A Christ Figure in William Faulkner's *Light in August*

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Faulkner denies his deliberate intention of Christ symbolism in Joe Christmas in *Light in August.*[1] However, Faulkner never denies that Joe Christmas is a Christ figure. He just mentions that "the people" "come first" and "The symbolism comes second" (*FU* 117), confirming that "Everyone that has had the story of Christ and the Passion as a part of his Christian background will in time draw from that" (*FU* 117). Questions arise because religious symbols in *Light in August* seem vague in relation to the theme of the novel. Thus Richard H. Rovere in the introduction of *Light in August* writes, "I think there is reason to believe that, in his [Faulkner's] mind, when he began the story of Joe Christmas, there was a connection of some sort between Christmas and Jesus Christ. What the connection might have been I am unable to imagine . . . ."[2] And Richard Chase says, "Faulkner seems not to sense exactly how the Christ theme should be handled, sometimes making it too overt and sometimes not overt enough."[3] Since the appearance of *A Fable* in 1954, the criticism has tended to put more emphasis than previously on the Christ imagery in *Light in August,* but there has never been a convincing discussion of Joe Christmas' function as a Christ figure, especially in consideration of Lena Grove whose story accompanies Joe Christmas' tragic life. Here the aim of this paper is to testify against Rovere and Chase, and to clarify how Joe Christmas functions as a Christ figure by showing his christhood as a sacrificial lamb and redeemer, and furthermore to clarify Faulkner's religious concept of the omnipresence of God's love in considering the relationship between Lena Grove and Joe Christmas.

It is natural that some should wonder why such a person as Joe Christmas can be considered a Christ figure. He might have been a murderer. To such a question Faulkner's comment sheds some light. Faulkner says that Joe Christmas was tragic because he didn't know what he was. Witness the passage from *Faulkner in the University*:

> Now with Christmas, for instance, he didn't know what he was. He knew that he would never know what he was, and his only salvation in order to live with himself was to repudiate mankind, to live outside the human race. And he tried to

1) *Faulkner in the University: Class Conferences at the University of Virginia,* eds. Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner (Charlottesville, VA: U of Virginia P, 1959), p. 117. All subsequent references to this book will be identified in the paper by the abbreviation *FU,* followed by the page number.
2) William Faulkner, *Light in August* (New York: Random House, 1950), p. xiii. All subsequent references to this book will be identified in the paper by the abbreviation *LA,* followed by the page number.
3) Richard Chase,"The Stone and the Crucifixion: Faulkner's *Light in August*" in *William Faulkner: Two Decades of Criticism,* eds. Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery (Michigan: East Lansing, 1951), p. 212.

> do that but nobody would let him, the human race itself wouldn't let him. And I don't think he was bad, I think he was tragic. And his tragedy was that he didn't know what he was and would never know, and that to me is the most tragic condition that an individual can have—to not know who he was. (*FU* 118)

Let us look into how Joe Christmas' utter lack of self-identity afflicts him. Joe Christmas can never know who he himself is, saying, "I think I got some nigger blood in me . . . I dont [sic] know. I believe I have" (*LA* 171). In fact there is no objective proof in the novel that Christmas is part Negro at all. Only his maternal grandfather, Hines, has the word of the circus manager who employed Joe's father and testifies that Joe's father was part Negro.

Joe Christmas himself believes he is part Negro, because he remembers being called a Negro and being treated as such. The children called him a nigger and so did the dietitian at the orphanage where Christmas lived; "You little nigger bastard! You nigger Bastard!" (*LA* 109) Also he remembers the harsh shock he received from the Negro yardman's reply when Joe asked of him, "How come you are a nigger?" the Negro said, "You are worse than that [nigger]. You dont know what you are. And more than that you wont never know. You'll live and you'll die and you wont never know" (*LA* 336). Such impossibility of self identification is the cause of his rootlessness which he has to face throughout his life. Never certain of who he is, he is unstable and unable to express himself. He has to struggle to search for his identity.

