Light in August Study Guide

Light in August by William Faulkner

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Plot Summary

Light in August is a classic novel written by a master storyteller. William Faulkner's writings are often meditative in nature, and *Light in August* is a powerful but grim meditation on racism, religious intolerance, and the plight of women in Depression-era Mississippi. Faulkner brings these themes to life through the characters of Lena Grove and Byron Bunch. Lena is a disadvantaged but determined young woman, who sets out to find the wayward father of her soon-to-be-born babe. Instead of the father, shiftless Lucas Burch, she is directed to Byron Bunch, a co-worker of Burch's with a similar name. This mistake proves to her benefit, as Byron quickly falls in love with her and is willing to give her the home and security which the child's father fails to provide.

The heart of the story, however, focuses on another co-worker of Burch and Bunch, named Joe Christmas. Christmas has been a social outcast since birth due to his mixed bloodline. In the racist south, a man of mixed parentage is shunned by blacks and whites alike. Raised to be a racist, Christmas is unwilling to reconcile himself to his dual heritage. He considers himself an abomination and freak, and behaves self-destructively to prove it.

Christmas' story intertwines with Lena and Byron's because of Christmas' business relationship with Lucas Burch. Burch, who takes the name Joe Brown in order to avoid Lena, becomes Christmas' partner in an illegal whiskey-selling enterprise which is headquartered on Miss Joanna Burden's property. Miss Burden is also a social outcast in the small town of Jefferson, Mississippi because of her family's abolitionist leanings. The aging spinster embarks on a torrid and obsessive love affair with Christmas, and gives him and his partner the use of a cabin on the back of her property. She, like Christmas, is internally conflicted. Her strict religious upbringing forbids sex outside of marriage, yet she is simultaneously desperate to make up for lost time with Christmas. When she begins to pray for Christmas to turn around his life and commit to their relationship, this pushes Christmas away from her. Her need to finally create a loving, stable home conflicts drastically with his inner demons, which drive him to throw away his life out of spite for all the people who've hurt him.

The lovers' quarrel results in homicide. Christmas kills Miss Burden, narrowly averting the bullet she had planned for him. This act effectively ends the whiskey business with Joe Brown, and Brown is so upset to have lost his easy money supply that he sets the Burden house afire with the corpse inside, hoping to cover up his partner's crime. However, once it is announced that there is a reward for the capture of Miss Burden's murderer, Brown quickly sells out Christmas to the local law enforcement.

Christmas' grandparents arrive from nearby Mottstown with the tragic story of how the grandfather had killed Christmas' father, allowed his mother to die in childbirth, and then had stolen the mixed breed baby away from his loving grandmother. The grandmother appeals to Byron Bunch, and together they attempt to save Christmas' life with the help of Byron's friend, former reverend Hightower. Christmas escapes police custody and

seeks sanctuary at Hightower's, but a militant citizen takes the law into his own hands and guns down Christmas in Hightower's kitchen.

Meanwhile, Lena's arrival in town has thwarted Brown's plan to get the reward money. He would rather skip town and leave the money behind than be forced to do the right thing and marry Lena. Fortunately for Lena, Byron Bunch is ready and willing to step into the breach left by Brown. Lena and Byron leave town together as the novel ends, seeking a new beginning for their little family.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Faulkner's masterful novel about racism, religious intolerance, and the plight of women in Depression-era Mississippi opens with Lena's story. This poor, barefoot and very pregnant woman evokes a touching image as she walks along the dusty road, carrying her shoes so that they will not be dirtied. Perfect strangers have taken in the sight of this poignant, proud and pitiful woman, and have chosen to help her out as she searches for the father of her child.

As the novel opens, Lena sits beside the road, watching a wagon approach, and musing how far she's come from Alabama. She comes from the tiny town of Doane's Mill, but before she was twelve years old, she had lived in a three-room log cabin with her mother and father. The summer her parents died, Lena had gone to live with her older brother in Doane's Mill, where the brother, McKinley, works. The mill town consists of the mill workers and their families. Although the train runs past, it doesn't stop unless someone flags it down with a red banner. Lena knows that once the pine mill has destroyed all the trees in the area, the mill will shut down, and Doane's Mill will become a tiny ghost town.

McKinley is twenty years older than Lena, married, with an ever-growing number of children. Lena has lived with them for eight years. By the time she is twenty, McKinley has become a hard, cold man, forged so by too much work, too little pay, and too many mouths to feed. One night, Lena figures out how to sneak out of the window of the bedroom she shares with three little nephews. Not long after, she finds herself with child. McKinley calls her a whore and accuses Lucas Burch of fathering the child. Lucas is the only likely candidate in the tiny mill town, and although he skips town six months before McKinley learns of his sister's pregnancy, Lena refuses to admit he is the father. Lena will only stubbornly repeat, "'He said he would send for me'; unshakable, sheeplike, having drawn upon that reserve of patient and steadfast fidelity upon which the Lucas Burches depend and trust, even though they do not intend to be present when the need for it arises." (pg. 4)

Lena's faith in Lucas is so strong that, as the months pass without any word of him, she decides to sneak out of the window one last time to search for him. On foot, carrying nothing more than a small bundle of possessions and a few scant coins, she sets out to find the father of her child. Four weeks later, she finds herself atop a hill by the side of the road, waiting for the wagon to reach her and perhaps offer her a ride. As she waits for its approach, Lena recalls all the kind faces of the strangers who have helped her get this far. To each stranger, she repeated her desire to find Lucas Burch, and her obviously pregnant condition has granted her much kindness and assistance. Lena imagines how thrilled Lucas will be to see her when she arrives.

The two men driving the wagon, Armstid and Winterbottom, had first noticed Lena pass by on foot about a mile back, while they were resting their horses. As they pull up to her, they wonder who she might be. Winterbottom assumes she is visiting family nearby, but Armstid is skeptical. Already, he has perceived her situation, and is considering what he can do to help. Armstid worries what his wife, Martha, will say when he brings this anonymous pregnant woman home. At last, the wagon stops for Lena, and she again explains to the strangers that she is seeking the father of her child. Lena mentions that people have been quite kind to her along the route. Armstid is skeptical of this, too, thinking that only men would be kind to an obviously unmarried mother-to-be like Lena. Armstid assumes his good wife, Martha, will judge Lena harshly; in fact, Armstid believes that it is a good woman's duty to judge a bad woman like Lena. As Armstid starts the wagon again, with Lena on board, he thinks to himself that Lucas Burch will soon find out he made a mistake by not running far enough if he had thought to outrun the determined Lena.

