An Examination of William Faulkner's Use of Biblical Symbolism in Three Early Novels: *The Sound and the Fury, As I Lay Dying,* and *Light in August*

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Scholarship devoted to examining the role of religious elements in the fiction of William Faulkner is by no means in complete agreement. Critics such as Alfred Kazin and Giles Gunn tend to minimize this role or dismiss it as nothing more than an extension of Faulkner's Southern religious upbringing, i.e., being brought up in the church at an early age and raised in a small town populated by people of several different denominations (Baptist, Methodist, Episcopal, and Presbyterian, to name a few). Other critics, including Cleanth Brooks, Virginia V. Hlavsa, and J. Robert Barth, contend that Faulkner at least held strongly to certain key beliefs within the Christian religion, though they often stop just short of referring to him as a genuine born-again Christian. These critics will be addressed in order to conclude that, at least in the early part of his literary career, Faulkner held beliefs consistent with those found in Christianity, though they may not have been outwardly apparent.

The focus of this study will be limited to three of Faulkner's early novels: *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), *As I Lay Dying* (1930), and *Light in August* (1932). Together, these novels all exhibit some degree of Christian content including, but not limited to, themes of human depravity and redemption, characters that serve as Christ figures, and outright Biblical references. In addition, they were all published within a four-year period. It is not a coincidence, then, that such content appears in these three novels, published consecutively in 1929, 1930, and 1932. Such a consistent display of Christian elements is indicative of a deliberate religious emphasis on Faulkner's part.

In order to reach this conclusion, the novels themselves will be discussed in detail, as well as critics' responses to them. Relevant biographical information will be used, coming mainly from the time period in which Faulkner is writing the novels (1928-1932). A select

amount of interview material will also be used, mostly from Faulkner's talks at the University of Virginia during the years 1957 and 1958. His responses here, however, should be treated with caution. An intensely private man, Faulkner is known to have been less than truthful when answering questions about his life and work. It's hard to gauge how honest he was with these responses. Also, Faulkner is about twenty-five years removed from these novels on which he is speaking; it stands to reason that his thoughts on the meaning of the texts could have changed over such a long period of time.

In interviews conducted around the time of *The Sound and the Fury's* publication, Faulkner provided answers that were less than serious. In response to a question regarding his birth, he said, "I was born male and single at an early age in Mississippi. I am still alive but not single. I was born of a negro slave and an alligator, both named Gladys Rock. I have two brothers, one Dr. Walter E. Traprock and the other Eaglerock, an airplane" (qtd. in Meriwether 9). The interviewer, Marshall J. Smith, writes, "I had to turn elsewhere to learn that he had been born in Ripley, Mississippi, in October, 1897, and that several years afterward the family moved to Oxford where stood the University supported by the state" (9). Even here, though, Faulkner's birth date is incorrect—he was actually born September 25, 1897. Smith also asserts the authenticity of Faulkner's service in World War I and seems to have genuinely believed that he hurt himself in battle (6, 13). When he asked Faulkner about his early life, this reply was given:

> Quit school and went to work in grandfather's bank. Learned the medicinal value of liquor. Grandfather thought it was the janitor. Hard on the janitor. War came. Liked British uniform. Got commission R.F.C. pilot. Crashed. Cost British government 2000 pounds. Was still pilot. Crashed. Cost British government 2000 pounds. Quit. Cost British government $84.30. King said, "Well done."

> Returned to Mississippi. (13)

The above selection shows Faulkner's penchant for stretching the truth in a convincing manner. A 1931 biographical sketch from *The New Yorker* reports that during the war Faulkner "crashed behind his own lines" and "was hanging upside down in his plane with both legs broken when an ambulance got to him" (23). It is now common knowledge that he never served in World War I, but apparently he was very skilled in convincing others that he did.

In this single interview, Smith notices the distance that Faulkner is trying to keep between himself and the inquiring public. This accounts for his nonsensical answers to serious and well-meaning questions. In a 1931 interview for the *New York Herald Tribune*, the interviewer writes, "Mr. Faulkner hates interviews, hates being asked questions, and 'Ah don't care much about talkin',' he says. He is a pleasant, somewhat embarrassed young man, until he gets interested in something he is saying, when he speaks with assurance. He answers questions slowly, almost reluctantly, in a Southern drawl so low that he is a little difficult to understand" (19). Later he writes, "The author grew almost perversely vague when he was asked questions about his books" (21). Faulkner's discomfort with talking about the content of his books is palpable here.

Such discomfort on Faulkner's part is also evident in the answers he gives to students at the University of Virginia in the late 1950s, particularly to questions that concern personal information. Douglas Day, then a graduate student, describes his experiences with Faulkner in this setting:

> . . . Faulkner never cared to discuss his work with me or any other supplicant. Our first meeting . . . was very frustrating. I asked my questions; Faulkner only smiled and sucked on his pipe . . . . I came to believe, after sitting in on many . . .

> classes, that he enjoyed the possibilities for incremental variation in his answers, responding one way today and another way next week, especially about his own work . . . . I reasoned that Faulkner had to keep from boring himself over so many interviews and conferences, and so quite understandably wished to embellish here and there, to revise the "facts" now and then, just for fun . . . . [I]f forced to talk about "literature," . . . he would almost unfailingly hide behind a shield of irony, amiable banter, or assumed (or real) forgetfulness. (xii, xiii)

Faulkner also employs this method of deflection when dealing with questions concerning his religious beliefs.

When asked directly about his personal Christian beliefs while at the University of Virginia in 1957, the answers Faulkner supplied were usually vague. One such exchange is as follows:

> Q: Mr. Faulkner, you have been called, among other things, [a] Christian humanist. I was wondering if you could tell me what you consider your relationship to the Christian religion?
>
> A: Why, the Christian religion has never harmed me. I hope I never have harmed it. I have the sort of provincial Christian background which one takes for granted without thinking too much about it, probably. That I'm probably—within my own rights I feel that I'm a good Christian—whether it would please anybody else's standard or not I don't know. (qtd. in Blotner and Gwynn 203)

At first glance, this seems like an honest response. It addresses the question in a not-so-direct manner and is full of typical Faulknerian wit. Critics such as Giles Gunn use or allude to quotes

such as the one above in order to advance the claim that Faulkner never intentionally placed Christian symbolism in his novels. Such quotes, however, were made about twenty-five years after *Light in August* was published. While this does not totally discount what Faulkner said, it is safe to say that his feelings toward the book and his reasons for writing it may have changed over the course of twenty-five years.

Scholars are in disagreement as to the exact nature of Faulkner's religious preferences, especially as they apply to the Christian elements of these particular novels. Some critics contend that this content does not serve as an extension of Faulkner's personal beliefs. Alfred Kazin, for instance, declares, "I for one find it hard to think of Faulkner as confiding his troubles to a personal God" ("Faulkner and Religion" 4). Interestingly enough, Kazin does not give a specific reason for this. Perhaps it has to do with Faulkner's widely documented drinking habits, or his uninhibited examination of sexuality in his novels—issues that likely would have kept him on the outside of any seriously minded religious community in his day. Kazin goes on to argue that the religious elements contained within novels such as *Light in August* are products of both Faulkner's religious background and the Southern religious culture of the time.

The term "Southern religious culture" refers to the collective spirituality found in most Southern states that has caused some to label it "the Bible belt." Samuel S. Hill writes, "The South is the only society in Christendom where the evangelical family of Christians is dominant" (1269). Religion was treated very seriously in the South; church attendance was encouraged, even expected (1273). Hill continues, ". . .[A]n impressive percentage [of religious Southerners] are involved in the organizational life of the congregation, often attending three or more activities per week" (1273). It is known that Faulkner experienced this particular aspect of Southern religious culture on a somewhat consistent basis, at least in his early childhood: he

attended Sunday school at the New Albany Methodist church as a young child (Blotner 16; Wilson 27).

Charles Reagan Wilson delves further into the subject of the religious culture of the South and its influence upon Faulkner's work. He is of the opinion that "Faulkner was a critic of Calvinism" because he "saw it limiting human potential" (22). Wilson's definition of Calvinism is as follows: "Calvinism teaches the absolute sovereignty of God and the depravity of human beings. They are unable to fathom God's purposes, nor can they dictate their own destinies. Accompanying Calvinism historically has been a pronounced belief in the doctrine of the elect, a conviction that Calvinists are God's chosen" (22). He claims that "Faulkner surely targeted this Calvinism as a source of Southern evil" (22). Though Wilson provides a good definition of Calvinism, and while Faulkner does seem to criticize the rigidity of this belief system, he also borrows heavily from Calvinistic thought. In particular, the theme of man's depravity is evident throughout *The Sound and the Fury*, *As I Lay Dying*, and *Light in August*.

John H. Leith also addresses the importance of Calvinism to the world of Faulkner's literature:

> Calvinism also influenced the literary development of writers such as William Faulkner. He once noted that he had used religious symbols in his works because they were all around him in north Mississippi, and Calvinism was perhaps the central religious influence he explored. Faulkner disliked what he saw as a puritanical stress on sober living, the discouragement of fleshly pleasures, and a spiritual self-righteousness, all of which he saw stemming from Calvinism. He portrayed characters made authoritarian and repressively violent by a Calvinist outlook. His Calvinists . . . show little concern for ritual or piety, but believe in

> God's justice and in human practicality and good works . . . . Faulkner did seem to admire especially one emphasis in Calvinism . . . that on the human will and the need for action. (1281)

These observations effectively describe Faulkner's interest in Calvinist thought. In *Light in August* especially, he shows how extreme Calvinism can have a negative effect on an individual's humanity.

Wilson addresses the importance of answering the denominational question when discussing Faulkner's personal religious beliefs. Though Faulkner "devotes considerable attention to the Presbyterians," they were not the dominant religious denomination of the region (23). Wilson continues, "The South has been and still is that region dominated by Baptists, with widespread secondary influence from the Methodists. . . .In Faulkner's time, Mississippi had one of the highest percentages of enrolled church members in the nation" (24). This shows that Faulkner certainly had an audience for the Biblical content of these early novels. Wilson concludes that Faulkner does not prefer one denomination over another; he instead ascribes to a more general belief in Christianity (26).

Wilson's argument serves as a complement to views of other critics like J. Robert Barth, who argues that Faulkner held Calvinistic beliefs. He writes, "[The] strong thread of predestination that runs through his work, together with his preoccupation with guilt and man's depravity, put the unmistakable Calvinist stamp upon him" ("Faulkner" 15). This is certainly true in one sense, considering Faulkner's seemed obsession with man's sin and its consequences, but some of the other major points of Calvinism (i.e., irresistible grace, perseverance of the saints, limited atonement) are less evident, if not entirely absent, in the three novels. It would be unfair, then, to consider Faulkner a complete Calvinist, since he only draws upon a few of its

major principles in his fiction. He does, however, share Calvin's interest in the sinful nature of man.

Biographical information pertaining to Faulkner's early experiences with the Bible and church is relatively sparse. It is known that he was baptized into the Methodist Church in New Albany, Mississippi at an early age (Wilson 27), where he "faithfully attended Sunday school" with his mother and brothers (Blotner 16). By 1904, however, this attendance began to decline as Faulkner's mother apparently grew tired of trying to force her sons to go (Blotner 20). It declined even further "after about the age of twelve as [Faulkner] began to prefer spending time at his father's livery stable and pursuing other Southern masculine pastimes, such as hunting" (Caron 59). When staying with their great-grandfather Dr. John Young Murry, the young Faulkner boys were required to recite a verse from Scripture before breakfast (Blotner 35). If no verse was ready, then the guilty party did not eat (35). In a 1956 interview, Faulkner recalls this particular family tradition in response to a question regarding the origins of his knowledge of the Bible:

> My Great-Grandfather Murry was a kind and gentle man, to us children anyway. . . . [H]e was (to us) neither especially pious nor stern either: he was simply a man of inflexible principles. One of these was, everybody, children on up through all adults present, had to have a verse from the Bible ready and glib at tongue-tip when we gathered at the table for breakfast each morning: if you didn't have your scripture verse ready, you didn't have any breakfast: you would be excused long enough to leave the room and swot one up. . . .
>
> It had to be an authentic, correct verse. While we were little, it could be the same one, once you had it down good, morning after morning, until you got a little

> older and bigger, when one morning (by this time you would be pretty glib at it, galloping through without even listening to yourself. . .) you would suddenly find his eyes on you—very blue, very kind and gentle, and even now not stern so much as inflexible; and next morning you had a new verse. (qtd. in Meriwether 250)

Faulkner also is reported to have given his future wife Estelle Oldham verses from the Song of Solomon (36). This implies, then, that he was at least studying some part of the Bible at an early age, if only for its poetic value.

Once Faulkner reaches his teenage years and twenties, there are no records of him attending church. The next significant involvement of church in his life concerns his marriage to Estelle Oldham in 1929. They were not able to get married in St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Oxford, where Estelle was a member, because she had been divorced from her previous husband Cornell Franklin, and the church had a strict policy about not remarrying divorcees (Blotner 241). Because of this, they had to settle for "one of the best-liked ministers in the county, Winn David Hedleston, . . . pastor of the College Hill Presbyterian Church" (241). In the early years of their marriage, the Faulkners did not attend church on a regular basis (Caron 59). They would, however, occasionally attend St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Oxford (Blotner 271; Wilson 26). Blotner writes, "At services, [Faulkner] would conscientiously join in the hymns, and he even had a Book of Common Prayer in which Estelle would see him make an occasional notation" (271). This shows that in this period of time Faulkner had at least a mild interest in the affairs of the church.

