Voice of the South, Voice of *Light in August*

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Mikhail Bakhtin remarks of Dostoevsky's novels that the text is woven in *"[a] plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses"*(6, italics Bakhtin). The same characterization applies to the narrative of *Light in August*. According to Bakhtin, Dostevsky's polyphony is mainly attributable to dialogue in characters who are *"not only objects of authorial discourse but also subjects of their own directly signifying discourse,"* and therefore the novel is structured "as a whole as a *'great dialogue'*" (7, 40, italics Bakhtin). Polyphony and dialogic relationships in *Light in August*, on the other hand, do not occur at the level of characters but rather occur in the context of communication among characters in an array of word-of-mouth communications such as conversation, dialogue and hearsay.[1] A large part of narrative in *Light in August* is consisted of communication represented by rumors and its transmitting process. The discourse of the town is created through "their" talking to each other, and is transmitted either by Byron-Hightower dialogue, or by the narrator.[2] "They" are white men, such as "the clerks, the idle, the countrymen in overalls," who perpetuate ideologies of Southern whiteness (348).[3] The reader learns how Southern white male ideology is brought into the town's discourse through the perspectives of Byron and Hightower, as well as the perspective of the narrator. I will first focus on the community's discourse-making process and how such discourse is transmitted, while examining that the narrative structure itself is opposed to the community's dichotomous discourse.

I then will focus on Joe Christmas and Lena Grove in relation to the community's ideology. *Light in August* starts with Lena coming to the town pregnant, and ends with her leaving with a baby. During her stay in the town, Christmas's crime reveals town's obsession as well as that of Christmas. While observing the community's response to Christmas as a character who is "neither/nor" in relation to the town's discourse, and Lena as a character who is "both," I will examine how such relationships reflect the structure of the text as a whole. Through this analysis, I will consider the problems of the relativization of the South, seeking the voice of *Light in August*.

I. Polyphony in *Light in August*

A. Discourse of the Town

"They," a dominant group in the town, talk about Christmas and his crime. It may be a

fact of the text that Christmas killed Joanna Burden. But it is not necessarily true that he is "black" and she is a "Southern" woman. Christmas's racial background is unknown, for his circus "Mexican" father might have a "black" ancestry. Joanna, in contrast, was born in the town, "yet she is still a stranger, a foreigner," "[a] Yankee, a lover of negroes" (46). The town's consensus, however, is designed to fit the discourse that a "nigger" killed "our" Southern white woman, which serves to expel and eventually kill Christmas.

What motivation might we attribute to Christmas's expulsion and murder? The most important reason is that the town of Jefferson is in crisis. According to René Girard, collective violence often occurs when any of the following conditions are met: first, a state of social and cultural crisis, which is to say, a generalized loss of differences; second, the presence of crimes that "eliminate differences"; third, the identified authors of these crimes possess the marks that suggest he or she may become a victim, the paradoxical marks of the absence of difference (*Scapegoat* 24). The town of Jefferson meets all three of these criteria. First, the town, like other Southern communities of the 1920s, is in social crisis, about to face the erasure of difference, which were established by structure of racism.[4] Hierarchical racial order as a social system, on the one hand, has been abolished in terms of slavery, but on the other the racism was reaffirmed by the "separate but equal" policy. As a result, the structure of racism became more internalized. Secondly, in such times of "an extreme loss of social order evidenced by the disappearance of the rules and 'differences' that define cultural divisions," black-on-white crime, which eliminates difference, presents a threat at a level of unarticulated emotion as well as an unforgivable violation of community rules (Girard, *Scapegoat* 12). Thirdly, according to community judgement, Christmas's way of life is racial passing.[5] Although passing is "a phenomenon of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century," it is most evident in the 1920s and 30s, in which context *Light in August* appears (Sollors 247).[6] In the frenzy of Christmas's capture, "they" comment that "'He dont look no more like a nigger than I do'" or that "'He dont look any more like a nigger than I do'" (346, 349). "'[W]hat made the folks so mad'" is that Christmas "'never acted like either a nigger or a white man'" (350). Christmas, whom they think is "'pretending to be a white man,'" is a threat, until at last they see "niggerness" when they see him "not saying anything: just bleeding sullen and quiet" when he is hit (349-50).

The fear of the social system's disruption manifests itself as the fear of miscegenation. As soon as people hear the rumor that Joanna was murdered, the crowd, "ranging from individuals to entire families," gathers around the burning house (287):

> Among them the casual Yankees and the poor whites and even the southerners who had lived for a while in the north, who believed aloud that it was an anonymous negro crime committed not by a negro but by Negro and who knew, believed, and hoped she had been ravished too: at least once before her throat was cut and at least once

afterward. (288)

The fear of miscegenation effaces differences among the white spectators—the Northerners, the poor, and women—and substitutes cohesion in its place. Jean-Noël Kapferer argues: "*To believe a rumor is to manifest one's allegiance to the group's voice,* i.e., to collective opinion. Rumors provide a group with the opportunity to stand up and be counted, and to express itself; in general that takes place at the expense of another group which is taken as a scapegoat" (104, italics Kapferer). Christmas at this moment becomes a representative of blacks or of blackness itself, and a scapegoat to be persecuted by the town. Brown's words to the sheriff that Christmas "'told me he was part nigger'" is what "they" waited for more than anything. The town of Jefferson expected that the murderer was a black man, long before Christmas's race is mentioned. Even the sheriff ordered the party to "[g]et me a nigger," despite the fact that the first witness of the fire said that the man he saw in the burning house was a white man (291). The information that Brown delivered answers the hopes, fears and forebodings they hold with respect to miscegenation, given that they "knew, believed, and hoped that she had been ravished" before and after "her throat was cut" (288). This information, of course, is immediate and significant to the Southern community, as the crime is considered to be subversive of white male supremacy.[7] Although Percy Grimm is actually the one who killed Christmas, the town "had accepted Grimm with respect and perhaps a little awe and a deal of actual faith and confidence, as though somehow his vision and patriotism and pride in the town, the occasion, had been quicker and truer than theirs" (456-57). The people of the town reaffirm this by saying, "'He's the captain of them. Special officer sent by the governor. He's the head of the whole thing. Sheriff aint got no say in it today'" (458). The law-abiding spirit represented by the sheriff is easily defeated, or more precisely, none of "them" hoped that Christmas would be executed by the law from the beginning.[8] Confronting the crisis of the disappearance of differences, the town needed someone to occupy the position Grimm came to occupy. Grimm, a racist extremist and a male supremacist, represents racist male-dominated society. The town, in other words, just betrays its real nature.

The original source of the rumors about Christmas's race is Doc Hines, whom everybody considers insane. He claimed that Christmas's father, whose racial ancestry is unknown, was a "nigger," in order to make his unmarried daughter's affair appear more sinful.[9] Since his life is driven by hatred and the justification of hatred he attributes to the fury of a Calvinistic God, Christmas is a perfect "instrument" to pursue his lifelong hatred. And because, as Thadius M. Davis says, "Doc Hines's God is a reflection of Hines himself," whatever he thinks is God Will is his own will (*Negro* 145). Doc Hines's thinking based on the self-made God is similar to Jefferson's stereotypical discourse in terms of the way that self-satisfaction is attained by seeing individuals as "instrument." Just like Hines is seeking somebody to hate, the town is always looking for somebody to exclude.

Exclusion is rather arbitrary and based on a dichotomous categorization of either/or. In this respect Brown played his best card. Brown himself was the prime suspect before he brought up the subject of Christmas's race. He was the suspicious man in the burning house. The time that he claims to have found the fire, eight o'clock, is three whole hours earlier than the time it was reported, near eleven. And people knew that he turned up with an eye to the thousand-dollar reward. When it was found that he had lived with Christmas in the cabin of the Burden house, the rumor was so disadvantageous to him that "everybody begun to tell about Christmas and Brown, . . . one of them or maybe both of them to murder that lady" (93). James Snead acutely explains that Brown is "so anxious to 'darken' and destroy Joe," because he is "Christmas's darker double," who "looks more like a 'foreigner' and 'nigger' and 'murderer' than Christmas does (he has a 'little white scar by his mouth')," thus "is likely to have 'black blood'" (92-93). It is conceivable that Brown knows by experience that the darker of two suspects is likely to be accused, as well as that once one is labeled "nigger," the other gets free of the suspicion. The way that the town abandoned two identical figures, Christmas to death and Brown to be exposed, reminds us of Girard's argument about how twins in "primitive" societies were abandoned in order to avoid contagion. In such societies, Girard writes that "twins inspire a particular terror" because they "invariably share a cultural identity, and they often have a striking physical resemblance to each other. Wherever differences are lacking, violence threatens" (*Violence* 56-57). Like "primitive" societies, Jefferson categorizes sociological twins, which resulted in the persecution of one as a "nigger," and exposed the other as nothing.

