

the prose used, with its splits and fragmentation, becomes a metaphor for the fragmentation of human beings isolated in their suffering, loneliness, and lack of identity.

Notes

¹ Edmond L. Volpe, *A Reader's Guide to William Faulkner* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1956), p. 28.

² Volpe, p. 32.

CHARACTERIZATION AS CARRIER OF THEMES IN *Light in August*

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All the characters in *Light in August* are carriers of the themes Faulkner presents and almost all of their names contain symbols related to these themes.

The first woman who appears in the novel, at the very beginning, is Lena Grove, a pregnant young woman searching for her sweetheart. She is a simple and patient incarnation of the indestructible earth itself. She inspires a calm confidence as an agrarian answer to the guilty and violent city life. Being able to assume the joys and sufferings of life, she represents cyclical life and death of all creatures of earth, opposed to Joe Christmas, who is an embodiment of the bewildered New South and whose image represents the conflict of modern man, like almost all of the other characters. While she represents tranquility, peace, self-assurance, the everlasting moment, Joe Christmas is a restless spirit and represents aimlessness, rootlessness, and the inability to deal with his own past. Lena accepts life as it is and doesn't blame anybody, not even her flighting lover, but Joe does not forgive the whites and

himself. Christmas, like Christ, who lived for 33 years, was persecuted and killed and, as a protagonist, presents the theme of fragmented identity and the search for it. Joe Christmas tries to find the essence of his being (which is represented by Lena's harmony) in his relationship with various women, but he never finds it: his relationship with them is never fulfilled and his personality is often shaped through his sexual experiences with them.

Milly Hines is the first woman in his life. To some extent he feels rejected when she dies at his birth. As Joe is the result of the union of an unmarried couple and as his father is a Mexican, he is considered abominable and is sent to an orphanage. When he is five years old, his first contact with sexual experience happens. It is associated with nausea, a feeling of guilt, and the fact that he is called an illegitimate negro. The orphanage dietitian, Ms. Atkins, gives Joe Christmas his pattern of life: instead of punishing him, as he expects and even wants, she rewards him and this fact makes him bewildered and confused. Joe's relationship with Mrs. Mc Eachern, his foster mother, cannot be called a sexual one, but she represents for him one aspect of women he dislikes: tenderness and affection. The conflict for Joe relies upon the contrastive behaviours: while her husband beats him, she tries to be soft to Joe (and he ends by running away with her money). When he is eighteen years old, he is attracted to Bobbie, a waitress in a Jefferson restaurant of low reputation. She initiates Joe into the rites of sex and their relationship could be trustful. But soon he is again rejected. Although revealing herself as being a whore, she rejects him and calls him negro. Finally Joe Christmas meets Joanna Burden, a spinster who has inherited her father's religious beliefs and her grandfather's

antislavery fanaticism. She devotes her life to negroes and is able to accept Joe as the negro that he is, although being white. Their sexual affair creates a struggle within her between passion and the demands of religion: she accepts his being a negro having sexual intercourse with him but afterwards forces him to pray in order to repent for their sin of having sex without being married. The conflict is so violent that it results in murder: Joe kills her. Joanna Burden embodies all the previous women in Joe Christmas' life and represents the burden that the white guilty Southern society has to carry. When he finds Joanna, he also finds frustration and guilt. Had he found Lena, he would have found his identity, his peace.

Some of the male characters in the novel also represent the oppression of racial problem and religion. The source of Joe Christmas' "negritude" comes from his grandfather, Mr. Eupheus Hines, a fanatic religious man. Suspecting that his illegitimate grandson's father was a negro, he killed him, put the child in an orphanage and spent the next thirty years acting as "God's chosen instrument" in attacking negroes. He may be compared to Mc Eachern, Joe Christmas' foster father. He was also a fanatic Presbyterian who was determined to teach Joe to fear God and detest idleness and vanity. So heavy was his fanatic oppression upon Joe that the young man ends by murdering him. We can establish a parallel between Joe's foster father and his grandfather for their similar roles in Joe's life. Both have made Joe Christmas suffer all his life at their religious authoritarian hands and both have inflicted corporal punishment on him: one by whipping him when he was young and the other by urging the Jeffersonians to lynch him. Mr. Gail Hightower, a presbyterian minister, as his name suggests, carries the idea of loneliness. His only friend is Byron Bunch. He also avoids reality,

trying to live in a magic world in the past. Hightower may be opposed to Joe Christmas: while Joe is deprived of all certainty about his past and cannot rest from his engagement with the present, Hightower, obsessed with the past, does not live in the present, withdrawing from life and its sufferings.

For Southern Puritans, women represent guilt, since they embody sex. They also represent the guilt resulting from racial exploitation. Men, on the other hand, represent guilt when embodying racial problems and also a religion based on notions of sin and punishment. These three elements, sex, religion, and race, are interlinked and represent the burden that society carries along. However, at the end of the novel, Faulkner unites Lena Grove to Byron Bunch. He represents the common man, the persistent one, who does not have the air of mystery or intrigue which surrounds the other characters. His name suggests common people, humanity. By uniting humanity to the earth, the only triumphant element of his version of the modern South, Faulkner gives us some hope that Man will prevail.

IMAGERY IN *Light in August*

Julio Cesar Jeha

Faulkner created a work loaded with symbols to depict the two strains that haunt the South and, by extension, all of mankind. These strains are the dualism represented by the black and white races, and time, as an inescapable circular trap.

Many are the symbols used, but there is one that summons up these aspects of Southern literature. It is the Ouroboros, the dragon biting its own tail. It is a Jungian archetype which is