The content of these three novels, however, suggests more than a mild fascination with Christian doctrine. All three are characterized by prominent Christian thematic elements. *The*

Sound and the Fury "contains more Biblical allusions than any other Faulkner novel" (Coffee 35). The novel takes place, at least in present time, during the Easter weekend of 1928. Each section of the novel is infused with Christian thematic content. Benjy Compson, the thirty-three year old idiot narrator of the first section, has often been compared with Christ. His brother Quentin also exhibits similarities with Christ. The novel's final section features a powerful sermon emphasizing the power of redemption brought by Christ's blood. *As I Lay Dying* as a whole is more muted in terms of religious content, but presents an equally comic and critical look at stereotypes found in the more "religious" characters, such as the Reverend Whitfield and Cora Tull. *Light in August* turns a critical eye on the practice of religious legalism. Also of interest in this novel is the ambiguous character of Joe Christmas, whom critics have often compared and contrasted with Christ. The Reverend Gail Hightower also deserves to be considered here, as his continuous struggles with the past interfere with his calling as a man of God and eventually cause him to leave the ministry and reject religion altogether.

Few would argue that there is a complete absence of Christian elements in these three novels, though some attempt to downplay them or disregard them altogether. For the most part, though, arguments revolve around why this content exists and what it ultimately represents about Faulkner himself. Evans Harrington phrases this question quite appropriately. He asks, "Why did this author, who consistently denied intentional Christian symbolism in his work, and most of the time denied belief in Christianity, write so often—one might even say obsessively—about Christ, Christians, and Christianity?" (162). Finding an answer to this question is the ultimate end of this study.

Chapter 2: Benjy Compson as Christ Symbol/Figure

Robert Detweiler provides an informative assessment of the use of the Christ figure in American fiction. His definition of a Christ figure is a simple one, bereft of any theological suppositions; in his estimation, a Christ figure is "the fictional presentation of a human being, a person who is made to experience, who communicates with us as readers, with whom we come into relation as with any literary character" (112). He divides the ways in which such a figure can be represented into four: through "sign," "myth," "symbol," and "allegory" (113). For the purposes of this study, it will be most helpful to understand the presentation of a Christ figure through "myth," as this seems to be Faulkner's mode of choice for his Christ figures.

When presented in a mythological capacity, a Christ figure becomes one of a "mythological archetype" (Detweiler 114).

> The artist who employs *myth* as his framework utilizes the cultural significance of Christ without becoming involved in matters of religious belief or biographical reconstruction . . . . Christ as *myth* takes his place among other heroes as an archetypal representing some verity or recurring action of life. . . The modern writer who employs *myth* can work with interpretations of Christ or facets of the Christ story in the assurance that his frame of reference will be comprehended, while retaining the freedom to finally mean whatever truth or pattern of life he wishes to emphasize through his particular treatment of the figure.
>
> Christ as *mythological archetype* can be made to serve any number of functions. He can be understood as the embodiment of the good and moral man who suffers for his goodness or as the misguided idealist who cannot survive in a materialistic world; he can be the redeemer on the supernatural level who mediates between

> God and man or the culture-bringer on the natural level who introduces his people to a better life; he can be the servant of humanity who suffers so that others are taught through him. (114-15, emphasis added)

This view represents a good definition to begin with. Faulkner seems to be clearly aware that his audience will recognize certain parallels between Benjy, the idiot son in *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), and Christ.

Jessie McGuire Coffee likens Faulkner's treatment of his Christ figures to the Biblical idea of "scapegoats" (29). This is initially a Hebraic concept, found in the book of Leviticus, in which God instructs Aaron to select a scapegoat on which to symbolically lay the sins of the people: "And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness: And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities. . . ." (16.21; Coffee 29). In a more general fashion, the editors of *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature* describe the "scapegoat" as "the hero, with whom the welfare of the tribe or nation is identified, [who] must die to atone for the people's sins and restore the land to fruitfulness" (Guerin 154). Coffee then asserts Faulkner "combines the Christ-sacrifice of the New Testament with the *scapegoat* theme of the Old Testament . . . and produces such unlikely Christ figures as idiots, prostitutes, rapists, and murderers" (30, emphasis added). In Faulkner's works, such a figure has three main characteristics: he "may have some of the chronology or symbolism of Christ," he is considered "Christlike in that he performs a sacrifice, [or] perhaps undergoes a kind of crucifixion," but is also not like Christ "in one or more ways" (30). In summation, such figures are "sin-bearers"

that “suggest Christ” but are also considered “the underdogs and the scapegoats” (30). Together, these definitions lay an effective foundation for this discussion.

For the most part, parallels between Benjy Compson and Christ have been well-noted by critics. In general, these parallels consist of Benjy being thirty-three years of age at the start of the novel, the present time of his section taking place on the day before Easter Sunday, and the fact that he endures abuse despite his innocent nature. However, some critics also claim there are no real parallels between the two. Still others contend that any Christ symbolism associated with Benjy is meant to be ironic.

Initial attempts to find significant similarities between Benjy and Christ prove to be problematic. The most obvious connection is their age: Christ is about thirty-three at the time of his death; Benjy is thirty-three in 1928, the present time in which the novel is set. Other than this, there does not appear to be any immediate concrete connection. Benjy is completely unable to take care of himself and must be attended to at every waking moment. He has absolutely no power over himself or his circumstances.

Both Benjy and Christ possess the capability of existing outside of time. Because Christ is part of the Holy Trinity, He has always existed. This is reflected in Genesis 1.26 when God says, “Let *us* make man in *our* image, after *our* likeness. . .” (KJV, emphasis added). However, Christ chose not to exercise this power while He lived on earth; He instead existed within time as man did. Benjy, on the other hand, has no such choice. His mental capacities conform to no pattern of growth. He has no concept of time and cannot comprehend its existence. He tends to jump from the past to the present and back based upon certain sounds (Matthews 36). For example, while he is out with Luster in the pasture that doubles as a golf course, he tries to crawl through a fence and gets caught on a nail. Luster says, “You snagged on that nail again. Cant

[*sic*] you never crawl through here without snagging on that nail" (Faulkner 4). Benjy's immediate response to this is to travel back to a time where he was previously caught on the same nail: "*Caddy uncaught me and we crawled through*." (4). The italics here are used to signify a shift in time to the reader—to Benjy, it is the same moment.

Some critics argue that Benjy is totally incapable of feeling anything. This assumption, however, is not exactly accurate. The one sensation he is able to feel is that of loss. He is able to understand simple binaries such as Caddy/no Caddy, slipper/no slipper, and fire/no fire. In the opening scene, he responds violently to the golfer who says, "Here, caddie" (3). This is noted by Luster saying, "Aint [*sic*] you something, thirty three years old, going on that way . . . . Hush up that moaning" (3). This feeling of loss is again shown near the end of Benjy's section, where he notices the results of his castration: "*I got undressed and I looked at myself, and I began to cry. Hush, Luster said. Looking for them aint* [*sic*] *going to do no good. They're gone*" (73). The italics again signify a shift in time for the reader, as Benjy has been brought back to the present by the word "undressed" that Dilsey speaks in his memory (73). When he looks at himself in the mirror, he realizes that an important part of him is missing, and he responds in the only way he knows—by bellowing. In a similar fashion, Christ is able to feel loss. A woman merely touches His "garment" and He immediately perceives "that virtue had gone out of him" (Mark 5.27, 30).

John Pilkington uses a cautious approach when discussing apparent parallels between Benjy and Christ, but does not go so far as to dismiss them outright. He writes:

> Benjy is not an allegory of Christ. The Compson idiot stands at the end of the family deterioration; he is not, like Christ, the salvation of the individual or family, much less the hope of the world for a new order. Unlike Christ, he has no particular message for others; he can only cry, moan, and bellow . . . . He makes

> no effort to fulfill the needs of others. Essentially, he is a passive observer of life and never an active participant except as a sufferer. The parallels to figures outside the novel, however, do enrich the portrait, particularly as they suggest that Benjy and Christ . . . suffer innocently from evils they have not caused but that come to everyman as part of the human condition. (57, 58)

In essence, Pilkington is saying here that Benjy becomes more like a Christ figure when one examines the situations that life subjects him to rather than his individual characteristics (57, 58). In this sense, Benjy can be viewed as a Christ figure because he, like Christ, is subjected to unnecessary and unjustified brutality.

At least one contemporary reviewer of the novel sees fit to mention the Benjy-Christ parallel. In a 1929 article, Evelyn Scott writes of Benjy, "He is a Christ symbol, yet not, even in the way of the old orthodoxies, Christly. A Jesus asks for conviction of sin and a confession before redemption . . . .Benjy is no saint with a wounded ego his own gesture can console. He is not anything—nothing with a name. He is alive. He can suffer" (116). Like Pilkington, she goes on to stress ways in which Benjy is unlike Christ.

As mentioned previously, Jessie McGuire Coffee agrees that Benjy is a Christ figure, but argues that he also coveys the image of a "scapegoat" (30). He is presented as "a sacrifice for the faults of others" (39). He also receives abuse that is unwarranted. When someone inadvertently leaves the front gate unlocked, Benjy gets out and grabs a young girl while "trying to say" (Faulkner 52). Because of this incident he is castrated, though the action is implied rather than shown (73).

According to Coffee, Benjy also echoes the sacrificial image of Christ that is found in Isaiah 53.7 (39). This verse reads, "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not

his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth" (KJV). Therefore, a main reason why Benjy is considered a sacrificial figure is because "he loses his masculinity" (39). Here, his manhood has been sacrificed and sterility has been imposed upon him, presumably for his own good, as he has been deemed too dangerous to reproduce.

Coffee concludes, "Benjamin is not a satisfactory Christ-figure, nor is he meant to be. His mental state does not qualify him for such a role. His sacrifice is an involuntary one, whereas Christ chose his propitiatory office" (39). The latter action can be found in Matthew 26.39, where Jesus prays, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt" (KJV). As for Benjy, he cannot serve as a complete Christ figure because he is unable to redeem or give salvation to anyone around him (39).

Arthur Geffen views Benjy more as a type of "holy idiot" than as an actual Christ figure (235). He defines this term as "one touched by divine force and capable of intuitive acts and knowledge denied to far more 'intelligent' people" (234). This theory is based in part on Dilsey's comment that Benjy is "de Lawd's chile" (Faulkner 317; Geffen 235). The key here is that she qualifies this comment by adding, "En I be His'n too, fo long, praise Jesus" (Faulkner 317; Geffen 235). From this statement, Geffen concludes that "Benjy achieves a condition [his status as the Lord's child] on earth which [Dilsey] can only achieve in the other world" (235). Therefore, Benjy has an ability to "transcend . . . time" (235) that is exclusive to every other character in the novel. In this manner, he is very much like Christ.

Ward L. Miner views Benjy as "a Christ figure in reverse" (262). He comes to this conclusion by looking at both of their lives. While Christ impresses as He grows older, Benjy

essentially regresses (262). He also equates Benjy's castration with Christ's crucifixion, pointing out that his particular even occurs in the middle of Benjy's life (262).

In Miner's opinion, "The novel, in symbolic terms, is the account of this Christ in reverse [Benjy] set against the crucifixion and resurrection of the real Christ 1895 years before" (262). This idea seems slightly farfetched. It is unlikely that Faulkner created the entire structure of the novel with this single purpose in mind. Miner's argument also fails to take into account the other three sections of the novel. He does, however, acknowledge that "Benjy is definitely limited in his symbolic function as a Christ figure" (263).

Cleanth Brooks sees Benjy as more of a contrast to Christ than anything else. He writes, "[I]f, as so many have proposed, it is Benjy who is to be regarded as a Christ-figure, such symbolism will have to be regarded as savagely ironic . . . for Benjy's sufferings accomplish nothing and avail nothing" (*First Encounters* 69-70). In the context of the final section of the novel, Brooks views Miss Quentin as more of a victim of crucifixion/abuse than Benjy because she "is the consciously suffering victim," whereas Benjy is, for the most part, completely unaware of events going on around him (70).

There are, in fact, many ways in which Benjy is not like Christ. Most notably, Benjy is totally unable to take care of himself, and must be attended at every waking moment. He has no power whatsoever over his circumstances. Christ, on the other hand, willingly submits to all abuse that He suffers, though He has the power to escape it. This power is referred to during the episode of His temptation, where Satan says, "If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, 'He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone'" (Matthew 4.6). Regarding their birth names, Christ's is announced by the angel Gabriel in Matthew 1.21, while Benjy's is changed

from Maury to Benjamin several years after he is born (Faulkner 58). Christ endures a brutal scourging in addition to further beatings (Matthew 27.26-30), yet defies death by rising from His own tomb (Matthew 28.5-6).

Some critics (whether by choice or their perception of a lack of evidence) acknowledge no link at all between Benjy and Christ. Irving Howe notes a smattering of "Christian references" throughout the novel but does not provide any link between them and his discussion of Benjy (120). Cleanth Brooks urges "symbolmongers" to "beware" (44). He cautions, "Attempts to find specific significances between, say, Benjy's monologue on Saturday [i.e., Benjy's entire section] and the body of Christ reposing in the tomb are, in my considered opinion, doomed to failure" (44). While it is possible to read too much into the symbolism that Faulkner has placed in the novel, there is no denying its existence. References to Christ or God can be found in every section of the novel, and it seems that Faulkner deliberately placed them there. Christ is obscured in Benjy's section because of his inability to comprehend any type of good or evil.

While serving as writer-in-residence at the University of Virginia in the late 1950s, Faulkner participated in a series of question and answer sessions. In one such session, he was asked a question regarding his intentions for the Christian symbolism in The Sound and the Fury:

> Q: In connection with the character of Christ, did you make any conscious attempts in The Sound and the Fury to use Christian references, as a number of critics have suggested?
>
> A: No. I was just trying to tell a story of Caddy, the little girl who had muddied her drawers and was climbing up to look in the window where her grandmother lay dead.