This either/or structure applies to the murderer and the murdered. Once Joanna is humiliated by a "nigger," her whiteness becomes so emphasized that they give her the status of "our" woman.[10] It is again a question of degree. "[T]hey would never forgive her and let her be dead in peace and quiet" at bottom, "even though she had supplied them at last with an emotional barbecue, a Roman holiday almost" (289). In comparison with the "nigger," how and how much they had hated her is ignored.

According to the terms of the town's monolithic white male ideology, individuals are the objects of a dichotomous categorization: either one or the other. The problem here is that there is no language to describe a person like Christmas, who is neither/nor. Since we perceive a thing mostly through language, it is almost impossible for us to perceive a thing that is not explained in that language. Besides, since facts are distorted to fit the limits of what is possible as discourse in Jefferson, people will be able to see neither facts nor limitations of the discourse, which both support and are supported by the limitations of such binary thinking.

B. Narrators as Relays

Christmas's crime and the possibility of his having "black blood" are transmitted from

Doc Hines to Christmas, then after almost thirty years, to Brown, to the sheriff and the deputy, to the town to Byron and finally to Hightower. By the end of this circuit, the "possibility" has, in "their" opinion, become a certainty.

The Byron-Hightower dialogue is a model for how communication transpires between the narrator and the reader. Hightower is a "narratee," who, as Martin Kreiswirth argues, "is not only the recipient of Byron's narrative but also functions as a model for the reader by explicitly calling attention to the means of making the narrative meaningful" (68).[11] What we should not forget about the Byron-Hightower communication is that their conversations occurs only at Hightower's house, just outside of town. As Byron thinks that if people found out, "'they'd take us both out and whip us,'" their relationship is restricted by the town and paradoxically strengthened by the fact that the town believes that nobody has "even been inside that house in twenty years" (73, 59). The taboo on talking and listening intensifies the secrecy of their communication and stimulates their desire to talk and be listened to. As a result, they get to the heart of the matter. Such a condition also creates a space out of mundanity, which is similar to the condition when the reader reads the novel.[12] Hightower and the reader, away from the town's hysteria, quietly examine "their" talk—which is to say, the discourse of the townspeople—about Christmas, which Byron relates. We should also remark the asymmetry in the relation between Teller and Hearer. Although their discussions tend to analyze the town's ideology with some antagonism, Byron is referred to as "a man of mystery" while Hightower is called by the more definitive epithet of "Gail Hightower Done Dammed in Jefferson," having been alienated and still residing in an alienated position (49, 61). The gaps between Byron and Hightower correspond to the gaps in the text-reader relationship: "the asymmetry" of the whole structure, Wolfgang Iser argues, "stimulates a constitutive activity on the part of the reader" (169-70). Since the constitutive activity of Hightower is predicated on his experience of the town's brutality and cruelty, this process itself stimulates the reader to bridge the gaps between what happened to Hightower twenty five years ago and what is happening to Christmas now. In other words, what the reader focuses on most through Hightower is the community's collective violence.

Byron is paired with the narrator in terms of his narrative position. Byron's transparency is very often emphasized: he is "a small man who had lived in the town seven years yet whom even fewer of the country people than knew either the murderer [Christmas] or the murdered [Joanna], knew by name or habit"; he is "the kind of fellow you wouldn't see the first glance if he was alone by himself in the bottom of a empty concrete swimming pool" (495, 416). His invisibility serves the reader to concentrate on what he says more than what he is. His remark that "most of what folks tells on other folks aint true to begin with," and his comment, "I reckon I aint no better than nobody else," are congruent with the novel's fundamental narrative characteristic, which avoids forming any authoritative view (54).

Before Byron appears as a narrator in chapter 4 and talks to Hightower how the town is

propagating rumors about Christmas's murder and his race, Byron's reliability as a narrator is fully presented. Chapter 3 shows that when Byron first came to the town, one of "them," those anonymous and exchangeable citizens, told him how the town's rumors triggered the lynching of Hightower by the Ku Klux Klan. Expected to eventually become an insider, the teller revealed the town's hidden and unwritten rule to Byron that the town unhesitatingly resorts to violence if somebody disturbs its order.[13] Despite "their" intention of making him an insider, Byron sees the town objectively when he says, the situation is "[a]s though . . . the entire affair [about Hightower] had been a lot of people performing a play and that now and at last they had all played out the parts which had been allotted them" (72-73). He analyzes "that the town had had the habit of saying things about the disgraced minister which they did not believe themselves" (74). He makes generalizations about human behavior, including "how people everywhere are about the same, but that it did seem that in a small town, where evil is harder to accomplish, where opportunities for privacy are scarcer, that people can invent more of it in other people's name" (71).

Juxtaposition of the unreliable frivolous town and objective philosophical Byron not only foregrounds but also relativizes the fallacy of the community. Byron's being so wary that "the chance to be hurt could not have found him" prevents him from being an outcast, until he becomes "wellnigh a public outrage and affront" for his seven days' behavior towards Lena (421, 417). The position of being neither an insider nor an outsider provides him a certain externality as well as the ability to communicate with both "they" and the alienated persons. As a result he becomes the most informed character in the community where as a rule the communication between one group and others is completely impossible. In other words, Byron provides the third parameter in the narrative with respect to the community's consciousness.[14]

Byron's narrative, however, is invested in his own condition. From the scene when a "countryman" found Brown in the burning house, we can surmise that Byron and the narrator differ in the way that they relay information. In chapter 13, the narrator relays the scene to the reader, focusing on the man's race. Byron's words to Hightower in chapter 4, on the other hand, is more invested in the dubiousness of Brown's character, calling him "drunk man" or "drunk fellow" in spite of knowing his name.[15] This is not because Byron is not interested in Christmas's race. In fact his primary interest is the same as that of the narrator, as it is certain that his account of the rumor begins with speculation about Christmas's race. He emphasizes Brown's intoxication and makes Brown seem suspicious because he is in love with Lena, who is pregnant with the child Brown fathered and is looking for him. Jealous Byron is unconsciously prejudiced, although he speaks as if he were simply repeating information from the point of view of the person who first discovered the fire. The narrator, in this sense, is narrating not from an objective point of view but in order to induce the reader to focus on race. What the narrator is doing in chapter 13, therefore, is not only to clarify and

redefine the information Byron related in chapter 4, but also to provoke the reader to focus on racial issues, through the terms of a dichotomous black and white discourse.

By means of the juxtaposition of Byron and the narrator, the reader becomes aware of the perspective of the narrator in relation to the community. Besides, the difference of these two narrators' primary concerns—for Byron it is Lena, and for the narrator, it is dichotomous discourse—foregrounds the narrator's perspective toward the narrative.

The narrative structure of chapter 19 is an example that the narrator introduces "their" communication in order to reveal and criticize the self-satisfied and monolithic discourse of the community. The chapter is composed of three parts: how "the town wondered" about Christmas's escape; Gavin Stevens's dialogue with his friend who remains mute; and the narrator's depiction of the death scene of Christmas. The reasoning and opinions of anonymous townsmen speculating about why Christmas escaped to Hightower's house are presented on the surface to indicate their sameness, and in order to compare to Stevens's theory. Stevens is specifically named because he is "the District Attorney, a Harvard graduate, a Phi Beta Kappa" with a long prestigious family ancestry in the town, seemingly different from the anonymous and exchangeable collective of "they" (444). The disposition of Stevens's theory, however, rather reveals that the most distinguished person in the town is same as "they" in considering Christmas to be a "nigger," except that he shows the dichotomous structure which privileges white over black even more pointedly than "they" do.[16] Or rather Stevens, who upholds the laws operative in Jim Crow states as a Southern white lawyer, is shown to be even more fallible than "they," by virtue of the fact that he knows that Doc Hines is mad but yet accepts the claim that Christmas has black ancestry. Stevens's dialogue with his schoolmate at Harvard, now a college professor of the neighboring state university, also reveals the fragmentation within the town. Although Stevens "has an easy quiet way with country people . . . talking to them in their own idiom about nothing at all," he discusses the incident not to "them" but to a man with a similar background as he, because it is not "nothing at all" (444). The fact that Stevens's friend neither asks him any questions nor challenges his opinions indicates that he ascribes to the same beliefs as Stevens. As an intellectual, he is in the same position as Stevens in his own town, and they are both parts of the "they" in their respective towns. This setting of communication shows even more emphatically the pervasiveness of monolithic Southern white ideology.

After Stevens's narration, the narrator presents what "really" happened in the town. In this narration, many things appear via the figure of Percy Grimm, none of which had been mentioned by the "they" of the town and Stevens, such as Grimm's conflict with the representatives of law-abiding people such as the commander of the American Legion and the sheriff, the town's acceptance of Grimm, and his murder and castration of Christmas.[17] The communication of characters can be regarded as the place where their lack of objectivity is revealed: none of the perspectives of the characters is without its own prejudice. The

narrator and Byron are no exceptions: they relay characters' communication as tinged with their own concerns. Polyphonic structure, in this respect, serves to save the text from being a collage of unreliability, avoiding the possibility of any one perspective taking over a position of authority. Yet the voice of the community is set as an axis of the narrative and the narrative focuses predominantly on the community. Since none of the perspectives is infallible, we might say that the fallacy of the community as a whole is most emphasized.