Lena wants a ride to the nearby town of Jefferson, where she has been told Lucas Burch may be working at the planing mill. Armstid insists that she come stay with him and his wife for the night. In the morning, he tells her, he'll take her to town, and she can get a ride from the general store with a wagon bound for Jefferson, which is only twelve miles away. She accepts his offer, and again Armstid thinks about Martha and his belief that good women have no sympathy for women like Lena. Only men are capable of kindness to fallen women. At home, Armstid explains to Martha that Lena is going to the planing mill in Jefferson, because someone along the road has told her that there is a man with a name like Burch who works there. Martha comments wryly that Lena must expect to find him there, waiting for her, with a fully furnished house for their new family. Martha faces him with her hands on her hips. Armstid asks her if she really wants to turn Lena out in her condition. Martha merely shakes her head. "'You men,' she says. 'You durn men.'" (pg. 14)

In the kitchen, Martha refuses Lena's help with the meal preparation. She asks Lena some pointed questions, finally getting Lena to admit that her last name is not Burch, and that the man she is seeking is not yet her husband. Lena defends Lucas, as Martha tries to get her to see the light. Lena explains how Lucas found out he would have to leave Doane's Mill. Martha asks if by chance he found this out at the same time Lena told him about the baby. Lena insists that Lucas had found out a couple of weeks before, but he hadn't said anything to her, not wanting to worry her. However, continues Lena, as soon as Lucas found out about the baby, he realized he had to finally tell her about his plans to leave. Lena insists that both she and Lucas felt it was better for him to leave and find work elsewhere, since the foreman in Doane's Mill treated Lucas poorly. Lena further insists that Lucas simply hadn't realized how long it would take for him to get settled elsewhere to provide for her. He's young, she states in his defense, and he simply hasn't sent for her yet, because he's been too busy working hard to provide for their future. Generously, Lena had wanted to give Lucas this last little bit of freedom before settling down, since Lucas is such a fun-loving guy. Martha expresses her contempt for Lena's naivety, but Lena believes that the Lord will make sure her little family is all together when the baby comes.

That night, in the bedroom with her husband, Martha angrily breaks open her piggy bank. She gives the coins to her husband with instructions that he give the money to Lena and take her where she wants to go the next morning. In the morning, Martha cooks a huge breakfast for Lena, but vanishes out of sight before Lena can say goodbye to her. Armstid takes Lena to the general store in town and introduces her to some fellows who are headed out to Jefferson. As she thanks him and bids him goodbye, he tries to warn her not to count on Lucas Burch, but Armstid realizes that Lena is not capable of hearing such words from him or anyone else. Nor does she listen when some of the men at the general store inform her that the man at the planing mill in Jefferson is named Bunch, not Burch, and has worked at the mill for seven years. The only thing worrying Lena is whether she dares spend fifteen cents of the money Martha gave her for a tin of sardines from the general store.

In the wagon heading for Jefferson, Lena repeats her story again, refusing to hear the skepticism in the wagon driver's voice when he asks if Lucas sent word for Lena to join him in Jefferson. She eats the sardines greedily, and feels the baby kicking inside her. As they approach Jefferson, the driver is captivated by a column of smoke. It is not factory smoke; it is clearly a house on fire. Lena scarcely notices. She is filled with her now-customary wonderment about how far she's managed to come from Alabama.

Chapter 1 Analysis

In this opening chapter, author William Faulkner demonstrates his gifts for revealing character and creating tension through the use of flashbacks. The action in this chapter is minimal: A pregnant woman, Lena, is offered shelter and transportation by kind strangers as she heads for her destination of Jefferson. However, it is through the flashback that the emotional dynamics of the story are explained and given context. The reader learns that Lena has had one lover in her twenty years. She has great faith that this man, Lucas Burch, will make an honest woman out of her by marrying her since she is carrying his child. Her glorious visions of their future domestic harmony are in jarring conflict with the facts, as revealed through flashback and the skeptical eyes of the strangers she meets along the road. It is made clear to the reader that Lucas Burch high-tailed it out of town as soon as Lena told him about the pregnancy. He has abandoned her completely, having never had any intention whatsoever of marrying her. The conflict between the true facts of the situation, and Lena's illusions about it, creates dramatic tension from the very first chapter.

Lena's surety and faith seem destined to make a fool out of her, although she refuses to believe it. She is aware what other people think about her and Lucas, but refuses to join them in their cynical views. Lena believes that the Lord will set things right for her, and this strong faith is to become one of the major themes of the novel. However, at this point, the reader has no reason to share her faith. In fact, the author provides several reasons for doubt. After traveling many miles, Lena has finally discovered Lucas Burch's whereabouts; yet shortly before she reaches the town of Jefferson, she learns that the man at the planing mill is actually named Bunch and has been at the mill for seven years. This is clearly not her man, yet she proceeds to Jefferson, her expectation of

finding Lucas Burch as strong as ever. The reader is left to imagine the disappointment she must surely face upon arriving in Jefferson and meeting the wrong man. Her situation seems utterly hopeless, for it has already been made clear that even if she does find Lucas Burch, he will not turn out to be the husband and father she seeks. Faulkner tops off this dynamic tension with the column of smoke that fills the sky as Lena arrives in Jefferson. The symbolism of a burning home is portentous of what Lena can expect to find as the end of her journey approaches.

Another major theme is established in this chapter regarding the status and treatment of women in society. The character of Armstid is the first, but not the only, character in this novel to blame society's harsh judgment of feminine sexual behavior on women themselves. He believes that "good" women - defined as women who do not engage in premarital sex and who, after marriage, are faithful to their spouses - are the reason that "bad" women like Lena are persecuted socially. *Light in August* was first published in 1932, decades before women's rights gained any significant support in the United States of America, where the book is set. Neither birth control nor the concept of a gender double-standard was prominent in the public consciousness. Women were supposedly held to strict religious standards of chastity, yet the male-run churches contravened the very word of God which they claimed to believe in by refusing forgiveness or mercy to any woman who gave into her hormonal urges. Men, of course, were routinely forgiven for such 'sins.' A man like Lucas Burch could love and leave as many women as he pleased, and suffer no more than a minor reputation for being a ladies man. Meanwhile, a loyal and faithful woman like Lena is forever condemned to the status of "fallen woman" for having taken a lover, even though her intention all along was marriage to Lucas Burch.

To further complicate matters for women like Lena, the men in the novel blame "good" women for forcing society to shun unmarried mothers. This twisted and self-serving bit of logic is widely believed by the men in the novel, and demonstrates a complete lack of empathy or understanding for the suffering of women. Blaming the victim is a common trait of abusers, and generally speaking, society in this era held abusive beliefs towards women. Further, society blamed women for forcing it to be so strict with its women. Armstid feels sympathy for Lena's plight, and imagines that his wife does not. Yet it is his wife who voluntarily prepares two large meals to feed Lena, who gives Lena her own hard-won money (not her husband's money), and who tries, with some exasperation, to clue Lena into the reality of her situation. Armstid believes that Martha is unfeeling and that because Martha is a "good" woman, she must naturally hate and judge someone like Lena. What Armstid and the other men in the novel fail to see is that Martha has a great deal of sympathy for Lena's plight. Martha, better than Armstid, understands the high price a woman is forced to pay for the same actions which cost a man like Lucas Burch nothing. Martha's feelings on the subject are indeed quite strong, but only because Martha fully understands the hard life in store for Lena, and is powerless to stop it or help Lena in any meaningful way. Martha can only watch in frustration as another young life is sacrificed to the ego of men.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

At the planing mill, Byron Bunch recalls the day, three years ago, when the man named Christmas first came to work for the mill. The man's clothes had been as soiled as a tramp's would be, yet the quality of the material in his soiled suit indicates Christmas is not a vagrant. Upon his arrival, Christmas does not socialize with the other men at the mill. He wears a perpetual scowl of contempt, and the other men make little attempt to speak to him. Bunch studies Christmas and notices that he is a hard worker. Byron Bunch believes that Christmas is penniless, for he does not change his suit nor bring food for lunch that first week. However, Christmas is too proud to admit it. When Byron offers him food, Christmas mocks it as slop, refusing to take charity. Yet, as Byron suspects, the day after payday Christmas comes to work in a new pair of overalls, carrying a brown bag lunch. Even then, Christmas does not eat with the other workers, and the contemptuous scowl remains on his face.