His character is formed during the years he spends as an adopted son of McEachern, a ruthless, stern Presbyterian who thinks himself "God's instrument . . . to watch the working out of His will" on Joe Christmas (*LA* 333). During these years, under harsh discipline, Joe resists the burden of his unidentified blood in his own way. He wouldn't submit to changing his name when McEachern proclaims, "Christmas. A heathenish name. Sacrilege. I will change that" (*LA* 126). Yet Joe exclaims, "*My name aint*[sic] *McEachern. My name is Christmas*" (*LA* 127).

Having no peace because of the failure of self-identity, Joe Christmas refuses from Mrs. McEachern "that soft kindness which he believed himself doomed to be forever victim of and which he hated worse than he did the hard and ruthless justice of men" (*LA* 147). In his disgust, he resents any appeal to sentiment or tenderness because he hardly knows what love is. He chooses to be hated in order to justify his lack of identity. He protects his weakness by the illusion of strength.

His illusion, however, is broken and his innocence is destroyed during the period he is associated with Bobbie, who works at a county-hall to which Mr. McEachern takes Joe Christmas. At least Joe is true to Bobbie. He is honest enough to pay back five cents he thinks he owes Bobbie. He even discloses his utmost trouble saying, "I think I got some nigger blood in me" (*LA* 171). Discovering that Bobbie is a prostitute, Joe does not change his favorable feelings for her.

When Mr. McEachern insults Bobbie, Joe hits him with a chair, not knowing what he is doing, and perhaps killing him. Despite his act of "love," on the same night he is rejected by Bobbie and beaten and robbed by her associates. There he has to discover the truth that Bobbie does not love him. She claims, "Bastard! Son of a bitch! Getting me into a jam, that always treated you like you were a white man. A white man!" (*LA* 189) Her words are more than Joe can bear. Now in addition to committing murder and stealing for Bobbie, Joe has his own love disgraced by her. Thus while bearing the burden of his uncertain heritage, his own fatalism is being formed as he is accepting a life in which he is sure to fall into some "fateful mischance" (*LA* 163), recognizing himself as "the volitionless servant of the fatality in which he believed that he did not believe" (*LA* 244–245).

Then desperately Joe Christmas takes the torturous road of flight from himself. Sometimes he lives with a black-skinned woman, but he can never escape from himself. Even his coming back to Jefferson after fifteen years does not give him a new start. In fact his pride is completely shattered by his living together with Miss Joanna Burden. Incidentally, Joe Christmas and Joanna Burden share the same problem. Because of her extensive activities on behalf of Negroes, Miss Burden is regarded by the white people as an outsider, while Christmas' attitude toward the possibility of having Negro blood makes him another kind of outsider. Taking advantage of Christmas' utter passiveness though, Miss Burden imposes her way on Christmas too much. She tries to confine Christmas in her world by making him kneel down and pray. Again this is more than Joe Christmas' pride can bear.

The seven-day period of flight after Christmas furiously leaves Miss Burden's home signifies a final stage of his search for himself. His flight is not an effort to escape death, but his last attempt at accepting himself as nobody, as one utterly to be denied. During the seven days he has no need for food. His final self-acceptance is made explicit in his self-recognition in Mottstown. He recognizes himself as neither white nor black, nor even as being a murderer:

> He never acted like either a nigger or a white man. That was it. That was what made the folks so mad. For him to be a murderer and all dressed up and walking the town like he dared them to touch him, when he ought to have been skulking and hiding in the woods, muddy and dirty and running. It was like he never even knew he was a murderer, let alone a nigger too. (*LA* 306–7)

At this stage, he can accept himself calmly as a man totally denied and he at last finds peace within himself.

Thus by looking at Joe Christmas' life as his desperate search for his identity, crying, "*This is not my life. I dont belong here*" (*LA* 225), we cannot help but pity him. As his search for identity ends, his impulse to live also ends. Consequently, we can say that Joe Christmas suffers and dies because of the Southern evil of racial prejudice. He is genuinely

a victim, because he just suffers. Joe Christmas is a sacrificial lamb in being a victim of the South's sin of racial discrimination.

Here we have to stop to think if we can say Joe Christmas is a genuinely sacrificial character though he has killed Joanna Burden. Some may have doubts. As far as I know, no interpreters of this novel have denied that Christmas killed Joanna Burden. However, is it proved beyond a shadow of doubt that Joe Christmas murdered Joanna Burden? Let us examine the possibility of Christmas' innocence.

