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THE FUNCTION OF CHRISTIAN SYMBOLISM IN WILLIAM FAULKNER

by

Eleanor Marianne Lang

A THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Faculty

of Lehigh University

in Candidacy for the Degree of

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

This thesis is accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

September 17, 1964
(date)

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ABSTRACT

Literary critics confronted with the problem of Christian symbolism in Faulkner's novels will assume a position only at the extremes of the difficulty. Either they enthusiastically delineate and support the Christian symbols, or they vehemently reject or ignore such approaches to Faulkner's work.

My thesis is that Faulkner has used Christian symbolism as a chart against which man could measure himself and as "a matchless example of suffering and sacrifice and the promise of hope." This symbolism works within the novels as an expression of Faulkner's basic perception of the irreconcilable duality and ambiguity of the human situation, which he sees as somewhere between good and evil, despair and hope, salvation and damnation, crucifixion and resurrection. In developing my thesis I have made an accounting of the parallels to and the digressions from the Christ-story in the three Faulkner novels which exhibit the fullest development of Faulkner's use of Christian symbolism, The Sound and the Fury, Light in August, and A Fable.

Faulkner's time structure of The Sound and the Fury around the days of the culmination of Christ's passion serves as an immediate indication that we are to read his story in terms of crucifixion and resurrection. Critics have found as many as four Christ-figures in the novel but only one character maintains a continuous identification with Christ and that is Benjy. Benjy, in his role as victim, is crucified on the Compson cross of utter selfishness. But he is not solely victim. He is also the potential source of redemption for

the Compsons. Compassion toward Benjy is a way to human salvation in Faulkner's eyes. Faulkner has made Benjy "one of the least of these" and in the end it is only Dilsey who recognizes Christ in the idiot.

Mindful of the theme of religion in Light in August, it is perfectly organic that Faulkner should portray the Christ of that Christianity he is condemning. Joe Christmas is that Christ, and he is a shattering indictment. But it is equally important to recognize Lena as a kind of Virgin Mary and her son as another hope-filled Christ. Faulkner affirms as well as denounces various aspects of Calvinistic belief and practice. Lena's son is the Christ of that affirmation.

The Christ-parallels in A Fable seem obvious, but upon further examination prove to function only as a secondary tool which Faulkner has used to structure his novel. Although Faulkner's heavy imposition of a Christ-pattern becomes, at times, a tour de force, his use of Christian symbolism does have a positive value in helping to communicate his main theme of the duality and ambiguity of existence.

Faulkner's use of Christian symbolism does not make him a Christian writer. Indeed, his use of Christian symbolism is an indication of the limitations of his view of existence. Within the limits of his vision, Faulkner's use of Christian symbolism is totally organic, but only because he has reduced that symbolism from the level of belief to the level of myth. Such a reduction works because the heart and center of the story he tells is not the coming of Christ, but the coming of man.

CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM OF CHRISTIAN SYMBOLISM IN FAULKNER

It is curious to observe that literary critics confronted with the problem of Christian symbolism in Faulkner's novels will assume a position only at the extremes of the difficulty. Either they enthusiastically delineate and support the Christian symbols, or they vehemently reject or remain disdainfully aloof from what Cleanth Brooks terms "symbol-mongering."[1] Though it is true that the analysis of these symbols has, in certain instances, wandered into the realm of the ridiculous (Brooks' citation of the Stewart and Backus "symbolically appropriate" discovery that Benjy has committed incest with Caddy is a good example[2]), it is also true that a great many of these symbolic findings have a firm basis in the text and also in the total context of the novel and cannot be ignored. When Beach Langston writes that Lena Grove's faded blue garment indicates that Lena is a symbol for the Virgin Mary,[3] our first impulse is to shout "Symbol-mongering!" But when we consider the care with which Faulkner has endowed Lena with so many of the other characteristics of the Mother of Christ, we should, I think, ponder the problem more thoroughly.

Serious critical consideration of any symbolic levels in Faulkner must trace its descent from George Marion O'Donnell's influential 1939 essay, "Faulkner's Mythology."[4] Despite his overly categorical approach, he demonstrated that Faulkner can be

read symbolically. Since then, a small but steady stream of studies has been concerned with an analysis of the Christian symbolism in the various novels. Notable among these studies are those by Carvel Collins,[5] Sumner C. Powell,[6] and Lawrence E. Bowling[7] on The Sound and the Fury, the extensive work by C. Hugh Holman[8] and Beekman Cottrell[9] on Light in August, and Malcolm Cowley's initial delineation of the Christ-story parallels in A Fable.[10] Hyatt Waggoner, in his book William Faulkner: From Jefferson To The World, is also sympathetic to the presence of Christian symbolism in Faulkner's works.[11]

Such views, however, remain a minority opinion, partially because the case for Faulkner's Christian symbolism has been jeopardized by the occasional extremism of its advocates. Those who attack or ignore the Christian symbolist critics seize upon such items as an excuse for denying the existence of valid claims for a genuine and ordered symbolic design in Faulkner that is based upon the Christian myth. For instance, Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga Vickery reject a view of Gail Hightower as a Pontius Pilate-figure because Cottrell makes the mistake of presenting obscure etymological data as proof for his premise, but they ignore completely the other solid and readily discernible textual proof Cottrell advances to support his basic contention.[12] It is a case of not seeing the forest because of the trees.

But this is only part of the reason Faulkner's use of Christian symbolism has been ignored. The real problem lies in an inherent

unwillingness to see the Christ-story as anything other than the basis of religious belief. But the Christ-story belongs not only to the churches and the faithful, but also to all of western culture. Once we can accept Faulkner's use of the Christian myth as a legitimate literary device, we will be able to perceive a further richness in the design of Faulkner's novels, a symbolic richness which functions organically in communicating his vision of the human condition.

Faulkner himself has testified to this organic use of Christian symbolism in his novels. At the University of Virginia he said:

> . . . that Christ story is one of the best stories that man has invented, assuming that he did invent that story, and of course it will recur. Everyone that has had the story of Christ and the Passion as a part of his Christian background will in time draw from that. There was no deliberate intent to repeat it. That the people to me come first. The symbolism comes second.[13]

And in his interview with Jean Stein for the Paris Review he gave the following account of his aim and method:

> Interviewer: Can an artist use Christianity simply as just another tool, as a carpenter would borrow a hammer?
> Faulkner: The carpenter we are speaking of never lacks that hammer. No one is without Christianity, if we agree on what we mean by the word. It is every individual's code of behavior by means of which he makes himself a better human being than his nature wants to

> be, if he followed his nature only. Whatever its symbol--cross or crescent or whatever--that symbol is man's reminder of his duty inside the human race. Its various allegories are the charts against which he measures himself and learns to know what he is . . . It shows him how to discover himself, evolve for himself a moral code and standard within his capacities and aspirations, by giving him a matchless example of suffering and sacrifice and the promise of hope.[14]

My thesis is that Faulkner has used Christian symbolism in the manner he described, as a chart against which man could measure himself and as "a matchless example of suffering and sacrifice and the promise of hope." This symbolism works within the novels as an expression of Faulkner's basic perception of the irreconcilable duality and ambiguity of the human situation, which he sees as somewhere between good and evil, despair and hope, salvation and damnation, crucifixion and resurrection.

The implementation of this thesis involves certain limitations and criteria. First, this discussion of Christian symbolism is limited to parallels between Faulkner's characters and the people in the Christ story and will not be concerned with the symbolic potential of water, fire, and the like. Secondly, the criteria which shall be used to determine acceptance or rejection of a Christ-parallel will depend solely on an unmistakable identification such as name or age or circumstances of birth or manner of death which possess an indisputable parallel to the same event in Christ's life. Thus, Dilsey is certainly Christ-like, but it is to Benjy that

Faulkner has given the age of thirty-three. According to this criteria, then, Benjy is a Christ-figure and Dilsey is not. It will then be necessary to distinguish the degree of parallel, that is, whether Faulkner's use of Christian symbolism is only a suggestion or whether it is part of a consistent attempt throughout the novel to project meaning. If it is more than a temporary buttress, its function at its point of occurrence in the novel and its connection to the novel as a whole will then be examined. The final question will be how the use of Christian symbolism satisfies Faulkner's stated aim of "a chart" and "a matchless example."

Although the matter of Christian symbolism can be fruitfully pursued through a number of Faulkner's novels, I have limited my study to The Sound and the Fury, Light in August, and A Fable because of all the novels these three demonstrate the fullest development of Faulkner's use of Christian symbolism.

CHAPTER 2

CHRISTIAN SYMBOLISM IN THE SOUND AND THE FURY

It was not until twenty years after the publication of The Sound and the Fury in 1929 that any critical attention was paid to the Christian symbolism in the novel. Sumner C. Powell[1] in the 1949 volume of Perspective was the first to consider the problem seriously and draw thematic implications from his findings. But not until 1957 were the specific parallels traced with thoroughness by Carvel Collins,[2] with enough thoroughness, in fact, to unearth not one Christ-figure, but three. In 1958 Lawrence E. Bowling[3] drew further useful conclusions from his tracing of the Christ-pattern, although a few of the parallels he perceives are open to question. William Mueller's[4] chapter on The Sound and the Fury in his book The Prophetic Voice in Modern Fiction adds yet another candidate to the growing list of Christ-figures in this novel. Finally, in 1959, Hyatt Waggoner's[5] book on Faulkner accepts Benjy's Christ-figure status as certain and essential to an understanding of the novel. Such an opinion is, however, a great distance from universal acceptance. In 1960 Walter Slatoff[6] considered analysis of the Christian symbolism in the novel more confusing than illuminating. Cleanth Brooks'[7] recent volume on Faulkner does not even mention the existence of the problem.

The obvious indications Faulkner gives us that we should look for some manner of Christ-pattern are the dates he assigns as headings for three of the novel's four chapters. In 1928 those

dates, April 6, 7, and 8, fell on Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday. But precisely how this frame of time reference is to be applied is a matter of some disagreement among the critics. An examination and evaluation of the claims made for the four Christ-figures in the novel will be useful before attempting to determine how that Christian symbolism functions in The Sound and the Fury.

Walter Mueller advances several solid reasons for considering Dilsey the true Christ-figure in the novel. The core of his argument centers upon the Suffering Servant passage in Issaiah. Because this passage has relevance not only to this discussion of The Sound and the Fury but also to the following chapter on Light in August, extended quotation is in order.

