Dark Houses and a Sanctuary: Joe Christmas's Struggles with Home in *Light in August*

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William Faulkner's *Light in August* (1932) is full of unyielding characters who persistently follow their own courses. Joe Christmas is a rare exception, as his life has been "monstrously Other-oriented" (Weinstein 103) due to the contradiction between his white appearance and his "essential" racial identity as black. He learns, for instance, that he is at least seen as black by others through their repetitive, pejorative appellation of "nigger" during his early days at the white orphanage, even though whether he has any "black blood" is debatable. Additionally, his attitudes, behavior, and values are heavily influenced by the strict discipline of his white adoptive father, Simon McEachern, which internalizes the image of a white Southern male as "a racist, a sexist, and a puritan" (Bleikasten 317) in Christmas. Although Christmas endeavors to live his life independently by saying "*My name aint McEachern. My name is Christmas*" (*LA* 145), he cannot find his own course and yields to the social pressure surrounding him.

In the novel, the narrator explains Christmas's social maladjustment: "there was something definitely rootless about him, as though no town nor city was his, no street, no walls, no square of earth his home" (*LA* 31). It is true that Christmas's nomadic nature reflects his frantic wanderings throughout his life, but society does not always exclude him on the grounds of his racial ambiguity and violence. In fact, he has the options of remaining in the homes of the McEacherns or Joanna Burden if he can accept their Christian way of living and their assumption of his being either white (McEachern) or black (Joanna). His escapes from each of these Christian homes and the Southern racial code need further consideration because he eventually bursts into another Christian home—that of Gail Hightower—after the frenzied chase drama with Percy Grimm and ends his life there. Given that Faulkner initially considered "Dark House" as the title of this novel, it is worth closely examining the actual houses where Christmas has stayed and reevaluating the meaning of "home." Accordingly, this paper focuses on the homes of the McEacherns, Joanna, and Hightower and explores Christmas's struggles with the denial and acceptance of a dark house and a sanctuary.

1. Dark Houses

In reference to the collection of Faulkner's unpublished letters, *Thinking of Home* (1992), Michel Gresset describes Faulkner's "home" as "where one belongs" (48). While pointing out the semantic ambiguity of the term "belonging," Gresset explains that home is a nostalgic notion of returning to the place where one fits in best. James G. Watson also argues that home, "a definite and particular locale," is closely associated with the characteristics of a house, which can be understood as "not only a localized refuge but a universal mode of self-definition and expression" (139). Faulkner's houses are used symbolically to evoke a sense of place that influences each character's values, actions, and personality. According to Watson, "to be *unhoused*" means "to be isolated potentially not only from a particular place in space and time but from fundamental referents of human identity" (139). Due to his background as an orphan, the term "unhoused" does well explaining Christmas's unstable situation from a different point of view other than his racial ambiguity. With no place to feel at home, he cannot develop a sense of belonging and moves from place to place, living in temporary dwellings.

When we examine his life, we see that Christmas is often mentally unhoused and physically resides in a dark house. According to Wesley and Barbara Alverson Morris, the novel's original title of "Dark House" is deeply tied to "the darkness of the old, patrilineal lines [that] lay the cultural contradiction which generated dispersal, disruption, and digression" (100). The houses of the McEacherns and Joanna are referred to as being "dark" (*LA* 106, 229, 281), and the father figure of each family embodies the residents' old-fashioned lives and manners, as well as their dogmatic values and attitudes. Likewise, André Bleikasten pays attention to the houses in this novel and indicates that they mostly "appear at night" (295) in the darkness. In his view, "all the houses known to Christmas, from the orphanage to Joanna's house, are associated with a female presence, and in each instance he ends up by fleeing them—except the last one, Hightower's house, where he finds his ultimate refuge, in death" (295).

Although I agree with Bleikasten's account of the female presences and of Hightower's house, I would argue that Christmas does not always flee from the houses in which he stays. In the orphanage, for instance, Christmas has a passive acceptance of his fate in life; it is actually Eupheus (Doc) Hines, who is the janitor of the orphanage and his actual grandfather, and McEachern, his future adoptive father, who guide him in and out of the orphanage. In addition to his relationships with women and racial ambiguity, what Christmas struggles to escape from is a Christian home that attempts to hedge him in with the rigorous disciplines of Calvinism. The immediate cause of Christmas

voluntarily moving away from the dark houses of the McEacherns and Joanna is the unilateral imposition of Christianity by his adoptive father and lover.