For two and a half years, the other workers conjecture as to where Christmas lives, and what has brought him to the planing mill in Jefferson. Not until the other stranger at the mill, Brown, opens his mouth do the men learn that Christmas has been selling whiskey illegally, and living in an old negro cabin on Miss Burden's property just outside of town. Brown, like Christmas, shows up at the mill, out of nowhere, six months ago, seeking work. Unlike Christmas, Brown is not a hard worker, although he makes a good show of pretending to work hard. Also unlike Christmas, Brown does not use his first week's wages to buy new clothes. He continues to show up, day after day, in the same dirty pair of overalls, and can be found each Saturday night gambling away his weekly earnings at the dice games in town. The third main difference between Christmas and Brown is that Brown talks a lot, even though he has little of value to say. The other men remark that Brown appears to be a weak man, with little strength of character, although his weakly handsome face is attractive to the ladies. Byron Bunch notices Brown's nervous mannerism of looking over his shoulder, as if constantly expecting to be followed. He thinks Brown is an opportunist, and will likely not last very long at the mill.

To Byron's surprise, it is Christmas who quits first, after three years at the mill. Brown sullenly informs the other men that Christmas has gone, and watches the clock all morning. The other men talk about Christmas' good fortune, for he has recently been seen riding around town in a new car with his partner, Brown. By now the men know that Brown delivers Christmas' illegal whiskey to his clients in town. Brown is talkative, and once he becomes Christmas' partner, the rumors begin to flow about the illegal whiskey business which Christmas had carried on quietly for three years. No one is sure that Christmas is involved, but many people are now aware that Christmas and Brown are both living in the cabin on Miss Burden's property. Perhaps, thinks Byron, somebody ought to warn her about the illegal activities taking place on her grounds. However, Byron knows that no one will say anything, for the townsfolk have long shunned Miss Burden because she is an abolitionist, in favor of negro rights. In fact, her grandfather

and brother were killed some sixty years ago by the townspeople, because they stood up for the negroes' right to vote.

To Byron, it is obvious that Brown is jealous that Christmas no longer needs to work at the mill, and so Byron is not surprised when Brown quits by lunchtime that very day. Both Christmas and Brown consider the mill job to be "niggers work." (pg. 39) Wryly, Byron informs Brown that a nigger wouldn't still have a job at the mill if he worked as lazily as some white folks do. Byron Bunch is a hard worker. In fact, he spends six days a week at the mill, working alone on Saturdays when the other men are in town enjoying themselves. Byron keeps to himself, so no one knows why he spends so many hours at work; the other men assume he does it for the overtime pay. The only man who knows Byron Bunch well is former minister Hightower. Hightower is the only person in Jefferson who knows where Byron spends his weekends. Each Saturday night, Byron leaves Mrs. Beard's boardinghouse and doesn't return until Monday morning. Only Hightower knows that Byron rides all night to a distant country church where he conducts choir services on Sunday, and gets back in town on Monday just in time to report for work at the mill.

Hightower knows all this, because Byron visits the ex-minister at his home several nights a week, after work. Hightower has lived in seclusion on the outskirts of town for twenty-five years since being disgraced as a minister and losing his church. Thus, Hightower understands that Byron spends all of his time either working or at church in order to avoid getting into any trouble. Nonetheless, Byron's plan to avoid becoming involved with his fellow human beings is foiled unaccountably one day. Working alone at the mill on a Saturday, Byron feels safe. Trouble can't possibly find him. It is the day of the big house fire, and it is the day Byron falls in love. Byron does not seek out love; it comes to him in the form of Lena Grove, who shows up at the mill, expecting Byron Bunch to be Lucas Burch.

The moment Lena sees Byron Bunch, the expression on her face changes from happy anticipation to disappointment. He is not the man she seeks. Byron introduces himself, and Lena explains the mix-up over the names Burch and Bunch. Byron asks her if she is Mrs. Burch, but Lena changes the subject. As she explains her situation, Byron realizes that she is hunting for a man who has abandoned her, and that Lena does not yet realize that she has been abandoned. They watch the column of smoke in the distance from the burning house as they chat, while Byron marks the time he spends not working so he can make it up that evening. He comments on the fire and hopes aloud that Miss Burden, and the two former factory workers who live in the cabin out back, all got out okay. Lena asks about the men, because the name Joe Christmas seems strange to her. Byron tells her it's a strange name for a strange man, and then goes on to describe his partner Joe Brown as well. When Lena hears that Joe Brown is a loud-mouthed man who likes to play practical jokes and goof off, she asks Byron what Christmas and Brown do for a living now that they've left the planing mill. Already in love, Byron can't deny her, although he does not like to gossip. He tells her the rumors about the illegal whiskey business. When Lena asks if this Joe Brown has a small, white scar by his mouth, Byron cannot lie to her.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Byron and Lena's first meeting, in this chapter, further develops the author's theme of faith. There will be many characters throughout the book who symbolize and speak of religious faith, but Lena's character is the brightest example of true, trusting faith. She has followed that faith, on foot, all the way from Alabama, trusting in her belief that the Lord will ensure that her child is born into a loving family. Ironically, even as Lena's faith is shaken in this chapter when she discovers Byron Bunch instead of Lucas Burch, the author is actually providing support for that faith with the introduction of Byron.

Byron is everything Lena could hope for in a man. He is dependable, trustworthy, honest, and has a kind heart. As the chapter is presented from Byron's point of view, the author is able to foreshadow Byron's impending love for Lena. He recounts this chapter from a historical perspective; Byron the character does not yet realize he loves Lena, but Byron the narrator does, and thus foreshadows their relationship for the reader's benefit. Lena believes God has let her down by leading her to the wrong man, but the author is implying that God has actually answered her prayers in the form of Byron Bunch.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

From his study window, Hightower can see the street running by his house, and the weathered, hand-painted sign which he crafted laboriously some years ago. The sign advertises Hightower's artistic services, including art lessons, hand-painted greeting cards, and photography development. He had put up the sign hoping to earn some income after losing his position in the church twenty-five years ago. Hightower still has a monthly income, inherited from his father, but he sends half of it to a charity for delinquent girls, and thus does not have enough to meet his daily needs. The sign has brought him very little business over the years, and the locals scarcely notice it anymore. However, if a passing stranger were to ask one of the townsfolk about the sign, they would tell him about Hightower and his disgrace.

Hightower, the townsfolk would say, originally came to town as minister of the Presbyterian Church, but his wife had gone bad and disgraced him. Apparently, gossip has it, Hightower had been unwilling or unable to satisfy his wife, and so she would slip out of the house on Saturday nights and disappear to Memphis. She had died a scandalous death in Memphis, and the papers had gotten a hold of the story. The townspeople forced Hightower to resign, but to their chagrin, he refused to leave town, which they felt would have been the respectable thing to do. He has spent the twenty-five years since in seclusion, rarely leaving his house. The neighbors can see him, however, every night at dusk, as he sits in his window. The townspeople don't know that each night he waits for that moment just between twilight and full dark, when the reflected light of the day still falls on the earth, though the sky is black.

Byron Bunch had noticed the sign seven years ago, upon first arriving in Jefferson. When Byron had asked about it, he heard the story of Hightower's disgrace. The townspeople had told Byron how Hightower arrived in town with his young wife, excited to have won the position of minister in Jefferson. Hightower had gleefully told the townspeople how hard he had petitioned to be posted in this particular town. To the church elders, it had sounded as if Hightower were more interested in living in Jefferson than in caring for his new flock. The young minister told everyone a confusing story about how his grandfather, a cavalryman in the Civil War, had been killed in Jefferson.