First of all, it is clear that there is no definite evidence in the book that Christmas committed the murder since the actual murder is not described at all. As Byron points out: "He [Christmas] aint never admitted that he killed her. And all the evidence they got against him is Brown's word, which is next to none" (*LA* 341). We only know it is Lucas Brown, not Joe Christmas, who is found at the Burden house. We must also question why Brown is so desperate to prevent the first witness, the farmer, from going upstairs. It is possible that Brown knows that Joanna is upstairs with her throat cut. Could we not think that Brown, who according to the farmer, "was a drunk man in the hall that looked like he had just finished falling down the stairs" (*LA* 79), having just been struck by Christmas (*LA* 90) and jealous of the Negro's relationship with the white woman, has committed the murder himself, burned down the house to destroy the evidence, and charged Christmas with it?

Actually, it appears the sheriff believes Brown is the main suspect until Brown reveals that Joe Christmas is a Negro. It is Brown's revelation of Joe's Negro blood in his last attempt to save himself that changes the entire situation:

> 'That's right,' he [Brown] says. 'Go on. Accuse me. Accuse the white man that's trying to help you with what he knows. Accuse the white man and let the nigger go free. Accuse the white man and let the nigger run.' (*LA* 85)

Joe's alleged Negro blood decisively convinces the sheriff of Joe Christmas' guilt. Thus the most crucial evidence for Christmas' murder allegation is doubtful since it is testified by Brown, who is described as a notorious liar, and whose essence is "confounding and mendacity" (*LA* 32), who seduces Lena in Alabama, deserts her pregnant, and leaves for Mississippi.

The second piece of evidence that is given to prove Joe's guilt is the weapons, the pistol and the razor. When Joe Christmas is fleeing from the Burden place, a young couple pick him up and they find him waving a heavy pistol in his right hand. It is the "old style, single action, cap-and-ball revolver almost as long and heavier than a small rifle" (*LA* 247) which Burden aimed at Joe. She did pull the trigger but it misfired. The hammer has fallen only once, which means the pistol might still have been loaded. As Joe examined the pistol later he sees it "with its two loaded chambers: the one upon which the hammer had already fallen and which had not exploded, and the other upon which no hammer had yet

fallen but upon which a hammer had been planned to fall" (*LA* 250). It is possible that when he heard the pistol mis-fire, he ran across the room to take it from her. It is true that he once held the razor in his hand, but then he went to the table and "laid the razor on the table and found the lamp and struck the match" (*LA* 246). He scarcely had time before Joanna could pull the trigger a second time to take the razor off the table and open it since "it was not open yet" (*LA* 246), and then go across the room to Joanna to cut her throat. Rather he might have run to the bed and struggled to get the pistol out of her hand. And if he really wanted to kill Burden, it is unnatural that he would not fire the pistol at her rather than return to the table for the razor to cut her throat.

If the hypothesis of Christmas' innocence regarding Burden's murder is right, we can be reassured that Joe Christmas is a Christ figure. In fact an extensive study will show numerous parallels between the life of Joe Christmas and that of Christ. To begin with, as Byron suspected, his name "was as though there was something in the sound of it that was trying to tell them what to expect" (*LA* 29). Richard H. Rovere has pointed out, there is "his uncertain paternity . . . the virginity of his mother" (*LA* xiii). Joe Christmas is abandoned at the orphanage on Christmas day. Mrs. McEachern's ceremonial washing of Joe's feet (*LA* 145) might parallel Jesus having his feet washed by Mary Magdalene. Just as the Scripture makes no record of Christ's middle years, Christmas' life is largely unrecorded, from the time that Christmas flees the McEachern's at eighteen until his return at thirty-three. He has Lucas Brown as a "disciple" (*LA* 39) for some three years just as Jesus trains his disciples over three years. Joe Christmas is betrayed by his disciple for money as Christ was. When Joe Christmas leaves the McEachern home, he wanders about the entire country, seeking love and identity. He is "rootless, homeless, no street, no walls, no square of earth his home" connoting Jesus' saying, "Foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests, but the son of man hath not where to lay his head" (Mt 8: 20). As Jesus chased the money-lenders from the temple, Joe Christmas enters a Negro church and drives the worshippers out with a table leg and "caught Brother Bedenberry by the throat, trying to snatch him outen the pulpit" (*LA* 282). On the Thursday night of his flight, Joe Christmas finds a meal mysteriously appearing before him, just as that Thursday night Jesus celebrated a passover meal with his disciples. As Jesus remained silent when he was charged by the chief priests and elders, Joe Christmas never denies when he is asked by Halliday, "Aint your name Christmas?" (*LA* 306) As Roman soldiers scourged Christ and placed a crown of thorns on his head, Halliday hits Christmas on the face until he bleeds. As the leaders of the Jewish people agitated the crowds to cry out, "Crucify him, crucify him," Doc Hines cries, "Kill him. Kill him" (*LA* 302). Faulkner makes Percy Grimm the symbol of Pontius Pilate, for as Pilate Grimm says, "I'll leave this to you fellows. I'll do what you say" (*LA* 397).