> Q: But Benjy, for example, is thirty-three years old, the traditional age of Christ at death.
>
> A: Yes. That was a ready-made axe to use, but it was just one of several tools. (qtd. in Blotner and Gwynn 17)

Here, Faulkner's second answer appears to contradict the first one he gave. He goes from denying outright that he deliberately included Christian references to admitting that similarities between Benjy and Christ were intended to add to the effectiveness of the story (17). Perhaps dubiously, there is a note that precedes this particular transcription that reads, "Not recorded. Reconstructed from memory" (17).

There is some evidence that Faulkner revised Benjy's section to place more emphasis on, among other things, Benjy's age. According to Michael Millgate, the manuscript version of *The Sound and the Fury* includes far fewer references to Benjy's age and birthday (344). He writes, "Faulkner presumably realized before or during the process of reworking the first section that the allusions to Benjy's birthday . . . could be made to serve as a kind of motif or signal of present time in the section and thus assist the reader in keeping his bearings among the shifting and merging time planes . . . ." (344). It is interesting that Faulkner would place more emphasis on Benjy's age. This would further emphasize one of the bonds that links Benjy to Christ. Faulker's decision to add to this rather than delete it shows that it held significance for him within the novel.

It appears that the common bonds between Benjy and Christ are intended, but secondary to the differences between them. A comparison of these differences makes the two appear to be complete opposites. Both go through a great deal of suffering, though Benjy himself is unable to distinguish such a concept. Moreover, it does not seem that Faulkner intentionally constructed

Benjy to be seen as a purely straight parallel with Christ. Benjy is Christlike in his role as a "sufferer" as well as a "scapegoat" (Scott 116; Coffee 30, 39), yet his lack of intelligence makes him drastically different from the Biblical Christ. In creating Benjy, Faulkner draws upon both New and Old Testament material, suggesting that the Bible is important to him during this time. It is likely that he intended Benjy to be viewed, at least in part, as a reverse or impotent Christ figure rather than a true parallel. Benjy does not embody a complete representation of Christ in human form. Instead, he reflects Christ's suffering on earth—he is acted upon, even abused, by outside forces and offers no retaliation. Additionally, as Dilsey recognizes, he is presented as someone whom God loves, even though he is incapable of understanding or receiving it.

Chapter 3: Quentin Compson's Struggle for Meaning

The second section of *The Sound and the Fury* is narrated by Benjy's brother Quentin. In this section, there are several references to both Christ and God that are mostly negative in nature. Confused and haunted by the despairing words of his nihilistic father who scoffs at Christ, Quentin struggles throughout his life to find something concrete to believe in. Unlike Benjy, Quentin is aware that he is bound by time, and this fact proves to be a hindrance that he cannot overcome. Christ's own sacrifice is not sufficient for Quentin, so he attempts to supplant Him by sacrificing himself. This is not, however, a sacrifice that results in victory, as Christ's did; Quentin is simply choosing to end his life because he cannot bear to live any longer. Through this sacrifice, Quentin becomes a Christ figure.

Carvel Collins draws attention to some positive parallels between Quentin and Christ. He notes that the date of Quentin's section, June 2, 1910 (Faulkner 76), is a Thursday, and the events contained in the section bear similarities to actual events from the Bible's presentation of Holy Thursday (Collins 71). He then provides more examples:

> Quentin has a Last Supper not only when he joins Shreve and Gerald and their companions in the picnic with its wine (and blood) but when he "breaks bread" with the little Italian girl in a parallel with the establishment of the Eucharist and its later ritual . . . . Quentin's tortured conversation with his father is an important part of his memories during this monologue which takes place on the same day of the week as Christ's anguished calling upon His Father. Quentin is captured by a mob as Christ was. And, like Christ, he is taken before a magistrate. (71)

Collins then extends his argument in a footnote. He says, "The date at the head of Quentin's monologue [June 2, 1910] is the date of the Octave of Corpus Christi in 1910, and Corpus Christi

is Holy Thursday reenacted in a happier context at another time of year and with the addition of new elements, one of them the carrying of the bread through the streets (cf. Quentin and the little Italian girl with her loaf) (71, n. 1). Additionally, Quentin is mostly silent during the scene with the magistrate, as was Christ (Matthew 26.59-68). Quentin never speaks unless he is replying to a direct question from the magistrate, and even then his answers are mostly left unrecorded. His dialogue during the scene amounts to a total of two lines: "Yes, sir. How much?" and "Yes" (Faulkner 144, 145). Quentin's actions here mirror those of Christ when He is brought before Pilate (Matthew 27.2, 11-14).

Ward L. Miner addresses the "distorted" nature of crucifixion imagery in Quentin's section (263). He also notes that such treatment of these images is carried over from the previous section: "Benjy is not capable of death—his crucifixion is sterility. The Compson family is capable of death . . . but not in connection with the moral victory of Christ's crucifixion. They know only the moral defect of suicide" (263). Quentin's sacrifice, then, is ironic because there is no "victory" achieved through it (263).

Like the actual resurrection of Christ, Quentin's suicide is not shown; it is only referred to. Quentin, however, has no hope of resurrection—he is aware that his death is final and irreversible. This awareness is demonstrated when he muses about his suicide: "And I will look down and see my murmuring bones and the deep water like wind, like a roof of wind, and after a long time they cannot distinguish even bones upon the lonely and inviolate sand. Until on the Day when He says Rise only the flat-iron would come floating up" (80). This last statement, in particular, represents Quentin's acceptance of his father's dismissal of Christ as a Savior of anything. Quentin, then, is the only one who can save himself, and he chooses to do so by ending his life.

A main reason for Quentin's decision to kill himself is the highly negative system of values he has inherited from his father. The opening sentences of Quentin's section hold much information pertaining to these values:

> When the shadow of the sash appeared on the curtains it was between seven and eight oclock and then I was in time again, hearing the watch. It was Grandfather's and when Father gave it to me he said I give you the mausoleum of all hope and desire; it's rather excruciating-ly apt that you will use it to gain the reducto absurdum of all human experience which can fit your individual needs no better than it fitted his or his father's. I give it to you not that you may remember time, but that you might forget it now and then for a moment and not spend all your breath trying to conquer it. (Faulkner 76)

The first sentence indicates Quentin's obsession with time and shadow, motifs that will continue throughout his section. Here, he is able to tell the time of day merely by looking at the shadow that the sun casts on the curtains. The following sentence gives the reader a summation of Mr. Compson's rather depressing worldview—essentially, he tells Quentin that it is impossible to find any hope or meaning in a life that is measured only by the clicking of a watch. Quentin realizes that shadow represents the steady passage of time and "he identifies his own coming death with shadow" (Hunt 63). The final sentence portrays Mr. Compson as a father giving his son a small piece of advice. Quentin, however, does not completely heed this advice. He seems to treat time with ambivalence; he carries an obsession with it while trying to run from it. He is undone by his own sense of moral confusion. He fails to come to terms with his father's denunciations of Christ, as well as his own moral convictions.

John T. Matthews recognizes the dangers inherent in Quentin's dilemma. He writes, "Quentin's obsession with time marks one of his main efforts to comprehend the nature of his plight. Time means change and death to Quentin, so he is haunted by symbols of its power" (53). Matthews then goes on to point out the many references to time that occur in the first scene of Quentin's section (53). He notes that Quentin seems "mildly surprised" when Shreve tells him that he will be late (53). However, Quentin's response of "I didn't know it was that late" does not appear to be a result of surprise (Faulkner 78). He makes no attempt to hurry after Shreve has left; he even deliberately delays himself: "He went out . . . . I quit moving around and went to the window and drew the curtains aside and watched them running for chapel . . ." (78). Additionally, if the chapel he refers to is any kind of religious service, he is rejecting it by not going.

Other important statements attributed to Quentin's father concern time and Christ. At one point Quentin muses, "I dont suppose anybody ever deliberately listens to a watch or a clock. You dont have to. You can be oblivious to the sound for a long while, then in a second of ticking it can create in the mind unbroken the long diminishing parade of time you didn't hear. Like Father said down the long and lonely light-rays you might see Jesus walking . . ." (76). Though this passage is puzzling, it seems to imply that Mr. Compson believes Christ to be bound in time. If Christ is bound in time, then He is denied the power of resurrection. Elsewhere Mr. Compson remarks, "…Christ was not crucified: he was worn away by a minute clicking of little wheels" (Faulkner 77). Donald Palumbo notes that Quentin consciously accepts his father's estimation of Christ "as a fiction" (144). This is evidenced in the phrase "Jesus walking on Galilee and [George] Washington not telling lies" (144; Faulkner 80). This rejection of Christ's resurrection and crucifixion is something that will haunt Quentin throughout his life. Because

his father rejects these ideas, Quentin will also reject them, but he will not be able to dismiss them as easily as his father. Quentin longs to find meaning and order in life, but eventually accepts his father's bleak outlook.

A major factor in Quentin's moral confusion is his relationship with his sister Caddy. He desperately tries to convince his father, Mr. Compson, that he has committed incest with her. He says, "*I have committed incest I said Father it was I . . .*" (Faulkner 79). He later recalls another conversation, which is presented in unbroken prose:

> . . . [Father said] every man is the arbiter of his own virtues whether or not you consider that courageous is of more importance than the act itself than any act otherwise you could not be in earnest and i [said] you dont believe I am serious and he [said] i think you are too serious to give me any cause for alarm you wouldnt have felt driven to the expedient of telling me you had committed incest otherwise and i [said] i wasnt lying i wasnt lying and he [said] you wanted to sublimate a piece of natural human folly into a horror and then exorcise it with truth and i [said] it was to isolate her out of the loud world so that it would have to flee us out of necessity . . . . (176-77)

Here, Quentin fails to convince his father of his imaginary incest with Caddy. Mr. Compson responds with typical cynicism but makes an important comment, specifically that ". . . every man is the arbiter of his own virtues . . ." (176). Quentin's failure to establish a personal code of values, as well as his failure to stay with Caddy, are contributing factors in his decision to sacrifice himself to the river.

Quentin's decision to manufacture an incestuous relationship between himself and Caddy is analyzed by John W. Hunt. He argues that Quentin's view of the act comes from a Christian moral perspective:

> By contemplating a deliberate act which is sinful rather than merely criminal, Quentin invokes a Christian moral order . . . which crushes man not because of his finitude but because of his guilt. Incest is a sin linked in such a way to his [Quentin's] first and unsuccessful strategy that he can save something of traditional meaning even if on nontraditional terms. It is not merely a flaunting of the social code of honor, a violation of society's familial structure; it is a corruption of the heart of a rigid Calvinism which claims to discern a moral order independent of social consent of sinful man. Quentin's uncanny strategy is to coerce damnation in terms which will relate his life to traditional structures of meaning. (59-60)

The final sentence here is especially important. Because Quentin fails to create meaning in his life through his imagined incest with Caddy, he essentially damns himself (60). There is no meaning left for him in life; therefore, his only hope lies in the act of dying. His status as a Christ figure then, is ironic.

Like Benjy, Quentin is not intended to be a complete representation of Christ. Though he willingly sacrifices himself, his reasoning behind this action stems from his selfish desire to bring his life to an end. He is not attempting to save anyone else through this sacrifice, only himself. The events of Quentin's section strongly parallel the last hours of Christ's life, with one important exception—the absence of a resurrection. By committing suicide, Quentin becomes his father's definition of Christ—the one who "was worn away by a minute clicking of little

wheels" (Faulkner 77). Through Quentin, Faulkner shows the destruction that can occur when man cannot successfully identify and adhere to a moral code for himself.

Chapter 4: Christ Received: Dilsey and the Reverend Shegog

The final section in *The Sound and the Fury* employs an unnamed omniscient narrator. A major character in this section is Dilsey, the Compson's elder Negro servant. Her responsibilities include cooking, attending to Mrs. Compson when needed, and occasionally looking after Benjy. The majority of criticism on religious, specifically Christian, elements in *The Sound and the Fury* has centered on this final section, which details Dilsey's Easter Sunday trip to the local Negro church. The speaker for that particular morning, the Reverend Shegog from St. Louis, delivers a powerful sermon that moves Dilsey to tears. She does not fall under the category of "Christ figure" but, unlike any of the Compsons, she chooses to accept Christ's sacrifice. Through this, she finds ultimate meaning and peace—things that the Compsons are never able to achieve.

Dilsey is perhaps the most sympathetic character in the entire novel. She defies Jason's tyranny, caters to the overbearing Mrs. Compson, and does her best to make sure Benjy is taken care of properly. More importantly, her "faith is treated . . . with only the merest hint of irony and far from patronizingly" (Palumbo 144). Hence, it seems that Faulkner intends for the reader to take her and her faith seriously.

However, Dilsey does not appear to be able to attend church on a regular basis. This is reflected in Mrs. Compson's comment, "The darkies are having a special Easter service. I promised Dilsey two weeks ago that they could get off" (279). It seems likely that Dilsey would attend church every week, though, if she were permitted.

Additionally, Dilsey is not presented as a completely pious character. In Cleanth Brooks's terminology, she is not a "plaster saint" (70). On several occasions, she proves herself capable of displaying a fiery, judgmental side. She is quick to tell her grandson Luster, "[Y]ou

got jes es much Compson devilment in you es any of em" (Faulkner 276). She seems unimpressed with Frony's description of Shegog as "Dat big preacher," replying, "Whut dey needs is a man kin put de fear of God into dese here trifling young [Negroes]" (290). Frony, Dilsey's daughter, then complains about Benjy's presence: "I wish you wouldn't keep on bringin him to church, mammy. Folks talkin" (290). Dilsey replies, "And I knows whut kind of folks. Trash white folks. Dat's who it is. Thinks he aint good enough fer white church, but [Negro] church aint good enough fer him . . . . Tell um de good Lawd dont keer whether he bright er not. Dont nobody but white trash keer dat" (290). In spite of these judgments, Dilsey does show kindness and compassion toward characters that are mistreated, especially Benjy.