At the end of the chapter, the narrator presents the death of Christmas to the reader as the last information about him:

> 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.* 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.* It will be there, musing, quiet, steadfast, not fading and not particularly threatful, but of itself alone *serene*, of itself alone *triumphant*. (465, my italics)

André Bleikasten points out that "all of a sudden," blood which "was mostly a metaphor of defilement and malediction . . . turns into a radiant sign of glory" (*Ink* 328-29). Bleikasten is correct in saying that "the sacred is both the holy and the unholy, the pure and the impure" and thus Christmas has become, "through his sacrificial death, a superhuman figure," acceding to "the immortality of heroes or saints, if not of gods" (*Ink* 329). Yet, we miss the point if we regard this apotheosis merely as Christmas being "white and black," "both Christ and Antichrist" (Bleikasten, *Ink* 330).[18] Christmas's body is "pale," evacuating "the pent black blood" in the process of becoming a holy existence. To be apotheosized, does Christmas first have to be a white, because holiness belongs to whites? If so, the narrator is in the position of those who believe that "'God aint no nigger'" (384). The intention of the narrator here, however, is to disclose the limitations of the narrator who too uses dichotomous narrative. The narrator, while criticizing the town's dichotomous thinking as the cause of ignoring human beings as they are, has no other language than that of the town. Because in the narrator's term there is no language to describe this state of Christmas, who is finally freed from the bondage of categorization, the narrator cannot help making Christmas apotheosized and presenting him as "a superhuman figure."

As we have observed, the narrative of *Light in August* is polyphonic, conditional and indecisive. It is because the town's discourse is monolithic, authoritative and decisive. In other words, because the discourse of the town is composed in this way, the text takes a

diametrically opposite narrative style. Such polyphonic narrative, on the other hand, enables the reader to interpret the text and consequently relativize the South as the third parameter in terms of the text. In this case, does the narrator consider the reader the third parameter from the beginning? Or is it the case that the reader turned out to be the third parameter? We have observed that Byron is set as the third parameter in terms of the community's consciousness. Regarding the composition of the chapter, it seems that the narrator aimed to relativize the text at the point of the narrator and then to present it to the reader as the voice of the text, just as Byron transmits to Hightower the voice of the community. But it seems that the narrator failed to accomplish this aim due to the limitations of dichotomous language, only presenting ambiguous and oratorical description of dead Christmas. What then is the voice of the text? Is there such a thing in *Light in August*? If such a thing exists, the clue may reside in the narrator's concern about the problems of time—the past, the present, and the future—and its relation to the South as a whole. The victims of "[o]ld disasters" are not only those of the town's violence but also everybody who lives in the South. The narrator is trying to thrust these tragedies into the position of "old disasters" by trying to assume the future would be "peaceful" and "placid." The present has to be blocked up like a tableau, for at this moment there is nothing to connect between "disasters" and "hopes." From this amalgam of anxiety and hope of the future in ambiguous oratory, we can assume that the narrator is trying to introduce a viewpoint of future in order to relativize the South. The narrator is the only one in the text who grasps the town in the context of the South and has the perspective of future.[19] This will lead us further into a consideration of Christmas, who embodies the past of the South, and Lena, who implies its future.

II. Shared Obsession

The story of Christmas's life is embedded from chapter 5 to 12, in the middle of the chapters which articulate the town's rumors in chapter 4 and 13. The account of his life is presented in the form of Christmas's memory-narrating, being introduced such phrases as "[m]emory believes before knowing remembers" and "[a]nd memory knows this" (119, 146).[20] Why is it placed there and why is it memory-narrating?[21] One of the reasons for this is, as we have observed in the previous chapter, is to emphasize how the town's consciousness totally neglects an individual existence. Because of this positioning, the reader sees Christmas not as an object of the town's rumors but as an individual who struggles with his life. Another reason is that Christmas is a reflection of the town, insofar as he is a prisoner of the Southern white male ideology. The shared obsession of Christmas and the town is stressed by that the chapters which treat his tragic life intervene between the chapters which deal with the town's hysteria. Christmas is an embodiment of simultaneously the ideology of the Southern community and its ominous shadow image.[22] Eric J. Sundquist sees Christmas as "a *figure* rather than a person," someone who is "at once a reminder (of the amalgamation of white fathers and

black mothers during slavery) and a threat (of the amalgamation of black fathers and white mothers ever since)," for he "at a psychological level is a literal embodiment of the uncanny; while at a sociological level he is an emblem of his country's heightening trauma, containing 'within' himself the fantasized projection of a further, invisible country within" (71). Sandquist is correct, yet we had better consider Christmas a person and not "a *figure*" because he has become "a *figure*" or "an emblem" in the society which does not consider a human being unless he or she is racially categorized.[23] Everybody in such a society holds the anxiety that in fact he or she might become another Christmas at any time.

How, then, is Christmas presented in terms of the ideologies he shares with the Southern white men? First, he is obsessed with dichotomous categorization. And because he cannot be categorized under this classification, he is the evidence that this scheme is completely untenable. His life, therefore, is precisely a series of trials and failures of categorization. From Doc Hines to the town, including Christmas, all are eager to label him as it suits them, and none of them succeeds. Among these attempts to characterize him, the condition in Memphis orphanage is the most significant as Bleikasten poignantly points out that this experience constituted "the beginning of his schizoid sense of himself as self-etranged and heralded a future of isolation, alienation, and fragmentaion" ("Closed" 83). In particular, the rejection of the black yardman, with whom Christmas tried to identify, is almost fatal:

> [T]he nigger said 'Who told you I am a nigger, you little white trash bastard?' and he says 'I aint a nigger' and the nigger says 'You are worse than that. You dont know what you are. And more than that, you wont never know. You'll live and you'll die and you wont never know.' (383-84)

The yardman, who is no exception to binary thinking, invites Christmas's self-contradictory feeling, determining his condition of *nobody* in Southern society.[24]

Because "nigger," the first label applied to him, served only to alienate him, being isolated became almost his identity, just as the South identified itself with isolation from the United States at this period. As the South needs the North to isolate itself, Christmas needs the circumstances that isolate him. This is the second obsession, which Christmas and the Southern white males share. Christmas places himself on the worse side of the two, if it is necessary to choose sides. His life, on the surface, may be considered as "passing," but in terms of his own self-definition, he doesn't consider himself as "passing." The difference is significant when compared with his contemporary passing characters. Characters in *Passing* by Nella Larson pass for "the rights, benefits, and privileges" which are granted for only whites (Davis, Introduction viii).[25] The same motives are found in the anonymous protagonist of *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* of James Weldon Johnson.[26] The protagonist declares: "I had made up my mind that since I was not going to be a Negro, I would avail

myself of every possible opportunity to make a white man's success. And that, if it can be summed up in any one word, means money" (167).

What we see here is character's determination to pass; to pass for the better. As we see from his scenes of jobs, Christmas, on the other hand, is "in turn laborer, miner, prospector, gambling tout," and once an army soldier for four months (224). He apparently desires none of the privileges of whites, and rather longs for the most difficult option if he needs to choose one. In the South, he represents himself as "black" to put himself in situations such as telling (white) prostitutes that he is "black," and tricking or teasing white men "into calling him a negro in order to fight them: to beat or be beaten" (225). After finding out that representing himself as black, a weapon against society, is useless in the North, he stays sick for two years, just as the South entered the depression after the Civil War. He then leads a reverse life: he lives with blacks, shunning white people; fights the blacks who call him white (225).