Also, Christmas' castration makes another impressive connotation. After Grimm castrates Joe Christmas, like a forgiving Christ, Joe looks up to Grimm and his men "with peaceful and unfathomable and unbearable eyes" (*LA* 407). Christmas' body is "pale" (*LA* 407). His blood is "black" (*LA* 407). It pours from his body "like the rush of sparks from a

rising rocket" (*LA* 407), as if his body were soaring up to heaven. Christmas seems to become, like Christ, serene and triumphant. That was the scene which demonstrates the most Christ-like figure of Joe Christmas.

The remaining problem is why on earth Joe Christmas comes back to Jefferson after fifteen years, with just one purpose, to die "as though he had set out and made his plans to passively commit suicide" (*LA* 388). However vague his recognition might be, he may well know what he is doing. By Friday of the week of his flight, he stops and thinks his ordained destiny is that he must run away and people must avoid him:

> "They all want me to be captured, and then when I come up ready to say Here I am *Yes I would say Here I am I am tired I am tired of running of having to carry my life like it was a basket of eggs* they all run away. Like there is a rule to catch me by, and to capture me that way would not be like the rule says." (*LA* 294)

Although Christmas is a victim, he does not seem to be totally passive in his life course. Rather he seems to have come to find his own way of dying:

> Again his direction is straight as a surveyor's line, disregarding hill and valley and bog. Yet he is not hurrying. He is like a man who knows where he is and where he wants to go and how much time to the exact minute he has to get there in. (*LA* 295)

Moving in a straight line, Christmas heads toward Mottstown. Such a seven-day journey may be compared to Christ's way to Golgotha. Christmas knows that he must die. At this point Joe Christmas may be compared to the Christ, who is resolute to bear the burden of human sin. Christmas seems resolute too, as he approaches Mottstown in the wagon beside the young Negro, smelling the black shoe of him; "that mark on his ankles the gauge definite and ineradicable of the black tide creeping up his legs, moving from his feet upward as death moves" (*LA* 297). Joe Christmas' flight to Mottstown is directed to death as the final destination like Christ's.

With all those pieces of evidence taken together, it is not inappropriate that Christmas is compared to the crucified Christ because Joe Christmas, who is possibly white and black, plays a role of sacrificial lamb for the sins of racism. He dies for the crucial predicament of man: "the savage and lonely street which he [Christmas] had chosen of his own will" (*LA* 225) was for "the white race's doom and curse for its sins" (*LA* 221), although his death did not free people of racism.

If Joe Christmas is a sacrificial lamb who dies for the South's sins, he must be a redeemer, too. Christ, the Lamb "has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows" (Is 53: 4) and "he [Christ] was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed" (Is

53: 5). We can see two major characters in the novel who have undergone inner transformation through their contact with the life of Joe Christmas. Both are involved in the plight of Christmas. And unexpectedly they become mentors of Mrs. Hines, who is desperately wishing to save Christmas, her grandson. The one is Byron Bunch and the other is Gail Hightower.