> . . . he hath no form nor comliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.
> He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.
> Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.
> But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised to our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.
> All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.
> He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep

> before her shearers dumb, so he openeth
> not his mouth.
> He was taken from prison and from judg-
> ment: and who shall declare his generation?
> for he was cut off out of the land of the
> living: for the transgression of my people
> was he stricken.
> And he made his grave with the wicked,
> and with the rich in his death; because he
> had done no violence, neither was any deceit
> in his mouth.
> Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he
> hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make
> his soul an offering for sin, he shall see
> his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the
> pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his
> hand.
>
> (Isaiah 53:2-10)

The parallels between Dilsey and the Suffering Servant (and, according to Mueller, parrallels to Christ by inference, since the servant in Isaiah was one of His precursors)[8] are extensive. Her appearance is less than comely:

> She had been a big woman once but now her skeleton rose, draped loosely in unpadded skin that tightened again upon a paunch almost dropsical, as though muscle and tissue had been courage or fortitude which the days or the years had consumed until only the indomitable skeleton was left rising like a ruin or a landmark above the somnolent and impervious huts, and above that the collapsed face that gave the impression of the bones themselves being outside the flesh, lifted into the driving day with an expression at once fatalistic and of a child's astonished disappointment . . . (p. 282)[9]

She bears the griefs and sorrows of all the Compsons, who have indeed "gone astray" and "have turned every one to his own way." As Mueller

has phrased it, Dilsey "is forever picking up the responsibilities which others drop."[10]

But though Dilsey possesses many of the characteristics of the Suffering Servant, it should be remembered that the Suffering Servant is not Christ but only a precursor of Christ. Dilsey is truly Christ-like in spirit through her undeviating devotion to the Compsons and especially to Benjy, but nowhere does Faulkner endow her with any tangible similarity to Christ through age or name, birth or death.

Carvel Collins expounds a rather convincing argument in favor of regarding Quentin, Jason, and Benjy all as Christ-figures, stating that they amalgamate at the symbolic level of Freudian interpretation into one son. He finds that such an interpretation proposes a helpful ordering of the chapters. Thus, Quentin's section is dated Thursday and parallels portions of Christ's actions on Holy Thursday. Jason's section is dated Good Friday, and he experiences events similar to those of Christ on Good Friday. And in Benjy's section, which falls on Holy Saturday, Collins discovers some remarkably illuminating parallels to liturgical symbols. Finally, Collins finds that the fourth section of the novel, which bears the date of Easter Sunday, has within it a parallel between what happens to the Compson family that day and the events that occurred on the first Easter. On both days there is the discovery of an empty room which contains discarded garments.

The parallels between Quentin's section and the New Testament story include both a Last Supper and a Gethsemane. As Collins notes, the picnic which Quentin goes on with Shreve and Spoade and the girls includes a hamper of wine (p. 166). When he leaves the picnic, he shares his bread with a little Italian girl. Together these two events constitute a kind of Last Supper for Quentin since it is on that evening that he commits suicide. Collins also observes that a large part of this section is devoted to Quentin's remembered conversation with his father, in which he asks him to recognize his incest with Caddy. On Holy Thursday night, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Christ also called upon His Father in anguish. Moreover, Quentin is set upon by the mob of angry Italians much as Christ was arrested by a crowd in Gethsemane. And both Christ and Quentin are arraigned before the law and subsequently die.

The parallels Collins draws between Jason's section and the Friday of the Passion are also of great interest. On the first Good Friday Christ's mother follows all His suffering. It is in this Jason section that Mrs. Compson is most in evidence. Jason also has his Magdalen in the person of his Memphis woman. Collins has also unearthed the fact that Jason's name not only relates him to the seeker of the Golden Fleece, but also was used for "Jesus" by the Hellenized Jews. There is, above all, the fact that Jason begins his cotton speculation at noon on Friday and is financially annihilated by his Jewish brokers at three that afternoon and the fact that Jason Compson bears the same initials as Jesus Christ.

Although Collins acknowledges the variances between Quentin and Jason and Christ, he does not give these variances the significance they deserve. It is more than inversion; it is a matter of violent digression for the sake of ironic indictment. There is, for example, nothing eucharistic about Quentin's last supper. The bread and wine do not give life to him, for he has already determined to take his life into his own hands and destroy it. In his Gethsemane dialogue with his father, as Collins has observed, he is not requesting freedom from impending agony, but rather he is begging his father to let him suffer the consequences of the charge of incest with Caddy. In the end he embraces death in self-pity as a cowardly escape from his anguish. Christ asked His Father to let this cup pass from Him, but, obedient to His Father's will, He gave Himself to be crucified in order that mankind might be redeemed. On the day of his death Quentin engages in the same actions as Christ, but in his trembling hands these actions are devoid of any strengthening power. Unwilling to rise above the decay of his family, he chooses instead to pervert his will-power. Under the guise of predestination or fatality, he uses his acquiescence to despair as an excuse to escape responsibility for his actions.

Jason's section makes equally flagrant digressions from the parallels it contains to the Christ-story. The self-pitying, self-righteous, and selfish Caroline Compson could not be more antithetical to the courage, humility, and love that characterized the

Virgin Mary. But the greatest digression of all lies in Faulkner's use of time parallels between Jason's cotton speculation and Christ's agony and death on the Cross. The irony here is enormous and rather appalling. The juxtaposition of Christ's crucifixion with Jason's financial crucifixion enforces as no other symbol could the focus of Jason's worship.

Though both Quentin's and Jason's actions find definite parallels in the Christ-story, it cannot be said that either of them is really a Christ-figure. The reader, conscious of Faulkner's choice of Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday as his frame of time reference, is not surprised that Faulkner should deliberately contrast the selfishness and decay of the Compson family with the love and life-imparting qualities of the New Testament story. But several momentary allusions do not constitute a Christ-figure. Faulkner has simply used this method of juxtaposition to underscore his major theme of love and the lack of love. As Collins has observed, " . . . God's Son passed through the events of the Passion and rose as a redeemer; the Compson sons pass through parallel events but go down in failure. And they do so because love, which Christ preached as an eleventh commandment, is lacking or frustrated or distorted in their family."[11]

There is, however, strong evidence that Faulkner wished Benjy to be considered a Christ-figure. Faulkner not only makes him thirty-three on Holy Saturday, but also emphasizes the fact by

having Dilsey give him a birthday party. Powell notes also that Christmas is apparently mentioned during talk of the birthday for no other reason than to make a link between Benjy's birth and that of Christ. And Dilsey tells Benjy, "You's de Lawd's chile . . ." (p. 333). Mueller has noted that Mrs. Compson's dread of Christmas, coupled with her thinly disguised distaste for her idiot son, heightens this link between the two birthdays.

Collins has traced the closest parallels between Benjy's section and the corresponding events in the New Testament and in the Easter liturgy. His section bears the date of Holy Saturday, 1928, the aniversary of the day on which Christ descended into hell. Benjy exists in a mental and emotional hell because of his idiocy, a hell intensified by the cruelty and neglect of most of the Compsons and alleviated only by Caddy and Dilsey. Collins also observes that Benjy's birthday candles are reminiscent of the Paschal Candle that is lighted on Holy Saturday from the new fire that is kindled in ritual. The fascination that fire holds for Benjy is emphasized repeatedly throughout the novel.[12]

Powell has called attention to further general parallels between Benjy and Christ. Both are innocent. Benjy, incapable of reason, is incapable of sin. Christ also was without sin. Also, both Benjy and Christ suffer intensely and are wholly undeserving of the anguish they endure. Mueller has observed the extensive parallels between Benjy and the Suffering Servant of Isaiah. Benjy is also without comeliness. He is, in fact, almost repulsive. He was

> a big man who appeared to have been shaped of some substance whose particles would not or did not cohere to one another or to the frame which supported it. His skin was dead looking and hairless; dropsical too, he moved with a shambling gait like a trained bear. His hair was pale and fine. It has been brushed smoothly down upon his brow like that of children in daguerrotypes. His eyes were clear, of the pale sweet blue of cornflowers, his thick mouth hung open, drooling a little. (p. 290)

He is indeed despised and rejected by all except Dilsey and Caddy. Mrs. Compson, in particular, hides her face from the sight of her idiot son. The irony of the truth Mrs. Compson unconsciously speaks when she complains that Benjy's idiocy is "a judgment on me" (p. 25) finds a further parallel in Isaiah: " . . . and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." Benjy is also a man of sorrows. He spends a majority of his time howling because things are not in their ordered place around him. The fact that Jason has him castrated harks back to the lines in Isaiah about the servant who is brought "as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers dumb . . ." Benjy is indeed dumb,[3] for he cannot speak and is capable of only incomprehensible babbling. Thus, these parallels to the Suffering Servant, coupled with the identifying marks of a kind of Christ, further strengthens a view of Benjy as a Christ-figure. Of all the Compson household, only Benjy is the truly innocent victim.

But despite the parallels between Benjy and Christ, one is continually conscious of the great digressions from those parallels

that often loom larger than the similarities. The greatest of these digressions is, of course, Benjy's idiocy, which is the source of his innocence. The efficacy of Christ's suffering was predicated upon His willing and conscious acquiescence to His Father's will. Benjy, however, is a victim who is deprived even of assent to his sufferings because of his lack of mentality. There is, moreover, the matter of Benjy's castration, which also sets him apart from Christ. Also, Benjy does not suffer an actual crucifixion, and the hell he lives in has no redeeming effects for the Compson household.

It is evident, then, that although Benjy resembles Christ in some ways, he is radically Christ's opposite in many other aspects. I propose that both the parallels to and the digressions from the Christ-story form a functional pattern within the novel. It is a pattern that complements the major function of Benjy as a Christ-figure, which is, as Powell has noted, to deliver a judgment on the Compson family for their sins.

This indictment is placed side by side with the role of Dilsey as an ethical norm, a role Olga Vickery has recognized and defined as "the realizing and acting out of one's humanity."[13] And, as she observes, it is from this norm that the Compsons have deviated, each into his separate world. Christ once said, " . . . where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." The respective treasures of each member of the Compson household fully indicate where their hearts are. Mr. Compson's heart is with cynicism and the

oblivion brought on by drink. Mrs. Compson gives her highest regard to her false pride and neurotic self-pity. Quentin treasures his misplaced sense of honor and his thoughts of despair and self-destruction. Jason hoards the money he has stolen from his niece. Caddy ultimately chooses promiscuity over her love for Benjy. All that Benjy has to treasure are order and pleasing sensations such as firelight. Only Dilsey's treasure lies in the realm of the supernatural, in her belief in "de blood en de ricklickshun of de Lamb" (p. 313), and in her reward, which is to be gained only through compassion for others.