Before Shegog even begins to speak, he is described in a curious manner and is not well received by the majority of the congregation. He is greeted with "a sigh, a sound of astonishment and disappointment" (293). He is "undersized, in a shabby alpaca coat" and has "a wizened black face like a small, aged monkey" (293). His appearance causes the children in the choir to sing "in thin, frightened, tuneless whispers" (293). Frony sarcastically remarks, "En dey brung dat all de way fum Saint Looey" (293). Dilsey, though, immediately comes to his defense, saying, "I've knowed de Lawd to use cuiser tools dan dat" (293). She appears to be the only one to initially take him seriously.

Initially, the congregation seems to think Shegog is crazy, and regards him with mild curiosity and disinterest. Faulkner's descriptions of him help to achieve this feeling. Immediately after he opens his mouth to speak, though, the language used to describe him begins to move from parody to something more powerful: "[His voice] was as different as day and dark from his former tone, with a sad, timbrous quality like an alto horn, sinking into their hearts and

speaking there again when it had ceased in fading and cumulate echoes" (294). He then begins to speak with more passion:

> He was like a worn small rock whelmed by the successive waves of his voice. With his body he seemed to feed the voice that, succubus like, had fleshed its teeth in him. And the congregation seemed to watch with its own eyes while the voice consumed him, until he was nothing and they were nothing and there was not even a voice but instead their hearts were speaking to one another in chanting measures beyond the need for words, so that when he came to rest against the reading desk, his monkey face lifted and his whole attitude that of a serene, tortured crucifix that transcended its shabbiness and insignificance and made it of no moment . . . . (294-5)

This serves as a commanding display of the power that Shegog holds. The congregants quickly begin to pay more attention to him, especially Dilsey. Faulkner writes, "Dilsey sat bolt upright, her hand on Ben's knee. Two tears slid down her fallen cheeks, in and out of the myriad coruscations of immolation and abnegation and time" (295). Though Shegog has spoken a mere few words, "Brethren and sisteren . . . I got the recollection and the blood of the Lamb," the power he holds has not been lost on Dilsey (294). Because of the depth of her Christian faith, she is able to understand and experience the true meaning of the sermon—the suffering of Christ and His eventual resurrection—and respond to it.

Crucifixion imagery holds a prominent place in Shegog's sermon. John Pilkington notes that Shegog's sermon focuses comparatively little on the actual resurrection of Christ, instead focusing more on the crucifixion—unusual for a sermon preached on Easter Sunday (79). Indeed, one whole passage from Shegog's sermon features the crucifixion: "I sees Calvary, wid

de sacred trees, sees de thief en de murderer en de least of dese; I hears de boastin en de braggin: Ef you be Jesus, lif up yo tree en walk! I hears de wailin of women en de evenin lamentations; I hears de weepin en de cryin en de turnt-away face of God: dey done kilt Jesus; dey done kilt my Son!" (Faulkner 296). This description is the clearest picture of the suffering of Christ that the novel has to offer.

Pilkington's comments on this scene, however, are not entirely accurate. In his sermon, Shegog gives equal time to Christ's crucifixion, His resurrection, and the coming Judgment that all people will have to endure. He says, "Wus a rich man: whar he now, O breddren? Wus a po man: whar he now, O sistuhn? Oh I tells you, ef you aint got de milk en de dew of de old salvation when de long, cold years rolls away!" (295). He then goes on to say, "I tells you, breddren, en I tells you, sistuhn, dey'll come a time. Po sinner sayin Let me lay down wid de Lawd, lemme lay down my load. Den whut Jesus gwine say, O breddren? O sistuhn? Is you got de ricklickshun en de Blood of de Lamb? Case I aint gwine load down heaven!" (295). Both the crucifixion and the anticipated Day of Judgment are inseparably linked with Christ's resurrection—deny any of these and the entire process of salvation is denied.

On this Easter Sunday, however, Faulkner does not let the reader forget the resurrection. In his final passage Shegog declares, "I sees de resurrection en de light; sees de meek Jesus sayin Dey kilt me dat ye shall live again; I died dat dem whut sees en believes shall never die. Breddren, O breddren! I sees de doom crack en de golden horns shoutin down de glory, en de arisen dead whut got de blood en de ricklickshun of de Lamb!" (297). Thus concludes a bona fide presentation of the Gospel in Negro dialect.

Dilsey is deeply moved by the sermon. Crying most of the way home, she tells Frony, "I've seed de first en de last" (297). Curiously, though, when Frony asks her mother what she

means, Dilsey replies, “Never you mind” (297). By doing this, Dilsey shows that she is content to muse over her personal reaction to the sermon rather than share it with her own daughter. It’s as if she believes Frony will not understand.

At least one critic suggests that there are hidden Christian meanings within the text of the passage detailing Shegog’s sermon and Dilsey’s reaction. David Hein argues that Dilsey receives the Easter service as a “sacrament” as well as a sermon—as if it has the same effect as the act of communion (561). This way, Dilsey’s experience and subsequent reaction is not merely from the sermon itself; it also comes through the fact that she has experienced Christ’s life, suffering, and most importantly, His resurrection (561).

Hein also tries to determine the particulars of the church that Dilsey attends:

> In the congregation to which Dilsey and the rest of [her] family belong—a church whose denomination is not specified but which all internal and external evidence suggests is Baptist—the Lord’s Supper [communion] would be a rare event, celebrated at most on a quarterly basis and possibly only biannually. Hers is not a . . .church with an altar in the most prominent position but a word-centered church, in which the pulpit is the center of attention and the preacher is an exalted figure. In 1928, on Easter Sunday, the vast majority of the world’s Christians . . . would have celebrated the resurrection of Christ by participating in a service of Holy Communion. But in a Baptist church like Dilsey’s, worshipers would not remember Christ’s resurrection by holding a service of the Lord’s Supper; rather, they would proclaim their Easter faith through praise, prayer, and, most of all, preaching. (561-2)

This implies, then, that a sense of communion would have to be conveyed through the sermon itself (561). Hein goes on to further illustrate this point, saying, "In Shegog's preaching, Christ is alive in the . . . Word, alive within the body of believers through the ministrations of an otherwise unprepossessing black clergyman" (562). Through this sermon, the congregation is able to transcend time and "experience the divine reality contemporaneously in meaning-filled past, ecstatic present, and blessed future" (562). He then points to a similar observation made by John T. Matthews: "Bands of Christian believers have regularly practiced the ritual of the Eucharist, the sharing of bread and wine in symbolic celebration of Christ's broken body and shed blood. . . . Though Dilsey's congregation does not literally celebrate the Eucharist, or communion, during this service, its effect can be seen in the moment of fusion they enjoy" (Matthews 83; qtd. in Hein 562). If, in fact, the congregation is receiving an experience of Eucharistic elements through the words of the sermon, it gives a more powerful edge to their reactions, especially Dilsey's.

Interestingly, Benjy also seems to be affected positively, even soothed, by what he hears from Shegog. Moments before Shegog begins to speak, Dilsey says to Benjy, "Hush, now. Dey fixin to sing in a minute" (294). This implies that he has been whimpering and/or moaning beyond acceptable audio levels. Yet, while Shegog is speaking, Benjy is described as sitting "rapt in his sweet blue gaze" (297). This is not a state of complete miscomprehension, as Miner suggests (264). Clearly, there is something within the sermon that Benjy can sense and identify with, though what this might be is unclear. Additionally, he does not make any more disruptive noises until he reaches the gate to the Compson residence (298). He is in a complete state of peace until he returns home. It seems as though he can feel the contrast between the hallowed

ground of the Negro church and the amoral, irreligious, hopeless atmosphere that pervades the Compson household.

Critics offer varying interpretations of the characteristics of Dilsey's faith. Cleanth Brooks curiously detects a note of "fatalism" in it (70). He writes, "Dilsey rather expects to be disappointed though she has never become really reconciled to it. In short, hers is a fatalism that does not crowd out Christian hope, but hers is a chastened hope. She is constantly astonished that so many things go so badly, but she does not subside into despair" (70). He does not, however, provide any textual evidence for this view.

One important component of Dilsey's faith, in Brooks' analysis, is her view of time (71). Her understanding of time is religious in nature, for it "includes the concept of eternity" (71). Brooks continues: "She believes in an eternal order, and so the failures of the past, the daily disappointments, and her own meager prospects for the future, do not haunt her. [She] believes that goodness will prevail in time, or, rather, in a realm outside time. She knows, then, what time is worth and what it is not worth, and so can properly evaluate [it]" (71). He then references an incident in which a clock strikes five times and Dilsey announces that it is "Eight oclock" (Faulkner 274; Brooks 71).

Joseph Adamson makes similar comments concerning Dilsey's Christian view of time. In particular, he is interested in the effectiveness of this view in the context of the novel as a whole. He states, ""It is only after being berated, battered, and benumbed…that we come upon the last section and are delivered at last….At long last we *see* and no longer have to hear anyone" (241, original emphasis). Indeed, the section does offer (literally) a new viewpoint through which the reader can view the characters. Although this viewpoint affirms the Compsons' hopelessness, it also demonstrates that Dilsey is grounded in her faith.

Giles Gunn is unimpressed with the Christian content that is found in the final section of the novel. He argues:

> Many critics have supposed that because clarity and resolution are achieved only in section four, where Dilsey's faith is triumphant, Faulkner is making a religious statement not just *in* the novel but *with* the novel, that he is here taking up all the discordant and destructive views of the book and integrating them, indeed, reordering them, in a holistic vision of religious transcendence….
>
> But Faulkner himself (who, to be sure, is not always to be trusted in such circumstances) put a different construction on the religious trappings of his novels as a whole, and particularly on section four of this novel, when he spoke to students at the University of Virginia. In response to a question about the symbolic meaning he intended by the dates of *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner spoke of hunting around in the carpenter's shop to find a tool that would make a better chicken house." (53-4, Gunn's emphasis)

Gunn is simply paraphrasing here. The original question, as well as Faulkner's response to it, goes as follows:

> Q: What symbolic meaning did you give to the dates of *The Sound and the Fury*?
>
> A: Now there's a matter of hunting around in the carpenter's shop to find a tool that will make a better chicken-house. And probably—I'm sure it was quite instinctive that I picked out Easter, that I wasn't writing any symbolism of the Passion Week at all. I just—that was a tool that was good for the particular corner I was going to turn in my chicken-house and so I used it. (qtd. in Blotner and Gwynn 68)

In Gunn's analysis, he downplays the significance of the Christian elements in *The Sound and the Fury* by pointing to Faulkner's own words from a time more than twenty-five years removed from the novel. He even admits that Faulkner's words should not automatically be taken at face value (53). It is puzzling that he would make this comment and then go on to use Faulkner's response to further his point. The complexity and delicacy in which Faulkner uses these elements—in his presentations of Christ figures, parallels to Christ's own life, as well as a reverent sermon espousing the essential Gospel message—suggests that they hold an important place in his life.

An important question that must be answered here is, "What does this final section mean when set within the context of the whole novel?" Certainly, it seems that Faulkner intended to place this section, the one with the most hope, just after the bleakest, most hopeless section—the one belonging to Jason Compson. After being subjected to the pain and suffering of the pitiful Benjy and the tortured confusion of Quentin, the reader is presented with a character that is confident in the validity of her Christian faith. Dilsey is no evangelist, but her beliefs are enough to sustain her from day to day. In addition to her role as the Compson family servant, she also serves as a contrast to them; she finds hope and peace while they cannot, either because they are incapable or they refuse. Her peaceful outlook is antithetical to theirs, which is bleak and hopeless. Like Benjy, Dilsey is unable to redeem those around her, though for different reasons. Through the character of Dilsey, Faulkner displays a profound, more than casual understanding of the Christian faith.

Chapter 5: The Influence of the Bible on *As I Lay Dying*

Compared to *The Sound and the Fury* and *Light in August*, *As I Lay Dying* (1930) contains the smallest amount of Biblical content and references (Coffee 183). This does not mean, however, that there are none present. In the context of this particular novel, however, the content is presented in a light that is both positive and negative. In any case, it is clear that Faulkner does draw heavily from the Bible for this work, incorporating themes and symbolism from both Old and New Testaments.

Two of the novel's Christian characters, Cora Tull and the Reverend Whitfield, are not portrayed in a positive light. Cora Tull is a neighbor to the Bundrens. She wields her Christian faith as one would a weapon. Charles Reagan Wilson dismisses her as "a self-righteous, complacent churchwoman, minding other people's business . . ." (37). She is also called "conventional religion incarnate," someone who "has a tidbit of scripture to wrap around every one of her neighborly condemnations and rash judgments" (Rule 113). She is presented, for the most part, as hypocritical. For example, she thinks, "Riches is nothing in the face of the Lord, for He can see into the heart," then follows this by wondering aloud if she can sell some of her cakes at the local bazaar (Faulkner 7). In another instance she muses, "If it is [God's] will that some folks has different ideas of honesty from other folks, it is not my place to question His decree" (8). Regarding this passage, Warwick Wadlington states that Cora "does the very thing she denies doing, questioning what she sees as God's will, at least the part that she doesn't like—God's allowing dishonesty to exist. She does so even while she as a poor woman identifies with the part of the divine will she does like—God's power to punish the rich . . ." (48).

In yet another passage, Cora brags aloud of her assurance of an everlasting reward, while at the same time condemning her dying neighbor Addie Bundren:

> I have tried to live right in the sight of God and man, for the honor and comfort of my Christian husband and the love and respect of my Christian children. So that when I lay me down in the consciousness of my duty and reward I will be surrounded by loving faces, carrying the farewell kiss of reach of my loved ones into my reward. Not like Addie Bundren dying alone, hiding her pride and her broken heart. (Faulkner 23)

Though she claims to be a perfect example of upright Christian behavior, Cora has a definite problem with pride and a self-righteous attitude.