Being a worker at the Jefferson planning mill, Byron "has spent six days of every week for seven years at the planning mill, feeding boards into the machinery" (*LA* 41). On Sunday he "rides thirty miles into the country and spends Sunday leading the choir in a country church—a service which lasts all day long" (*LA* 42). He shows some concern for others who are in need. In fact Byron is Hightower's only link with the outside world. Despite these redeeming qualities of some concern for others, Byron has lived a solitary life, forgetting love for thirty years.

Byron's contact with Joe Christmas begins when he learns that the new mill worker, Joe Christmas, has no money to buy lunch. He benevolently offers him food. Then Byron meets Lena Grove and falls in love with her immediately. Byron is defenseless against her; for he "is already in love, though he does not yet know it" (*LA* 48). He senses the seriousness of his involvement. Joe Christmas' way to his death can be paralleled with Byron Bunch's way to the thorough service for Lena Grove, whom he knows to be pregnant. Without concern for the paternity of her child, he serves Lena selflessly as Joseph in the Bible serves Mary, finding a home for her and persuading Hightower to deliver her baby. He used to be a man of belief that there is a price for being good the same as for being bad; a cost to pay. And he now believes "it's the good men that cant deny the bill when it comes around. They cant deny it for the reason that there aint any way to make them pay it, like a honest man that gambles" (*LA* 341).

Byron's real predicament comes when he hears Lena's newborn child cry out. It is notable that it happens on the day that Christmas is crucified. He is struck with the idea that the father of the child must be Lucus Burch. Byron takes his mule to arrange a meeting of Lena and her child's natural father. Then he prepares to leave Jefferson with his hurt pride. How ridiculous his situation is at this childbirth:

> *Byron Bunch, that weeded another man's laidby crop, without any halvers. The fellow that took care of another man's whore while the other fellow was busy making a thousand dollars. And got nothing for it. Byron Bunch that protected her good name when the woman that owned the good name and the man she had given it to had both thrown it away, that got the other fellow's bastard born in peace and quiet and at Byron Bunch's expense, and heard a baby cry once for his pay. Got nothing for it except permission to fetch the other fellow back to her soon as he got done collecting the thousand dollars and Byron wasn't needed anymore. Byron Bunch* (*LA* 365)

However, by helping to bring life into the world, Byron has been already elevated above his moral sense of responsibility as he says, "it seems like a man can just about bear anything. He can even bear what he never done. He can even bear the thinking how some things is just more than he can bear" (*LA* 371). Thus, confronting with Brown, he resolves that he will live in the world of time, saying, "Yes. I'll have to be moving. I'll have to get on so I can find me something else to meddle with" (*LA* 385). Like Joseph, Byron has chosen to act compassionately for Lena and her baby at the cost of his reputation. It is as though the redeeming power of Christmas' death brought Byron salvation, he starts a new life with Lena Grove and her baby.

We can also say that Hightower's relationship with Christmas has changed him. It is said that he is "the fifty-year-old outcast who has been denied by his church" (*LA* 42). Observing the change in Byron who "speaks in that new voice: that voice of brief, terse, each word definite of meaning, not fumbling" (*LA* 274), Hightower begins thinking of his own way of life. He realizes it is the sense of being a victim that he has been suffering from:

> I am not a man of God. And not through my own desire. Remember that. Not of my own choice that I am no longer a man of God. It was by the will, the more than behest, of them like you and like her and like him in the jail yonder and like them who put him there to do their will upon, as they did upon me, with insult and violence upon those who like them were created by the same God and were driven by them to do that which they now turn and rend them for having done it. It was not my choice. Remember that. (*LA* 319–320)

Hightower sees in Christmas' utmost suffering the Crucifixion of Jesus who dies for the ignorant mob:

> *And so why should not their religion drive them to crucifixion of themselves and one another?* . . . not for justification but as a dying salute before its own plunge, and not to any god but to the doomed man in the barred cell within hearing of them and of the two other churches, and in whose crucifixion they too will raise a cross. 'And they will do it gladly,' he says, in the dark window . . . . 'Since to pity him would be to admit selfdoubt and to hope for and need pity themselves. They will do it gladly, gladly. That's why it is so terrible, terrible, terrible.' (*LA* 322)