Faulkner's time structure of the novel around the days of the culmination of Christ's passion indicates that we are to read his story in terms of crucifixion and resurrection. Bowling has perceived that Benjy's birthday falls neither on Good Friday nor on Easter Sunday, but on the Saturday between Good Friday and Easter Sunday, a fact which suggests that Benjy is a paradoxical symbol pointing two ways. For Bowling, Benjy symbolizes not only the Crucifixion (the world's sin) but also the Resurrection (its possible redemption).[14] Benjy has indeed been crucified on the Compson cross of utter selfishness. But as a Christ-figure he is not solely victim. He is also the potential source of redemption for the Compsons. According to Waggoner, all the other characters in the book are finally judged in terms of their feelings and actions toward Benjy. Compassion toward Benjy is a way to human salvation in Faulkner's eyes. Caddy, despite her other failings, becomes affirmative through

her love for Benjy. And Luster, in spite of the little torments he inflicts on Benjy, also qualifies as more or less compassionate. But it is only Dilsey who is totally committed to a Christian compassion. Bowling has drawn several telling interpretations of this compassionate way to salvation from the Negro minister's Easter sermon. He notes that just as Faulkner places Benjy's birthday between Good Friday and Easter Sunday, so the Negro preacher places the Flood between the Crucifixion and the Resurrection. The Negro preacher sees the Flood as God's punishment on the people because they killed Jesus. The preacher's placement of the Flood between the Crucifixion and the Resurrection is in error historically, but Bowling observes that it is symbolically correct for Faulkner's view of the modern world, which has also killed Jesus and suffers from spiritual darkness. But the preacher still finds hope for redemption, and Bowling perceives that those who see and believe can, according to the preacher, crack the doom and achieve glory. According to Bowling, Faulkner implies that "the way to salvation is through love, through the exercise of pity and compassion and sacrifice, through spiritual communication and communion with something outside and beyond the self."[15]

This brings us to the final way in which Benjy functions as a Christ-figure. Christ described the Last Judgment in these words:

> And before him shall be gathered all nations:
> and he shall separate them one from another,

> as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats:
> And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.
> Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:
> For I was hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:
> Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick and ye visited me: I was in prison and ye came unto me.
> Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee hungred and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? . . .
> . . . .
> And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren ye have done it unto me.
>
> (Matthew 25:32-37, 40)

Surely Benjy is "one of the least of these." And in the end it is only Dilsey who recognizes Christ in the idiot son. It is a recognition which Faulkner has indicated he wants the reader to experience also.

CHAPTER 3

CHRISTIAN SYMBOLISM IN LIGHT IN AUGUST

Several highly respected voices have discounted any view of Joe Christmas as a Christ-figure in Light in August (first published in 1932). Cleanth Brooks relegates the matter to a footnote[1] and supports this dismissal by affirming William Lamont's discovery that Joe is actually thirty-six and not thirty-three when he dies.[2] Richard Rovere, in his introduction to the Modern Library edition of Light in August, thinks that Faulkner began with some sort of connection between Christmas and Christ, but he does not believe "there is much profit, except for those critics who may be professionally concerned with tracking down all sources in Faulkner, in exploring the matter very deeply or in using it to interpret the novel."[3] Irving Howe believes that one could "remove the several cloudy suggestions that Christmas is some sort of Christ-figure, and it would hardly matter . . ."[4] Sean O'Faolain finds Faulkner's use of symbol "entirely capricious"[5] and an invalid method for obtaining an "inflation of theme."[6]

I should first like to refute Howe's contention with a full accounting of all the parallels between Light in August and the story of Christ. I then wish to propose that the many digressions Faulkner has made from these parallels do not obviate the unalterable existence of those parallels, that, instead, the parallels and digressions to and from the Christ story comprise a coherent pattern that can be used to interpret the novel.

C. Hugh Holman[7] and Beekman Cottrell[8] have pursued the matter of Christian symbolism with the greatest degree of thoroughness. It will be useful to attempt a synthesis of their findings in order to have a clear basis from which to discuss the function of Christian symbolism in Light in August.

The parallels between Christ and Joe Christmas apply most closely to the circumstances surrounding Joe's birth, early childhood, and death. Both are the sons of unmarried mothers. Joe bears the name of Christ's foster father. Joe's last name is that of the feast of Christ's birth, and he has the initials JC. When Joe is five years old, his grandfather steals him from the orphanage at night in a futile attempt to keep him from placement in a Negro orphanage. As Alwyn Berland has noted, this incident has a certain similarity to the flight into Egypt by the Holy Family to save the Christ Child from Herod's soldiers.[9] Joe acquires a foster father, in the person of Simon McEachern. For Cottrell, the name Simon suggests that "for a time at least he and Christmas walk side by side in unspoken understanding. Simon McEachern is the type, the rock upon which the puritan, evangelical church of Yoknapatawpha County is based."[10] The name Simon also enhances a different interpretation than has hitherto been given to the action of Mrs. McEachern's washing Joe's feet when he first enters the house. Richard Chase was the first to observe the symbolic property of the washing of the feet,[11] an observation seconded by Cottrell

and Holman with the inference that the parallel is to Christ's washing the feet of his disciples at the Last Supper. Such a view, however, would put Mrs. McEachern in the position of a Christ, a position which has no possible value to recommend it. Another more satisfactory parallel would be to Luke vii:38, in which it is related that Christ, upon entering the home of Simon, the Pharisee, had his feet washed with the tears of Mary Magdalen.

When he is eight years old, Joe refuses to learn the Presbyterian catechism, despite the beatings inflicted upon him by McEachern. He thinks to himself, "On this day I became a man."[12] Holman sees a parallel between McEachern's Calvinistic order and the Pharisaic order encountered by Christ. He views Joe's refusal to learn the catechism as similar to Christ's rejection of the Old Law in favor of His Own Gospel. Christ was thrust from the synagogue at Nazareth and threatened with death when He declared His New Law for the first time. Joe is denied food and beaten because he rejects McEachern's Pharisaic morality.

Holman perceives that Joe, like Christ, is tempted three times, by Mrs. McEachern's food, by the Negro girl when he is fourteen, and by McEachern's offer of the heifer. The rejection of the food and the girl satisfies the conditions for temptation, but the offer of the heifer does not. Although Joe consciously reflects, "'I didn't ask for it. He gave it to me. I didn't ask for it'" (p. 158), he nevertheless accepts the heifer from McEachern. If the offer

is a temptation, the acceptance becomes tantamount to yielding to that temptation, and to yield would be to break the Christ pattern that Faulkner is evidently attempting to establish here. Rather, the third temptation resides in Joe's refusal, despite the whippings, to learn the Presbyterian catechism, thus rejecting the formal expression of the Pharisaic code by which McEachern lives. According to Holman, Joe's trip into town and the restaurant constitutes an initiation into the world, "the restaurant being a kind of carnal temple and Bobby and its owners being priests of that world."[13] A parallel to this event is Christ's first initiation into the world in which He would live when He remained to teach in the temple while Mary and Joseph searched for Him. Supporting evidence for Holman's interpretation may be found in Faulkner's description of the restaurant, in which Max has a "monklike face" (p. 169), Mame "like a carved lioness guarding a portal" (p. 152) becomes a kind of idol, and Joe and Bobbie face each other "a little like they were praying" (p. 156). When McEachern discovers them at a dance together, Joe attacks him in a violent outburst of his accumulated religious hatred.

We have only a vague idea of what transpires in the middle period of the lives of both Christ and Joe. We see them clearly again only for the three years immediately preceding their respective deaths. Joe's public life begins when he first comes to Jefferson. Faulkner has placed this section of the action at the beginning of his novel, thus giving particular emphasis to Byron's

observation about Joe Christmas: "a man's name, which is supposed to be just the sound for who he is, can be somehow an augur of what he will do, if other men can only read the meaning in time" (p. 29). Placed as it is early in the novel, this line of Byron's would appear to be an obvious way in which Faulkner is saying that, if the reader can read the meaning in time, the pattern of the Christ-figure will be evident throughout the novel. Further Christ-parallels in this passage point in the same direction. As Holman has observed, Joe is a stranger, as Christ was. Christ had nowhere to lay His head. For Joe, "no town nor city was his, no street, no walls, no square of earth his home" (p. 27). Joe's private life is described as being hidden "behind the veil, the screen" (p. 31) of his job at the mill, just as the sacramental life of Christ is hidden behind a tabernacle veil or screen. As Cottrell points out, Joe spends some time working with wood, as Christ worked in the carpentry shop of his foster father, Saint Joseph. Joe also at this time acquires a partner in the person of Brown, and Faulkner refers to them specifically as "master" and "disciple" (p. 39). This disciple also betrays the master. Three years later, because she tried to make him pray, Joe kills Joanna Burden in a third instance of that religious hatred which has previously motivated his refusal to learn the Presbyterian catechism and his attack on McEachern.