A Christian home has been an important factor in American religious life, particularly after the nineteenth century. According to Colleen McDannell, however, the significance of home as a sacred place has changed with the trend of the times:

> During the second half of the nineteenth century, mainstream Protestant Americans sought to make their domestic space holy by elaborating an ideology which placed the home, and not the church, at the center of the creation of religious and patriotic values. . . . By the beginning of the twentieth century, however, social and cultural changes in America weakened the common assumption of the sacred character of the home. . . . By the 1930s domestic religion no longer functioned as a unifying force which transcended Protestant denominational differences. Home Bible reading, placing pious sayings in the living room, and believing in the saving forces of domesticity marked one as a conservative Protestant who was critical of modern perspectives on Christianity. (McDannell 162-63)

This passage reveals that by the time *Light in August* was published in 1932, a Christian home was unpopular among the public and was mostly supported by the traditional Protestants. For those Protestants who kept to the old ways, McDannell states, the family was the important unit for making good Christians and, especially for the Presbyterian conservative pastors, "the home was a refuge from an evil and incomprehensible world" (181). When McEachern adopts Christmas and takes him home from the orphanage, McEachern explains that he "will find food and shelter and the care of Christian people" (*LA* 144). What this scene implies is that McEachern is a member of the religious conservatives and considers his house a "shelter"—a Christian home. Similarly to the powerful Victorian fathers who act as a "prophet, priest, and king" (McDannell 178) in the house, McEachern changes Christmas's "heathenish" name to his own and forces his adoptive son to "eat [his] bread and . . . observe [his] religion" (*LA* 144, 145).

Indeed, from the day of Christmas's arrival, McEachern inculcates the teachings of the Bible and the Christian way of living based on "a Presbyterian catechism" (*LA* 147) into Christmas's mind and often imposes corporal punishment on him when he shows defiance. On the subject of doctrine, Harold J. Douglas and Robert Daniel explain that "Calvinism is apt to turn up almost anywhere that religious belief impinges upon Southern life" (39-40), and the Presbyterian churches, along with those of Methodists, Baptists, and Episcopalians, are no exception. These critics outline its ideas and

principles:

> American Calvinism . . . conceives of man as bound to sin and threatened by damnation, but not *doomed* to it. The way to redemption, by an act of choice, remains open. . . . Yet the knowledge that the majority of men are doomed not to receive the good tidings, along with descriptions of the punishments that await impenitent sinners, usually beclouds the message of hope and joy. . . . The influence of Calvin is to be detected not so much in a literal application of the doctrine of the elect and the damned, as in a serious and often gloomy view of man's fate, in an insistence upon strictness of behavior, particularly on the Sabbath, and in the belief, stated or implied, that sexuality is the chief sign of man's fallen nature. (Douglas and Daniel 39)

According to McEachern, "the two abominations are sloth and idle thinking, the two virtues are work and the fear of God" (*LA* 144), and people need to live humbly by faith and hard work. Due to Christmas's unwillingness to learn the Bible, McEachern commands him to kneel and pray for forgiveness for his "stubborn heart" and "the sin of disobedience" and administers physical punishment while pleading the pardon "for trespass against the Sabbath and for lifting his hand against a child, an orphan, who was dear to God" (*LA* 152). Instead of finding "a good home" (*LA* 143), Christmas lives in a cold, dark house filled with the strict Calvinistic discipline.

While trying to acquiesce McEachern's creed on the surface, Christmas eventually reaches the limit of his patience and knocks his adoptive father to the ground with a chair when McEachern bursts into the dance party and calls his girlfriend, Bobbie Allen, by the biblical name that suggests lechery, "Jezebel" (*LA* 204), in front of the townspeople. Bobbie works at a back-alley restaurant in town where McEachern forbids Christmas to go and, in the eyes of McEachern, has led to his adoptive son's sexual degradation and dishonesty. Christmas becomes so thoroughly disgusted with his adoptive father's religious intolerance and asceticism, which are also indicated in McEachern's old-fashioned heavy Bible, plain manner of dress, and horse riding instead of automobile driving, that there is no other way left for him but to run away from his Christian home. He also abhors his loving and caring adoptive mother, who embodies the domesticity of a Christian home, and rejects her food and "soft kindness" (*LA* 168). In fact, Christmas has mixed feelings toward his adoptive parents because he "detests his stern Presbyterian stepfather, yet prefers his harsh morality to Mrs. McEachern's softness and weakness" (Douglas and Daniel 40). After the incident in the dance hall, Christmas returns home and, as if to show his hostile feeling toward his adoptive mother, steals her secret

savings under her mournful eyes before leaving the dark house for good. He escapes to Bobbie's house, which is also described as "dark" (*LA* 198), to marry her only to fail. She and her parties, who suspect him of committing McEachern's murder, call him "a nigger" (*LA* 218, 219), beat him badly, and eventually set out for Memphis, leaving him behind in the empty house.

Due to his racial uncertainty, Christmas's religious struggle is much stronger and more problematic in Joanna's Christian home than that of the McEacherns. McEachern does not care much about Christmas's parentage and raises his adoptive son as a white man, even though he appears to have heard a little about the possibility of his adoptive son's mixed blood from the dietician at the orphanage. Unlike the McEacherns, Joanna considers Christmas black and tries to rehabilitate him to become a good Christian. Before reaching this paternalistic (not maternalistic) state of mind, however, she abandons herself to lust, which wracks her with guilt. When the love affair between Joanna and Christmas is on track, she is "not ready to pray yet" and wishes to "be damned a little longer, a little while" (*LA* 264). During that time, Christmas has fixed "a [*sic*] old nigger cabin in the back" of Joanna's "old colonial plantation house two miles from town" and meets her there secretly at night (*LA* 79, 36). It is notable that Joanna's plantation house and Christmas's cabin demonstrate their relationship of white master and black servant from the old days. Indeed, Joanna takes the initiative in their romance and repeatedly calls him "Negro!" (*LA* 260) in their love life. Her powerful influence over him, nevertheless, does not last long: their affair begins to fail when she lies about her pregnancy and asks him to help her charitable business for the black schools, and ends when she demands him kneel before God for salvation.