The Cross of Jesus is to liberate a man from the darkest abyss of life. In the light of Christ's crucifixion, Hightower regards himself in retrospect. He had thought that he had already suffered enough for his sin, but he realizes that he has not. He confesses that he had kept himself within the barricades without caring for the needs of his congregation:

> I came here where faces full of bafflement and hunger and eagerness waited for me, waiting to believe; I did not see them. Where hands were raised for what they believed that I would bring them; I did not see them. (*LA* 427)

Hightower's real awakening comes when he is given "one trust" (*LA* 427) by Joe Christmas. His recognition of his own fault comes to climax when he confesses, "I have been a single instant of darkness" (*LA* 430). He realizes that he has shut himself within his hallucinated past, a closed world of karma or fatalism, being "impregnable . . . in his own conviction will" (*LA* 277). Hightower, reconsidering his past life, discovers inevitably what he has so long refused to face. He knows he has hardly lived at all, regretting quietly,"I shall not have got out of the habit of prayer" (*LA* 278).

Now that he knows his crucial fault, he falls out of his obsession with the past and tries to be intent upon "now Now" (*LA* 431). Leaving his "dead life," he tries to make a desperate effort to save Christmas by testifying to Grimm that he and Christmas were together on the night of Joanna Burden's murder: "Listen to me. He was here that night. He was with me the night of the murder. I swear to God—" (*LA* 406). Hightower now sees that his own wheel of karma has confined him (*LA* 430) and he was entrapped by the past. But he now finds himself accepted in the lambent suspension of August, which seems like the light of God:

> The wheel, released, seems to rush on with a long sighing sound. He sits motionless in its aftermath, in his cooling sweat, while the sweat pours and pours. The wheel whirls on. It is going fast and smooth now, because it is freed now of burden, of vehicle, axle, all. In the lambent suspension of August into which night is about to fully come, it seems to engender and surround itself with a faint glow like a halo. (*LA* 430)

Thus we may say that the contact with Christmas leads both Byron and Hightower to their own salvation.

When thinking of Lena Grove in consideration of Christmas, throughout the novel, Lena is depicted quite differently from Joe. While Joe repels and is rejected by the people who he encounters, Lena attracts the people, and is accepted by them. Faulkner keeps describing her as an amiable person; "Her face is calm as stone, but not hard. Its doggedness has a soft quality, an inwardlighted quality of tranquil and calm unreason and detachment" (*LA* 16).

Though Lena is a woman of humility in "a shapeless garment of faded blue, carrying a palmleaf fan and a small cloth bundle" (*LA* 8), she is a woman of faith and dignity. It is significant that her journey seems transcend time: "she advanced . . . like something moving forever and without progress across an urn" (*LA* 6); "The wagon goes on, slow, timeless" (*LA* 25). Her relation to time is vividly contrasted with Armstid's. While Armstid

cannot command time at all, leaving a mule half-awake and half-asleep, Lena brings the order which is in accord with nature: "The wagon now has a kind of rhythm, its ungreased and outraged wood one with the slow afternoon, the road, the heat" (*LA* 11). Lena is living in accord with time;

> "The woman [Lena] went on. She had not looked back. She went out of sight up the road: swollen, slow, deliberate, unhurried and tireless as augmenting afternoon itself" (*LA* 9).

We can say Lena lives in accord with Christ as I explained that in Faulkner's world time is closely associated with Christ.[4)]

Her first contact with Christmas is under the August sky when Lena sees the burning Burden house. She later learns that her new home has been the home of Joe Christmas and Lucas Burch, the man she is hunting for. Furthermore, the birth of Lena's child has its own meaning. Old Mrs. Hines, having come to Jefferson in search of Joe Christmas, mistakenly takes the newly born child for Joe Christmas, vividly reliving his birth.

We also notice that Lena's receiving Christ into herself is symbolized by the scene of her eating the sardines since the fish has been a symbol of Christ signifying "Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour" in Greek [Ichthyus].[5)] Lena decides to buy a nickel box of sardines and she feels a divine power within her during her humble meal:

> She begins to eat. She eats slowly, steadily, sucking the rich sardine oil from her fingers with slow and complete relish. Then she stops, not abruptly, yet with utter completeness, her jaw stilled in midchewing, a bitten cracker in her hand and her face lowered a little and her eyes blank, as if she were listening to something very far away or so near as to be inside her. (*LA* 25)

With the grace of Christ within her Lena remains calm, through the violence of murder, chase and lynching, "her face fixed in an expression serene and warm, as though she were about to smile" (*LA* 357). Thus Lena can be a Mary figure in her conceiving a Christ like figure. Having a Joseph like figure with her, she makes a Holy Family.

