York: Crowell, 1964), supports my own interpretation. She writes: "Although there is no assurance that Hightower will now actively seek involvement with the living, or that he will no longer wait for the ghost-visited moment at twilight, his recognition of what he has been is a triumphantly positive achievement in which he gains stature as a kind of tragic figure rising from the shadows of an empty life" (p. 53).

51. See Langston.

52. He had attended the American Martyrs High School in Los Angeles and had learned this formulation from the priests there.

53. Olga Vickery supports the idea that Lena is not interested in finding a place in the community: "What she is looking for is security not respectability. Once Byron assumes this responsibility, she shows no great haste to marry and so to remove the social stigma from herself and her child" (p. 80).

54. For further comments on the relationship between the Keats poem and Faulkner's urn image, see Norman Holmes Pearson, "Lena Grove," *Shenandoah*, 3 (Spring 1952), pp. 3–7, or the excerpt from Pearson included in Minter, ed., *Twentieth Century Interpretations*.


56. Baldanza, p. 70.

57. See, for example, O'Connor, p. 84, or Pitavy, p. 56.