The common duties imposed on Christmas by the McEacherns and Joanna are the commitment to the religious acts including the act of praying at home. In Christmas's "darkening cabin" (*LA* 248), Joanna tells him the story of her fanatical father that she heard when she was four years old: "The curse of the black race is God's curse. But the curse of the white race is the black man who will be forever God's chosen own because He once cursed him" (*LA* 253). Her father's insistence upon "God's curse" of race has been imprinted into her mind since childhood and eventually becomes the grounds for her obsession, leading her to ask for Christmas's engagement in assisting the blacks "out of darkness" (*LA* 276). As is the case with McEachern, Joanna demands Christmas kneel and listen to her prayer in her old house, which, in Christmas's mind, suddenly changes from an ordinary home with food and bed to a Christian home with a noble, philanthropic mission. Christmas refuses to accept Joanna's proposition and leaves her

old plantation house after allegedly killing her with his razor, which reminds readers of "the archetypal weapon of the black murderer in popular fiction" (Sundquist 21), just before she tries to shoot him with a revolver. Although the actual murder scene is not present in the text, the story continues to incriminate Christmas for killing her. He becomes rootless again and flees desperately from the pursuers who regard him as black and charge him with Joanna's murder.

The dark houses of both the McEacherns and of Joanna enhance Christmas's antipathy toward Victorian-style, old-fashioned Christian homes and serve as the catalyst of Christmas's rootless wanderings during his life. When the McEacherns adopt Christmas and take him home from the orphanage, as a small child, he does not respond to his adoptive father's word "Home" (*LA* 143), for he seems to have no idea of what a "home" is like. Afterward, he has internalized the notion of "home"—a Christian home—and struggles to overcome that concept only to fail. The influence and pressure of a Christian home are so enormous that all he can do is escape from these dark houses. His violent attacks toward his adoptive parents and lover and his rejection of a Christian home consequently lead to his restless wandering.

2. From Dark Houses to a Sanctuary

Christmas not only lives in dark houses but spends a long time drifting aimlessly from place to place. When looking at Christmas's life, readers notice that all of his wanderings—except his last flight from the jail to Hightower's house—reveal his inner feelings, which emphasize his sense of rootlessness resulting from his uncertain racial background. As the black custodian of the white orphanage foretells five-year-old Christmas's extreme hardship in the future ("You'll live and you'll die and you wont never know [what you are]" [*LA* 384]), Christmas has always identified himself as an orphan and struggles with the ambiguity of his situation—that is, whether he is black or white—throughout his life. When Joanna asks him about his parentage, Christmas responds with "an overtone, unmirthful yet quizzical, at once humorless and sardonic: 'If I'm not [part black], damned if I haven't wasted a lot of time'" (*LA* 254), implying the fifteen years of his long journey before drifting to her old house. The feeling of unease has prevented Christmas from staying in one place.

His nomadic wanderings around "Oklahoma and Missouri and as far south as Mexico and then back north to Chicago and Detroit and then back south again and at last to Mississippi" (*LA* 224) for fifteen years illustrate his attempts to search for a place where he belongs. Saying "*All I wanted was peace*" to himself, he drifts from town to

town and concludes with "the despair of courage" that "it was loneliness which he was trying to escape and not himself" (*LA* 112, 226). Until his eventual capture in Mottstown, Mississippi, and transfer to Jefferson's jail for allegedly murdering Joanna, he confronts the challenges of the social code and prejudice alone. At the end of running in circle, however, he pours out his heart by saying, "*I am tired of running of having to carry my life like it was a basket of eggs*," and eventually acknowledges "the black shoes smelling of negro" that signify his blackness (*LA* 337, 339). Accepting his race as a finality, though still possessing his white nature as indicated in his white shirt, he stops running and is arrested on the main street of Mottstown.

The course of Christmas's life shows that he has struggled with his uncertain racial identity alone and has not contemplated his familial background. This, nevertheless, may be the case until he meets his grandmother, Mrs. Hines, in Jefferson's jail. Regina K. Fadiman points out that their familial connection became more explicit in the final version of the novel, as "there was little reason for maintaining ambiguity about Christmas's relationship to the Hineses, for a new ambiguity had become more tantalizing: the mystery of Christmas's black blood" (60). The sudden appearance of Mrs. Hines "clearly represents the missing link he had always needed for comprehending his experience" (Singal 183) and must have triggered an emotional shift in his attitude toward his familial origin and his life. Even though the identity of his biological father, who worked for a traveling circus, is left unresolved as being between possibly part Mexican (according to the circus owner) and part black, the important point here is that he is no longer an orphan. Christmas has finally met his flesh and blood and, perhaps for the first and last time, becomes aware of his heritage. It is therefore highly suggestive that his wanderings end in Mottstown, where his grandparents live. He coincidentally—or fatalistically—makes it "home."