Another character, the Reverend Whitfield, espouses hypocrisies that are even greater than Cora's. He and Addie Bundren have an affair that results in the birth of a son, Jewel. In the section of the novel narrated by Whitfield, he claims that he is told by God to "repair to that home in which you have put a living lie, among those people with whom you have outraged My Word, confess your sin aloud. It is for them, for that deceived husband, to forgive you: not I" (177). The final sentence is a distortion of 1 John 1.9: "If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (KJV). This distortion is made clear because Whitfield reports that he confessed his sin prior to hearing God's voice (177).

Similar distortions and contradictions appear throughout Whitfield's brief section. He claims that God has sent him to the Bundrens to confess his adultery, but his confession to Anse, Addie's husband, takes place only in the mind; there is no actual representation of the scene. Yet, after the imaginary confession, Whitfield states, "It was already as though it were done. My soul felt freer, quieter than it had in years; already I seemed to dwell in abiding peace again . . ." (178-9). He justifies his actions further by saying, "[God] will accept the will for the deed, Who

knew that when I framed the words of my confession it was to Anse I spoke them, even though he was not there" (179). Whitfield appears completely comfortable with the notion that God equates good intentions with good deeds.

Additionally, Whitfield displays a proud, judgmental attitude similar to Cora's. When he finally reaches the Bundrens' home, he states that he "entered the house of bereavement, the lowly dwelling where another erring mortal lay while her soul faced the awful and irrevocable judgment, peace to her ashes" (179). He follows this with an almost mocking "God's grace upon this house" (179). It is apparent, then, that Whitfield is a character who is not meant to be taken seriously. The expectations of his office make his sins even more outrageous.

With Jewel, the product of the adulterous union of Addie and Whitfield, Faulkner uses symbolism and allusions to present, in some instances, an inverted Christ figure. Instead of a divine birth, Jewel is born illegitimate. He is also, ironically, born of a "holy" father. He is by far the angriest character in the book, and his dialogue contains many uses of profane language. He rejects any notion of God, saying, "[I]f there is a God what the hell is He for" (15). On the other hand, he only narrates one section of the novel (14-15); most of his actions and words are presented to the reader by other characters. This parallels the treatment of Christ in the four Gospels, as His actions are reported through four different authors.

In spite of all of his faults, Addie considers Jewel to be her savior. She says, "He is my cross and he will be my salvation. He will save me from the water and from the fire. Even though I have laid down my life, he will save me" (168). One critic notes that this parallels Psalm 66.12: ". . . [W]e went through fire and through water: but thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place" (KJV; Rule 110). Even in her dying state, Addie realizes that she is in need of a

savior, but she exalts Jewel to this position. She treats him as if he were, in an echo of John 3.16, her "only begotten son" (KJV).

Philip C. Rule argues that *As I Lay Dying* owes much to themes found within the Old Testament. He notes that Anse's vow to return Addie to the place of her birth echoes Genesis 49.29: "And [Jacob] charged them, and said unto them, I am to be gathered unto my people: bury me with my fathers . . ." (KJV; Rule 107). Indeed, Anse faithfully takes responsibility for organizing the trek to Jefferson once Addie dies.

Richard J. O'Dea notes how Faulkner implicitly addresses a heresy that is present within Christian doctrine. He writes:

> There has been almost, from the inception of Christianity, a heresy that insists upon the angelism of man, a heresy that denies that man is a . . . union of body and spirit . . . .In whatever age or whatever form this heresy appeared, it was essentially a Platonic denial of the body, an assertion that man is a trapped angel imprisoned in flesh, that his spirit is in the body. . . .This obviously denies the fact of Christ's incarnation, his Resurrection, and his promise that all men will one day arise from the dead. (52)

Faulkner's refutation of this heresy can be found in the character of Addie Bundren (53). She "is an incarnationalist demanding that the word take on flesh" (53). Indeed, Addie holds little faith in words or the ideas they represent. Her section of the novel is filled with extensive musings on words. One reads, "I would think how words go straight up in a thin line, quick and harmless . . . and that sin and love and fear are just sounds that people who never sinned nor loved nor feared have for what they never had and cannot have until the forget the words" (Faulkner 173-4). For Addie, "the word sin is unreal . . . until it is incarnated. She comprehends adultery after she

takes Whitfield for a lover and after Jewel is born of that union" (O'Dea 53). By giving Addie this mind-body awareness and placing her at the center of the novel, Faulkner affirms the possibility of Christ's incarnation and resurrection (53).

Several critics stress the value that religion holds within *As I Lay Dying*. Warwick Wadlington writes, "Religion is an especially important storehouse of symbolic values in the world of this novel. . . . [A] religious framework is indeed paramount in the mentality of [the] characters in *As I Lay Dying*" (84). Charles Reagan Wilson notes the presence of "folk religion" in the novel (37). In Faulkner's world, this is defined as that which "represents the reservoir of Biblical teachings, doctrines, sayings, and general folk wisdom that can be summoned" (37). He continues, "The Bundrens themselves do not give evidence of being churchgoers, but they are not outside the religious culture. They have absorbed sayings from the Bible and reflect the emotionalism and the religion of the heart typical of Southern Evangelicalism" (37). For his characters to accurately reflect such characteristics, Faulkner must have drawn these characteristics from his own personal experience and/or feelings. The inclusion of such religious elements is suggestive of their importance to him. Also, Faulkner may have seen the Bundrens as a semi-reflection of himself; though he did not attend church on a regular basis, he remained keenly interested in the religious culture around him.

Wilson also recognizes that Anse Bundren, Addie's husband, has a particularly religious side (38). On the day of Addie's funeral, he is shown wearing "Sunday pants" (Faulkner 86; Wilson 38). This implies that he has at least one pair of nice clothes, perhaps used when he attends church. When the funeral crowd says to him, "The Lord giveth," he affirms this, repeating, "The Lord giveth" (86). He also makes occasional comments such as, "I done my best. I tried to do as [Addie] would wish it. The Lord will pardon me and excuse the conduct of

them He sent me" (106). Another comment reads, "I am the chosen of the Lord, for who He loveth, so doeth He chastiseth. But I be durn if He dont take some curious ways to show it, seems like" (111). This is an allusion to the first part of Hebrews 12.6, which reads, "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth . . ." (KJV; Blotner 266). Though Anse "chastiseth" instead of "chasteneth," the two words are synonymous in this particular Bible passage (Faulkner 111; Hebrews 12.6). This is reflected in Hebrews 12.8, the logical follow-up to verse 6: "But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons [of God]" (KJV). Here, Anse counts himself as one of God's flock. He also shows his trust in the Lord while at the same time acknowledging the difficulty in understanding His will.

One quote from Faulkner that critics often cite concerns the novel's development. While fielding questions at the University of Virginia in the late 1950s, he said, "[The novel] was written in six weeks without changing a word because I knew from the first where that was going" (qtd. in Blotner and Gwynn 87). This is yet another example of Faulkner telling half-truths: ". . . [T]he handwritten manuscript and the final typed copy reveal numerous deletions, changes, and minor revisions" (Pilkington 87). In fact, one of the changes includes the addition of a sentence that reads, "It surged up out of the water and stood for an instant upright upon that surging and heaving desolation like Christ" (Faulkner 148; Pilkington 88). In the novel, this sentence refers to a log that the Bundrens see while they are trying to cross a flooding river. Here, Faulkner paints an image of Christ standing powerful and erect above the "desolation" that is man and his sinful nature (148).

Joseph Blotner makes note of other Biblical parallels and echoes in *As I Lay Dying*. One concerns some remarks made by Anse:

> I have heard men cuss their luck, and right, for they were sinful men. But I do not

> say it's a curse on me, because I have done no wrong to be cussed by. I am not religious, I reckon. But peace is in my heart: I know it is. I have done things but neither better nor worse than them that pretend otherlike, and I know that Old Marster will care for me as for ere a sparrow that falls. But is seems hard that a man in his need could be so flouted by a road. (Faulkner 38; Blotner 266)

In a notation for this passage, Blotner writes, "See Matt. 10.29" (266). This verse reads, "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father" (KJV). This passage along with its associated verse reveals much about Anse. He recognizes the sinful nature of man, implying that he knows of hypocrites who like to judge him based on their own standards of religion. This is thematically similar to Jesus' words in Matthew 15.7-8: "Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias [Isaiah] prophesy of you, saying, 'This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me'" (KJV). Additionally, Anse professes a belief that God will take care of him, then immediately follows this with hints of weariness, doubt, and impatience. Such emotions are common throughout the Psalms.

In another passage Anse demonstrates an understanding of Heaven, as well as the value of not giving up:

> It's a hard country on man; it's hard. Eight miles of the sweat of his body washed up outen the Lord's earth, where the Lord Himself told him to put it. Nowhere in this sinful world can a honest, hardworking man profit. It takes them that runs the stores in the towns, doing no sweating, living off of them that sweats. It aint the hardworking man, the farmer. Sometimes I wonder why we keep at it. It's because there is a reward for us above, where they cant take their auto and such.

> Every man will be equal there and it will be taken from them that have and give to them that have not by the Lord. (Faulkner 110; Blotner 266)

Here, Anse laments the fact that he feels cheated by those wealthier than he—those who are known by their material possessions. He then expresses his faith in the justice that will be rendered in Heaven, where material possessions will not be used to determine the worth of a man. Anse, therefore, is confident that he will get to Heaven someday, and this confidence helps him to cope with the troubles of the world.

Blotner notes that the preceding speech from Anse reflects two verses, one from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament (266). The first verse comes from Genesis 3.19, which reads, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (KJV; Blotner 266). This verse reflects God's requirement of Adam to work the land in order to produce food to live off of; Anse can certainly identify with this, since he is a farmer. The second verse alluded to is Matthew 13.12: "For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath" (KJV; Blotner 266). Interestingly, the previous verse, Matthew 13.11, reads, "He answered and said unto them, 'Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given'" (KJV). Though there is little evidence from the text that suggests Anse attends church regularly, he does exhibit an understanding of the Bible far greater than that of the more "religious" characters.

For all his good qualities, Anse is not a perfect character. At times, he seems to espouse a philosophy of self-pity: "I am a luckless man. I have ever been" (Faulkner 18). He also reveals a penchant for selfish motives and insensitivity. Immediately following his wife's death

he says, “God’s will be done. Now I can get them teeth” (52). The morning after he buries Addie he appears with a new wife, unwilling to look any of his children in the eye (261).

Similar to Anse, Vernon Tull serves as a more rational religious contrast to his wife Cora’s semi-crazed fanatical judgments. Though he is not presented as an overtly religious man, he knows enough to recognize the wrong in Cora’s actions. At one point she declares in front of Darl, Anse’s son, “It’s a judgment on Anse Bundren. May it show him the path of sin his is a-trodding” (72). Vernon responds to this by thinking, “If it’s a judgment, it aint right. Because the Lord’s got more to do than that. He’s bound to have . . . . It aint right. I be durn if it is. Because He said Suffer little children to come unto Me dont make it right, neither” (73). Here, Vernon quotes verbatim from Mark 10.14, but fails to understand that the word “suffer” in King James English means “to allow” (Wadlington 88). More importantly, he correctly assumes that judgment is not God’s sole responsibility to man and experiences a moral conviction concerning his wife’s senseless and rash condemnations. Through characters like Anse and Vernon, Faulkner demonstrates that one need not be outwardly self-righteous to understand God and the content of His Word.

Though the Christian content in *As I Lay Dying* is less overt than that which is found in *The Sound and the Fury* and *Light in August*, there is a definite Biblical current flowing through the book. Though Faulkner uses irony in presenting his undoubtedly “Christian” characters as acutely Pharisaical and creating a somewhat inverted/perverted Christ figure in Jewel Bundren, his overall tone is not one of total irreverence. The Bundrens themselves are not completely without religion. Their patriarch Anse Bundren, though far from perfect, faintly echoes Dilsey in his belief in a benevolent, omnipotent God and his assurance of a place in Heaven. In these

aspects he can be seen as more moral than either Cora Tull or the Reverend Whitfield, who mercilessly flaunt their religiosity.

Chapter 6: A Study of Joe Christmas: What Purpose Does He Serve?

Structurally, the narrative of *Light in August* (1932) follows three separate characters—the pregnant Lena Grove who comes to Jefferson in search of the child's father, the isolated ex-reverend Gail Hightower, and the possibly racially mixed Joe Christmas. A significant portion of the discussion regarding the Biblical elements in *Light in August* focuses on the mysterious nature of Joe Christmas. Several critics—Virginia V. Hlavsa and Donald M. Kartiganer, for example—view him as a possible Christ figure, referring to numerous similarities between the two. However, just as many critics reject this idea, including John Pilkington and John W. Hunt. There is no true critical consensus on the nature of Christmas, nor on what Faulkner's intentions are concerning his role in the novel. The most significant parallel between Christmas and the Christ of the Bible is their rejection by an outside community and their violent deaths at the hands of others. Additionally, a strong thread of Calvinism is woven throughout the novel, particularly in its negative effect on some of the characters.

The progression of Christmas's life through the course of the novel is not completely linear and is often confusing. He is first introduced as a man in his thirties who appears at the Jefferson planing mill looking for work (31-2). The next several chapters are taken up by an extended flashback into Christmas's past (119-286). It will be helpful, then, to provide a brief outline of important events in his life in a more straightforward fashion than the novel presents. As a small child, he is left on the doorstep of an orphanage at Christmas by his grandfather, Eupheus Hines, who later comes to work there as a janitor (384). Around the age of 5, Christmas is adopted by the stern Presbyterian Simon McEachern, who subjects him to a rigorous life of hard labor, discipline, and religious learning that becomes abusive when Joe resists (145-77). He then begins an affair with a white waitress without McEachern's knowledge

(190-200). One night, Christmas beats McEachern severely and leaves him for dead (204-5). He spends the next fifteen years as a wanderer until he comes to the town of Jefferson and takes a job at the local planing mill, while at the same time making his home in a cabin on the estate of Joanna Burden, a white woman mostly ostracized by the community (209-31). Three years later, Christmas murders her (282-3). He allows himself to be captured (340), then escapes, taking refuge in the home of the Reverend Gail Hightower (463). He is pursued by Percy Grimm, who murders—and subsequently castrates—Christmas in Hightower's kitchen (464).