Apparently, Hightower's wild sermons made little more sense than his Civil War stories, and the congregation did not care for his speaking style at all. The townspeople felt that Hightower did not care about anything or anyone besides that fateful day when his grandfather had been shot. He did not even care about his wife, they had told Byron. Perhaps if he had been more attentive, she might not have gone bad. Byron had been inclined to sympathize with that point of view, "thinking how that is the sort of thing that men do to the women who belong to them; thinking that that is why women have to be strong and should not be held blameable for what they do with or for or because of men, since God knew that being anybody's wife was a tricky enough business." (pg. 56)

The townspeople realized something was wrong with the minister's wife, even if Hightower himself did not notice her. She stopped visiting with the church ladies, and eventually stopped leaving the house at all, until she began slipping out to Memphis each weekend. One day, the wife returned late from her trip to Memphis and interrupted her husband's Sunday sermon by standing in the aisle and shrieking incoherently at him. The church people had taken up a collection to send the poor woman to a sanatorium to rest up. When she returned, they treated her and Hightower with loving compassion. The church ladies began visiting again, and the wife received them. However, it is the town's belief that good women don't forgive or forget bad women easily. Thus, when the wife left town again, nobody believed Hightower's claim that she was visiting family. The church ladies stopped visiting again. Soon thereafter, the wife fell or jumped to her death from a Memphis hotel room, where she was registered as man and wife with a drunken man whom police found in her room and arrested.

The Sunday following her death, reporters crowded the lawn in front of the church. The townspeople were horrified when Hightower arrived and began his sermon as if everything were all right. One by one, they filed out until the church was empty. Then, the reporters entered and filled the recently vacated pews. Hightower, without a word, closed his Bible and left the church. Outside, he tried to shield his face from the cameras with a hymn book, but a reporter managed to take a picture of him from the side. The photo, printed in the paper, showed Hightower's face in a twisted grimace, looking like the very devil himself. Hightower attempted to give the sermon at his wife's funeral, but another minister came forward and took the Bible away from him. The Presbyterian Church asked Hightower to resign, but he refused. Finally, they locked him out of the church, forcing him to resign.

Relieved by his resignation, the townspeople took up a collection to help him relocate out of town. However, when Hightower bought a house on the outskirts of town instead, they were livid. The church elders accused him of accepting their money under false pretenses, and so Hightower returned every dime. The elders refused to take the money back; they only wanted Hightower to leave, and he had no intention of doing so. Cruel rumors began to fly around town, until the entire town became convinced that Hightower was an evil, unnatural man. The local Ku Klux Klan (K.K.K.) terrified the black woman who worked as Hightower's cook, until she both quit and confirmed the rumors about Hightower having unnatural desires. The K.K.K. followed this up by throwing a threatening note attached to a brick through Hightower's window. When Hightower ignored the note, they took him into the woods, tied him to a tree and beat him unconscious. After this, the townspeople pressured Hightower to tell them who did the beating. Then, they pressured him to leave town, for his own safety.

Hightower stood up to the pressure, remaining in his home, doing his own cooking and housework. He continued to live in near-total seclusion until eventually the townspeople forgot about him and left him in peace. Hightower now spends his time reading, and Byron, the only Jeffersonian to see the inside of his house in twenty years, is amazed at his book collection. Hightower's only commerce with the townsfolk came about four years ago, when a neighboring negro came to the house, desperate because his wife was in labor, and it would take too long to find a doctor. Hightower had taken a medical

book off his shelf and gone to do what he could for the neighbor woman. When he arrived, the woman, in her pain, had thrown herself from the bed, and was on the floor wailing. He helped her up and delivered her child according to the instructions in the book. The child was stillborn, yet the doctor, when he finally arrived, assured Hightower he had done everything right. The baby's death had likely occurred when the woman had fallen from the bed.

Nonetheless, the situation stirred up all the old rumors about Hightower. Townspeople said that the baby had surely been Hightower's, and that he let it die on purpose. Hightower returned to his seclusion to avoid further trouble. By this time, he and Byron were already friends, but when Byron got angry about the unfair rumors, Hightower defended the townspeople. Hightower informs Bunch that it is not for them to say that the townspeople are wrong in their beliefs about Hightower. All Hightower cares about - all that any man can aspire to, he believes - is to be allowed to live peacefully amongst his fellow men. The two friends discuss why they both lead such solitary lives, Hightower in his secluded home, and Byron working all hours at the mill. Byron comes up with a theory. Byron thinks to himself that man is more afraid of change than of the troubles he already has and with which he is familiar.

On this night, as Hightower waits alone in his window for darkness to fall, he can hear the sounds of the Sunday evening service at his former church. Unexpectedly, a familiar figure approaches up the street. Hightower watches Byron Bunch turn into his gate. He's much surprised to see Byron on a Sunday, as Byron has always, in the past, spent his Sundays at the country church thirty miles out of town.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Again in this chapter, the author employs the use of flashback to add depth to his characters. The detailed retelling of Hightower's graceless past reveals more about Byron Bunch and the townspeople of Jefferson than it reveals about Hightower himself. The judgmental, unforgiving heart of Jefferson is exposed through its treatment of Hightower. The town's violent hatred for African-Americans extends to any Caucasian man or woman who dares defend their basic human rights. Hightower's African-American cook is terrorized by the local K.K.K. until she agrees to tell damaging lies about Hightower and quits. All of the other black cooks in town value their lives too much to risk them working for Hightower. Thus, the town's revenge on Hightower is accomplished by threatening and browbeating the town's black population. Further to these outrages, the town's misogynism is exposed by the author through the retelling of Hightower's story. The town has inflexible views regarding good women and bad women, and does not believe that bad women like Mrs. Hightower can ever be redeemed. This is so, despite the fact that the town believes Hightower drove his wife to her self-destructive behavior through some perverse form of abuse. Byron's point of view regarding Mrs. Hightower is much more forgiving and sympathetic than the town's, which reveals his kind heart and foreshadows his future relationship with Lena.

This chapter is a wonderful example of a technique which the author uses to narrate his story. Faulkner assigns a personality and a voice to the town of Jefferson. The town speaks in a mixture of gossip and insightful deduction. By giving the town a personality and a voice, Faulkner is acknowledging the collective consciousness of the town. Jefferson may be comprised of individuals, but in the novel, the town speaks in one voice. This voice, or collective consciousness, is the sum total analysis of the varying individual points of view of its citizens. To use this fictional voice as a narrative technique drives the story by allowing Faulkner to reveal greater detail in his flashbacks. No one person can know the full story, but the collective voice of the town is capable of revealing all the known and conjectured facts to the reader.

Faulkner accomplishes something else, as well, through his use of the town as a character in the narrative. By assigning the town a voice, he allows the reader to understand the unofficial regime of racism and close-minded judgment under which the individual townsfolk must live. This provides an important clue for the reader as to why all of the main characters in the book - as the reader will eventually learn - are loners, separate from society. So far, the author has introduced Byron and Hightower as reclusive men. The reader has not yet learned that Lena, Christmas and Miss Burden have also separated themselves from society, in thought, if not in deed. By introducing the story of Hightower's disgrace in this chapter, the author makes it clear that there is a high price to pay for bucking society's norms. However, Faulkner also makes clear that society's norms are tinged with racism, prejudice, misogynism, and an insufferable level of intolerance. Given those facts, the reader is much more inclined to sympathize with the loners in the book who defy society, either by actively rebelling, or by passively retreating from the company of one's fellow men and women.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Byron and Hightower face each other across the desk in Hightower's study. Byron tells Hightower about Lena, and about how Byron accidentally let it slip that Joe Brown is the same Lucas Burch whom she seeks. Hightower asks why Byron thinks this is a problem; after all, Lena had come looking for the father of her child, and Byron has helped her find him. Byron mentions the fire at the Burden house, but Hightower, in his isolation, has not heard the gossip surrounding the fire yet. Byron explains that Joe Christmas and Joe Brown had been living in the cabin on the Burden property, using the place as headquarters for their illegal whiskey business. Byron tells him the whole story - how Christmas took Brown on for a partner, and how both men quit their jobs at the mill to spend their days riding around in Christmas' new car. Byron explains how the talkative Brown has been gossiping about their business, including some shady business in Memphis involving Christmas, a pistol, and a liquor truck. Finally, Byron tells Hightower that he repeated all of that salacious gossip to Lena before he realized that Brown was her man.