Christmas's "home" in Mottstown, unfortunately, is also a dark house from the perspective of Mrs. Hines's husband, Doc Hines. He is Christmas's grandfather, who reproaches Milly—his daughter (and Christmas's biological mother)—because her lechery has led to the possibility of miscegenation. After her death during childbirth, Doc Hines, repeatedly condemning his daughter as "bitchery and abomination" and his grandson as "a pollution and a abomination on [God's] earth," immediately takes Christmas to a white orphanage in Memphis (*LA* 361, 374, 386). When Doc Hines meets grown-up Christmas again in town, he becomes upset and fervently tries to agitate a crowd into lynching his own grandson. At Hightower's house, he often interrupts the conversation among Byron Bunch, Hightower, and Mrs. Hines and insists on the legitimacy of his hurling insults at

his daughter and grandson by saying, "God give old Doc Hines his chance and so old Doc Hines give God His chance too" (*LA* 371). Considering himself and others to be "a part of His purpose and His vengeance," he never doubts his mission to be the "instrument of God" and keeps an eye on his demonic grandson (*LA* 383, 385). The fanatical tendency of Doc Hines resembles that of McEachern and Joanna's ancestors—that of religious bigots who commit themselves to the Bible and Christianity—but in a more extreme and less intelligent way. Considering the family's dark past, including Christmas's abandonment, the Hineses have lived in a "little house *dark* and small and rankly-odored as a cave" (*LA* 348, emphasis added).

Doc Hines's dark house eventually transforms into a warm home from Mrs. Hines's point of view. In fact, to understand Christmas's innermost feelings, a re-evaluation of Mrs. Hines's story shows another aspect of Christmas's circumstances from the familial point of view and becomes indispensable in understanding his unaccountable flight into Hightower's house in the end. Mrs. Hines's words and deeds shed new light on the meaning of "home" for Christmas that eventually leads to the notions of "a Christian home" and "a sanctuary."

After thirty years of no contact with Christmas, Mrs. Hines suddenly becomes active and resolute in her desire to follow her grandson, who has been transferred to another prison in Jefferson. She courageously takes a train to Jefferson to see the aftermath of Christmas's capture in her town and tries to save him through some means "for some definite purpose or at least with some vague hope" (*LA* 369). Upon her arrival in Jefferson, she discloses the untold story of her family to Gavin Stevens, Hightower, and Byron and hesitantly makes an impassioned plea to the ex-minister Hightower to free her grandson from jail for one day, as if "he had been on a trip and come back, telling [her] about the trip, without any living earth against him yet" (*LA* 388). Mrs. Hines understands that her grandson's death is inevitable for the alleged murder but endeavors to speak about her feelings with a glimmer of hope of his returning home.

In contrast to the suppressive Doc Hines, few critics have paid much attention to his wife's personal narrative and background in the novel. Compared to Lena Grove and Joanna, who are the "central figures" of the novel, Mrs. Hines is surely one of the "eight minor female characters" (Wittenberg 115). She is always referred to as "Mrs. Hines," without her first name, although this is not odd since the usage of "Mrs." was a convention in those days (Wittenberg 109). Her shabby appearance as "a dumpy, fat little woman with a round face like dirty and unovened dough, and a tight screw of scant hair" (*LA* 346) underscores her low profile and status among the other impressive

characters, including her fanatical husband, Doc Hines, who might be "the most odious character in all of Faulkner's fiction" (Chappell 67). In sum, Mrs. Hines has mostly been regarded as "a product of non-fulfillment" (Chabrier 90) and "the downtrodden or neglected wife" (Bleikasten 287) who does not have much of a presence in the novel.

Though admitting Mrs. Hines's influence on Christmas's final escape, not many critics place a high value on her desperate attempt to save her grandson. For instance, one critic concluded that, despite her persistent love toward her grandson throughout the novel, the "grandmother who cannot save him from the wrath of her husband at the beginning of his life is no more able to do so at the end of it" (Burroughs 199). Based on Christmas's indifferent and defiant attitude toward the protection and care of his adoptive mother, Mrs. McEachern, Noel Polk suggests that Christmas is also disgusted at Mrs. Hines's meddling and explains that Christmas's final escape is "a desperate ultimate repudiation of the dungeon who is mother herself, trying in one last furious effort both to escape his desire for her and to provoke the punishment he deserves for that desire" (88). Although Polk's Freudian argument further explains Percy Grimm's castration of Christmas in Hightower's house, we cannot place Mrs. Hines on the same level as Mrs. McEachern because the former is Christmas's biological grandmother who is undaunted by rowdy mobs and her bigoted husband and gathers her courage to visit her grandson in jail.