The events of the week following Joe's murder of Joanna Burden closely parallel the events of the week of Christ's Passion and Death. Joe is betrayed by his "disciple" Brown for $1,000, just

as Christ was betrayed by his disciple Judas for thirty pieces of silver. Holman sees a parallel also between Joe driving out the worshippers at a Negro church with a table leg and Christ casting the buyers and sellers out of the temple at Jerusalem. However, Holman contends that Joe terrorizes the Negro service on the Tuesday of his week of flight, the same day of Holy Week on which Christ cleansed the temple. But since there is no mention in the gospels of the day of the week on which Christ did cleanse the temple, this portion of the parallel would be without foundation. The day of the week and the event are both parallel in the matter of the Last Supper and the mysterious dinner which appears before Joe. Both of these events occur on a Thursday and take place in the home of a 'brother.' It is on Thursday night that Joe feels strangely compelled to calculate the day of the week because "it was as though now and at last he had an actual urgent need to strike off the accomplished days toward some purpose, some definite day or act, without either falling short or overshooting" (p. 293). That intense need is to give himself up when he discovers that it is Friday. He heads straight for Mottstown: " . . . his direction is straight as a surveyor's line . . . 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. 295). In much the same manner, Christ went to the Garden of Gethsemane knowing that He would be betrayed and arrested there. Joe's actions also imitate those of Christ in his refusal

to deny his identity. When Joe is recognized in Mottstown, Halliday asks him, "'Ain't your name Christmas?' and the nigger said that it was. He never denied it. He never did anything" (p. 306). When the Sanhedrin asked Jesus if He was the Christ, Christ answered, "I am." Halliday and Doc Hines both hit Joe in the face as Christ was struck about the face by Pilate's soldiers. And, as Holman observes, Joe's grandfather, Doc Hines, assumes the role that the Pharisees played in the mob that urged Pilate to crucify Christ. Both shout, "Kill him. Kill him" (p. 302). As Joe is led from the Mottstown jail to the car which will take him to Jefferson, Mrs. Hines makes her way to the front of the crowd and looks at Joe. This is very like the meeting of Christ and His Mother which oral tradition tells us took place on the way to Calvary. Holman perceives, too, that Joe is moved from Mottstown to Jefferson, another legal jurisdiction, and that the Mottstown sheriff yields his responsibility happily. Pilate was likewise relieved to move Christ to Herod's jurisdiction. Also, Grimm's American Legion platoon gamble while they are guarding Joe in Mottstown, as the Roman soldiers gambled over Christ's garments while they guarded the crucified Christ on Golgotha. Joe's break for freedom also has an analogy to Christ. Cottrell believes the parallel is to be found in Christ's words, spoken from the cross, "'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?'" A much closer parallel can be found in Christ's words in the Garden of Gethsemane,

"'O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.'" When Joe escapes from the sheriff and runs to Hightower's house, Grimm shoots him five times, just as Christ sustained five wounds during His Passion. Cottrell has noted a possible parallel between the mutilating of Joe by Grimm and the Roman soldier's piercing of Christ's side. There is, finally, a parallel between the way "someone covered all five shots with a folded handkerchief" (p. 406), and the manner in which Christ's Body was covered with a shroud.

Other characters in Light in August contribute to this pattern of Christian symbolism that refers predominantly to Joe Christmas. The parallels between Lena and the Virgin Mary lay the most insistent and also the most indisputable claims to critical consideration. As Cottrell has noted, both travel a great distance to a strange place in order that their sons might be born there. Both give birth in humble surroundings on the outskirts of town. As Beach Langston has observed, Faulkner tells us six times in the first chapter that Lena is dressed in blue, the traditional color for Mary. There is the additional matter of Mrs. Hines' and, subsequently, Lena's confusion of the birth of her child with the birth of Joe Christmas, thus giving Lena's newborn son aspects of a Christ-figure additional to those which accrue to him by virtue of his mother's identification with the Virgin Mary. This view of Lena as Mary and her child as a kind of Christ-figure finds

further support in the characterization of Byron Bunch as Saint Joseph. Both Byron and Joseph are workers in wood. Both are willing to marry and care for an expectant mother no matter what the paternity of the child. Both assume the role of guardian and protector to the new-born child. And in the closing scene of the novel, Lena with all her Mary attributes and Byron with his aspects of Saint Joseph and the child with his stable birth, all projects definite aspects of a kind of Holy Family.

Besides the symbolic translation of Lena and Byron and the child into a Holy Family and of Joe Christmas into a Christ-figure, Cottrell has found a number of additional minor parallels to other persons and events in Christ's life. He perceives that Joanna Burden bears a certain similarity to John the Baptist. He substantiates this claim by noting that the name Joanna is the feminine form of John, that her initials are the same as those of John the Baptist, and that her head is severed from her body as his was.[14] Cottrell also finds that Hightower conforms in many particulars to the role of Pontius Pilate. After dredging up some obscure etymological data on Hightower's name,[15] Cottrell describes several reasonable similarities between Pilate and Hightower. Both are outcasts in an unimportant corner of their respective realms, the Roman empire and the church. It is, however, in their little corners of the world that the Christ of their day is put to death. Both receive pleas to save the accused Christs from crucifixion,

Pilate from his wife and Hightower from Mrs. Hines. Both Pilate and Hightower ignore these pleas and become conscious of their hands. Pilate washes his hands before the mob that cries for Christ's crucifixion in a feeble effort to free himself of guilt. Cottrell notes that the last vision of Gail Hightower is focused upon "the twin blobs of his hands upon the ledges" (p. 432). And, as Cottrell observes, Hightower, before his final scene, has asked himself the question which Pilate must have asked after the Crucifixion: "Shall I be held responsible for that which was beyond my power?" (p. 428).

From the preceding catalogue of the parallels between Light in August and the Christ story, it is now possible to reject Irving Howe's belief that the Christ-parallels are cloudy and insignificant. Faulkner's use of the Christ-story is too careful to be accidental and permeates the novel too deeply not to be thematically vital.

The next and rather more complicated task will be to demonstrate that these parallels are neither erased by the many disquieting digressions that Faulkner makes from them, nor obliterated by the numerous shifts within the symbolic pattern itself.

The digressions from the New Testament story crowd in without fail on almost every parallel to Christ. Joe enters the world under the stigma of illegitimacy. The Christ Child is born through the power of the Holy Ghost and the Blessing of God the Father on His

Son. Joe is abducted from the orphanage by his grandfather, not out of love and protection, but from motives of hatred and bigotry. Joe's foster father relies not on God's wisdom and providence, but upon his own self-righteousness. His treatment of Joe is impersonal and ruthless, the very antithesis of Saint Joseph's treatment of Christ. Joe's rejection of the religious code of McEachern is negative and violent. Christ did not entirely reject the Old Law, but rather He built the New Law upon the foundation of the Old. He sought to change the religious order with love and self-abnegation, not with hatred and violence toward those who persecute Him. Joe rejects his three temptations only to supplant their proffered evils with his own desire for violence and for the almost masochistic joy of violence endured. Christ rejected the devil's temptations by virtue of and to maintain His own goodness. The final and greatest digression drawn by Faulkner is, of course, that Joe's death descends into greater depths of ignominy than Christ's through Grimm's act of mutilation. The succeeding digressions of Joe from Christ are self-evident. It is sufficient to observe that Joe is sullen, crude, a willing slave to his appetites and obsessions, and a murderer, and that he bears, at times, a closer resemblance to an animal than to a man, much less to Christ.[16]

But these factual digressions are only a small indication of the great gulf that stretches between the spirit that moves Joe and the spirit that moved Christ. Joe is obsessed with law and punish-

ment and the complete rejection of any hint of charity and compassion. Christ's whole being was directed toward the establishment of a moral order in which mercy and love and forgiveness would constitute the supreme good. Joe's acquiescence to suffering and death is a masochistic fatalism; Christ's is the supreme sacrifice for a higher good. The value of Christ's whole life and suffering and death was predicated upon His Resurrection for this proved His Divinity. It is more than doubtful that Joe experiences any resurrection. The source of the problem of Joe's resurrection centers upon this passage:

> For a long moment he looked up at them with peaceful and unfathomable and unbearable eyes. Then his face, body, all, seemed to collapse, to fall in upon itself, and from out the slashed garments about his hips and loins the pent black blood seemed to rush like a released breath. It seemed to rush out of his pale body like the rush of sparks from a rising rocket; upon that black blast the man seemed to rise soaring into their memories forever and ever. (p. 407)

The only evidence that Joe himself experiences a resurrection comes from his "peaceful and unfathomable and unbearable eyes," a look which, to be consistent with Joe's life history, would spring quite naturally from his final and complete surrender to the fatalism that he has alternately accepted and rejected throughout his life. For Joe himself there is no resurrection, and this is the last and greatest digression from the Christ-figure parallels. If there is

any resurrection in this passage at all (the more accurate term would be "awareness" or "consciousness"), it is the indelible imprint of a terrible crucifixion without a resurrection on the memories of the characters and readers who have seen it. Character and reader have shared a momentary glimpse of how terrible the human condition can be if man so makes it. This knowledge is "of itself alone triumphant" and "they are not to lose it, in whatever peaceful valleys, beside whatever placid and reassuring streams of old age, in the mirroring faces of whatever children they will contemplate old disasters and newer hopes" (p. 407).

The matter of digressions from the Christ-figure is further complicated by the duplications and shifts within the symbolic pattern itself. For example, there seems to be an excess of Virgin Marys among the women of Light in August. In giving birth to Joe Christmas, Milly Hines becomes a Mary-figure. And as Cottrell points out, Mrs. McEachern, like Mary, "realizes she cannot come between him (Joe) and the hardships."[17] This realization and the mother-role she tries to play for Joe make Mrs. McEachern a kind of Mary-figure.

There is also the shift in the symbolic references to Joe Christmas. When Joe attacks McEachern, Faulkner tells us that to McEachern, Joe's face is the face of Satan. Later, when Joe breaks into the Negro church, the woman on the mourners' bench identifies him also with Satan. In his blasphemous usurption of the pulpit

in the Negro church, Joe also assumes aspects of a violent anti-Christ.

Most of these duplications and shifts, however, are not persistent. They occur at a single point of action to elucidate or convey the significance of the moment. In the case of the Mary-figures, the purpose is to focus our attention on Joe as a Christ-figure. Milly's and Mrs. McEachern's appearances as Mary are both brief and without later elaboration, in contrast to Lena's, which is continuous and fully developed. Joe Christmas's two performances as Satan stem organically from the event in which he is engaged and are not part of a pattern of Satan-figures. If this Satanic aspect of Joe has any place in the development of the Christian symbolism, it is to further accentuate the numerous other digressions that Faulkner has made from that Christ-figure pattern which he employs so extensively.

But the element of Christian symbolism does not stand alone in Light in August. It is inextricably bound up with the theme of religion which Faulkner pursues so intensely in this novel. Faulkner's attitude toward Calvinism is complex. As Alwyn Berland[18] and Harold Douglas and Robert Daniel[19] have demonstrated, Faulkner, in Light in August, seems to be engaged in a simultaneous affirmation and rejection of Calvinism.