Throughout his adolescent years, Christmas is a victim of his foster father's abusive treatment. This abuse on the part of McEachern is religiously motivated. In this context, Robert N. Burrows calls Christmas an "outstanding example of a person haunted by the sense of religious oppression" (145). Donald Palumbo agrees that McEachern's "stiff, cold, affectionless nature contributes to the warped formation of Christmas' psychotic personality . . ." (144). One of McEachern's possessions is "an enormous Bible with brass clasps and hinges and a brass lock" (Faulkner 146). Evidently McEachern is not concerned with the Christly love found in this Bible because he whips Christmas for refusing to learn a Presbyterian catechism (149), as well as for failing to polish his shoes properly the night before (147). Because the former whipping takes place on a Sunday morning (146), the entire family misses church. This shows that Mr. McEachern is more interested in breaking Joe's rebellious nature than attending a place of worship.

McEachern himself is described in cruel, menacing terms. He believes that Christmas's last name is "heathenish" and "[s]acrilege." (144). Another passage reads, "His voice was not unkind. It was not human, personal, at all. It was just cold, implacable, like written or printed words" (149). The act of him praying is described as "that monotonous voice as of someone

talking in a dream, talking, adjuring, arguing with a Presence who could not even make a phantom indentation in an actual rug" (154). This strongly Calvinistic view of an impersonal God seems to reflect the view that McEachern holds and the view that he tries to impress upon Joe. Robert N. Burrows remarks that McEachern "is almost diabolical in his harsh religious tyranny, which allows him not a moment's pleasure or relaxation" (145). He gives Joe little room to exercise his free will. Though Joe is free on Saturday afternoons, he is aware that he will be punished if he returns home late:

> . . . [H]e had never before been this far from home this late. When he reached home he would be whipped. But not for what he might have or might not have done during his absence. When he reached home he would receive the same whipping though he had committed no sin as he would receive if McEachern had seen him commit it. (155-6)

As seen here, McEachern's rigid Calvinism has a largely negative effect on Joe. Because he does not receive love, he is unable to give any. He also wanders through life without any true sense of purpose.

A symbolic scene occurs when Mrs. McEachern washes Joe's feet (166). In one sense, this echoes the passage in which Jesus' feet are washed by the young woman (John 12.3). Also, it provides a contrast to the insensitive, unloving way in which Mr. McEachern treats his adopted son. Joe is so unaccustomed to being treated with kindness that he automatically braces himself for some kind of punishment: "He didn't know what she was trying to do, not even when he was sitting with his cold feet in the warm water. He didn't know that that was all, because it felt too good. He was waiting for the rest of it to begin; the part that would not be pleasant, whatever it would be. This had never happened to him before. . ." (166). McEachern's consistently harsh

treatment of Joe creates a feeling of inevitability toward such treatment, and this instance of kindness startles Joe into a state of paralysis and confusion. His mind cannot comprehend the possibility of kindness; therefore, he is incapable of responding to it. Similar emotional confusion will continue to haunt Joe throughout the rest of his life. Joe's inability to react to a simple display of kindness is another example of the ruinous effect that McEachern's Calvinism has on him. .

Another example of the kind of Calvinism that dominates McEachern's life is seen in Percy Grimm, once more in a negative light. Grimm is not oppressed; he is just "suffering the terrible tragedy of having been born not alone too late but not late enough to have escaped first hand knowledge of the lost time when he should have been a man instead of a child" (450). He also doesn't have anyone "to open his heart to" (450). Therefore, he feels like he has to fight his entire life. He turns to "a sublime and implicit faith in physical courage and blind obedience. . ." (451). Once Christmas escapes, Grimm determines that he will be the one to kill the fugitive. As he pursues Christmas, he moves with a "lean, swift, blind obedience to whatever Player moved him on the Board" (462). He notes that Christmas appears "indefatigable, not flesh and blood, as if the Player who moved him for pawn likewise found him breath" (462). Finally, the car that carries Grimm's fellow soldiers is marked as being "just where the Player had desired it to be" (463). Such references to the "Player" (462, 463) suggest Grimm's belief that he has no free will, that he has been destined to kill Christmas, and that all events will work in an order which allows the slaying to take place. Faulkner is certainly not condoning Christmas's death, but is showing through characters like Grimm and McEachern that a loss of free will necessitates a loss of self in man.

The way in which Christmas's life ends is essential to understanding his significance as a type of Christ figure. Virginia V. Hlavsa argues that Faulkner intentionally parallels the lives of Jesus Christ and Joe Christmas, at least in certain portions of the novel. She does this by pointing out numerous similarities between the novel and the Gospel of John. She notes that the most important similarity involves parallels between the nineteenth chapters of both texts (129). In the Bible, the crucifixion occurs in this chapter; in *Light in August*, Christmas is murdered and subsequently castrated by the vengeful Percy Grimm (129). Hlavsa compares Grimm and his three assistants (Faulkner 463) to the four soldiers who draw lots for Jesus' garments in John 19.23, as well as to the "Angel of Death" (135). She also equates Christ's crucifixion with Christmas's castration: both are ruthlessly cruel acts intended to destroy the victim's humanity (129).

Donald M. Kartiganer also agrees with the theory that Joe Christmas is intended to represent at least some aspects of Christ. He writes, ". . .[I]t appears to me that the daring of Faulkner's creation here is that Christmas *is* a Christ in the novel, a figure whose form—the antithesis in which his personality is rooted, the struggle for a wholeness of identity unknown to human beings—repeats the structure of the life of Christ" (13, original emphasis). Indeed, the two figures share a common bond in terms of their identity as perceived by others. Both are misunderstood and rejected, and both willingly submit to their attackers, eventually resulting in their violent deaths.

Phyllis Hirshleifer takes this argument even further with her discussion of the Christmas-Christ connection. She writes:

> The Christ image, as seen primarily in Joe Christmas, is a fundamental device of the book. The three years Christmas spends with Miss Burden may be taken as an

> enlarged three days of involvement in life (an ironic inversion of the three days in the tomb) from which he gains release by the more explicit crucifixion which begins with the arrest on Friday and ends with his death on Monday. (253-4)

Faulkner has demonstrated a fondness for inverting Christian symbolism at times, and Hirshleifer does well to make note of this.

Jessie McGuire Coffee also notes similarities between Christmas and Christ. These include their identical initials, Joe's arrival at the orphanage around Christmas time, his uncertain parentage, and the fact that he willingly submits himself to be crucified while in his thirties (43). This analysis, while partly true, presents a problem. There is nothing uncertain about Christ's parentage, unless one counts the outside community's perception of it. An angel announces to Joseph in a dream that the child within her womb "is of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 1.20). Apart from this, Coffee's argument on this level is convincing.

Coffee then discusses a deeper level of connection between Christmas and Christ. Firstly, Christmas is betrayed by an associate (43). This associate, Joe Brown, informs the sheriff that Christmas has Negro blood following the murder of Joanna Burden: "I'm talking about Christmas. The man that killed that white woman after he had done lived with her in plain sight of this whole town. . . . He's got nigger blood in him. I knowed it when I first saw him. . . . One time he even admitted it, told me he was part nigger" (Faulkner 98). This echoes the betrayal of Jesus in Matthew 26.47-50.

Secondly, Christmas experiences a quasi-resurrection through the birth of Lena Grove's child (Coffee 43). This birth is attended by Christmas's grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Eupeheus Hines (Faulkner 397). Mrs. Hines imagines that Lena is actually her daughter Milly, Joe's mother, and the baby she has just given birth to is Joe (397). She tells the doctor, "You can see

to Milly now. I'll take care of Joey" (397). Looking down at the baby, she says, "It's Joey. It's my Milly's little boy" (398). Through this scene, Christmas undergoes a symbolic resurrection, even though he has not yet been killed (Coffee 43).

A study of the text will reveal ways in which Christmas does not act like a character one would consider to be a Christ figure. An obvious example is his senseless (to the community) murder of Joanna Burden (Faulkner 282-3). Still, at one point Christmas openly rebels against God. He walks into the middle of a revival in a Negro church and erupts into violence (322-4). This incident is relayed by a member of the congregation:

> It was all happening so fast, and nobody knowed him, who he was or what he wanted or nothing. And the women hollering and screeching and him done retch into the pulpit and caught Brother Bedenberry by the throat, trying to snatch him outen the pulpit. . . . [T]hen some of the old men, the deacons, went up to him and tried to talk to him and he let Brother Bedenberry go and he whirled and he knocked seventy year old Pappy Thompson clean down into the mourners' pew. . . . Then he turned and clumb into the pulpit . . . [a]nd he began to curse, hollering it out, at the foks, and he cursed God louder than the women screeching . . . . (323).

Additionally, upon entering the church, a woman looks at Christmas's face and screams, "It's the devil! It's Satan himself!" (322). Coffee notes that Christmas is like an "anti-Christ" in this scene (44). Indeed, he is very far from Christ at this point. Coffee adds, "Whereas Christ was the epitome of love, Joe lives a life of sadistic hatred, his career but one series of outrages against common decency" (44).

Hlavsa reaches a conclusion similar to Coffee's. She also sees Christmas as a Christ figure represented as a "typical scapegoat"—someone upon which the sins of the people are laid (138). In this case, "*Light in August* cannot be a tract for the literal truth of Christianity" (138). She concludes, then, that "Faulkner may have been suggesting that the value of religion depends not on its historical truth, but in its ability to generate understanding of and sympathy for the human condition" (138).

John Pilkington disagrees that Christmas is meant to be considered as a Christ figure. He asserts that Faulkner did not intend to draw attention to the possibility of a parallel between Joe Christmas and Jesus Christ (138). He writes that, during revision, Faulkner made a change that affected Christmas's age: "In the autograph manuscript, Joe Christmas arrived in Jefferson at the age of thirty; thus, his death would have occurred when he was age thirty-three. Very likely because Faulkner did not wish to make an analogy between Christmas and Christ . . . too exact, he changed the date so that Christmas would die at age thirty-six" (138). It is also possible that Faulkner did not wish to overemphasize a Christmas-Christ connection, yet still considered it an important element in the story.

John W. Hunt is also wary of attempts to label Joe Christmas as a possible Christ figure and Faulkner as a Christian. He cautions, "[Faulkner's] use of images and terms from the Christian story does not make him Christian any more than his use of 'Christ symbolism' in such disparate figures as Benjy and Joe Christmas makes them 'Christ figures'" (13). This symbolism, then, serves only "as useful tools" to advance the story or the point Faulkner is trying to make (13). Hunt makes a good point, but Faulkner's choice to include such heavy symbolism in this novel (as well as *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying*) cannot be ignored. It is

rather conspicuous that this "tool" of Christian symbolism and references appears with regularity in these novels (13).

Hunt does, however, concede the importance that *Light in August* holds in the Faulkner canon in terms of its Christian elements: "For anyone interested in [Faulkner's] relationship to the particular content of the Christian faith . . . *Light in August* would appear at first glance to be *the* book of his early mature period to study, for in it he seems to have pulled the stops on the use of Christ symbolism" (13, Hunt's emphasis).

Hunt's tone, however, retains an air of skepticism. He claims that the novel "lends itself easily to the game of discovering extensive Christian parallelism. . . . With a variation here, an inversion there, a parallel circumstance in one instance and an ironic twist in another, Faulkner makes the trappings of the Christian story leap out at the reader" (15). This assumption, though, is a quizzical one. In *Light in August* alone, Faulkner makes such a significant number of allusions to various aspects of Christian dogma that it can hardly be determined that he has inserted this content simply to appease people who may have been looking for it.

In a number of ways, Christmas acts as a reverse or perverted Christ figure. For example, though Christ and Christmas share a common conflicted identity as perceived through the eyes of others, a big difference lies within their perception of themselves. Throughout the novel, Christmas struggles to form a basic conception of his own identity, whereas Christ never has such an issue. Matthew and Luke even begin their Gospels with extensive genealogies of Christ. As far as the issue of Christmas's identity goes, nothing is certain. His first scene in the novel is dominated by ambiguous language. He is described in such phrases as "He looked like a tramp, yet not like a tramp either" and "[T]here was something definitely rootless about him, as though no town nor city was his, no street, no walls, no square of earth his home" (Faulkner 31). Robert

M. Slabey writes, "Joe, rejected as White, as Negro, as a human being, is treated as a thing. He attempts to give his life meaning by insisting on his right to be, to be human, to be himself. . . . *Light in August*, an archetypal story of alienation is the record of Joe's quest for identity, self-knowledge, self-definition, and status in the world" (268). Slabey's comments concerning Christmas's identity are accurate insofar as they relate to the rejection of Christmas by both the black and white worlds, as well as his lifelong struggle to come to terms with the question of his identity. Christmas's struggle, however, is not the sole focus of the novel, though it is an important part. The novel is equally concerned with other characters, such as Lena Grove and the Reverend Gail Hightower.

Martin Kreiswirth also notes the aura of mystery that accompanies the introduction of Christmas. He argues that Christmas is presented as a "virtual walking oxymoron" and is misunderstood by the community because they view him as an embodiment of "enigmatic contradictions" (63). The "community" in this particular scene simply refers to the group of men who work at the planing mill where Christmas first appears (63). Kreiswirth continues, "[Christmas's] name also functions as a kind of as yet undisclosed cipher: '[A]s soon as they heard it, it was as though there was something in the sound of it that was trying to tell them what to expect'" (63; Faulkner 33).