The best means for isolating himself is violence, hurting others as well as hurting himself. Violence is another obsession for both Christmas and the Southern white men. It provides them an order and a system, as we can see in the relationship between Christmas and his stepfather McEachern, which clearly distinguishes between the ruler and the ruled, and the one who forces, orders and gives, and the other who resists, disobeys and refuses consequently:[27]

> He [Christmas] seemed to recognize McEachern without surprise, as if the whole situation were perfectly logical and reasonable and inescapable. Perhaps he was thinking then how he and the man could always count upon one another, depend upon one another. (159)

Violence creates cohesion among the Southern white men, and it is strengthened by the opposing parameters of blacks and women. Christmas considers his stepmother, Mrs. McEachern, to be an enemy who tries "to get herself between him and the punishment," which Christmas accepts "as a natural and inescapable fact" whether it is "deserved or not, just or unjust" (167):

> It was the *woman*: that *soft kindness* which he believed himself doomed to be forever victim of and which he hated worse than he did the *hard* and *ruthless justice* of *men*. 'She is trying to make me cry,' he thought . . . . 'Then she thinks that they would have had me.' (168-69, my italics)

The parameters of men and women, represented in the division of the qualities attributed to them, such as by "hard and ruthless justice" and "soft kindness," correspond to the similar division between whites and blacks by "cold hard air" and "summer smell and summer voices" (115, 114). Just as he claims to be "doomed to be forever victim of" woman,

Christmas is doomed to be victim of the concept of "blackness." And all the white men in the South have internalized the concept of blackness and women.[28] Hatred toward blacks and women is linked together and redirected into an even stronger hatred of black woman, a category which is termed "Womanshenegro." In the case of Christmas it appears in the strongest way, because he is constantly conscious of his "blackness" in himself.[29] In other words, to condemn his inner "Womanshenegro," he cannot help hating black women as the diametrical opposite parameter of his ideal self.[30]

This shared obsession appears as the celebration of masculinity. The reason that the town chose not Brown but Christmas as a scapegoat is, in a sense, that Christmas is an ideal figure for Southern white men, who adore lawless violence.[31] Christmas, termed "nigger," violated the strictest taboo of raping and killing a white woman. John N. Duvall says that Grimm's castration of Christmas is to force upon him the "role of woman" and points out that "Grimm's outrage and his excessively violent response can be read as an instance of homosexual panic," arguing that "[t]he 'black blood' that flows from Christmas's hip and loins is metaphorically and metonymically menstrual blood; Joe bleeds where women (and only women) bleed" and one of the Grimm's men vomit to see this "repeats Joe's vomiting upon learning of menstruation from Bobbie Allen" (63-64). Duvall is correct, but Christmas is killed not as a woman but as a black woman. Because Christmas represents white males, he has to be forced into the extreme opposite parameter against them, as the symbol of "Womanshenegro."

The most obvious reason for the desire for masculinity is rejection. Christmas is rejected by the society.[32] And it is same with respect to Southerners: they are rejected by the Northerners, the dominant group of the country. It is fairly common for oppressed people to direct their violence not against the oppressors but against those they themselves oppress. In order to affirm themselves, the Southern white men oppress blacks and women, weaker than they are in terms of societal power. In such a condition, the more the man is denied by the society, the more he craves the powers attributed to white male supremacy. This is the case of Christmas.

In his relationship with Joanna, Chiristmas thinks that "'it was like I was the woman and she was the man'" (235). Joanna is sexually a "dual personality: the one the woman at first sight . . . ; the other the mantrained muscles and the mantrained habit of thinking" (234-35). He becomes enslaved to her "hard, untearful and unselfpitying and almost manlike yielding of that surrender," her resistance "fair, by the rules" and "the necessity to despoil [her virginity] again that which he had already despoiled—or never had and never would" (234-35). To him, Joanna is a fellow white "man" and sex with her is a fight to defeat and to be defeated, to hate and to be hated.[33] Joanna, however, becomes a feminine person, and then becomes an oppressively masculine person. When her femininity ironically is revealed by her menopause, Christmas is bothered by the idea that "she got too old to be any good any

more," although he persuades himself that "it was not her fault" (106). He is clearly obsessed with youthfulness, for the good fights he desires are permitted only to young men. In his mind Joanna drops out of eligibility for the category of fellow man. As soon as she lost her femininity, she becomes like an old man. Just as McEachern forced him to repeat the catechism to make him into a hardworking honest farmer, she tries to force him to kneel down and pray as well as to go to a black college and become a black lawyer. Their relationship becomes subject to the logic of the ruler and the ruled, white over black. Christmas at last "believed with calm paradox that he was the volitionless servant of the fatality in which he believed that he did not believe" and repeats his reason for killing Joanna: "*All I wanted was peace* . . . 'She ought not to started praying over me'" (280, 112). The fate he cannot avoid is to be a black, a woman, a defeated person. Peace for him is constant fights with his fellow white men.

Christmas, first of all, never considers himself black. His confession of his racial ambiguity is always articulated from the "white" side, as is shown in his expressions such as "part-nigger," or "nigger blood in me." When he lived "as man and wife with a woman who resembled an ebony carving," he tries to dispel his whiteness in him (225):

> At night he would lie in bed beside her, sleepless, beginning to breathe deep and hard. He would do it deliberately, feeling, even watching, his white chest arch deeper and deeper within his ribcage, trying to breathe into himself the dark odor, the dark and inscrutable thinking and being of negroes, with each suspiration trying to expel from himself the white blood and the white thinking and being. (225-26)

We can apply the above passage to a person who is fully "white" blooded. "Blackness" in him does not matter at all here.

Christmas has "black blood" only at a conceptual level and no more than that. In McEachern's, it is a means of last resort to destroy his relationship with his stepparents, and thus is a passport to freedom.[34] In making up his mind to run away, "[h]e felt like an eagle: hard, sufficient, potent, remorseless, strong. . . . though he did not then know that, like the eagle, his own flesh as well as all space was still a cage" (160). What changed this is the lost love with Bobbie Allen. Christopher A. LaLonde observes that the relationship with Bobbie solicits Christmas into a "perverted passage," "a passage marked by denial, violence, and disintegration," and that the "identity is constantly regenerated by memory and actions that reestablish the pattern begun with Bobbie," for the pattern for Christmas "is self-defining" (108). In slight modification to LaLonde's view, we should not overlook the fact that the "perverted passage" is brought by Christmas himself. He tries to share his sweet secret with Bobbie to show his deep feeling of intimacy of her, but once the voice "I got some nigger blood in me" is introduced, Bobbie freezes up with the horror while Christmas remains the

same (196). Christmas is too innocent to think that her denial is not about sharing his own imaginary world, but about being a "nigger's" lover. He is satisfied with her resolution that "I dont believe it" (197). In terms of being blind to others' thinking and his self-satisfied reasoning, he is no different from the other Southern white men. As his grandfather's God is his own creation, for instance, Christmas's meaning of "nigger" is created just for him. No matter how familiar this definition is to him, it is extremely disturbing to others. Yet, Bobbie actually does not seem to believe it, because his secret is beyond all imagination. When he strikes down McEachern, she for the first time accepts his words to make sense of the situation by connecting the crime to the term "nigger," in order to reject him. And Christmas, being rejected by his lover, for the first time sees his dream-like imaginary destroyed and his sweet secret changed into something bitter. "Black blood" remains only as a weapon for the denial, violence, and disintegration of the others as well as of himself. On the way to get arrested after seven days on the run, he realizes that "he is still inside of the circle," thinking, "'[a]nd yet I have been further in these seven days than in all the thirty years, . . . But I have never got outside that circle. I have never broken out of the ring of what I have already done and cannot ever undo"' (339). The circle, from which he desired to escape in his boyhood, is the cage inside of him and he is totally entrapped into it.

Christmas's voice is a voice typical of Southern white men as spoken from the inside. The town's response to Christmas is a voice spoken from the outside. From both inside and outside, each side cries out with the fear of their own ideology. This answers the question of why Christmas's life is presented in the form of his memory-narrating, and why it occupies about two-thirds of the novel, and why it is placed in the middle of the town's nest of rumors. The result of their refusal to see Christmas as an individual, due to being absorbed in labeling him "nigger," is that "they" refuse to hear their own voice. Oppressed by their own ideology, all they can do is to keep hurting each other within it.

III. Woman as a Negative Figure

Faulkner has stated that *Light in August* is mainly "the story of Lena Grove," and that the "light" of the title, "just that luminous lambent quality of an older light than ours" connects with "Lena Grove, who had something of that pagan quality" (*University* 74, 199). It is true that Lena's quality "of a luminosity older than our civilization" lies throughout the novel, lighting up and wraps around the chapters of "our civilization," Western civilization based on an ideology which privileges white male, from the beginning to the end (*University* 199). Is Lena, then, a character who only flavors the novel with her luminosity, as many critics of this novel analyze her as an abstraction, enigmatic figure, earth goddess, or wonderful creature?[35] I rather disagree with them. Lena may remain in the background of the novel but it is a background that illuminates the limitations of Southern white male ideology, just like the polyphonic narrative structure of the novel illuminates the limitations of their discourse.

Lena cares about neither the crime Christmas committed nor his racial labeling, calling him "'the one in jail, that Mr Christmas'" (409). Lena's baby, fathered by Brown, who might well have black ancestry, as Snead points out, might "be another mulatto in a long string of uncertain progeny" (93). Viewed in this light, Lena is much more dangerous to the community than any other character. She is an opposing force to the ideology of Southern white males, but the town sees her as only a stranger coming and leaving, considering her nothing serious. The town cannot conceive that she is a threat because of its dichotomous perspective.

The town links Lena with Brown, who is connected to Christmas. We can observe the town's arbitrary and binary ways of creating discourse: as soon as Christmas is categorized as "nigger," Brown becomes inconsequential to the town, which perfectly fits with his shallow behavior. The Brown-Lena relationship, then, falls into a stereotypical story of the frivolous man and the abandoned woman, which is thoroughly banal and boring compared to that of a "nigger" murderer and a slain white woman. In addition to this, community-centered perspective, which can only see things through the past, makes the town blind. It would not consider Lena a threat unless her racially ambiguous children revolted against the town's order in the future.