Faulkner's denunciation of certain forms of Calvinism is most immediately evident. Each of the several aspects of this

denunciation finds expression in a character. In the person of Simon McEachern (whose sect is Scotch Presbyterianism, which was known in the South for the extreme literalism of its Calvinistic doctrine),[20] Faulkner attacks rigid and ruthless adherence to the letter of the law, an adherence made at the expense of pity and compassion. McEachern whips Joe into a state of unconsciousness for not learning the Presbyterian catechism, puts him to bed, only to order him when he wakes up to "'Take the book'" (p. 134). It is not so much what McEachern does as how he does it. Faulkner repeatedly describes him as not unkind, but rather not human or personal at all. For McEachern the only two virtues are "work and the fear of God" (p. 126). Love is not included in McEachern's vocabulary.

Joe's grandfather, Euphues Hines, embodies another unlovely aspect of Calvinism, religious fanaticism. Hines believes that God has installed a private line of communication between Himself and His servant, Euphues. As this self-styled instrument of God's justice, Hines takes it upon himself to punish women and Negroes, his "bitchery and abomination" (p. 327), to the extent of committing two murders (those of his daughter, Milly, and her lover) and trying to incite a crowd to riot in order to accomplish a third murder, that of Joe Christmas, his own grandson.

Joe Christmas himself is at once the victim and perpetrator of the excesses of Calvinism. Faulkner reiterates the similarities

between Joe and McEachern, "in their rigid abnegation of all compromise more alike than actual blood could have made them" (p. 130). Joe also resembles Hines in the violence with which he insists upon his own approach to existence.

As Ilse Dusoir Lind notes, "Two of the occasionally observable concomitants of the more judgmental Protestant sects are suppression of the 'soft' emotions and the self-licensing to physical violence in the name of righteousness (often for the outlet of other emotions which have been suppressed)."[21] Joe and Joanna Burden both exemplify the consequences of the dearth of love and compassion in excessive Calvinism. Deprived of the good and natural exercise of their passions and of an affirmative response to kindness, Joe and Joanna perpetuate a violent rebellion against that deprivation. With Joanna, this rebellion assumes the form of depraved sexuality; with Joe Christmas, the form of an abnormal thirst for punishment. But Joanna herself (whose Unitarianism is the direct historical descendant of Calvinism)[22] is responsible for practicing another Calvinistic abuse, that of self-righteous allegiance to the forms of her religion, forms which no longer have any substance to give them significance. Joanna asks Joe to kneel with her as if the mere act of kneeling possessed, of itself, some virtue. Faulkner characterizes her kneeling, her "attitude of formal abjectness," as "a part of the pride," and her voice as "calm and tranquil and abnegant" (p. 245). She presumes, as Hines did, to make herself an instrument

of God's will in His plan for Joe Christmas when she pressures him to accept a Negro identity and finally presents him with an unconditional choice between praying and dying.

It is in and through Hightower, however, that Faulkner vents his fullest condemnation of the excesses of Calvinism. Hightower, the one example Faulkner gives of leadership in the Calvinistic faith, becomes a minister only to escape the demands of reality and to indulge his need for a romantic attachment to the past. In his sermons he combines and confuses the dogma he is supposed to preach with his vision of his grandfather's being shot from the galloping horse. Thus, in both motivation and action, Hightower projects an almost total lack of meaning in religious preaching and leadership. And in his moment of awareness after Joe's death, Hightower explicitly cites the specific failures of the religion whose minister he is supposed to be. He perceives

> that that which is destroying the Church is not the outward groping of those within it nor the inward groping of those without, but the professionals who control it and who have removed the bells from its steeples. He seems to see them, endless, without order, empty, symbolical, bleak, skypointed not with ecstasy or passion but in adjuration, threat, and doom. He seems to see the churches of the world like a rampart, like one of those barricades of the middleages planted with dead and sharpened stakes, against truth and against that peace in which to sin and be forgiven which is the life of man.
>
> 'And I accepted that,' he thinks. 'I acquiesced. Nay, I did worse: I served it.' (p. 426-427).

It is this complete negation of joy and meaning, this abysmal failure of love in certain aspects of Calvinism that Faulkner is condemning.

Joshua McClennen has, I think, correctly isolated the basic attribute which characterizes all these examples of excessive Calvinism.[23] He finds that attribute to be Christian complacency, which he defines as a feeling on the part of the individual of self-righteousness that has its source in fancy, not in fact, in the selfish, not the unselfish instincts. McClennen believes that Faulkner perceives that such an attitude of self-righteousness "finds fertile soil in Christianity, or what passes for Christianity, and particularly in Protestant Christianity," but that Faulkner sees this complacency "as a feeling natural to man as man, able to flourish independent of any church connection."[24]

McClennen cites McEachern as a clear example of this self-righteousness. He notes that McEachern is a completely sincere man who demands no more of others than he would demand of himself, but that at the same time he is a complete bigot who refuses to recognize any way of doing things other than his own. If Faulkner is highly critical of the churchgoer, McClennen observes that he also finds little that is worthy in the clergy. Reverend Gail Hightower, although he possesses little of the moral rigidity that Faulkner condemns in McEachern and Hines and Joanna Burden, is still a failure and still complacent. McClennen writes, "By living in

the past he surrenders his chance to discharge his responsibilities to his congregation. In many ways he is just as guilty of a denial of life as are McEachern and Hines."[25]

But the immediate recognition of Faulkner's denunciation gives way, upon further examination, to the discovery that Faulkner is also affirming certain aspects of Calvinism. Harold J. Douglas and Robert Daniel have arrived at a definition of American Calvinism which sets up a series of doctrinal points that will be a useful measure by which to consider Faulkner's relation to Calvinism and the effect this relation has upon his use of Christ-figures:

> American Calvinism . . . conceives of man as bound to sin and threatened by damnation, but not doomed to it. The way to redemption, by an act of choice, remains open. In sermons that call upon their hearers to return to Grace, the degeneracy of mankind--not only from the original state of perfection in the Garden but also from some previous age of relative goodness since the Fall--occurs often as proof both of the need for regeneration and of its possibility. Yet the knowledge that the majority of men are doomed not to receive the good tidings, along with descriptions of the punishments that await impenitent sinners, usually beclouds the message of hope and joy.[26]

Faulkner denounces the perversions of this basic doctrinal position, but he affirms this fundamental Calvinist perception of man "alienated from his Creator by his own choice."[27] Such a perception provides a valuable artistic frame. As Douglas and Daniel have observed, it furnishes the condition for tragedy, and they quote Yeats: "We begin to live when we have conceived life as tragedy."

But Faulkner also employs the Calvinistic vision of man as a moral frame for Light in August. Faulkner affirms, first of all, the doctrine of free will. Hounded though Joe is by the malevolent forces of society, he freely acquiesces to those forces, and acquiescence involves as much volition as rebellion does. When Joanna wants him to assume once and for all the identity of Negro, Joe thinks, "No. If I give in now, I will deny all the thirty years that I have lived to make me what I chose to be'" (p. 232). Faulkner also affirms the Calvinistic ratio of the damned to the saved. Only Byron and Lena, who occupy less than a quarter of the novel, exhibit any evidence of possible freedom from damnation. Faulkner also matches the Calvinistic intensity of the darkness into which the damned are cast. But, above all, Faulkner affirms a rigorous morality. In doing so, however, he substitutes his own hierarchy of virtues for those of excessive Calvinism. Instead of McEachern's "work and the fear of God" (p. 126), Faulkner proposes that pity and compassion determine the damnation or salvation of a person. It is against this background of heavily shadowed hope that the parallels and digressions of the Christ-figure pattern are portrayed.

Critics have denied the existence of the parallels between Joe Christmas and Christ because of the digressions Faulkner makes from the Christ story or have declared that Faulkner fails because the digressions undercut the continuity and effect of the Christ-

figure pattern. But, as Ilse Dusoir Lind writes, "Repeatedly . . . we discover that Faulkner's seeming defects are failures of our own perception, which is not prepared for the new uses to which he applies his resources."[28] I suggest that the pattern of parallels to and digressions from the Christ story functions coherently within the framework of the theme of religion in the novel, and that, furthermore, its function in this regard is more than ironic.

The problem centers upon what manner of Christ-figure Joe Christmas is. Holman believes the parallels have been dismissed as insignificant because the critics have looked for a theological Saviour whose death is an expiation of man's guilt. Regarded in terms of a theological Saviour, Joe does, as Holman observes, become a cruel and irreverent travesty upon Christ. Holman sees Joe not as the Messiah of St. Paul's epistles, but rather as the Suffering Servant of Isaiah.[29] It is true that Joe, like the Suffering Servant, is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, oppressed and brought as a lamb to the slaughter. But Joe, unlike the Suffering Servant, is a masochist and a murderer and does not qualify for this category any more than he did for the category of theological Saviour.

A clue to Joe's Christ-figure identity may be found in seeing that Joe is like Christ in what happens to him, but that he is unlike Christ in his responses to those happenings. Mindful of the theme of religion in Light in August, it is perfectly organic that Faulkner should portray the Christ of that Christianity he is

condemning. Joe is that Christ, and he is a shattering indictment. Such a Christ-figure, all externals and no essence, is a powerful symbol of Faulkner's vision of the failure of a Calvinism that is all form and no meaning, that sacrifices the New Law of Christian charity for its self-righteous adherence to the Old Law of retribution. Such a Christ has no resurrection. The church of such a Christ has no life, for without resurrection there is no divine life in the Church. So purposely off-center are the parallels between the people and events of Christ's life and of Joe's life that we react as to the screech of chalk upon the blackboard. It is this emotional response that is Faulkner's primary aim, this setting of our complacent teeth on edge because our fathers have eaten the sour grapes of pseudo-Christianity.

Through consciousness of the pattern which the Christian symbolism takes, by seeing Joe as a Christ without divinity, with something less than humanity, without Christian charity, we can recognize the nature of Joe's crucifixion, why he dies as he does, why they shall not forget him. But it is equally important to recognize Lena as a kind of Virgin Mary, Byron as a Joseph, and, above all, the child as another hope-filled Christ. It will be remembered that Faulkner affirms as well as denounces various aspects of Calvinistic belief and practice. Lena's new-born son is the Christ of that affirmation. Mothered into existence by a simplicity and innocence that is oblivious to evil and protected by a guardian

who has faced evil and emerged with a goodness all the more valuable because of its consciousness of its adversary, the child bears all the hope of Faulkner's vision of the human situation just as Joe Christmas bore all the despair. As Edmond Volpe has written, Light in August . . . is like an altar triptych with a large central canvas of the crucifixion, dark, somber, and violent. The small sidepieces, hinged to the major canvas, are bright, joyous, placid scenes of the mother and child and of the holy family. One of the remarkable achievements of the novel is the consistency with which Faulkner creates these opposing canvases."[30]

Through Lena and Byron, Faulkner declares that the only verities are those of the heart. It is for a lack of these verities that Joe Christmas suffered his crucifixion. It is, finally, with a reaffirmation of these verities that Faulkner ends Light in August.[31] The concluding exchange between Byron and Lena therefore assumes a special significance. "'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. 443).