Indeed, there is little information given on Christmas at the beginning of the novel. There is, however, a foreshadowing of the hostility the community will later feel toward him. When he first arrives at the planing mill, he is described as having a look of contempt on his face, to which the mill foreman remarks, "We ought to run him through the planer. Maybe that will take that look off his face" (32). Ultimately, similar feelings of anger and outrage will result in Christmas's violent castration and death.

At the moment of death, the parallels between Christmas and Christ are especially evident. In Christmas's final hour, he takes refuge in the home of the ex-minister Gail Hightower, but this seems to be his last consciously performed action. His pursuers, led by Percy Grimm, corner him in the kitchen:

> . . . [Grimm] ran straight to the kitchen and into the doorway, already firing, almost before he could have seen the table overturned and standing on its edge across the corner of the room, and the bright and glittering hands of the man who crouched behind it, resting upon the upper edge. Grimm emptied the automatic's magazine into the table; . . . (464)

Here, Christmas makes no real effort to shield himself, as if he is simply waiting for Grimm to arrive and pull the trigger. One might think he would resist, but he does not. He submits himself to the force and will of his attackers, mirroring Christ, who does not resist those who seek to arrest him in the garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26.50).

Additionally, the account of Christmas's death mirrors that of Christ's as recorded in the Gospel of John. John 19.30 reads, "When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost" (KJV). Faulkner's account is as follows:

> For a long moment [Christmas] looked up at them with peaceful and unfathomable and unbearable eyes. Then his face, body, all, seemed to *collapse*, to fall in upon itself, and from out the *slashed garments about his hips* and loins the pent black *blood seemed to rush like a released breath*. It seemed to rush out of his pale body like the rush of sparks from a *rising* rocket; upon that black blast the man seemed to *rise* soaring into their memories forever and ever. (464-5,

emphasis added).

The italicized words and phrase are suggestive of imagery involving Christ on the cross. There is an implied implosion that is effected through the word "collapse" (465) and the phrase "gave up the ghost" (John 19.30). The "slashed garments" and rushing blood (465) evoke John 19.34, in which a soldier pierces Jesus' side with a spear, and a combination of blood and water pours out. Finally, Faulkner's use of the word "rise" and its derivatives (465) conveys a sense of the Spirit of Christ ascending into Heaven.

Jessie McGuire Coffee sees Christmas's death and castration as an echo of the archetypal "scapegoat" figure, which Benjy also represents (45). She writes, "It is not inappropriate that Joe is crucified. Christ, both man and God, was able to become a propitiation to the divine for the human. Joe, possibly [both] white and black, is a symbolic propitiation for the sins of the two races against each other" (45).

Through his actions alone, Christmas distances himself from an easy identification as a true parallel with Christ, with the exception of his death scene. He storms into a church and seizes the pulpit while erupting into apparently unprintable language, sleeps with several women, and commits multiple acts of brutal violence—including murder—without expressing any shred of remorse. Joe beats his foster father and leaves him for dead; he walks into a Negro church and erupts with fury upon some of the congregants; he murders one of his white lovers, Joanna Burden. Such actions would never be associated with Christ. However, the details in which Christmas's death is described strikingly reflect the image of Christ on the cross. This evidence suggests that Faulkner did not intend for Christmas to serve as a complete parallel comparison with Christ. Christmas does, however, fit the mold of a Christ figure as "scapegoat" (Coffee 45;

Hlavsa 138). Once the community has determined that he, as a Negro, has murdered a white woman, they essentially lead him away to be slaughtered—and he goes willingly.

Chapter 7: The Function of the Reverend Gail Hightower

Gail Hightower, the isolated former Presbyterian minister in *Light in August*, plays a much more prominent role than Shegog and Whitfield, the ministers of *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying*, respectively. Hightower is portrayed as a man negligent of his ecclesiastical and social duties because of his inability to separate himself from the demons of his own past. His failed relationships—with his wife, his congregants, and the Jefferson community in general—are detailed explicitly. He is not shown to be a completely pious character, nor is he totally undone by his faults. He is a man who has been rejected by the community because they do not understand him, and he rejects them in return.

The very name "Hightower" suggests an image of one who judges or presides over something. This motif is evident from the novel's very first mention of Hightower: "From his study window he can see the street" (Faulkner 57). He spends a great majority of the novel seated in this study, listening, whether to music coming from a distant church or the concerns of other characters. He is not introduced until the third chapter, in which some important biographical information is provided by an unnamed resident of the town of Jefferson:

> He come here as a minister of the Presbyterian church, but his wife went bad on him. She would slip off to Memphis now and then and have a good time. . . . Some folks claimed he knew about it . . . . Then one Saturday night she got killed, in a house or something in Memphis. . . . He had to resign from the church, but he wouldn't leave Jefferson, for some reason. They tried to get him to, for his own sake as well as the town's, the church's. That was pretty bad on the church, you see. Having strangers come here and hear about it, and him refusing to leave the town. (59)

Since leaving the ministry, Hightower has isolated himself in his home on the edge of town, rarely ever coming out. A sign posted outside of his residence reads: "REV. GAIL HIGHTOWER, D.D. Art Lessons Handpainted Xmas & Anniversary Cards Photographs Developed" (58). When someone asks what the "D.D" represents, the answer give is "Done Damned. Gail Hightower Done Damned in Jefferson . . . ." (60-1). Hightower has essentially damned himself in the eyes of the community, presumably because he failed them as a minister. Also, the use of the word "Xmas" is ironic, given that Hightower still places the "Reverend" title before his name" (58). It suggests the fact that he has banished all semblance of religion from his life. By providing this information in particular, Faulkner contrasts the expectations of Hightower's former office with his current isolationist policies. The reader is now beginning to see that he is a flawed character.

Hightower's only real confidant is Byron Bunch, who works at a local mill during the week and helps out with services at a Negro church on Sundays. It is through information given to Byron that the reader is told more about Hightower's obsession with the past and his inability to serve as an effective minister:

> And they told Byron how the young minister was still excited even after six months [in Jefferson], still talking about the Civil War and his grandfather, a cavalryman, who was killed, and about General Grant's stores burning in Jefferson until it did not make sense at all. They told Byron how he seemed to talk that way in the pulpit too, wild too in the pulpit, using religion as though it were a dream. Not a nightmare, but something which went faster than the words in the Book; a sort of cyclone that did not even need to touch the actual earth. (61-2)

Here, Hightower's obsession is so great that he fails each and every Sunday to provide his congregation with even the simplest coherent Biblical message.

Hightower's ineffectiveness in the pulpit is further complicated by his inattention to his wife. It is reported that "the neighbors would hear her weeping in the parsonage in the afternoons or late at night, and the neighbors knowing that the husband would not know what to do about it because he did not know what was wrong" (62). One Sunday morning, his normally reserved wife interrupts a sermon with an outburst of emotion, much like Christmas does in the Negro church:

> In the middle of the sermon she sprang from the bench and began to scream, to shriek something toward the pulpit, shaking her hands toward the pulpit where her husband had ceased talking, leaning forward with his hands raised and stopped. Some people nearby tried to hold her but she fought them, and . . . she stood there, in the aisle now, shrieking and shaking her hands at the pulpit . . . . They did not know whether she was shaking her hands at him or at God. Then he came down and approached and she stopped fighting then and he led her out, with the heads turning as they passed, until the superintendent told the organist to play. (64-5).

Incidents such as this one are never told from Hightower's point of view, but from the community's negative perspective.

Such eccentricities of character ultimately doom Hightower's productivity in his ministerial office. They cause him to be "rejected by Jefferson because he has proved himself unworthy of directing its religious, spiritual life" (Vickrey 77). He is ineffective because "the legends of the past become the only truth and the only reality for [him], rendering his connection with the public world precarious at best" (77). In this sense, it is not God who calls Hightower to

the pulpit; it is the past that calls him to Jefferson. Yet, Hightower attempts to mask his real intentions by pretending that God has called him. This truth is not fully revealed until the penultimate chapter, where he imagines himself saying to the seminary elders, "Listen. God must call me to Jefferson because my life died there, was shot from the saddle of a galloping horse in a Jefferson street one night twenty years before it was ever born" (Faulkner 478). Hightower does not belong in the pulpit or the ministry because he lacks an important qualification: the ability to establish and maintain relationships with other human beings.

Various critics see Hightower as someone who ironically holds no regard for the religion he formerly served. Maria Gillan argues that Hightower makes an "intellectual rejection of Southern Protestantism" (137). Hyatt H. Waggoner concurs: "Hightower's thoughts constitute a terrible indictment of Southern Christianity, charging that it has become so distorted that it leads men toward hatred and destruction and death, crucifying Christ all over again. . ." (101). Both base this claim on a quote attributed to Hightower that occurs near the end of the novel: "Pleasure, ecstasy, they cannot seam to bear: their escape from it is in violence, in drinking and fighting and praying; catastrophe too, the violence identical and apparently inescapable *And so why should not their religion drive them to crucifixion of themselves and one another?*" (Gillan 137; Waggoner 101; Faulkner 368, Faulkner's emphasis). Equally important here, though, is the reason why Hightower makes such a rejection, at least in this case. The reference to crucifixion anticipates the death of Joe Christmas as well as the sacrifice that Hightower will make to attempt its prevention.

Hightower's statements in this scene are intended to reflect his judgments on the Church because of its non-treatment of Joe Christmas. As Hightower listens to the organ music playing from the church, he understands that those inside feel a false sense of sympathy for Christmas:

"the doomed man in the barred cell within hearing of them and of two other churches, and in whose crucifixion they too will raise a cross" (Faulkner 368). Hightower realizes the irony of the situation—there are three churches currently having prayer meeting, and likely none of them are praying for Christmas. He continues thinking, "Since to pity [Christmas] would be to admit selfdoubt [*sic*] and to hope for and need pity themselves. They will do it gladly, gladly. That is why it is so terrible, terrible, terrible" (368). As one critic notes, Hightower is now "painfully aware of the distance between the Christian gospel of love and compassion and the stern Calvinist religion of his community, which he himself had not merely sustained, but made even more inhuman and violent" (Berland 48-9). At this point in the novel, Hightower is rejecting errors he finds within institutional Christianity that corrupt the very foundation of the faith—love for one's neighbor (Matthew 22.39).

In fact, Hightower does commit a single act of love and self-sacrifice. When Joe Christmas takes his final refuge in Hightower's house, the minister does his best to protect him from his pursuing attackers. Even though he has just received a blow to the head from Christmas, Hightower determines to protect him. He cries, "Men! Listen to me. He was here that night. He was with me the night of the murder" (464). This is an outright lie, and even if it were true it could not serve to redeem him to the community. Nevertheless, it is an act of compassion and pity for Christmas. Ironically, though, Hightower initially refuses to protect Christmas when asked by Byron and Christmas's grandmother, Mrs. Hines. He responds to their request, "It's not because I cant, dont dare to, it's because I wont! I wont! do you hear? . . . .Get out of my house! Get out of my house!" (391). It follows, then, that at some point in time after this incident but before Christmas entered his house, Hightower changes his mind. He decides to reach out and help someone in need for the first time in his entire ministry. It is through this

action that Hightower comes closest to the true nature of Christianity that he has failed to see for so long.

Edmond Volpe errs slightly in his assessment of Hightower's change. He writes, "Only after the death of Christmas does Hightower face the truth about his life and acknowledge that he betrayed his ministry and his wife because he would not establish contact with his parishioners on a human, personal level. . ." (157). The latter part of this observation is true, but it is evident that Hightower begins to realize the error of his ways after he delivers Lena Grove's baby, which occurs before Christmas is killed. Once he returns home from the deliver, he begins to feel a "warmth" and a "glow" (Faulkner 404). He also "moves like a man with a purpose now, who for twentyfive years has been doing nothing at all between the time to wake and the time to sleep again" (405). Thus begins the germination of a feeling that will soon become a full-fledged sense of purpose, to be enacted with a long-lost passion when he attempts to save Christmas's life.

Nevertheless, after this brief moment of resurrection, it appears that Hightower settles back into his comfortable womb of isolation: "'I am dying,' he thinks. 'I should pray. I should try to pray.' But he does not. He does not try. 'With all air, all heaven, filled with the lost and unheeded crying of all the living who ever lived, wailing still like lost children among the cold and terrible stars. . . . I wanted so little. I asked so little.'" (Faulkner 492). At this point, his isolation is complete; he has chosen to cut himself off from other humans as well as God, who he believes will not hear his prayers. He does not "abandon the concept of God completely, [he] comes to recognize [and accept] the vastness of the gulf between God and man. . ." (Palumbo 144). Hightower cannot bear the burden of his own actions nor the actions of others, so he makes his final escape into the past.

Like Shegog and Whitfield, Faulkner's other ministers, Hightower is a flawed individual. He is also the only one of the three who has to leave the ministry. This does not, however, prevent him from being trusted by other characters, nor does it mean that Faulkner portrays him in an entirely unsympathetic manner. His vision of God is clouded by delusions of past grandeur. Like Whitfield, he imagines the voice of God calling him to action, specifically to the pulpit in Jefferson. Uniquely, though, he is given a final chance at acting like a minister, and he does so in his attempt to save Joe Christmas.

What, then, does all this say about Hightower's function in the novel? For one, he does ultimately reject the religion of the community—not only because of their racist practices, but because he has rendered himself socially incapable of responding to people. From his high tower—the second floor window of his home—he looks down upon the world, specifically the religious world, and judges it. This poses an important question: How much of his voice, if any, should be seen as Faulkner's own? Certainly, this is a difficult question to answer. It is highly probable that Faulkner did not intend for Hightower to serve as a complete representation of himself. Faulkner is certainly not consumed with the past to the extent that Hightower is. However, Hightower's comments concerning his estimation of the errors of the organized religious community in Jefferson appear to stem from a moral conviction similar to Faulkner's own. If there was any reason for Faulkner to reject the organized religion of his native Mississippi, it would be, in a fashion similar to Hightower's rejection, on the basis of its preoccupation with itself and its failure to reach out to the downtrodden in the community.