Once Byron realized he'd said too much, he had fibbed to Lena to prevent her from going up to the Burden place and searching for Brown. He didn't want her to make a fool of herself in front of the whole town, which had gathered to watch the fire. Byron told her that she could find Brown in town after six o'clock, which was probably true after all. Hightower still cannot understand what Byron thinks he has done wrong in helping Lena find her husband. Byron explains that there is more to the story and continues. He had taken Lena to his boardinghouse to arrange a room for the night, but as they passed through town, Byron heard, and tried to keep Lena from hearing, some nasty rumors about the fire. He changed the subject each time Lena asked about the fire, and finally got her settled in for the night without having to answer her questions.

What Byron had been so worried about her hearing was that Miss Burden was murdered, and the fire set by the murderer. Yesterday evening, as he settled Lena into the boardinghouse, Joe Brown was at the county jail accusing Christmas of the murder, and of the business with the liquor truck and the gun. At first, no one believed Brown. Then, Brown tells the sheriff Christmas' biggest secret: He is part negro. The moment the townspeople learn that Christmas has negro blood, they immediately believe that Christmas is the murderer.

Byron relates the known details of the murder to Hightower. Yesterday morning, a countryman, on his way to town with his family, passes the Burden place and sees the fire. The man breaks down the door and finds a drunken man standing in the hallway. The drunken man tries to prevent the countryman from going up the stairs to check for survivors. The countryman goes up anyway, and finds Miss Burden's body. Her head has been cut almost all the way off. The countryman gathers her body in a blanket, careful not to lose the head, and carries her downstairs and out of the house. He calls

for the sheriff and fire department. Back in town, Miss Burden's closest living relative, a nephew living in the North, is informed. He quickly offers a thousand-dollar reward for the capture of his aunt's murderer. Meanwhile, at the still-burning Burden place, the sheriff learns that Christmas and Brown were living in the cabin, and both of them are missing.

Later that evening, Brown arrives in town, sober now, and begins making his accusations about Christmas. He tells the sheriff how Christmas lived as man and wife with old Miss Burden for several years. Brown claims that he has been afraid for some time that Christmas would harm Miss Burden, and that he had stayed at the cabin with Christmas hoping to prevent such an eventuality. Brown's story about the time and manner in which he discovers the fire does not add up. The police are about ready to arrest him for murder when Brown reveals that Christmas has black blood in him, which is all it takes for the sheriff to believe Christmas is the killer.

Brown insists on his thousand-dollar reward for fingering the murderer, but the sheriff tells him the reward is only for capturing Christmas. Brown is locked up in the local jail for safekeeping until Christmas can be located. Now, it is the night following the fire, and Byron informs Hightower that Christmas has still not been found. Byron is running out of excuses to keep Lena from finding Brown in such disgrace. Byron believes that it was Brown who set the fire, to cover his partner's tracks. However, since Brown is now off the hook for the murder, Hightower concludes that it's safe to let Lena know he is at the jail. Byron hedges, thinking that if Brown can collect the thousand dollars, he might do the right thing and marry Lena. Byron thinks that without the thousand dollars, Brown will certainly abandon Lena again. Thus, he hopes to prevent her from seeing him until Christmas is captured.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Faulkner presents two of the story's central conflicts in this chapter, one internal and the other external. Byron Bunch is struggling with an internal conflict which he can barely articulate, even to himself, much less to his friend Hightower. Byron is already in love with Lena, yet he has not quite grasped that fact. Byron is a loner who has long avoided close relations with his fellow man, or woman, and thus does not initially recognize love when it has found him. He considers himself a good man, and spends all of his time either at work or at church to ensure he does not get into "trouble." Yet, what this actually indicates is that Byron is afraid of his deeper emotions, and fears that if he allows himself to feel those emotions, he may betray his principles in some way. In other words, he does not trust himself, and therefore has spent his life avoiding all temptation. This fear hints at a deeply emotional nature, despite all of Byron's attempts to live a chaste and untroubled life. Now that he's found Lena, those long-buried emotions threaten to erupt into his consciousness, and he is afraid to admit to himself that he has fallen in love.

Hightower serves as Byron's conscience, and by attempting to hide his feelings from Hightower, Byron is really hiding them from himself. At the same time, Byron is seeking

absolution from Hightower for those very feelings, and the subsequent actions they will prompt him to take. In this chapter, Byron struggles to deny his love for Lena even as he acts from that love by helping Lena reunite with the father of her child. Byron demonstrates his inherently good nature through his willingness to sacrifice his own feelings in order that Lena may reunite with the man she hopes to marry. Yet, Byron also hides the truth from Lena about Brown's whereabouts, thus, demonstrating his conflicting feelings. He tells Hightower he is keeping Lena away from Brown for her own sake, so that she might not learn what type of man Brown truly is. However, Lena is already aware, thanks to Byron's careless tongue, that Brown is a bootlegger, and she must certainly have heard the rumors in town about the death of Miss Burden.

Is Byron really acting to protect Lena, or is that the lie he tells himself in order to prevent her from reuniting with Brown? Likely, both are true. Byron does seek to protect her from the disappointment, which surely awaits her when she confronts Brown at last. Simultaneously, Byron must be hoping, deep in his heart, that Brown will abandon Lena again, in order that Byron might have a chance to woo her.

The external conflict which Faulkner introduces in this chapter is between Christmas and Brown. Upon discovering Miss Burden's body, Brown's initial reaction was to set the house on fire in order to protect both his partner and their illegal whiskey business from the ramifications of a murder charge. As Byron states to Hightower, it is unlikely that Brown feels any moral outrage over the murder of Miss Burden; it is merely a huge inconvenience which has destroyed his profitable bootlegging business. His first instinct is to cover his partner's tracks. However, once the murder has been discovered and a thousand-dollar reward posted, Brown turns against his partner, hoping to sell out Christmas for the reward money. The conflict, which has been brewing between the two men, has at last exploded to the surface because of the murder.

A man of obviously weak character, Brown is not taken seriously at first by the local lawmen. In fact, Brown's non-stop talking, peppered with a mixture of lies and half-truths, nearly convinces the sheriff that Brown is the murderer. However, Brown plays his trump card. He announces that Christmas has "nigger blood" in him. The deeply racist heart of the town is exposed by the townspeople's immediate acceptance of Brown's accusation, and by their subsequent reaction to that accusation. Not only does the town take Brown's word regarding Christmas' genetic lineage, but they immediately assume that Christmas is indeed the murderer, solely on the strength of their belief that he carries African-American blood in his veins. The fact that Christmas is part black is all the proof the sheriff requires to convict him of murder. That grossly unfair assumption sheds a great deal of light on Christmas' character. In subsequent chapters, the author will detail Christmas' self-destructive behavior. That behavior is viewed by the reader in the context provided in this chapter, which explains why Christmas feels like an outsider, and why he is consumed with self-hatred.