As a matter of fact, none of the white men grasps Lena as a whole person. Lena is called a "whore" by her brother, and Verner thinks her pregnancy is because "[s]he has no mother" (26). Byron, despite her pregnancy, fits her into the image of a virgin, who needs his good care. For Brown she is nothing but an object to satisfy his sexual desire. Armstid admires her belief in family, saying to himself, "'she knows more than even Martha [Mrs. Armstid] does . . . about how the Lord will see that what is right will get done'"(25). Hightower believes that "*She will have to have [other children] . . . That will be her life, her destiny. The good stock peopling in tranquil obedience to it the good earth; from these hearty loins without hurry or haste descending mother and daughter*" (406). The furniture repairer and dealer sees in her a sturdy and independent woman, and marvels, "'You cant beat a woman'" (506). Each of them sees Lena partially, and as a result Lena is described as a kaleidoscopic woman. Since they do not need to attain any consensus on her, unlike they do with Christmas, their description of Lena becomes a mere reflection of their images of her.

We may say that critics who see Lena as a figure, such as an abstraction or a goddess, make the same interpretation. They of course express her as a total personality, but still conceive of Lena as an image rather than an individual. We may say that they too are caught through reading in the same binary thinking of either/or. The life of Christmas is, as we have discussed, a series of categorization and it is narrated internally, in the form of Christmas's memory-narrating, and externally as the town's rumors. This double emphasis is even strengthened by the problematization of the narratee in Byron-Hightower dialogue, Hightower, who too was the object of categorization. Moreover, people such as the Hines couple who are categorized as outsiders talk to Hightower about Christmas, and like Joanna, who is also

the object of categorization, they interrelate with Christmas. This practice of obsessive categorization which involves constant telling and re-telling induces the reader, or the critic, to see Lena as an object of categorization and to evaluate her in comparison with Christmas.[36] But why do we suddenly need to compare these two characters based on the same kind of dichotomous categorization, just as the hysterical town does? We know that such categorization falsely labels a character and triggers a tragedy such as that which happened to Christmas. And furthermore, we know that the text itself makes it clear that such characters' views are unreliable through the very act of telling and re-telling.

Given what we have learned in terms of method, then, how do we see Lena? In the first few pages of the novel, the narrator gives an account of two interesting episodes, one from Lena's childhood, and one describing her flight from her brother's house:

> After she got to be a big girl she would ask her father to stop the wagon at the edge of town and she would get down and walk. She would not tell her father why she wanted to walk in instead of riding. He thought that it was because of the smooth streets, the sidewalks. But it was because she believed that the people who saw her . . . would believe that she lived in the town too. (3-4)[37]

> The sister-in-law told the brother [about Lena's pregnancy]. . . . He called her whore. . . . Two weeks later she climbed again through the window. . . . She could have departed by the door, by daylight. Nobody would have stopped her. Perhaps she knew that. But she chose to go by night, and through the window. (6)

From these passages, we know that Lena pays enough attention to public eye to make herself look good, even though only she thought this worked. Even when she flees in the moonlight through the window, she casts herself as a loose woman, applying the norm of the town to herself. At Armstid's on the way to Jefferson, she has only a cup of coffee and a piece of cornbread because she thinks it is polite, "thinking with a sort of serene pride: 'Like a lady I et. Like a lady travelling'" (26). Lena is the producer and the actress of her own image, and others to her are subordinates or audience, if not background.

Given this, her way of associating with people is skillful. Depending on how manipulable they are, she changes her attitude: the most manageable to her are men, and the least, women. Knowing the antipathy of women toward her, she places men between herself and them. For instance, she uses Armstid and Byron as a barrier against Mrs. Armstid and Mrs. Beard. While she never answers men when they ask invasive questions about her marital state,[38] she not only answers Mrs. Armstid but also confesses to her, "'I told you false'" (18). Among women, she clearly distinguishes Mrs. Armstid from Mrs. Beard, considering the former closer to what she considers male, and thus easier to manage than the latter. Mrs. Armstid's

toughness is emphasized, in her description as "the gray woman with a cold, harsh, irascible face," "with a savage screw of gray hair at the base of her skull and a face that might have been carved in sandstone" (15, 18). Her view on men is rather mild, as seen in her tone of resignation, such as when she exclaims "'You men,'" or "'You durn men'" (16). On the other hand, Mrs. Beard, Byron's landlady, is a middle class woman, "comfortable," "with red arms and untidy grayish hair" (84-85). She is placed in the opposite position of men in that she is analytical and wise, as her name implies. Although she looks at Lena "as strange women had been doing for four weeks," her eyes are not "exactly cold" but "not warm" because she understands the whole situation that Lena is with the man named Bunch, who is in love with her, and she has yet "*to find a husband named Burch at the same time*" (86). She knows what the dominant ideology is, and how Lena suavely utilizes it:

> "They'll take as much time and trouble and country money as they can cleaning up what us women could have cleaned up in ten minutes Saturday night. For being such a fool [Christmas]. Not that Jefferson will miss him. Cant get along without him." (420)

> "you [Byron] would know that women dont mean anything when they talk. It's menfolks that take talking serious. It aint any woman that believes hard about you and her [Lena]. . . . Aint you and that preacher and ever other man that know about her, already done everything for her that she could think to want?" (419)

Mrs. Beard is well aware of what Lena is doing. Lena, therefore, keeps absolutely quiet when the landlady and Byron talk about her, and she even moves to the cabin of the Burden house. To solve her predicament, Lena needs to make men feel that she is the victim of not just one irresponsible man, but all men, appealing to men's unconscious feeling of shared guilt, without them noticing what she is doing. She explains to Hightower how Mrs. Hines mistakes her child for Christmas: "'I dont like to get mixed up. And I am afraid she might get me mixed up'" (408). This is because she knows that Hightower once drove his wife to death for his irresponsibility. On the road, Lena is quite stubborn, believing what she wants to believe and ignoring what she does not want to accept. For example, no matter how often and how firmly she is told the man working at the planing mill is Bunch, and not Burch, she refuses to believe she may have gotten the name wrong, and insists that her interlocutors are wrong. Despite the fact that people insinuate that the man she is looking for has run away from her, she does not admit it. Upon arriving in Jefferson, she pays absolutely no attention when the wagon driver points out the fire at the Burden house, instead focusing on her arrival. However, we find that she understands it well from her later explanation to Byron, that "'We could see it from the wagon . . . . It's a right big fire'" (53). Conceiving of the men

she meets on the road as modes of transportation to Jefferson, she acts the part of a weak-minded, abandoned woman. At the same time, she emphasizes her plight as an ignorant, vulnerable, and believing woman in order to make them feel superior to her. Knowing that men prefer essentialist ideology, Lena often repeats the homily that God will see to that "'a family ought to all be together when a chap comes'" and presents herself in a way that agrees well with their essentialism (21). She accepts Byron's lie that Brown is on business for the sheriff, because it is convenient to her. Byron almost becomes aware of what Lena is doing and tells Hightower, "'It's like she was in two parts, and one of them knows that he [Brown] is a scoundrel. . . . the other part believes . . . it was God that looks after women, to protect them from men,'" but he is too in love with her to examine her deeply (302).

Once she settles her difficult situation, Lena shows the face of strong and independent woman. When Byron tries to rape Lena on the road, she quietly but firmly scolds him, "'Why, Mr Bunch. Aint you ashamed'" and treats him "like she would that baby if it had been about six years old" (503). When Byron comes back and tells her, "'I be dog if I'm going to quit now,'" she says, "'Aint nobody never said for you to quit'" (506). Lena is not at all the passive dullard she is often made out to be by critics. She understands the situation and plays the appropriate role of a town girl, a fallen woman, a lady seeking her lover or a happy mother. It is white male ideology that is monolithic and limited: she is either a whore or a virgin, passive or independent, credulous or unbelieving, and vulnerable or stubborn. But she is both and more, just like anybody else.

Given all these points, we may see Lena in the following way. Because of her fertile body and her credulousness, she will be pregnant again and again, probably not by a single man but by several men.[39] Some of them may have black ancestry like Brown, but it makes no difference to her, because she ignores anything that may be to her disadvantage. She will not act like the mother of "nigger" children, because she knows how to deal with white men, the ruling group of society. Lena, who is still travelling, is a threat to the future of the South from the point of view of white men. The key term here is "the future of the South," for it is the main concern of the narrator.