Furthermore, considering that her new born baby makes a Christ figure, we may boldly proclaim that a Christ figure may appear anywhere no matter how the situation is, because of God's predominant love of man. This is what Joe Christmas knows even in his predicament:

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4) See "The Triumph of Time As Seen in *The Sound and the Fury*," in *Sociology Department Stuides* (Kwansei Gakuin University, 1998) No. 81, pp. 93–103.

5) *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Tradition*, ed. David Lyle Jeffrey (Michigan: Grand Rapids, 1992), pp. 451–452.

> . . . thinking *God perhaps and me not knowing that too* He could see it like a printed sentence, fullborn and already dead *God loves* me too like the faded and weathered letters on a last year's billboard *God loves me too* (*LA* 91)

Also that is the very knowledge Joe Christmas attains at the end of his search for himself. In his futile wanderings he knows he has been in God's circle:

> Looking, he can see the smoke low on the sky, beyond an imperceptible corner; he is entering it again, the street which ran for thirty years. It had been a paved street, where going should be fast. It had made a circle and he is still inside of it. Though during the last seven days he has had no paved street, yet he has travelled farther than in all the thirty years before. And yet he is still inside the circle. 'And yet I have been farther in these seven days than in all the thirty years,' he thinks. 'But I have never got outside that circle. I have never broken out of the ring of what I have already done and cannot ever undo,' he thinks quietly . . . (*LA* 296)

To conclude this paper the theme of the novel can be summarized as follows. Truly Faulkner depicts Joe Christmas as a Christ figure[6] by showing him to be a sacrificial lamb, Christ in the darkness who is in the utmost predicament because of man's sin, and thus redeems the sin. Because of Christ's redeeming power, Hightower can get out of his closed world and Byron can act as a Joseph figure. Faulkner who thinks the writer's privilege is "to help man endure by lifting his heart,"[7] appears to say that as Byron makes reality of the concept of love in his relationship with Lena by becoming a Joseph figure; of a father of an imminent child, or as Hightower makes his testimony for Christmas at the cost of his safety, it is human dignity for us to get out of our own closed world and respond to the love of God by caring for others' needs so that we can find ourselves in accord with our essence in the love of the supreme God, the universal light as we see in the presence of Lena Grove, who brings order in the turmoil of the world by receiving Christ into herself.

6) As for other Faulkner's Christ figure please refer to Yayoi Okada, "Salvation for Temple Drake: A Study of *Requiem for a Nun,*" in *Sociology Department Studies* No. 82 (Kwansei Gakuin University, 1998), pp. 59–71; "Faulkner's Ultimate Gospel: A Study of a Christ Figure in William Faulkner's *A Fable,*" in *Sociology Department Studies* No. 83 (Kwansei Gakuin University, 1999), pp. 41–57; "A Study of a Christ Figure in *Pylon,* William Faulkner's Waste Land" in *School of Sociology Journal* No. 89 (Kwansei Gakuin University, 2001), pp. 135–148.

7) "Upon Receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature, 1950" in *Essays Speeches & Public Letters by William Faulkner,* ed. James B. Meriwether (New York: Random House, 1965), p. 120.

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A Christ Figure in William Faulkner's *Light in August*

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Though since the appearance of *A Fable* in 1954, the criticism has tended to put more emphasis on the Christ imagery in *Light in August*, there has never been a convincing discussion of Joe Christmas' function as a Christ figure, especially in consideration of Lena Grove whose story accompanies Joe Christmas' tragic life. The aim of this paper is to clarify how Joe Christmas functions as a Christ figure by showing his christhood as a sacrificial lamb and redeemer, and furthermore to clarify Faulkner's religious concept of the omnipresence of God's love in considering the relationship between Lena Grove and Joe Christmas.