CHAPTER 4

CHRISTIAN SYMBOLISM IN A FABLE

With The Sound and the Fury and Light in August a study of the Christian symbolism had to begin with a thorough delineation of the Christ-story parallels because the presence of such parallels has been so energetically disputed by many of the critics. A consideration of the Christian symbolism in A Fable (first published in 1954) presents the opposite problem. Almost to a man, critics such as Malcolm Cowley,[1] Carvel Collins,[2] F. W. Dillistone[3] and Olga Vickery[4] have acknowledged the pervasive presence of Christ-parallels in the novel, almost to the extent of taking those parallels for granted. And therein lies the problem, for the matter is not so simple as might at first appear. As Hyatt Waggoner has observed, "the correspondences are at once close and twisted, obvious on the surface and obscure at a deeper level."[5]

Once again it will be useful to attempt an accounting of the parallels to the Christ-story before considering a critical interpretation of those parallels, but not before declaring two premises. First, although the Christ-pattern is more overt in this novel than in any other, it is not so functional as the same pattern is in The Sound and the Fury and Light in August. The use of the Christ-pattern is, in fact, rather heavily imposed upon the whole of the novel in order that it might be employed as minor supporting material for the novel's main theme. Second, it does not appear to me that

Faulkner is relating his version of the Second Coming. He is simply using the Christ-story as he has always used it before, to help express his vision of the human condition. This time, however, he rather overdoes it now and then, and his use of the full accoutrements of the Christ-story at times becomes, as he later admitted, something of a "tour de force."[6] This chapter, however, is a sympathetic study of the valuable aspects of the function of the Christ-pattern in this novel.

The first parallel that presents itself is one of setting. F. W. Dillistone has noted that the struggles and tensions of the First World War are similar to first-century Palestine in the very midst of the political struggles and national tensions of that period. The Corporal is born on Christmas eve, the son of an absent father and a mother who has travelled a great distance before giving birth in Christ-evocative surroundings of "the straw, the dark stable and the cold" (p. 290).[8] The mother dies, but, as Norman Podhoretz observes, Marthe becomes a kind of virgin mother to the new-born child.[9] The Corporal also helps to work the farmland of Marthe's husband, who becomes a foster father to the boy and who has planned to bequeath the farm to him. One is reminded of Christ working in Saint Joseph's carpentry shop in Nazareth. His middle years pass in relative obscurity, except that he rescues a girl named Magda from a Marseilles house of prostitution; this parallels the pity Christ took upon Mary Magdalen, who gave up her life of sin to follow Him.

The Corporal's squad of twelve men corresponds to Christ's twelve disciples. Both groups engage in the spreading of a gospel. The Corporal and his twelve spend their leaves and furloughs going about the war zone, even over to the German side, advocating passive resistance to the army's fighting orders. The essential worthiness of the Corporal's gospel is underscored by his various good works, just as Christ established the validity of His preaching by performing miracles. For instance, the Corporal collects enough money from the other soldiers to buy a poor couple wine for their wedding feast. This, of course, parallels the wedding at Cana, at which Christ changed the water into wine.

As the Corporal's death approaches, the Christ-parallels gain great momentum until, in the death scene, the Christ-figure overwhelms the character of the Corporal completely. The Corporal's entry into the Place de Ville is, as Waggoner notes, an ironic inversion of Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem.[10] On Thursday night the Corporal and his twelve men eat a Last Supper as Christ and His disciples did. On this same night the one faithless member of the Corporal's squad receives the reward of freedom for his betrayal to the army high command of the plan to stop the war, just as Judas betrayed His Master to the Scribes and Pharisees. At this time, one of the Corporal's men, significantly named Pierre, denies he is a member of the squad. In like manner, Peter denied Christ on the Thursday night of His arrest.

Again, like Christ, the Corporal is subjected to three temptations. The General takes him to a high place and offers him freedom, the world, or life if only he will refuse the martyrdom which awaits him in the morning. The Corporal, like Christ, elects martyrdom. His death comes to him much as it came to Christ: both die on Friday between two thieves at the age of thirty-three. Before Christ died, He told the good thief, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise." The Corporal tells the mindless thief, "'It's all right. We're going to wait. We won't go without you'" (p. 385). When the Corporal is shot, his body falls backward into a tangle of barbed wire which encircles his head as the crown of thorns encircled Christ's head. And just as the Roman soldier pierced Christ's side to make certain He was dead, so the sergeant-major shoots the Corporal in the head to insure his death.

Joseph of Arimathea went to Pilate to ask for the Body of Christ that he might bury Him. In like manner, the Corporal's two half-sisters, Marthe and Marya, with Magda, ask the General for the Corporal's body that they might bury him on the farm where he grew up. The three women correspond to the women who followed Christ's passion and were solicitous for His proper burial. On the Sunday morning after the Corporal is buried, the war is renewed and a shell explodes in the place where the Corporal lies. Although the three women and Marthe's husband search all day, no body is found. This constitutes a kind of resurrection for the Corporal. Some years

later the man who betrayed the Corporal's plan returns to the farm where Marthe and Marya live. They give him food and he lays down twenty-nine coins. Marya tells him, "There would be one more" (p. 429). As he leaves the farmhouse, he is framed for a moment against the lintel tree, and the feather in his hat resembles a cord by which it appears he is actually hanging. These events further emphasize his parallels with Judas Iscariot.

There are additional components of the symbolic whole that Faulkner is attempting in this novel. The British runner, for instance, is a parallel to Saint Paul. Both the runner and Paul experience a conversion. Collins notes that the barrage which sears the runner with a bright flame is reminiscent of the blinding light which struck Paul down at his conversion.[11] Podhoretz observes that the runner spreads the Corporal's gospel among the "gentiles" in one battalion.[12] And after the Corporal has died, the runner continues to proclaim his gospel, even from the gutter of a Paris street. Collins also sees a parallel between John the Baptist and the Quartermaster General because he is "midway between the old dispensation and the new."[11]

The allusions to Christian details are continuous throughout the novel. The bread the fainting Magda receives while waiting in the Place de Ville is a kind of Communion. When Marthe and Marya carry Magda to an empty stable after escaping from the mob, Marthe takes "from the basket which everyone had seen empty itself when

the woman at the fire threw it at her, a piece of broken bread . . ." (p. 222). This bears a striking parallel to Christ's miracle of the loaves and fishes, especially when they put the fragments they have not eaten back into the basket. Also, Marthe refers to their arrival at the stable at the time of the Corporal's birth as "our advent" (p. 292). There are also such matters as the fact that the young pilot's Sidcott burns in the shape of a cross. Faulkner describes the smoldering as "creeping up toward the collar and down toward the belt and across toward each armpit . . ." (p. 120). And when the runner asks the old man why three miles of blank AA shells are being shipped to the front, "'For the signal!' the old man cried. 'The announcement! To let the whole world know that He has risen!" (p. 81). The novel is filled with such Christian allusions.

But such a construction of the Christ-parallels dissembles more than it illuminates, for, as Julian Hartt has observed, "Faulkner gives with one hand and takes away with the other, and we don't know which hand, or who, is ahead at the end."[13] The reader is told, for instance, that the Corporal has sufficient persuasive power to convert a division of soldiers and their counterpart on the German line to his idea of recessing the war. Yet the one time we see him with his own squad, they ignore his injunctions to "'Come on now'," which leads Paul the Breton to ask, "'Do you want me to make them shut up, Corp?'" (p. 337).

The greatest source for confusion of this sort is the matter of the identity of the old General. As Olga Vickery has observed,

the General projects definite aspects of Messianic identity.[14] He is the heir of the richest and most prestigious family in France, but he renounces these worldly advantages in order to make his own way in the world. In much the same way, Christ surrendered His purely divine existence and became man in order to devote Himself to His evangelical mission. Both Christ and the General choose to set themselves apart from other men for a time in order to prepare for their respective missions. Christ fasted and prayed for forty days and forty nights in the desert. The General elects a lonely African desert outpost over an opportunity for captaincy and also spends time in a Tibetan lamasery "'To wait! . . . To prepare!'" (p. 270). Also, the Quartermaster General who takes the General's place at the desert outpost tells him, "'You will save man.'" (p. 264). This is not unlike John the Baptist's recognition of Christ. When He came to be baptized, John said, "Behold the Lamb of God Which taketh away the sins of the world." The Quartermaster General tells the General further, "'Because I didn't just believe in you. I loved you. I believed from that first moment when I saw you in that gate . . . that you had been destined to save us . . . to be the one out of all earth to be free of the compulsions of fear and weakness and doubt which render the rest of us incapable of what you were competent for; that you in your strength would even absolve us of our failure due to our weakness and fears'" (p. 328). The old General is, then, an object of faith, hope, and love to

those who believe in him, which include not only the Quartermaster General but also all of Western Europe and America whose fate he commands.

In his position as Supreme Commander for the Allied Forces the General projects aspects not of a Christ, but of God the Father. There is a parallel in the respective omnipotence of the two. Moreover, the General continually refers to everyone below him as "My child." Olga Vickery has found that these God-figure parallels are most closely related to the Old Testament prophecies of the saviour as a Warrior King.[15] As Vickery notes, the emphasis in the Old Testament is almost entirely upon God's omnipotence, and the most characteristic expression of that all-powerful quality is military might. When the chosen people yielded themselves to God's will, God rewarded them with military conquests and spoils. If they did not obey God, their punishment was to suffer defeat at the hands of their enemies. Also, the chosen people were led by men who had been divinely chosen and who were endowed by God with attributes of power and wisdom. As Allied Commander, the General wields the power of life and death, victory or defeat over the soldiers and citizens of the Allied Nations. Moreover, he displays not a little intelligence and even wisdom in his confrontation with the Corporal.