Furthermore, that the narrator indirectly refers to the interaction between Christmas and his grandmother in Stevens's hearsay account is worth mentioning because she is supposed to be the only biological relative with whom Christmas comes into contact in his life. Until Mrs. Hines appears in the novel, Christmas considers himself an orphan with no familial connections. The fact that Stevens displays Christmas's final stage in terms of his personal relationship with his grandmother—even though Stevens somewhat carelessly ends up in the stereotypical blood theory—leaves much room for further discussion about Mrs. Hines's impact on Christmas's mind during his last attempt to flee. As Judith Bryant Wittenberg points out, Mrs. Hines's role as a narrator in the retelling of her own story, however awkwardly, is critical in the novel: "Some of her wishes have been heeded, and her narration of the events of the past has imbued them with some sort of meaning and order" (111). Stevens foregrounds the significance of Hightower's role in Mrs. Hines's story: "that old outcast minister was a sanctuary which would be inviolable not only to officers and mobs, but to the very irrevocable past" (*LA* 448). While Stevens's sudden appearance at the end of the novel can "mark a flaw in the novel's structure" and does "not fit smoothly into the narrative"

(Ruppersburg, *Voice* 44), he reconstructs the indispensable episode of Mrs. Hines that urges Christmas to seek refuge in Hightower's house as his sanctuary.

Visually speaking, it is noteworthy that the houses of the Hineses and of Hightower share a similar architectural style: that of a bungalow. The couple's "small bungalow in a neighborhood of negroes" in Mottstown reminds readers of Hightower's "brown, unpainted and unobtrusive bungalow" in Jefferson (*LA* 340, 57). Hightower's bungalow is "the house unpainted, small, obscure, poorly lighted, mansmelling, manstale," whereas the couple's is a "little house dark and small and rankly-odored as a cave" (*LA* 48, 348). Considering that no other bungalows appear in the novel, the similar exterior appearances of the houses indicate the significance of Hightower's house as "home" for Christmas. That both live in small bungalows implies that Christmas's final destination is indirectly connected with his grandparents' house, even though he never has a chance to visit their home. Mrs. Hines clings to some shreds of hope that the ex-minister's Christian home will somehow protect her grandson from the world.

While grandmothers are generally considered to have little individuality in the novel, whereas "the grandfathers of Joe, Hightower, and Joanna could be seen as images and envoys of God the Father, the Almighty" (Pitavy, *Faulkner's* 45), this is not necessarily the case for Mrs. Hines. People have always referred to Christmas as a "nigger" in the Southern context, especially after his supposed murder of a white lady, even though his white skin and supposed "Negro blood" contradict and confound both him and society. Mrs. Hines, despite being white, is actually the only person in the novel who is not at all concerned with Christmas's racial ambiguity—after all, Christmas is nothing more than "my grandson, my girl's little boy" (*LA* 388) to her. It is, then, Mrs. Hines's special fondness for Christmas and her decisive actions that make her significant in the novel. Whereas Doc Hines represents a dark house, Mrs. Hines embodies an enduring home. The image of her home ultimately transforms into that of a Christian home and a sanctuary when she asks for help from ex-minister Hightower.

3. A Sanctuary

To understand Christmas's confusing behavior during his final escape, some critics discuss the credibility of Stevens's story about Mrs. Hines's advice to Christmas in the jail cell when she says that he should turn to Hightower. Hugh M. Ruppersburg points out that Stevens's account is "the only explanation Faulkner gives for why Christmas went to Hightower's house" and "it seems likely, considering what *did* happen" (*Reading* 255). Cleanth Brooks also states that "the psychology offered by Gavin is sound: that

Joe's flight to Hightower's seems purposed, a running with hope, and that this must mean that Joe's grandmother must have given him the belief" (376) that he could find refuge with Hightower. According to Jay Watson, Stevens's hypothesis of Christmas's last moment is "at best shaky, at worst racist and absurd" but is "on solid interpretive ground" when it does not involve racial matters (93, 95). Watson, like Ruppersburg and Brooks, gives credit to Stevens's story—in which Mrs. Hines suggests that her grandson's escape into Hightower's house—and concludes that Christmas's flight is "neither random nor deliberately perverse, makes sense" (95).

While I second these critics' arguments for the most part because the fact still remains that Mrs. Hines has visited Christmas's jail cell and Christmas later seeks shelter at Hightower's house, Stevens and the critics seem too optimistic to draw the conclusion that "he believed her at once, without question" (*LA* 448), as Stevens insists. It is true that we can better understand Christmas's last moment when we pay regard to Stevens's reconstruction of the reunion scene, and the rest of my argument in this paper supports his speculation on Mrs. Hines's story. Yet at the same time, we should not take Stevens's words so easily, as things may not be that simple for Christmas if we reflect on all of the hardships throughout his life. It is not difficult to anticipate Christmas's confusion and consternation when he at last meets his biological grandmother in the jail cell. Given that Christmas has internalized the Southern social code of race and detested the Calvinistic belief system, his conflicting manners while on the brink of death could be explained by his inner struggle of whether to believe Mrs. Hines's advice to go to Hightower's place and his willingness to consider it a "sanctuary" (*LA* 310, 448).