IV. Voice of *Light in August*

When we read the text through the optic of miscegenation, Lena connects with all the main characters in the novel, and becomes paired with other characters.[40] First, Lena is paired with Brown. We are never able to determine whether or not Brown is "black." But there is no other character in the novel who connect his or her personal condition with "nigger" than Brown: when he talks to the foreman of the mill, he uses language like "'[s]tarting in at daylight and slaving all day like a durn nigger'" (44); when he talks to the sheriff, he says, "'Do you expect a man doing the work of a nigger slave at a sawmill to be rich enough to own a watch?'" (96); and when he talks to Lena, he refers to himself as

"'[s]laving like a durn nigger ten hours a day'" (431). For white men in the town, blacks do not stand on the same ground as they do, and thus are not the object of comparison. In this respect, Brown deviates from the mainstream of white men. Besides, Brown says to Christmas, "'You're a nigger, see? You said yourself. You told me. But I'm white. I'm a wh—'" (104). His declaration that "I'm white" is again something completely unexpected from the run-of-the-mill white man. Brown's saying, "'You said yourself,'" is as if he were ridiculing Christmas who has earlier unveiled his identity, implying that Brown himself is safe as long as he keeps silent.

Brown's white scar by his mouth, which indicates his dark skin color, completely drops out of the rumor's repetition-discussion process. Those whom Lena met on the way to Jefferson do not connect his complexion to a race: Lena said to Byron things such as "'Even when they told me the man they meant wasn't *dark complected*'" (51, my italics). It is because Brown is paired with Lena and his image of womanizer is so dominating that the other factors are neglected. Byron, who is in love with Lena, relates Brown's white scar to his attractiveness to women, which he lacks. He thinks that Brown has "an alert, weakly handsome face with a small white scar beside the mouth," and talks to Lena, "'*Dark complected*; womenfolks calls him handsome'" (36, 55, my italics). Byron's Hearer, Hightower, whose main concern is town's hysteria, simply accepts it as Joe Brown's identification with Lucas Burch. In the only scene in the novel where the couple appears together, the reference to Brown's white scar occurs twice:[41]

> Lena on the cot watched the *white scar* beside his mouth vanish completely . . . . She did not speak at all. She just lay there, propping on the pillows, watching him with her sober eyes in which there was nothing at all—joy, surprise, reproach, love—while over his face passed shock, astonishment, outrage, and then downright terror, each one mocking in turn at the telltale *little white scar*, ... (428-29, my italics)

The double mentioning of the white scar identifies Lucas Burch with Joe Brown (the narrator avoids calling him neither Brown nor Burch), but more importantly, it brings the issue of miscegenation to the surface. The first thing the woman says to the man is about the product of their relationship, the child: "[t]hen for the first time she spoke. . . . 'Come over here,' she said. 'Come on. I aint going to let him bite you'" (429). Brown's ambiguous racial status is emphasized by the fact of the child's existence.

The Lena-Brown relationship is paired with the Christmas-Joanna relationship through the figure of children. Lena, then, is paired with Joanna in that she is young and fecund, while Joanna is barren and in menopause. Bleikasten points out that when Joanna says to Christmas, "'A full measure. Even to a bastard negro child. I would like to see father's and Calvin's faces" (266), she "attempts to revenge herself upon her father and grandfather, and

her revenge would be complete if Christmas made her pregnant" (*Ink* 322). For Joanna, Christmas must be black, no matter how much he insists, "I dont know it" (254). Joanna's desire to have a "nigger" child corresponds to Lena's desire to have a child, whoever its father might be. It is more possible that a mixing of races will actually occur through Lena's omnivorous acceptance of any man than through Joanna's fantastic and obsessed pursuit of a "black" man, which is to say, Christmas.

In juxtaposition with Mrs. Hines, Lena's child is linked with Christmas as if it were his reincarnation: it was born right before Christmas was murdered, and Mrs. Hines actually mistakes it for Christmas, and proceeds to make up for her failure thirty years before.

These fragmented episodes converge in the last chapter of Lena's travelling: not in the town but in the more general space of the South. We should remark that the narrative perspective shifts from the narrator to a furniture repairer and dealer. The narrator now merely relays to the reader how the character narrator, a travelling furniture repairer and dealer, talks to his wife, and what he says. This shift in the role of the narrator itself shows the narrator's perspective toward Lena. Again it helps us see the structure more clearly when we use the optic of pairs: the narrator and Byron, two main narrators, the one in the text and the other out of it. Just before Byron loses his narrating position, he faces realities and consequently gains self-awareness. The issue of facing realities and self-awareness is emphasized twice right before the last chapter (chapter 21): the case of Byron in chapter 18, and the case of Hightower's failure in chapter 20. From the juxtaposition of these chapters next to each other, we may assume that the same self-awareness happens to the narrator, when narrating Christmas's death at the end of chapter 19.

As for Byron, when Lena gives birth, he is jolted into realizing that she was not a virgin long before he met her, and finds himself "nothing in this world" (401). In the process of reassessing reality, Byron learns of the nothingness of others as well as his own nothingness: "his mind is filled with still shapes like discarded and fragmentary toys of childhood . . . —Brown. Lena Grove. Hightower. Byron Bunch—all like small objects which had never been alive, which he had played with in childhood and then broken and forgot" (439-40). Finding that life consists of toy-like smallnesses, he loses respect for others, his honesty and gravitas, and becomes one of "them," an anonymous exchangeable Southern white man. He in fact has become a sort of evil person as we see when he does not say good-by to his only friend, Hightower, and even attempts to rape Lena on the road. He loses flexibility and communicability, and then loses the position of competent narrator he formerly held as someone in-between the town and its outsiders.

The completion of Byron's process of recognition is emphasized contrapuntally, followed by the incompletion of Hightower's self-awareness. In the evening after Christmas is killed, Hightower sinks into reverie. After looking back at his life, he sees halos of faces he has met in his life, just as Byron did. But he does not face the present. He thinks that he is dying and

should pray, but he neither dies nor prays. After the faces are extinguished, there appears his usual image of the cavalry, the symbol of his obsession with the past. If his future is death, death too is overpowered by the past he is obsessed with.

What is indicated here is that we need to take two steps in order to reach self-awareness: to realize that we are obsessed, and to cut off that obsession. While Byron manages to achieve these steps, Hightower was unable to achieve the second step of cutting off the obsessions and remains the same. Outside the parameters of the text, the narrator takes two steps. Before the scene of Christmas's death, the narrator probably considers that the polyphonic, conditional and indecisive narrative would prevent the text from becoming monophonic, authoritative and decisive, which is to say, like the community's dichotomy-based ideology. The narrator, however, realizes that the text, as well as the narrator is yet dichotomous and thus limited: if it cannot describe a person who is *neither/nor* like Christmas, neither can it depict a person who is *both* like Lena. To cut off such a narrative, the narrator abandons and passes the narrating position on to a new narrator, who may provide the third parameter in the text. The shift of narrators reaffirms our assumption that the narrator aimed to relativize the text and to present it to the reader. The furniture repairer and dealer is not obsessed with categorizing people. He is optimistic and holds wider perspective than the "they" in the town, for he travels a lot. Besides, he does not know that ambiguous-blooded Brown also keeps travelling, and it is not unlikely that this easy-going man might have made some ones of the women who think him handsome pregnant. He knows nothing about Christmas except that "they lynched that nigger" (497).

In the last chapter, sex is foregrounded in the form of pillow-talk. The furniture repairer and dealer tells his wife about Byron's failure to make love to Lena, a process which mirrors the successful lovemaking of the Teller and the Hearer. The solidity of their marital relationship, as they lie peacefully in bed, after having sex, puts the oddness of the relationship of Lena and Byron into relief. Lena, a good-looking country girl is traveling with a new born baby and a featureless man who is not even a father of the baby, and she is in total control over him. Lena, being neither a virgin nor a wife, is a deviant in the Southern community where a woman is supposed to be either the daughter or the wife of Mr. so-and-so, a man's personal property. Since she is no longer a virgin, she is supposed to settle down in the general category of wife. In this respect, Byron takes on the role of making her his possession for the order of Southern white men. He tries to discipline Lena and works to protect the Southern order. At this point, Byron is obsessed with conquering Lena to the extent of trying to rape her as shown when he says, "'I be dog if I'm going to quit now'" (506). His featureless appearance changes from transparency as a narrator to belonging to the anonymity and exchangeability of "them," the town's Southern white men. This bleak violence, however, is narrated comically by the Teller in this chapter. He alludes to the fact that Lena will eventually fall into Byron's hands, saying "'I think she was just travelling. . . . [S]he had just

made up her mind to travel a little further and see as much as she could, since I reckon she knew that when she settled down this time, it would likely be for the rest for her life'" (506). Here, the character narrator with a generous comic sense is flexible enough to grant her a respite. He allows for indecision and provisionality in that he remains only to imply her future settlement, though emphasizing that her travelling is the last repose before she becomes bound by patriarchal ideology. The fear of miscegenation no more exists in this chapter, and all left is the admiration of Lena as a representative of women.[42]

The shift of narrators—from the narrator to the furniture repairer and dealer—provides the novel with the image of a hopeful future, which is what the narrator desired. However, the narrator's other main intention of setting the third parameter in the text has not been accomplished. Although the furniture repairer holds a wider perspective than the "they" of the town, he is yet a Southern white man who sees Lena refracted through his own image of women: he requires women be either one or the other, which in Lena's case can be nothing other than being a wife. Byron's traveling symbolizes the state of the narrator. Being obsessed with possessing Lena now, Byron attempts to rape her, which results in failure. The narrator too is attempting to find a way to relativize the South in the text. The presentation of the furniture repairer and dealer is a provisional measure until the narrator finds and sets the perfect third parameter in the text, probably in the next novel. The role of the third parameter, for the moment, is left to the reader. Therefore, the reader in *Light in August* is the ultimate interpreter of the text, who constructs meaning along with the narrator, preventing the text from falling into a dichotomous structure and seeing individuals not as *neither/nor* but as *both* and more. We therefore conclude that in *Light in August* the further the reader is from the Southern community of the time, the more the text is relativized and vitalized.