Christmas is to suffer his entire life the vicious racism directed at African-Americans in this ignominious chapter of American history. Yet, since he looks white, neither can he be accepted by the African-American community. He is furthermore imbued with the racial ignorance of his society, and he actually believes that he is no good because of

his black blood. This belief will reassert itself time and again in the ensuing plot events, to become one of the overriding themes of the novel. In subsequent chapters, Christmas' internal conflict will be introduced and developed by the author until it both mirrors and overshadows Byron Bunch's internal conflict, introduced in Chapter 4.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Unable to fall sleep, Christmas lies awake in his bed in the cabin. Brown stumbles in, drunk and singing. Christmas quietly tells him to shut up, and Brown immediately stops singing. Then, Brown trips, falls to the floor and begins laughing loudly and drunkenly. Christmas beats Brown as he covers Brown's mouth and nose to prevent him from breathing. When Christmas releases him, Brown calls him a nigger. Christmas covers Brown's face again, allowing him to breathe just a little while Christmas considers how easy it would be to grab his razor and kill Brown. A voice in Christmas' head whispers that Brown is not the person he wishes to kill. Christmas releases the now snoring Brown and returns to his bed to smoke a cigarette and contemplate matters.

Christmas feels like something is going to happen to him; he is going to do something. He realizes it is because the woman, Miss Burden, has been praying over him. He sneaks out of the cabin to the main house on the property and stands underneath her bedroom window, wondering if she is awake. Christmas thinks to himself that it is not her fault that she is too old to be any good anymore, but she should have known better than to pray over him. Standing in the darkness, Christmas unbuttons the undergarment he wears and slips it off. Noticing the missing buttons on the undergarment, he remembers a time in his life when a woman had sewn his buttons on neatly for him. Christmas had tried to stop her, and when he couldn't prevent her, he had cut off all of the buttons she replaced, leaving the buttons she hadn't replaced alone.

Naked now, he slips through the cool, dew-wet grass to the side of the road. He stands there defiantly as a car passes by, revealing his nudity in its headlights. A woman's scream can be heard as the car whooshes past. Cold now, Christmas returns to the house and re-dresses himself in his undergarment. The last remaining button has now fallen off, and he is forced to hold it closed with his hand. He returns to the cabin and begins to lie down, then changes his mind. Christmas grabs his blanket and shoes and decides to head to the stables to bed down for the night. He tells himself he wants to smell the horses, because they are masculine; he does not want to sleep with the smell of a woman.

At dawn, he awakes and returns to the cabin. By the sound of Brown's breathing, Christmas can tell that he has sobered up overnight. He thinks how upset Brown will be to wake up sober, and how it will take Brown at least an hour to get drunk again. Christmas dresses in his suit pants, white shirt and bow tie. From under his bed, he retrieves a girlie/gun magazine, then puts his razor, shaving brush and shaving soap in his pocket. He enters the pasture beyond the stables and walks into the woods. He walks on until he comes to a valley with a small spring running through it. There, he builds a fire to warm himself and dry the dew from his shoes. He slips into sleep, and when he wakes up again, he shaves himself by the spring before hiding his shaving things and resuming his journey. Bearing away from the main house, he reaches the

road and crosses it to reach the small store just beyond. Christmas buys himself breakfast, and takes the food back to the spring to eat it. At the spring, he begins to read the magazine, cover to cover. As he reads, Christmas hopes that he has somehow already done the thing he knows he must do; if he has already done it, then it is no longer waiting for him to do. As he reads the magazine, he thinks again how she ought not to have prayed over him.

Christmas burns the magazine when he has finished it and heads to a nearby ditch. Here, he collects a shovel hidden beneath some underbrush and digs out six metal tins with screw tops. Christmas pours the whiskey out of the tins into the ground, where it soaks into the earth. It is late afternoon. By seven o'clock in the evening, Christmas has made his way to town, where he eats supper alone at a restaurant. At nine o'clock, he stands outside the barbershop window, staring at Brown, who does not notice him. Finally, the weight of Christmas' stare causes Brown to look up and meet Christmas' hard eyes. Christmas moves off down the street, making his lonely way through the empty town square. Unaware of his destination, the road leads him to Freedman Town, which is populated by the local negroes. He feels smothered by the negro voices he can hear, and feels as if he is at the bottom of a great, black pit. The voices begin to sound feminine. "It was as though he and all other manshaped life about him had been returned to the lightless hot wet primogenitive Female." (pg. 107) Christmas runs all the way back to the white part of town, but it takes him a while to shake off the negro voices and the negro smell of Freedman Town.

Alone again in white Jefferson, Christmas peers at the people in the lighted houses around him. He sees four white faces gathered around a card table; the bare arms of the white women shining smoothly in the light. "'That's all I wanted,' he thought. 'That dont seem like a whole lot to ask.'" (pg. 108) He follows another road which leads him past the railroad tracks to the woods beyond. From his vantage point, he can see the safe road he has just taken, which led him through the white part of town. He can see the other, dark road, which had betrayed him by leading him to Freedman Town. Christmas enters the dark woods, and his sense of direction guides him unerringly towards the road back to the Burden home. When he exits the woods, he spots a group of negroes walking down the road. They spot the white man coming out of the woods and immediately cross the street to avoid him. Christmas crosses the street, too, following. The negro men usher the women behind them. One of the negroes escorts the women safely past Christmas, while the other two negro men stop to confront him.

In pleasant voices, they ask him what he wants. Christmas just stares, saying nothing. After a tense moment, the negro men walk away to rejoin their friends. Christmas looks down and notices that he has his razor in his hand. He knows he is not holding it out of fear. He calls out loud, "'Sons of bitches!'" (pg. 110) Christmas pockets the razor, lights a cigarette, and wonders what is the matter with him; his hands are shaking. It is nearly ten o'clock as he heads towards the Burden house, thinking again that something is going to happen to him.

Chapter 5 Analysis

In this chapter the author takes the reader back to the moments in time just prior to Miss Burden's murder. Unlike the previous flashback scenes in the novel, this chapter has no present action with which to anchor the flashback firmly in the past. In Chapter 4, for example, the flashback to the previous day is anchored in the present by Byron, who narrates the past events to Hightower. In this chapter, however, Christmas is all alone, and although the entire chapter is a flashback, it is related to the reader as if it is taking place in the present. This lack of a present anchor contributes to the dream-like quality of the narrative. The reader's only cues that this chapter is a flashback must come from previous chapters. The reader already knows that Brown is locked up in the local jail, and that Christmas is missing. Thus, by placing them together in the cabin, the author makes it clear that the events of Chapter 5 must have taken place prior to the murder. Christmas' strange fugue-like behavior indicates that the events of Chapter 5 are leading up to the time of the murder itself.

Christmas' thought process leading up to the murder reveals his internal struggle. As he wanders apparently aimlessly through the town, his feet lead him down two different roads. One of the roads leads to Freedman Town, which represents to Christmas the black blood flowing in his veins which he is struggling to deny. His hatred of all things African-American becomes evident as his inner thoughts dwell on the odious smell of the negro town. He imagines the smells and the voices, and his hatred of negroes is intertwined with his hatred of women, whom he also imagines he can smell most strongly in Freedman Town. The other road he takes he considers safe, because it leads him through the cold, clean air of the white part of town. However, this road is lonely, and makes him feel like an outsider. Longingly, he peers in the windows and watches the white faces enjoying one another's company. '"That's all I wanted,' he thought. 'That dont seem like a whole lot to ask."' (pg. 108) With that thought, Christmas reveals his deep desire to be accepted by the white community. He does not seem to realize that he has separated *himself* from the company of his fellow men, despite the fact that in earlier chapters, he shunned all contact with his co-workers.