However, the scene between the General and the Corporal reveals yet another facet of the General's portrait, for here he emerges as an unmistakable Satan. He tempts the Corporal to abandon his followers

and his principles for the sake of his freedom, the luxuries and prestige of the world, or for the gift of life. Moreover, in this scene the General scores an intellectual victory over the Corporal by propounding, as Philip Rice says, "the more difficult faith in man, one which survives even the acceptance of the inevitability of wars and the multiplication of the Frankenstein machines which make man's plight even less controllable and his wars more devastating."[16] What is thoroughly startling is that the General believes his faith will not only endure, but prevail, an attribute not given to the Corporal's or to anyone else's argument in the novel.

All these facets of the General's character have grave consequences for the paternity of the Corporal. If the Corporal's principles of brotherhood and peace are worthy, why does he not defend his stand against the verbal onslaught of the General with something more than simple loyalty to his friends? This is not to underrate the virtue of loyalty, but in this dialectical debate, the General appears to win by forfeit. This atmosphere of intellectual forfeiture is underscored by the fact that when the Corporal takes leave of the General he says, "'Good-bye, Father'" (p. 356), thus accepting the paternity of an Old Testament God/ Satan-figure.

The final symbolic difficulty with which Faulkner leaves us is the matter of the Corporal's resurrection. Though it is true that on Sunday morning the Corporal's body disappears from its resting place, it is also true, as we subsequently discover, that

the body has not risen at all. It has not even disappeared. The owner of the adjoining farm discovers the body on his property, and the drunken squad takes it back to Paris to be buried in the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

The core of the difficulty lies in the kind of Christ-figure the Corporal is supposed to be. In A Fable it is not merely a question of external similarities to Christ in the things that happen to him, such as the crown of thorns; the Corporal is also very like Christ in spirit and in action. His efforts to bring peace, his charity toward people in need, such as the couple too poor to afford a wedding feast, the devotion to his ideals among his followers, and his quiet acceptance of martyrdom all evoke the Christ of the Gospels. But at several key points in the novel, Faulkner chooses to qualify this similarity. When the Corporal is brought into the mobbed Place de Ville, Faulkner describes his face as "merely interested, attentive, and calm, with something else in it which none of the others had: a comprehension, understanding, utterly free of compassion, as if he had already anticipated without censure or pity the uproar which rose and paced and followed the lorry as it sped on" (p. 17). If Faulkner were really attempting full and direct imitation of Christ, he would hardly attribute a lack of compassion to him. The other jarring note that Faulkner sounds in regard to the Corporal occurs when the runner goes to the farm to obtain the Corporal's medal. Marthe

asks him if he wishes to see the Corporal's grave and he replies, "'What for? . . . He's finished'" (p. 431).

A possible explanation for these antithetical events may lie in the development of the theme of duality, which Heinrich Straumann[17] and Edmond Volpe[18] rightly believe is central to the novel. The old General expresses the dualism in these words:

> . . . we are two articulations, self-elected possibly, anyway elected, anyway postulated, not so much to defend as to test two inimical conditions which, through no fault of ours but through the simple paucity and restrictions of the arena where they meet, must contend and--one of them--perish: I champion of this mundane earth which, whether I like it or not, is, and to which I did not ask to come, yet since I am here, not only must stop but intend to stop during my allotted while; you champion of an esoteric realm of man's baseless hopes and his infinite capacity--no: passion--for unfact (pp. 347-348).

As Volpe observes, the conflict between the father and the son stands for the eternal conflict between flesh and spirit, between the practical and the ideal. He writes, "For one who recognizes this dualism, moral judgments are difficult because the distinctions between good and evil become hazy. The Corporal, for example, by choosing martyrdom, causes the death of General Gragnon. And the Supreme Commander can preserve his own power only by executing the Corporal; but by making the Corporal a martyr, he strengthens the inimical force the Corporal epitomizes."[19] This duality reaches its fullest emotional statement in the last scene of the novel, in

which the laughter of the maimed and beaten British runner merges with the tears of the old Quartermaster General. It is the same throughout the novel. Nothing appears in its pure form or exists unchallenged by its opposite. The sacred and the profane commingle. As Straumann has observed, "There will always be one power which wants order, and one which rebels against it; there will always be one who struggles and endures and one who helps and reconciles; there will always be weeping and laughing . . ."[20]

At first glance, the confrontation between the General and the Corporal appears to be the clear-cut conflict of good and evil. But upon re-examination one finds that the General is actually proposing the wrong solutions for the right reasons. He is saying that the Corporal should duck martyrdom and desert his followers, which is obviously wrong. But his faith in the ability of man not only to endure despite the ghastly world he has constructed about himself, but even to prevail is magnificent. And just as the General is not pure evil, neither is the Corporal unmitigated good. His motives, while admirable, are not very effective. As Malcolm Cowley has observed, the result of the Corporal's passive resistance is to stop the war for six days and that is a very great accomplishment, but afterward the war begins all over again and no great change has been wrought.[21] From one viewpoint, the Corporal has sown only seeds of sorrow by persuading 3,000 men to make themselves liable to the firing squad for apparent cowardice under fire.

That is a heavy burden for all those anguished people who throng the Place de Ville. It is valiant to make a gesture for peace, but was the gesture really commensurate with the price of life it exacted? There is, moreover, that portrait of the Corporal's face as utterly free of compassion and without pity which haunts the succeeding pages of the novel.

Faulkner has, I think, used Christian symbolism in this novel to help project his vision of the state of unresolved ambiguity which he sees as the essence of the human situation. The Corporal is finished, but Faulkner leaves us with a fragment of hope in the runner's declaration that he will never die, that, in other words, the spirit of protest will never perish. Thus, this pattern of duality will go on as long as humanity lasts, the spirit almost but never quite surrendering completely to the flesh, the ideal barely surviving the onslaught of the practical and yet managing, the focus on goodness nearly erased from men's minds and yet surviving.[22] Faulkner perceives that what is obvious on the surface is actually obscure at a deeper level, that life does indeed give with one hand and take away with the other. If we do not know which hand, or who, is ahead at the end, we can hardly blame Faulkner. In his refusal to find a simple pat solution where, in truth, only complexities exist, he is alarmingly honest.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

In his comments on the Christian symbolism in his work which were quoted in the introductory chapter of this paper, Faulkner set up three judgments on the subject: he said that his symbolism was secondary, that he used it as a tool, and that it functioned as a chart against which man could measure himself.

When a great number of words are devoted to the analysis of a single aspect of an author's work, there is danger that this particular aspect will be exaggerated beyond its actual importance. The matter of Christian symbolism in Light in August is a case in point. Despite the pervasive and vital inclusion of such symbolism in that novel, the role of Joe Christmas as a Christ-figure is hardly the basis for the unity of the novel, as C. Hugh Holman contends.[1] The themes of Negro and of sex which figure so predominantly in Light in August remain practically untouched by Joe Christmas's role as a Christ-figure. The same is true of The Sound and the Fury and A Fable. Benjy's projection of certain aspects of Christ has nothing to do with Quentin's obsession with time or with his idea of incest with Caddy or with Caddy's promiscuity or Jason's greed. In other words, it is not a motivational influence on the novel. Benjy as Christ directly affects only Dilsey. His Christ-role affects the other members of the Compson family only tangentially, by way of the reader's perception. Faulkner uses "Benjy as Christ" as a

tool, as a method of comparison. But he uses that tool not to measure Benjy but to measure those whose failure of compassion afflicts Benjy. In Light in August also, the partial identification of Joe Christmas with Christ is not a judgment on Joe so much as it is an indictment of those who crucify Joe. As Hyatt Waggoner writes, "The characters are finally judged in terms of their response to Joe Christmas, and the professed Christians are convicted of having a faith that is dead because it never issues in works of love."[2]

In A Fable, however, Faulkner uses the Corporal's role as a Christ-figure somewhat differently. Here the Christian symbolism becomes a vehicle for abstractions. Christ in the abstract stands for ideals of goodness, peace, and love. In the abstract, then, a Christ-figure is the perfect foil for a conflict between these ideals and the calculated practicality of modern warfare, the war itself becoming an abstract for modern life. When Faulkner, at the same time, undercuts the compassion and pity and efficacy of the Corporal, still a Christ-figure, he gives further momentum to his main theme of the ambiguous duality of human existence. Despite the heavy overlay of Christ-story parallels in A Fable, Faulkner's use of Christian symbolism remains secondary. His primary task is to convey a sense of paradox. For this task, as for The Sound and the Fury and Light in August, Christian symbolism is a most effective tool to use.

The symbolism in Faulkner can be described most accurately in terms of myth. In writing of A Fable, Dayton Kohler defines myth as "the spoken part of ritual, and ritual itself is the recurrent act which symbolizes whatever is timeless or cyclic in human experience." He also makes the important point that "one of the conditions of ritual . . . is that it cannot reproduce the initial circumstances or actual mystery of the deed; its function is symbolic."[3] Decidedly, Faulkner is portraying Christ-figures, not second Christs. To do this, he extracts the timeless and cyclic qualities and actions from the historical character of Christ to clarify and intensify his themes. In other words, Faulkner is using Christ as he would use a Greek or Roman god, as myth, not as a sacred indication of an inner core of belief in the Son of God become man for the salvation of mankind. Faulkner is also concerned with the salvation of mankind, and he believes in the same principles of compassion that Christ preached. There is, however, nothing divine in Faulkner's belief. His use of Christian symbolism is an indication of that lack of divinity.

This brings us to the inevitable problem of Faulkner as a Christian writer. John Killinger, in his recent book The Failure of Theology in Modern Literature, has drawn up two valid criteria by which to judge the Christianity of an author. His first criterion is that the author should make Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension a matter of importance in the life of his character. In

Faulkner the matter of importance is how one reacts to the repeated crucifixions of one's fellow man. It is a worthy effort, but one which springs from no divine fount. Killinger's second criterion for the Christian writer demands that "symbols of the faith . . . must appear as more than enameled flowers upon the surface of a story: they must be seen to have roots proceeding out of the very heart and center of the story-situation, which is somehow involved with the coming of Christ . . . everything--sacred and secular, pure and obscene, good and evil--must hang together under the overall pressure of a Christian world view."[4] Within the limits of his vision, Faulkner's use of Christian symbolism is totally organic, but only because he has reduced that symbolism from the level of belief to the level of myth. Such a reduction works because the heart and center of the story-situation is not the coming of Christ, but the coming of man.