We are now in a position to consider the whole structure of the novel. *Light in August* consists of several circles that represent different sets of ideologies. The most outer circle is Lena's and it enwraps the circle of the town, which enwraps that of Christmas, the most inner one. Between the circles of the town and Lena, there is the circle of Byron. The isolated persons in the town, such as Hightower, Joanna, and the Hines, are all included in the circle of the town, for the town cannot exist without alienating a part of the population. The freest person is Lena and the most obsessed is Christmas. The distance from the center circle to the outer also indicates the temporal position—from the past, to present and then to the future—in which the person lives. Christmas is burdened with the history of the South to the extent of self-destruction; people in the town live in a present continuous from the past, not toward the future; Lena lives the present and future, for her newborn baby as well as the possibility of being pregnant. The further towards the exterior the circle is positioned, the more the freedom in mentality increases.

These circles correspond to the structure of the novel. *Light in August* starts and ends

with Lena, and the town's and Christmas's obsessions are sandwiched between her stories. With respect to space, the novel shifts from outside the community to the inside, and inside to outside. To put it concretely, the thematic focus of the text starts from the outside, which is the field of Lena (chapter 1), and moves to an in-between space, which is represented by Byron (chapter 2), then to the community (chapter 3 and 4). And following Christmas's story (chapter 5 to 12), it reverses direction, to once again treat the community (chapter 13 to 15), and gradually back to mix with the in-between space (chapter 16 to 20), then to the outside (chapter 21).

In addition, there is a power balance among the circles: the outer circles overpower the inner ones. The town, for instance, eliminates Christmas, and through such self-consecration, it is empowered in that it becomes even more shackled to the past and more closed. The circle of Byron almost disappears when he faces realities provoked by Lena. He tires to cut into the future, the field of Lena, but he is absorbed within the circle of the town, for having lost psychological freedom.

At the end of the novel there remain two circles of Lena and the town, the ancient luminous light, and the Western civilization, represented by the Southern white male ideology. According to the structure of the novel, the former absorbs the latter. Lena does defeat the town without making it noticed. While Lena gives birth to racially ambiguous children, the Southern ideology can never perceive it. The novel's structure celebrates the freedom and the future, not the past and obsession. It also applauds an individual who tries to accomplish self-realization in whatever society he or she is in.

Notes

[1] Stephen M. Ross points out that "the South's oral tradition exerted a profound effect on Faulkner's story-telling, from his admiration for the literary heritage of Twain and South-west Humor, to his love of oratory, to his development of narrative techniques derived from an oral heritage's shared habits of gossip, swapping yarns, and telling and retelling stories about fellow humans" (3).

[2] "They" are often referred to as "the town," although when "the town" is used, it is more likely that its consensus is solidified, and "they," on the other hand, the consensus is still in the making, with "them" still assimilating word-of-mouth information.

[3] White women in the town are incorporated into the category of "they" by virtue of the fact that they comply with the ideology of "them," though without being given a voice themselves. Black men and black women are never included in the group of "they," and thus are never given voices, unless the voices are used to illuminate "them" from the background. The voices of black characters and white female characters, therefore, are not dialogical but monological, thereby conveyed to the reader as static objects.

[4] The "separate but equal" ruling of the Plessy v. Ferguson case in 1896, which upheld the constitutionality of segregation and rigidified the "color-line," was used as the legal basis

for all public segregation in the United States until it was overturned by the Brown v. Topeka Board of Education decision in 1954. The Plessy decision not only defined American "race" relations for much of the twentieth century, but also conferred reality on the very concept of "race" (M. Nell Sullivan, 499).

[5] According to Werner Sollors, passing "is used most frequently. . . in the sense of 'crossing over' the color line in the United States from the black to the white side" (247).

[6] Thadius M. Davis points out two reasons for this. First is the fluidity of class markers in the 1920s, resulting from new opportunities and advances in education, professionalization, urbanization, and interracial socialization, which caused shifts in the economic structure in which blacks had been consigned to the lowest rungs of society, eventually expanding the black middle class. The second reason is the fluctuation of race markers which were seem to distinguish blacks from whites, such as manners, habits, customs, codes of conduct and behavior, and etiquette (Introduction xi). Those who "passed" after the decision of Plessy v. Ferguson did so mainly for opportunities in America, while those of who passed before were to escape from the condition of enslavement. Statistics on those who "passed" throughout the 1920s and 1930s vary radically "from as many as 30,000 passers per year, to a more conservative 10,000 passers per year, to a low of 2,500 passers per year," although the number should be much larger than is commonly suspected (Davis, Introduction x). The number of people who passed declined with the civil rights movement of the 1960s.

[7] Kapferer expresses the rumor's making-process in a formula: Rumor = Importance × Ambiguity, explaining that "a geometrical or multiplicative relation at work here: were the event of no importance whatsoever or totally devoid of ambiguity, there would be no rumor. The energy behind the group's mobilization would be lacking" (8, 51). Because the news of Joanna's murder is important and ambiguous, it spreads quickly: the crime occurs Saturday morning, just after midnight, and on Sunday night Byron tells Hightower what happened in the town, including Brown's showing up on Saturday night.

[8] Cleanth Brooks argues that Christmas is not lynched but rather killed by Percy Grimm "when, during his trial, he breaks away and tries to escape" (51).

[9] Olga W. Vickery states that Doc Hines "looks for a scapegoat who will bear the guilt and punishment. By calling her lover a 'nigger,' he can transform a commonplace seduction into the horror of miscegenation" (69).

[10] Several critics associate *Light in August* with the author's short story, "Dry September" in terms of the Southern definition of "lady" and "nigger." For instance, Eric J. Sundquist discusses as follows: "by making Joanna a 'nigger-lover' before making her a 'nigger's lover,' Faulkner deflected attention away from a more unsettling possibility he had already explored in the brilliant story 'Dry September' . . . in which the 'rape' of a white Southern spinster by a black man is clearly suggested to be a product of her own diseased imagination. It may be that Faulkner found this possibility too dangerous to elaborate in *Light in August* and thus countered Joanna's explicit desire for violation with her New England abolitionism" (84).

[11] Hightower satisfies all the qualifications for the role of narratee that Gerald Prince enumerates: the narrattee "constitutes a relay between the narrator and the reader, he helps

establish the narrative framework, he serves to characterize the narrator, he emphasizes certain themes, he contributes to the development of the plot, he becomes the spokesman for the moral of the work" (23).

[12] One of the reasons Byron respects Hightower is that he reads a great deal. His reading is in contraposition to "their" talking.

[13] Hightower was only a nuisance in the community, for his sermon did not really address "the church and the people" and he used "religion as though it were a dream" (61). Christmas, too, was merely somebody different from "them," a foreigner. The town resorts to violence when its expectations are betrayed: Hightower did not leave the town after resigned the church because of his wife's suicide; Christmas is determined to be a "nigger" after he committed a crime.

[14] In this paper, I am using the term, "the third parameter," to refer to the point of view which can relativize the structure which can only act or "read" in terms of an either/or categorization. The third parameter, therefore, comes outside of the structure.

[15] It is depicted as follows: "And immediately the countryman who had discovered the fire . . . remembered that he had seen a man in the house when he broke in the door. '*A white man*?' the sheriff said. 'Yes sir. Blumping around in the hall like he had just finished falling down the stairs. Tried to keep me from going upstairs at all. Told me how he had already been up there and it wasn't nobody up there. And when I come back down, he was gone'" (290, my italics). Byron relays the incident to Hightower as follows: "'It was Brown. But the countryman didn't know that. He just said it was a *drunk man* in the hall that looked like he had just finished falling down the stairs, and the countryman said 'Your house is afire, mister' before he realised how *drunk* the man was. And he told how the *drunk man* kept on saying how there wasn't nobody upstairs . . . . And besides, the man was too *drunk* to know, anyway. And he told how he suspected there was something wrong from the way the *drunk man* was trying to keep him from going upstairs. So he started upstairs, and the *drunk fellow* trying to hold him back, and he shoved the *drunk man* away and went on up the stairs. He told how the *drunk man* tried to follow him. . . and he . . . thought about the *drunk fellow*, . . .'" (90-91, my italics).