Despite placing high value on Stevens's insight into the reunion scene of Christmas and Mrs. Hines, I would argue that Christmas at first only half believes her suggestion of salvation at Hightower's house. As Alfred Kazin states, "Joe Christmas, open to everybody's contempt, hatred, and worse because he doesn't know who he is, has been left entirely to himself by his mad grandfather, and has no ties to anyone" (12). It is then difficult to be of the opinion that Mrs. Hines's words alone have eliminated his feelings of distrust and dislike toward others, in addition to his awareness of racial prejudice and religious bigotry. Accordingly, the unexpected encounter with his biological grandmother in the jail cell must have caused an emotional upheaval for Christmas regarding what and whom to believe during his final escape to Hightower's house. Christmas's last moment thus needs to be reexamined from his personal feelings and attitudes toward his newly discovered family connection other than his deep-rooted racial consciousness

and religious aversion.

Considering the impact Mrs. Hines's sudden appearance had on Christmas, it is notable that the narrator never mentions his response to her visit to the jail. One can only imagine Christmas's feelings from his later actions and Stevens's speculation, whereas his relationships with other women—Alice, the dietician, the Negro girl, Bobbie, Mrs. McEachern, and Joanna—are all illustrated as being his direct experience. Because Stevens, despite his frankness in disclosing information, never recreates the entire scene of the direct contact between Mrs. Hines and Christmas in jail, it almost seems as if "a positive effort has been made to remove or obscure all suggestion of family ties" (Hirshleifer 3) by Faulkner, especially in Christmas's case. As François Pitavy points out, the entire novel "is indeed remarkable for the lack or scarcity of intermediate family structures: the individuals are seen as actual or 'spiritual' bachelors, spinsters, childless couples, orphans" (*Casebook* xv). Here, we can presume that Faulkner meticulously removed this heartfelt moment from the novel and avoided the melodramatic effect of Christmas's encounter with Mrs. Hines. This understatement, ironically, has the opposite effect of highlighting the significance of their familial relationship and implicitly reveals Christmas's emotional change, which eventually appears through his mysterious act of running away to Hightower's house. To set up the suspenseful scenes of Christmas's final flight, Faulkner put the hardship of Christmas's life in the foreground rather than the warmth of his familial ties.

As is the case with Christmas's "silence" in seeing his grandmother in jail, his state of mind and the principal driving force behind his contradictory actions during his last escape are deliberately concealed. Mrs. Hines's positive actions and strong presence as a grandmother do not mean that Christmas has accepted Mrs. Hines's entire story without question. After thirty years as an orphan and a rootless wanderer, he has every reason to remain incredulous of his grandmother's appearance and seems irretrievably hardened; thus, it is not easy for him to break out of his loneliness and distrust toward others right away. Christmas's mysterious final flight reflects his growing awareness of his familial ties and exhibits his mixed feelings toward Mrs. Hines's hope that Hightower will save him somehow. At this moment, the presence of Hightower's place seems far from a sanctuary. In other words, his last escape baffles not only the townspeople but Christmas himself because it is essentially running with "doubt" rather than with "despair" and "hope."

If Christmas had followed his grandmother's advice undecidedly and had taken refuge at Hightower's house with doubt in his mind, it is quite understandable that

he would knock Hightower down with a pistol in the hall. Although this outburst contradicts Christmas's search for a sanctuary in Hightower's house on the surface, it follows the sentiment of Christmas's confusion and unease during his final escape on closer inspection. When the townspeople follow Grimm into Hightower's house, they discover Hightower lying on the floor and bleeding:

> . . . they stooped and raised Hightower, his face bleeding, from the floor where Christmas, running up the hall, his raised and armed and manacled hands full of glare and glitter like lightning bolts, so that he resembled a vengeful and furious god pronouncing a doom, had struck him down. (*LA* 463)

Christmas tentatively follows the words of his grandmother but cannot fully trust "Reverend" (actually, the ex-minister) Hightower as Mrs. Hines does when he rushes into Hightower's house. Indeed, it is not easy for him to have faith in Hightower—a stranger and Southern white male whom he has not met before—after all of his difficulties in establishing fruitful relationships with others in his life. Christmas's manacled hands suggest that the rules of society continually bind him, as Grimm feels "the panting and desperate breath of the man who even now was not free" (*LA* 461) during the frantic chase drama. Even at this final stage, Christmas still doubts his grandmother's advice to seek Hightower's help and fluctuates between his social conditioning in regard to race and his grandmother's devotion to save him.