Hightower spends most of his life in his own imaginary world, making a mockery of his office as Reverend. His depraved state is such that he loses his wife, congregation, and reputation, yet initially feels no remorse for these losses. His first exposure to true Christianity

comes through his interaction with Byron Bunch, and, to a lesser extent, Joe Christmas and Lena Grove. He attempts to apply Christian love in his efforts to save Christmas, but when he fails at this he makes his final rejection of God and waits for death to take him.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

There is no denying the presence of Biblical themes and symbolism in *The Sound and the Fury*, *As I Lay Dying*, and *Light in August*. Faulkner has included such content for a reason. The question remains, then, what was this reason? Over the years, critics in general have struggled to provide an answer to this question.

It has been objected that the world Faulkner creates through his fiction is one totally devoid of hope and redemption. One critic writes, "There seems to be no awareness in Yoknapatawpha of the loving and benevolent God of the New Testament" (Mansfield 47). This is not an accurate statement—one only has to look at Dilsey to refute it. If there is any character in these novels that is conscious of a loving God, it is she. In response to Frony's concern about Benjy attending church with them, Dilsey says, "Tell um de good Lawd dont keer whether he bright er not" (Faulkner 290). Elsewhere, she tells him, "You's de Lawd's chile, anyway. En I be His'n too, fo long, praise Jesus" (317). This is clearly an acknowledgment of benevolence on God's part, as well as a statement of Dilsey's assurance that she will one day reach Heaven because she believes in Christ's resurrection. Granted, such acknowledgments of benevolence are rare, but they do occur.

Faulkner's use of Biblical content in these novels is usually ironic. He tends to contrast positive and negative imagery against each other. For example, the Christian hope that is espoused in Shegog's Easter sermon is contrasted with Jason Compson's bitter, fruitless search for his runaway niece. In this manner, Faulkner gives the reader a look at both sides of the thematic spectrum. In spite of these contrasts, though, each novel ends on a note of hope—not merely a pure hope, but one injected with typical Faulknerian ironic strains. The final image of *The Sound and the Fury* finds a recently calmed Benjy gazing out of the surrey window "as

cornice and façade flowed smoothly once more from left to right, post and tree, window and doorway and signboard each in its ordered place" (321). For Benjy, the hope is pure; the order of the surrey ride which he has grown to expect has been restored. The same cannot be said for Jason Compson, who will never regain the money stolen from him by his niece, nor Luster, who must live with the guilt and shame of causing a scene in the middle of the town square.

The Biblical content in *As I Lay Dying* is employed in a similar fashion. The hypocritical Christianity of Cora Tull and the Reverend Whitfield is contrasted with simpler faith of Anse Bundren. This novel, too, ends on a note of hope. Having just buried his deceased wife, appears before his children with a brand new wife in tow, announcing, "Meet Mrs Bundren" (261). Prior to this announcement, the reader is allowed a brief glimpse into the future. Key to this glimpse is the fact that Anse's new wife has a gramophone among her possessions. His son Cash remarks on it: "It was for a fact, all shut up as pretty as a picture, and everytime [*sic*] a new record would come from the mail order and us setting in the house in the winter listening to it, I would think what a shame Darl couldn't be to enjoy it too. But it is better so for him" (261). Here, a rare picture of Bundren tranquility is presented. It seems that may be hope for this family after all, even for Darl, who has been sent to the insane asylum in Jackson. This does not, however, excuse the fact that Anse has acquired a new wife almost immediately after his previous one has been buried. Such actions demonstrate Faulkner's awareness of the range of human selfishness. Nevertheless, the final effect is an unmistakable gleam of hope in an otherwise darkly comic work.

Compared to the rest of the novel, the ending of *Light in August* is quite hopeful and humorous. It features Byron Bunch and his companion Lena Grove, along with her recently born child, bound for parts unknown. They hitch a ride with the driver of a flatbed truck, who

later recalls a humorous episode that occurs while they are camped for the night. The driver and Byron are sleeping on the ground while Lena and the baby are sleeping in the bed of the truck. The driver recalls:

> I heard [Byron] come up, quiet as a cat, and stand over me, looking down at me, listening. I never made a sound; . . . Anyway, he goes on toward the truck, walking like he had eggs under his feet, and I lay there and watched him. . . . I just watched him climb slow and easy into the truck and disappear and then didn't anything happen for about while. . . and then I heard one kind of astonished sound she made when she woke up, like she was just surprised and then a little put out without being scared at all, and she says, not loud neither: "Why Mr Bunch. Aint you ashamed. You might have woke the baby, too." Then he come out the back door of the truck. . . . I be dog if I dont believe she picked him up and set him back outside on the ground like she would that baby if it had been about six years old. . . . (502, 503)

Whatever Byron's intentions are during this scene, it is clear that he intends to stay with Lena for the foreseeable future, perhaps even marry her. This is the hopeful note on which the novel ends, just two chapters after the brutal murder of Joe Christmas and one chapter removed from the sad reentrance of Hightower into his world of isolation.

In this period of his life (1928-1932), Faulkner experiences a variety of major life changes. He gets married to his childhood sweetheart Estelle Oldham in 1929 (Blotner 241), purchases his first house (259), and suffers through the heartbreak of losing his first child, a baby girl named Alabama (273). She dies on January 20 in the year 1931, in between the publication

of *As I Lay Dying* and *Light in August* (273). This deep loss may have been a reason for the darker thematic content of the latter book.

Throughout these three novels, Faulkner consistently shows a fascination in his novels for the sinful nature of man, as well as man's tendency to act in a selfish manner. This idea stems from one of the main points of Calvinism—"the total depravity of human nature after the fall" (Barth 12). It has been argued, then, that Faulkner's worldview is based on a belief in Calvinism (Barth 11-31; Douglas and Daniel 37-51). A more accurate statement would be that Faulkner's worldview, while not encompassing all of Calvinism, certainly includes Calvinistic influences, particularly as it concerns human depravity.

Faulkner's Christ figures are never true parallels of Christ—they are always presented with some inversion or variation. Joe Christmas and Benjy Compson reflect the archetypal image of the Biblical "scapegoat" (Coffee 45; Hlavsa 138). Such figures do, however, become most like Christ when they are subjected to unwarranted abuse, and through the suffering that results from it. Alfred Kazin writes, "Faulkner's Christ is all victim—'the man things are done to' (*God* 236). This concept is fulfilled literally in Benjy. Since he is not able to even take care of himself, all things must be done to and for him. Quentin Compson chooses to do all things to himself. He painstakingly orchestrates a selfish crucifixion of himself in order to escape from the demons of his present. Joe Christmas is never able to gain a concrete sense of identity; therefore, he drifts back and forth between the black and white, the religious and the secular communities. He is never able to establish a sense of belonging and never has any real will of his own, other than willingly submitting himself to his attackers, who murder and castrate him. For Christmas, there is no redemption or resurrection.

John W. Hunt addresses the difficulty inherent in understanding Faulkner's use of "Christ symbolism" (20). He states, "The Christ symbols refer beyond themselves; they are used as a part of a total fictional strategy . . . . [T]hey never stand alone as the carrier of the novel's import. Rather, when Faulkner is most successful—as in *Light in August*—they are both supported by and contribute to the total effect" (20). He then asks, "Is it any wonder, then, that Faulkner, who is no stranger to southern Christian religiousness, should find Christian symbolism a ready and pertinent tool with which to explore his subject?" (21). Thus, Faulkner always has a purpose in mind for his use of such symbolism—it is not done arbitrarily (20, 21).

None of the religious leaders in these novels are portrayed as saintly characters. They are also treated with varying degrees of sensitivity by those that perceive them. Shegog is initially described as looking like a "monkey" before he opens his mouth and delivers the powerful sermon that moves Dilsey to tears and captures Benjy's attention (Faulkner 293). Before he speaks, the congregation regards him "with consternation and unbelief" (293). They appear to judge him at first sight as some kind of fanatic. Shegog, however, is the most positively portrayed minister of the three (Burrows 139). Whitfield commits adultery and then seeks to justify the act by being exonerated by what he thinks is the voice of God. Hightower is so caught up in the glorious past of his grandfather that he invents his calling to Jefferson, neglects his wife, and isolates himself from the community after her death and his resignation from the pulpit. In these three figures, Faulkner emphasizes their qualities as human beings. He does not present them as holy untouchables above their congregation; rather, he brings them down to a more human level.

For the most part, Faulkner takes great care to protect his privacy. This includes supplying outrageous answers to people who simply want to know more about his life and his

writing (Meriweather 6-15, 19-22). He even admits this in a 1955 interview with Jean Stein Vanden Heuvel

> Q: Mr. Faulkner, you were saying a while ago that you don't like interviews.
>
> FAULKNER: The reason I don't like interviews is that I seem to react violently to personal questions. If the questions are about the work, I try to answer them. When they are about me, I may answer or I may not, but even if I do, if the same question is asked tomorrow, the answer may be different. (qtd. in Meriwether 237)

Here, Faulkner seems to be more open, and provides a clear explanation for his occasional offbeat replies.

Later in this same interview, Faulkner speaks candidly about his view on religion, specifically Christianity. He says:

> No one is without Christianity, if we agree on what we mean by the word. It is every individual's individual code of behavior by means of which he makes himself a better human being than his nature wants to be, if he followed his nature only. Whatever its symbol—cross or crescent or whatever—that symbol is man's reminder of his duty inside the human race. Its various allegories are the charts against which he measures himself and learns to know what he is. . . . It shows [man] how to discover himself, evolve for himself a moral code and standard within his capacities and aspirations, by giving him a matchless example of suffering and sacrifice and the promise of hope. (qtd. in Meriwether 246-7)

The "matchless example" in question is Christ (qtd. in Meriwether 247). He willingly endured the scourging and crucifixion (Matthew 27.26-49) and died upon the Cross for the sins of

mankind (Matthew 27.50). He also gave man a reason to hope when He rose from the tomb (Matthew 28.5-6). In Him Faulkner finds a foundation upon which man can build his code of morality, whatever it may be.

J. Robert Barth affirms the positive religious influence found in Faulkner's work. He writes, "If the religious aspects of Faulkner's fiction are only a part of his work, they remain nevertheless an essential part. It might be said they are the soul of Faulkner's art, for it is his religious and human vision that gives shape to the material in which he works" (Epilogue 221). One question remains, then: "How can this vision be defined?"

Faulkner's religious vision includes the use of the Christ figure as a "mythological archetype" (Detweiler 114). This usage in particular suggests his awareness that his regional audience—made up of many churchgoers (Wilson 24)—will understand the associated religious symbolism. J. Robert Barth writes, "The mythic dimensions of Christianity especially have entered deeply into the fabric of many of his novels" (Epilogue 218). Additionally, Faulkner does seem to be writing out of a deep personal conviction that owes much to moral—if not purely religious—thought and doctrine. This conviction holds strongly to certain strands of Calvinistic thought, but is not wholly such. Faulkner is very concerned with man's ability to sin and the judgment of this sin by others, particularly those in the religious community. He certainly feels that such judgments are morally wrong. One can almost imagine him saying along with Jesus, "…[Y]ou hypocrites. . . This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me" (Mark 7.6). Faulkner is knowledgeable enough to recognize religious hypocrisy, and this recognition is apparent in characters such as Cora Tull and the Reverend Whitfield.

When asked to name the greatest commandment, Jesus replies, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love they neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22.36-40). These two commandments effectively represent the very foundations of the Christian faith. In Faulkner, only Dilsey provides a good example of adherence to the first. The other characters are, more or less, motivated by selfish desires.

Thematically, Faulkner gives an equal amount of focus to the second commandment, suggesting that the complexity of human beings and their interaction with each other holds importance for him. He demonstrates that man is inherently bad and sinful, but is not forced into a pattern of repeated sinful action; he is capable of overcoming the limitations placed upon him by his nature. Faulkner echoes this sentiment in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, given in 1950. He says, “I believe that man will not merely endure: he will prevail. He is immortal, not because he alone among creatures has an inexhaustible voice, but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance. The poet’s, the writer’s duty is to write about these things” (“Speech” 4). In other words, man has the power to love and respect himself, as well as others (4). The majority of Faulkner’s characters, however, choose to commit evil rather than good.

Faulkner’s use of Biblical symbolism in *The Sound and the Fury*, *As I Lay Dying*, and *Light in August* reflects a profound understanding of Christianity’s effect on humanity. In *The Sound and the Fury*, he contrasts Quentin’s hopeless struggle with Dilsey’s faith-based endurance through life. *As I Lay Dying* offers a unique contrast—the often derided Anse Bundren, despite his faults, seems to hold more consistent belief in God than the so-called

"religious" characters of Cora Tull and the Reverend Whitfield. *Light in August* contains a vicious attack on Calvinism carried to an extreme as portrayed in the characters of Simon McEachern and Percy Grimm. It also features Joe Christmas, who becomes a "sacrificial scapegoat" to the community because he is thought to have Negro blood (Coffee 29). Gail Hightower, the novel's ex-minister, invents his calling to the pulpit and is given a final chance at redemption, but does not take it.

Through the Biblical symbolism of these novels, Faulkner explores the condition of man in terms of his relationship to God and other human beings. The Christian symbolism used brings about both positive and negative results. Its use is as important to Faulkner as it is for his Southern audience. He understands that man must be held to some code of value, but should be free to choose the code. While Faulkner never explicitly states that he is "born again," it is clear that his belief system during this period of his life derives in part from his knowledge of the Scriptures and his understanding of Christian thought and doctrine.

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