[16] Some critics believe that Gavin Stevens reflects Faulkner's own ideas. Davis, for instance, argues that "Stevens' theorizing is purely fantasy and a whimsical, romantic fantasy at that. Yet his theory has been assumed to be Faulkner's own" (*Negro* 168). Such argument is not to the point only in that Stevens's theory is included in fallible opinions of the town.

[17] The name of Percy Grimm is never mentioned in "their" talk, except when the sheriff jokingly mentions him to Byron, who is leaving the town. This indicates that the town on the surface tries to hide its acceptance of this racist extremist.

[18] As for the use of Christ, Bleikasten claims that "[a]ll Christmas has in common with Christ are the trials of his martyrdom and the ignominy of his death" (*Ink* 330).

[19] One of the characteristics of the town is past-conscious. The alienated persons, such as Joanna, Hightower, and the Hines, are all obsessed to the past. Byron, located in an in-between position, is a mystery in terms of time and space: we never know what brought him to Jefferson or why he distances himself from others. All we know is that he

lives the present.

[20] This memory-narrating continues till Christmas walks into Jefferson, and gradually falls into the hands of the narrator with Christmas as a focal character, although the tone of memory narrator remains.

[21] In terms of memory-narrating, it is possible to think as follows. The community's consensus on Christmas is that he is a "nigger." If he were black, his voice would be reported to the reader as a monologue or a static thing according to the basis of the narrative in this novel. But the narrator knows that Christmas's race is ambiguous, that he might be a white. His racial ambiguity makes his position in the town incalculable, and this invites the narrator's indecisive attitude. The narrator, therefore, lets not Christmas but his memory narrate.

[22] This image is so strong that many critics view him as an abstraction or an enigma. Alfred Kazin's view of Christmas as "an abstraction seeking to become a human being" is probably most often quoted (252). Kazin argues that "Joe Christmas is the most solitary character in American fiction, the most extreme phase conceivable of American loneliness" (253). Hugh M. Ruppersburg argues that "[t]he enigma he [Christmas] represents, like the enigma of every human being, lies beyond explanation. As the archetypal individual—in conflict with his heritage, nature, time, society, himself—he remains at the end the selfsame mystery he was in the beginning" (54). Christmas, however, represents neither American loneliness nor every human being. He is the representative of the Southern white males.

[23] About Christmas's tragedy, Faulkner said, "he didn't know *what* he was, and so he was *nothing*. He deliberately evicted himself from *the human race* because he didn't know *which* he was. . . . he didn't know *what* he was . . . [w]hich to me is the most tragic condition a man could find himself in—not to know what he is and to know that he will never know . . . [T]he people that destroyed him made rationalizations about *what* he was. They decided *what* he was. But Christmas himself didn't know and he evicted himself from *mankind*" (*University* 72, my italics). The author's usage of *what* and *which* to mean the same thing also indicates that racial categorization is prior to any other category in the South.

[24] This episode is revealed not by Christmas's memories but by Doc Hines. As Sullivan says, "Christmas repressed the painful memory of this event" (507).

[25] In *Passing*, two types of passing are illustrated as Davis indicates: Clare "crosses over the color line permanently," while Irene crosses "temporarily or from time to time for social convenience." The former, therefore, enters "into the social privileges, protections, and entitlements of whiteness in all facets of their daily existence," while the latter's aim is "to obtain the goods, services, or entertainments they would otherwise be denied" (Introduction xi). Although the types are different, they pass with their own wills for opportunities.

[26] Christmas leads his street life probably from 1914 to 1929. *Passing* (1929) and *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912) are stories of his contemporaries, although the main locale is not small town in the Deep South but large cities or the North, such as Chicago, New York, Connecticut or cities in Florida.

[27] Doc Hines's watchful gaze is violence too. This old man and McEachern have much in common. Both believe in Calvinism in their own ways and use Christmas as a tool: for

Hines to hate, and for McEachern to obtain cheap labor (he looks at Christmas as if "he might have examined a horse or a second hand plow, convinced before hand that he would see flaws, convinced before hand that he would buy" when signing the promissory note in the orphanage) (142). They beat their wives, to whose suffering they are indifferent. Christmas learns mental violence, which is to say hatred, from Doc Hines and physical violence from McEachern.

[28] Philip M. Weinstein argues, in *Light in August* black is "not the color of a man's skin but instead a murderously projective state of the white male mind, that which blasts the community's precarious chances for mutual acceptance and peace" ("Marginalia" 178).

[29] Doreen Fowler points out that "of all Faulkner's characters, possibly none is more relentlessly contemptuous of women than Joe Christmas," arguing that his "vehement antipathy for women has deeply repressed psychic causes: when he lashes out at the women and blacks outside of him, he seems to be attempting to repudiate the womanliness and blackness within him" (146, 153).

[30] In Christmas, as Lee Jenkins points out, the "split of good/bad self incorporates also the dichotomies of strength versus weakness, male versus female, and, in terms of racial identity, whiteness versus blackness" (204).

[31] In his chase of Christmas, Grimm says "'Good Man'" (462).

[32] Characters who are racist and sexist extremists are all rejected by the society. Not to mention Hines, Grimm is seen to be worthless, showing "no ability in school, in which he had been known as lazy, recalcitrant, without ambition" until the new civilian-military act opened his life as a racist extremist (450-51).

[33] This is why Christmas becomes furious when he finds the dinner in the kitchen, saying, "*Set for the nigger, For the nigger*" (238). He found that he had failed to belong with the white men, who are allowed to hate one another at the same level.

[34] He thinks to tell Mrs. McEachern that her husband "has nursed a nigger beneath his own roof, with his own food at his own table" (168).

[35] Such examples are "world of nature with its total indifference to both moral and social categories" (Vickery 80), and "a kind of impersonalised catalytic force, effecting change but itself unchanging" (Michael Millgate 125). Weinstein discusses that how first six pages of the novel compose "a lyrical celebration of Lena Grove as a 'wonderful' creature" ("Meditations" 86). Bleikasten says Lena "is a very earthy earth goddess," associating her name with "Helen and Diana" ("Praise" 131). Judith Bryant Wittenberg argues that "we realize that she is leaving the community in the same impersonal, enigmatic way in which she arrived" and points out that "we see an intriguing struggle on the part of the narrator and characters such as Byron and Hightower between an effort of 'real' Lena in realistic terms and a wish to regard her as an almost abstract force" (116).

[36] For instance, Weinstein compares Lena with Christmas, arguing that in *Light in August* "the most solitary figure is Lena Grove" and "there is no one like her in the novel," because Christmas "is like McEachern and Hines in their unbending misogyny, like Grimm in his impatience with natural processes, like Burch in his being on the run, like Hightower in his latent homosexuality. . . . Lena, by contrast, is like no one else"

("Meditations" 86-88). Vickery also compares these two characters, pointing out that "[t]he same almost anonymous figures who attach the label of Negro to Christmas in order to lynch him also forget the social stigma of Lena's pregnancy in order to help her" because "while Joe comes bearing death for himself and others, Lena comes bearing life" (80). Millgate argues that Lena "provides a steady imperturbable groundnote, an onward linear progression that offers a contrast to the desperate contortions—moral, emotional, and physical—of the other characters" (125).

[37] Wayne C. Booth picks up this scene as an example of "how one character misinterprets another's unspoken thoughts or motives" and argues that "[t]he fact of the misinterpretation is something only the omniscient narrator could know, since it is made up of the father's private judgment and the daughter's private motive; yet the scene would be pointless as a clue to Lena's character unless the misjudgment were made clear to us" (172-73). This incipient episode forebodes that this novel is composed of a mixture of judgment and misjudgment, understanding and misunderstanding, and interpretation and misinterpretation.

[38] See, for example, *Light in August*, 28, 50-51.

[39] Faulkner said he presented Lena with "pagan quality . . . that's—the desire for that child, she was never ashamed of that child whether it had any father or not," and "she didn't especially need any father for it . . . . It was enough to have had the child" (*University* 199).

[40] The text multi-dimensionally emphasizes juxtapositions and pairings. As for names of characters, for instance, they are paired: Joe Christmas and Joe Brown, Joe and Joanna, and Bunch and Burch.

[41] Besides this scene, the narrator describes Brown as "a tall, lean, young man in dirty overalls, with a *dark*, weakly handsome face and curious eye. Beside his mouth there was a *narrow scar as white as a thread of spittle*" in the day Brown finds out the affair of Christmas with Joanna, a white woman (273, my italics).

[42] If this chapter is narrated by the narrator, who knows the possibility of miscegenation, it would be pessimistically, if not pedantically, as we find in the death scene of Christmas.

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