Meanwhile, this is not Christmas's first time behaving violently toward others, as indicated earlier in the text. He has assaulted his adoptive father and Joanna, beat Bobbie and the black girl, and insulted Joe Brown. Of all of his experiences, Christmas's striking Hightower down—as "a vengeful and furious god pronouncing a doom" (*LA* 463)—particularly resembles his brutal conduct at the revival meeting of a black church just before his arrest in Mottstown. Christmas bursts into the church and goes straight to the pulpit, where the minister, Bedenberry, has been preaching:

> 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. We could see Brother Bedenberry talking to him, trying to pacify him quiet, and him jerking at Brother Bedenberry and slapping his face with his hand. (*LA* 323)

As the previous passages reveal, Christmas takes the same measure of violence toward Bedenberry and Hightower—both of whom try to persuade him to come down—by striking at their face. In a spiritual sense, Bedenberry's role as a minister resembles that of the ex-minister Hightower, who used to preach fanatically at the Presbyterian church in Jefferson. Christmas running into Hightower's house, a church-like holy place,

at the end of his life echoes his abrupt intrusion into the black church. These similarities show that Christmas is unable to escape from his past completely and is repeating his previous acts of violence during his final moments.

The previous scene of the black church gives insight into Christmas's innermost feelings during his final escape. While the incident seems to be the action of a cornered and desperate person, it in turn could show Christmas's attempt to search for a sanctuary and a positive relationship with others. As Leigh Anne Duck points out, his attack "could suggest envy of the qualities he attributes to this group—not only communal sharing but also, perhaps, a spiritual life more beneficial than that to which he has been exposed" (277). His dreadful behavior in the black church demonstrates that he cannot communicate with the congregation through words and instead resorts to violence. In other words, the reactions of Christmas's mind and body to the surrounding environment are inconsistent and do not correspond with each other. For instance, he readily frees the minister from his hand by the deacon's persuasion, while knocking down seventy-year-old Pappy Thompson and his grandson Roz and breaking all the lamps in the church. He also seems to search for spiritual ties but, again, only ends up confusing the congregation and loudly cursing God. The violent scene at the black church serves as a precedent for Christmas's internal struggle of whether to believe in the ex-minister Hightower's help and his quest for a place with which he can associate himself.

Christmas, in reality, cannot belong to any of the segregated congregations and social groups in town. As is the case with the dark houses of the McEacherns and Joanna, which resulted in strong disbelief and catastrophic violence, the previous example of the black church shows that Christmas cannot fulfill his loneliness there either; rather, the church enhances his sense of isolation. When the eyes of the congregation concentrate on Christmas as he leaves the church, he talks to himself: "Looking and looking. . . . Dont even know they cant see me" (*LA* 325). Christmas's remark is not only limited to the actual invisibility of the congregation in the dark but includes their blindness, which signifies their lack of understanding of Christmas's feelings. By belonging nowhere in society, Christmas is painfully aware of the impossibility of mutual communication and understanding and continues to run from place to place alone. It has been difficult for Christmas to overcome society's barriers and dispel his lifelong distrust of others after enduring countless hardships due to racial prejudice and his multiple attempts to confront and run away from them.

This feeling of doubt smolders in Christmas's mind, even when he meets his

grandmother in jail and eventually follows her advice to escape to Hightower's house. Having gone through bitter experiences, Christmas is unable to completely escape from his past and take his grandmother's words at face value. Consequently, he ends up running away and hiding in the ditch, black cabin, and Hightower's house, just as he has been accustomed to doing throughout his life, even though the encounter with Mrs. Hines seems to have contributed greatly to his eventual drastic action toward hope—a sanctuary.

Christmas's contradictory behaviors culminate during the moment of his death in Hightower's kitchen, which to the townspeople seems "as though he had set out and made his plans to passively commit suicide" (*LA* 443) after committing violence against Hightower. Critics have discussed the appearance of aggressiveness and passivity in Christmas's final behavior. After going through previous studies of Christmas's image as "Christ or Oedipus or certain figures in primitive rituals" (259), James Leo Spenko emphasizes the significance of Grimm's last cry:

> "Which room, old man?" Grimm shouted.
>
> They held Hightower on his feet; in the gloomy hall, after the sunlight, he too with his bald head and his big pale face streaked with blood, was terrible. "Men!" he cried. "Listen to me. He was here that night. He was with me the night of the murder. I swear to God—"
>
> "Jesus Christ!" Grimm cried, his young voice clear and outraged like that of a young priest. "Has every preacher and old maid in Jefferson taken their pants down to the yellowbellied son of a bitch?" He flung the old man aside and ran on. (*LA* 463-64)

According to Spenko, Christmas hears Grimm's "Jesus Christ!" in Hightower's kitchen and associates it with his own name "Christmas," which "initiates an overpowering summons to inaction and death" (262). Considering the size of Hightower's small house, Christmas could probably hear the conversation between Grimm and Hightower in the kitchen. It is possible, then, that the power of appellation could have tapped into Christmas's unconscious mind and led him to act in conformity with his name.