There is a lot about himself that Christmas does not know. In fact, it is apparent that there are things about himself he prefers not to know. Throughout the day, as the reader realizes he is preparing himself to kill Miss Burden, Christmas does not once acknowledge to himself this plan. He thinks of the matter passively, as something that is going to happen to him, not as something that he intends to do. His thoughts first turn to murder in the cabin, when he contemplates using the razor on Brown. However, he realizes that Brown is not the right person. This uncompleted thought causes the reader to realize that there is a specific person he wishes to kill. His bizarre, nude stalking behavior as he stands below Miss Burden's window indicates to the reader that she is his real target. Christmas' hate-filled thoughts about women follow immediately on the heels of the night-stalking incident. He sleeps in the stable because horses, to his way of thinking, give of a distinctively masculine scent, enabling him to avoid the odious smell of womankind. The odd little memory of how he used to methodically remove the buttons which some long-distant woman had sewn on his clothes reveals a deep-seated

hatred of all things female. He would rather wear rags than allow a woman to do him a kindness.

Christmas seems unaware that there is anything wrong with his thinking. In his mind, it is Miss Burden who is wrong; Miss Burden has forced him into murdering her, because she dares to pray over him. Christmas behaves like a man who has made a decision, yet is reluctant to carry it out. All day, he studiously avoids the house where Miss Burden lives. His thorough reading of the magazine seems to be another delay tactic. As he reads, he wishes that the deed was already done, so that he would not still have to do it. Christmas seems barely conscious of what that deed is; he does not directly allow his mind to grasp that he feels the need to kill Miss Burden. Not once does it occur to him to not commit this crime. By hiding the full knowledge of his plans from his conscious mind, he is allowing his inner demons to drive him. Just as he does not remember taking out the razor blade during the confrontation with the two black men, he also does not consciously realize his intent to kill. Christmas has given himself over to his dark, unconscious urges, thus allowing him to sidestep responsibility for his own actions.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

"Memory believes before knowing remembers. Believes longer than recollects, longer than knowing even wonders." (pg. 111) Christmas remembers a corridor in a soot-blackened red brick building surrounded by cinder-covered grounds and ringed by a ten-foot steel-and-wire fence. He remembers orphans in blue denim uniforms and windows rain-streaked with soot like black tears. Christmas recalls being five-years-old and standing in that corridor. Then, he sneaks into the dietician's bathroom. For some time now, the child has been doing this. Young Christmas is fascinated by the wonderful smell and taste of the pink toothpaste which he has discovered in the dietician's bathroom. He is not yet aware of her as a person; she is only a pleasant pink face he sees in the dining hall. On this night, that is about to change.

As Christmas steals a tiny pink ribbon of guilty pleasure from the toothpaste tube, he hears the dietician entering the room with a man. Quickly, he hides behind a curtain, still clutching the tube. He neither hears nor understands the sexual congress which is taking place beyond the curtain. Five-year-old Christmas can think only of the trouble he will be in if he is caught stealing the toothpaste. Terrified of discovery, he eats the toothpaste compulsively, to calm himself. Always before he has been careful, taking only a tiny amount which would, he hoped, go unnoticed. Tonight his terror increases when he realizes the tube is nearly empty. Surely, he must now be caught. His terror, combined with the tube of toothpaste he has just eaten, conspires to make him sick. When he vomits, he is discovered. Too ashamed and sick to look up, Christmas does not see anything suspicious, nor would the small child have understood had he seen the disheveled dietician and her male companion. The dietician does not comprehend the innocence of children. Assuming Christmas has the knowledge and calculation of an adult, the dietician accuses him of spying. She calls him a "'little rat"' and a "'nigger bastard.'" (pg. 114)

Christmas spends the next two days hiding from the dietician, terrified of the punishment he is sure she will give him for eating her toothpaste. The dietician again attributes adult motives to the little boy. She assumes he is avoiding her in order to torment her; she thinks he is only delaying telling her boss about her sexual indiscretion in order to prolong her agony and fear. She lies awake at night, terrified and furious at the calculating little boy. On the third day, she finds Christmas and offers him a silver dollar as a bribe not to tell. Christmas, expecting to be whipped or worse, does not understand why she is offering the coin. He cannot believe she wants him to have it, and stands mute in his shock. She takes his silence for refusal and again calls him a nigger bastard. By the next day, she has plotted her revenge.

The dietician approaches the elderly janitor who guards the door each day as the children play in the yard. She asks him if he's noticed the other children calling Christmas a nigger in the yard. She confides to him that the little boy has caught her in

a bad position, and intends to tell on her. The janitor turns to her with madness in his eyes, although she, in her upset state, does not notice his obvious insanity. The janitor tells her that God is using the boy as an instrument to catch her in her sin. The janitor tells her that Christmas does indeed have negro blood. He informs her that he has watched the evil little boy for five years, waiting for God to reveal his plan. The dietician tells him that perhaps it is God's plan for her to tell the madam of the orphanage about the boy's lineage. Then, they will have to send the boy away to a negro orphanage. The janitor calls her problem "womanfilth" and "womansuffering," but says her sin pales next to the evil of the little boy.

Content with her now confirmed knowledge, the dietician sleeps peacefully that afternoon for the first time in days. That night, the janitor forces his way into her room. She assumes he is there to have sex with her; now that he knows her secret, she believes he will blackmail her into having sex with him knowing that she cannot get him in trouble over it without also revealing her own peccadilloes. To her surprise, he only wants to know if she has yet told the madam about the boy's negro blood. The janitor asks what will happen to the boy once she has told. The dietician tells him that the boy will surely be sent to a negro orphanage. For the first time, the janitor's eyes look human, though he looks around the room and calls it womanfilth.

The next morning, both the janitor and Christmas are missing. The dietician tells the matron that the janitor must have taken the child away, because he knows Christmas is a nigger. The matron is shocked at the news. Shortly thereafter, the janitor is apprehended and arrested while trying to put the boy in an orphanage for white children in a neighboring town. The matron demands to know how the dietician learned about Christmas' parentage. The dietician claims she had not known for sure, but that she had heard the children calling him a nigger on the playground, and that the janitor had recently tried to tell her something important about the child. The janitor hadn't finished disclosing the secret, claims the dietician, but under the circumstances, she has figured it out. She reminds the matron that the janitor had starting working at the orphanage five years ago, just before the Christmas night when the child was found on the doorstep. Pretending she is just this moment puzzling it all out, the dietician suddenly recalls another recent conversation with the janitor. The dietician tells the matron that the janitor had accosted her in the corridor, demanding to know if she had told the matron the child's secret. The janitor had told the dietician that if the matron were to find out, she would send Christmas away to a negro orphanage. The dietician rounds out this lie by musing how they all should have noticed sooner, because of Christmas' hair, eyes and face. The matron decides they must immediately place Christmas in a black orphanage.