If Faulkner's use of stable births, the age of thirty-three, crucifixions, virtues of compassion, and vices of Pharisaical self-righteousness seems imposed in any way upon the body of his work, it is because he has estranged these terms from the source of their life and meaning. He forces them into new contemporary contexts in order to shake our complacency and revitalize our failing sense of charity--and this is good. What is questionable is that he has used these terms without giving recognition to the Author of the terms.

When we consider the lack of resurrection in Faulkner and the solely human orientation of his vision, we must conclude that Faulkner is not a Christian writer. But although Faulkner is without any resurrection, he is not without nativity, a real nativity of the Spirit which does not preclude the possibility of a resurrection. Thus, Dilsey, Lena and Byron and the child, and the British runner all move on with a continuing sense of hope. Nativity is not resurrection, but it leaves the door open and, as such, is not at all a bad point from which to begin finding answers to the questions Faulkner raises. In such an endeavor, it would be possible to work backwards from Faulkner's use of the terms of Christianity to the Source of those terms.

It must be remembered, however, that the author's function is to ask questions, not to propound answers. Faulkner has raised his questions about a view of life in the terms of Christianity. He emphasizes crucifixion, admits nativity, but cannot bring himself to assent to resurrection. In raising such questions with power and intensity, he is fulfilling his artistic duty. All further responsibility rests with the reader.

NOTES

Chapter 1

[1] Cleanth Brooks, William Faulkner: The Yoknaptawpha Country, (New Haven, 1963), p. 6.

[2] Brooks, p. 7. The reference is to George R. Stewart and Joseph M. Backus, "'Each in Its Ordered Place': Structure and Narration in Benjy's Section of The Sound and the Fury," American Literature, XXIX (1958), 455.

[3] Beach Langston, "The Meaning of Lena Grove and Gail Hightower in Light in August," Boston University Studies in English, V (1961), 50.

[4] George Marion O'Donnell, "Faulkner's Mythology," Kenyon Review, I (1939), 285-299.

[5] Carvel Collins, "The Pairing of The Sound and the Fury and As I Lay Dying," The Princeton University Library Chronicle, XVIII (1957), 114-123.

[6] Sumner C. Powell, "William Faulkner Celebrates Easter, 1928," Perspective, II (1949), 195-218.

[7] Lawrence E. Bowling, "Faulkner and the Theme of Innocence," Kenyon Review, XX (1958), 466-487.

[8] C. Hugh Holman, "The Unity of Faulkner's Light in August," PMLA, LXXIII (1958), 155-166.

[9] Beekman Cottrell, "Christian Symbols in Light in August," Modern Fiction Studies, II (1957), 207-213.

[10] Malcolm Cowley, "Faulkner's Powerful New Novel," "Books," New York Herald Tribune, August 1, 1954, 1,8.

[11] Hyatt Waggoner, William Faulkner: From Jefferson To The World, (Lexington, 1959).

[12] Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga Vickery, "Introduction," William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism, (New York, 1960), p. 36.

[13] Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner (eds), Faulkner in the University, (Charlottesville, 1959), p. 117.

[14] Jean Stein, "William Faulkner," Paris Review, IV (1956), 28-52; reprinted in William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism, Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga Vickery (eds), (New York, 1960), p. 75.

Chapter 2

[1] Powell, 195-218.

[2] Collins, 114-123.

[3] Bowling, 466-487.

[4] Walter Mueller, "The Theme of Suffering: William Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury," The Prophetic Voice in Modern Fiction, (New York, 1959), pp. 110-135.

[5] Waggoner, pp. 34-61.

[6] Walter Slatoff, Quest For Failure: A Study of William Faulkner, (Ithaca, 1960), p. 155.

[7] Brooks, pp. 325-348.

[8] Mueller, p. 132.

9 *The Sound and the Fury* (New York: Modern Library, 1946). All references are to this edition and will be indicated in the text.

10 Mueller, p. 133.

11 Collins, 118.

12 Collins also discovers a parallel between the liturgical tradition of christening new members of the faith on Holy Saturday and Mrs. Compson's decision to change her son's name from Maury to Benjy on Holy Saturday. However, this parallel is invalidated by the fact that Mrs. Compson gives Benjy his name as soon as she discovers the nature and hopelessness of his idiocy, an event which occurs on a rainy day in November and is merely narrated on Holy Saturday, 1928.

13 Olga Vickery, *The Novels of William Faulkner: A Critical Interpretation*, (Baton Rouge, 1959), p. 47.

14 Bowling, 484.

15 Bowling, 485.

Chapter 3

1 Brooks, pp. 379-380.

2 William Lamont, "The Chronology of *Light in August*," *Modern Fiction Studies*, III (1957), 360-361.

3 Richard Rovere, "Introduction," *Light in August*, Modern Library edition, (New York, 1950), p. xiii.

4 Irving Howe, *William Faulkner: A Critical Study*, (New York, 1951), p. 210.

5
Sean O'Faolain, The Vanishing Hero, (London, 1956), p. 122.

6
O'Faolain, p. 131. There are numerous other adverse criticisms of Faulkner's use of Christian symbolism in Light in August, but all of them conform to one of these main critical opinions, that such symbolism is non-existent, capricious, or valueless.

7
Holman, 155-166.

8
Cottrell, 207-213.

9
Alwyn Berland, "Light in August: The Calvinism of William Faulkner," Modern Fiction Studies, VIII (1962), 161.

10
Cottrell, 208.

11
Richard Chase, "The Stone and the Crucifixion: Faulkner's Light in August," William Faulkner: Two Decades of Criticism, Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga Vickery (eds), (East Lansing, 1951), p. 212.

12
Light in August (New York: Modern Library, 1950), p. 128. All references are to this edition and will be indicated in the text.

13
Holman, 157.

14
Cottrell, 209.

15
Cottrell, 210-211. He finds, for instance, that the name Hightower has close associations with a whole group of Latin words centering on pila, a pillar, pons, a bridge or the floor of a tower, pilatus, bald or close-shaved. Also, the Roman's first name of Gaius, for Gail, is associated in Tacitus with the Pontius family. Cottrell also observes that Pontius Pilate, like Hightower, was a mysterious figure around whom legends have grown up. One of these legends is that Pilate, having failed his job in Judea, was recalled, exiled to Gaul, and driven to suicide by jumping from the peak of a mountain

now called Pilatus, to perish in the lake at its foot. Cottrell has discovered, too, that Pilate, like Hightower, was known for his loud voice.

16
There is also the exasperating matter of Joe's age. As Lamont has noted, Faulkner tells us he is thirty-three when he arrives in Jefferson. This would mean he was thirty-six when he died. But on p. 92, Faulkner tells us that Joe is thirty years old as he prepares to murder Joanna Burden. The matter of Joe's age is not an exact parallel, but it doesn't hold still long enough to be even a digression. I think we must just chalk it up to unresolved ambiguity and proceed to considerations of greater import.

17
Cottrell, 208.

18
Berland, 159-170.

19
Harold J. Douglas and Robert Daniel, "Faulkner and the Puritanism of the South," Tennessee Studies In Literature, II (1957), 1-13.

20
Ilse Dusoir Lind, "The Calvinistic Burden of Light in August," New England Quarterly, XXX (1957), 315.

21
Lind, 322.

22
Lind, 318.

23
Joshua McClennen, "William Faulkner and Christian Complacency," Papers of the Michigan Academy of Science, Arts, and Letters, XLI (1956), 315-322.

24
McClennen, 316.

25
McClennen, 319.

26
Douglas and Daniel, 2.

[27] Douglas and Daniel, 12.

[28] Lind, 307.

[29] Holman, 158.

[30] Edmond Volpe, A Reader's Guide to William Faulkner, (New York, 1964), pp. 173-174.

[31] The point of view of the furniture dealer does not qualify or negate this reaffirmation, but simply adds an objective and humorous commentary that is essential in order to keep Lena and Byron from becoming plaster saints.

Chapter 4

[1] Cowley, 1, 8.

[2] Carvel Collins, "War and Peace and Mr. Faulkner," New York Times Book Review, August 1, 1954, 1, 13.

[3] F. W. Dillistone, The Novelist and the Passion Story, (London, 1960), pp. 92-118.

[4] Vickery, pp. 192-210.

[5] Waggoner, p. 229.

[6] Gwynn and Blotner, p. 27.

[7] Dillistone, p. 106.

[8] A Fable (New York: Random House, 1954). All references are to this edition and will be indicated in the text.

[9] Norman Podhoretz, "William Faulkner and the Problem of War," Commentary, XVIII (1954), 231.

[10] Waggoner, p. 228.

[11] Collins, "War and Peace and Mr. Faulkner," 13.

[12] Podhoretz, 230.

[13] Julian Hartt, "Some Reflections on Faulkner's Fable," Religion in Life, XXIV (1955), 605.

[14] Vickery, p. 197.

[15] Vickery, p. 196.

[16] Philip Rice, "Faulkner's Crucifixion," William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism, Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga Vickery (eds), (New York, 1960), 378.

[17] Heinrich Straumann, "An American Interpretation of Existence: Faulkner's A Fable," William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism, Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga Vickery (eds), (New York, 1960), 349-372.

[18] Volpe, pp. 282-304.

[19] Volpe, pp. 282-283.

[20] Straumann, 360.

[21] Cowley, 8.

22
As Walter Slatoff has written, "Probably the most crucial indication of Faulkner's intentions is the fact that the endings of all his novels not only fail to resolve many of the tensions and meanings provided in the novels but also seem carefully designed to prevent such resolution. Above all, they leave unresolved the question of the meaningfulness of the human efforts and suffering we have witnessed, whether the sound and the fury is part of some larger design or whether it has signified nothing in an essentially meaningless universe. To read a Faulkner novel is to struggle to integrate and resolve a bewildering number and variety of impressions and suggestions. It is, and it is meant to be, a struggle without end." Quest For Failure, p. 149.

Chapter 5

1
Holman, 155-166.

2
Waggoner, pp. 250-251.

3
Dayton Kohler, "A Fable: The Novel as Myth," College English, XVI (1955), 475.

4
John Killinger, The Failure of Theology in Modern Literature, (Nashville, 1963), pp. 229-230.

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