Spenko's argument is convincing from a symbolic point of view, but another critical turning point exists for Christmas just before Grimm exclaims, "Jesus Christ!" (*LA* 464), if we deliberate Mrs. Hines's strong faith in Hightower. This is when Christmas hears Hightower's defensive explanation for Christmas's false alibi, just before Grimm's cry: "Listen to me. He was there that night. He was with me the night of murder. I swear to God—" (*LA* 464). When Christmas hears the ex-minister provide false evidence for

him, even though it is against God's rules to tell a lie, he can at last be confident in Mrs. Hines's sentiment that Hightower will save him. As is the case with his other escapes, he has been ready to confront Grimm and the others with the gun in his manacled hands and uses the table to protect himself in Hightower's kitchen. The change in Christmas's attitude, as if "to passively commit suicide," then takes place when he becomes aware of Mrs. Hines's meaning of "a sanctuary" in Hightower, who actually has no reason to protect him and could even be angry with his last violent attack (*LA* 443, 448). After years of rootless wandering by himself and the unjust racial prejudice of society, Christmas finally appreciates, in an understated manner, that he may not be alone and that he has someone who cares for him. This would be the decisive moment when he no longer feels it necessary to struggle with his fate alone.

Christmas's longtime struggles with the dark houses and rootlessness come at the end of the novel. When Grimm castrates him, Christmas makes neither a sound nor a move: "He just lay there, with his eyes open and empty of everything save consciousness, and with something, a shadow, about his mouth" (*LA* 464). Even in his last moment, Christmas remains conscious and tries to overcome his struggles with his racial ambiguity that appears as "a shadow," which culminates in his "pent black blood" spurting out from "his pale body" (*LA* 464, 465). At the same time, his final escape ends in his submissive arrest posture with "peaceful and unfathomable and unbearable eyes" (*LA* 464-65), as though he accepts both the pain and joy of his life and death. On the brink of death, he seems to recognize that there are some people, such as Mrs. Hines and Hightower, whom he could trust. Although the townspeople, including Stevens, interpret his death in terms of his blackness and whiteness, Christmas finally finds a means other than the blood theory of race by which to judge a person. Thanks to his first and last encounter with his grandmother, Christmas can put an end to his lonely wanderings in Hightower's house—which turns out to be his sanctuary—at the end of his life.

As his final moments reveal, Christmas's biological family connection with his grandmother has a subtle yet considerable influence on his final escape and death in the ex-minister's house. Before his grandmother visits him in jail, he believed in no one, and his life is full of suffering due to his uncertain racial and familial identities. His encounter with Mrs. Hines gives him an opportunity to understand what faith, hope, and love can signify and do. Although he has been unable to accept her words fully and has repeated similar violent actions until barricading himself in Hightower's kitchen, he eventually glimpses the significance of a sanctuary in a flash of enlightenment in Hightower's false

alibi. His grandmother was sincerely telling a truth—"Hightower would save him" (*LA* 448). No matter how helpless and tragic Christmas's life may seem from the outside, his unresisting, tranquil look at the last moment of Grimm's shooting and the castration suggests his final satisfaction with life and acceptance of death. At last, he has arrived at a place where he can rest in peace.

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Dark Houses and a Sanctuary: Joe Christmas's Struggles with Home in *Light in August*

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In William Faulkner's *Light in August* (1932), Joe Christmas cannot develop a sense of belonging due to the contradiction between his white appearance and his "essential" racial identity as black. Despite of his frantic wanderings throughout his life, he has the options of remaining in the homes of the McEacherns or Joanna Burden if he can accept their Christian way of living and their racial assumptions. His escapes from each of these Christian homes and the Southern racial code are critical because he ends his life in another Christian home, that of Gail Hightower. Given that the initial title of this novel was "Dark House," this paper reconsiders the significance of these houses and examines Christmas's struggles with the denial and acceptance of a dark house and a sanctuary.

Christmas struggles to escape from the Christian homes of the McEacherns and Joanna, who force him to make a commitment to the religious acts including the act of praying at home. He eventually knocks his adoptive father to the ground with a chair, steals the secret savings of his adoptive mother, and allegedly murders Joanna with his razor. The dark houses of both the McEacherns and of Joanna enhance Christmas's antipathy toward Christian homes and induce his rootless wanderings during his life.

Christmas also spends a long time drifting aimlessly from place to place due to his uncertain racial identity. Thus, the sudden appearance of Mrs. Hines, his biological grandmother, must have triggered an emotional shift in his attitude toward his familial origin and his life. Mrs. Hines, despite being white, is actually the only person in the novel who is not at all concerned with his racial ambiguity. His mysterious final flight reflects his growing awareness of his familial ties and exhibits his mixed feelings toward her advice to seek refuge in ex-minister Hightower's house as his sanctuary.

At Hightower's house, the turning point for Christmas is when he hears Hightower's defensive explanation for Christmas's false alibi. When Christmas hears the ex-minister provide false evidence for him, even though it is against God's rules to tell a lie, he can at last be confident in Mrs. Hines's sentiment that Hightower will save him. Christmas finally appreciates that he may not be alone and that he has someone who cares for

him. This would be the decisive moment when he no longer feels it necessary to struggle with his fate alone. Although the townspeople interpret his death in terms of his blackness and whiteness, Christmas finally finds a means other than the blood theory of race by which to judge a person. His encounter with Mrs. Hines gives him an opportunity to understand what faith, hope, and love can signify and do.