Christmas wakes up in the arms of the janitor. He lies still in the man's arms, making no protest, as the janitor carries him down the steps and towards the side door of the orphanage. Christmas is unconcerned, because he has seen other orphans disappear when they're adopted. Now, he assumes that this is how the other children had been carried out of the orphanage as well. At the door, the janitor sets him on his feet and tells him to get dressed. Christmas does as he is told. Although he has not spoken many words to the janitor in his young life, Christmas has always somehow understood

that there is a bond between them. Christmas knows that the janitor's eyes are always on him in the playground; he has watched him for years. Outside, they catch a streetcar, and the man feeds him a sandwich during the ride. The janitor takes him to another place just like the place Christmas has just left. The boy is not surprised when, three days later, the police arrive and take him back to the first orphanage. The child, in his sanity, knows better than the janitor that this situation could not last.

Back at the orphanage, the child avoids the dietician, having long since forgotten the reason. One day, the matron calls the boy into her office and asks him how he would like living in the country with some nice people. Christmas looks up at the stranger who is meeting with the madam. The man has cold, light-colored eyes and wears a black suit. The man stares at the child intently as he asks about his parentage. The madam insists she has no knowledge of the boy's parents. The stranger says that he has been in correspondence with the dietician, Miss Atkins, and had been under the impression that they did know something about his parentage. The matron stares him down, and the man says it does not matter. The man tells the matron that he and Mrs. McEachern will ensure that the boy grows up to fear God and be a hard worker despite his origins.

Two months after the toothpaste incident, Christmas is taken from the orphanage by the harsh man. In the buggy on the way to his new home, the man lectures Christmas about the sins of sloth and idleness, and the virtue of labor and fearing God. Later, Christmas would recall the man's final comment to the madam. The man had told her that Christmas is a heathen name, and that he would give the child his own name, McEachern.

Chapter 6 Analysis

The flashback presented in this chapter, again without benefit of a present-day anchor in the story, nonetheless provides the reader with a greater understanding of Christmas' present-day behavior. While the author never directly states Christmas' motives for murder; this chapter, combined with the additional flashbacks which will be presented in Chapters 7-10, gives context and motivation to Christmas' murderous behavior. Chapter 6 provides the reader a detailed view of a critical turning point in young Christmas' life. Christmas' experiences with the dietician and with the crazy old janitor allow the reader to see him as a victim of circumstance. Christmas' subsequent downward spiral and self-destructive behavior begin to seem a natural outgrowth of his horrifying childhood and adolescence. Some might argue that the author is setting aside the concept of personal responsibility, and this argument certainly has some merit. However, William Faulkner seeks to make a different argument entirely.

His character of Christmas is presented as a human sacrifice, and is often referred to by literary critics as a Christ figure. This literary archetype of a Christ figure is seen in many great literary works of art, including J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*. Use of such archetypes was much in vogue during the time of Faulkner's celebrated career, and Joe Christmas is the epitome of the Christ figure archetype. Even his initials, J.C., highlight this symbolism, as does his last name, and the fact that he arrived at the orphanage's

doorstep on Christmas day. Throughout the story, the word sacrifice is used repeatedly, and Hightower particularly will come to understand that Joe Christmas is being symbolically crucified by the town of Jefferson. Hightower's character is in an excellent position to explain this position to the reader, as he will do in later chapters, since Hightower himself has in the past been sacrificed by the town.

It has not been uncommon throughout human history to assign all blame and negativity to a scapegoat such as Christmas. In fact, modern day studies of social dynamics explain the psychological lift any given group of people experiences upon creating a scapegoat. When inevitably something goes wrong within a social group, the group selects its weakest member and assigns all blame to this individual. By banishing or otherwise destroying the individual, the group manages to psychologically purge itself of guilt and negativity. Unfortunately, this age-old practice is nothing more than a temporary fix. Sacrificing a scapegoat may make everyone else feel superior and blameless, but the fundamental problems go unaddressed. Whatever problems the social group experienced prior to sacrificing their scapegoat eventually resurface, and then a new scapegoat must be created to once again absolve the larger group of blame. This practice has resulted in the needless, mindless sacrifice of many individual lives and reputations, and can be said to have been part of early American society's driving 'need' to defend slavery. Through slavery, society was able to assign the entire African-American race the role of societal scapegoat. No matter what problem a white man or woman faced, what failure or crime committed, there was always a slave nearby to conveniently absorb the blame. Faulkner makes this point vividly through the sheriff's absolution of Joe Brown. By any account, Brown lacks integrity, but because Christmas is black, the sheriff becomes instantly convinced that Brown's integrity must be stronger than Christmas'. Thus, Christmas is indeed a literary Christ figure - not for any of the positive qualities associated with Jesus Christ, but by virtue of being sacrificed for the sins of others.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Christmas' memories now wander to the day on which he became a man. He recalls himself as a boy, sitting at a table with a large Bible in front of him. He wears a white shirt and black pants, and his shoes are polished clumsily, as a child would polish them. McEachern stands beside the table and accuses the boy of not trying to learn. McEachern looks at his watch and tells the boy he will give him another hour to learn it. McEachern's shoes are well polished, remembers Christmas, because the child had been beaten the night before for polishing them clumsily, and had re-polished them in the morning. Half an hour later, Mrs. McEachern enters wearing her church clothes. She looks at the silent tableau of man and boy for a moment, and then leaves again. At the end of the hour, McEachern asks the boy is he has learned it yet. The boy responds with a "no." McEachern calmly leads the boy down the hall, past Mrs. McEachern; both man and boy ignore her as she calls out quietly to the man. The man and boy, both of their backs set in a stubborn erectness, walk together to the stable.

Inside the stable, McEachern tells the boy to drop his pants. With an impersonal air, he whips the boy with the strap, slowly and deliberately. Then he instructs the boy to leave his pants down, but to take up the heavy Bible and hold it. McEachern waits another hour for the boy to memorize the catechism. The boy spends the hour staring at the wall, not even glancing at the Bible he holds. At the end of the hour, McEachern beats the boy again with the strap. Neither man nor boy has eaten breakfast yet. The boy staggers, but refuses to sit down when McEachern suggests it. An hour later, the boy does not respond to McEachern's question. McEachern takes the Bible out of his hands, and the boy falls to the floor, immobile. The boy comes in late that afternoon, in his own bed in his attic room. McEachern sits beside him on the bed. When he sees that the child is awake, he bids the boy rise and kneel with him beside the bed. McEachern prays for a long time, asking forgiveness for lifting his hand against a child, and he asks God to forgive the child for his stubborn sin of disobedience. After the prayer, McEachern again hands the boy the Bible.

The boy does not eat at all that day. When he comes to next, it is dark outside, and he is alone in his room. He hears footsteps on the stairs and knows that it is not McEachern, for the man has gone to church to expiate his sins. Mrs. McEachern enters with a tray of food. Young Joe ignores her when she calls his name. She tells him that the food was her idea, not the man's. Joe sits up at those words and takes the tray. He carries it to the corner of the room and dumps it upside down, spilling food and breaking crockery. Mrs. McEachern does not speak as she picks up the broken dishes and leaves the room. Christmas remembers how his eight-year-old self had arisen an hour later and eaten the food off the rug like a dog.

Fourteen-year-old Joe McEachern, as he is known to his friends, is already late in getting back home for the day; he knows he will be whipped by McEachern when he

arrives. Nevertheless, he accompanies his four teenage friends to a deserted sawmill, where one of the boys has arranged for them each to take a turn having sex with a negro girl, who waits inside. When it is Joe's turn, he enters the dark shed, feeling suddenly overpowered by some internal force. He finds the negro girl in the darkness and begins kicking her; then he pulls her upright and strikes her with his fists. The other boys hear her cries and rush Joe, holding him down as he continues to lash out, now at the boys. They ask him to quit, but he refuses to stop fighting them. Eventually, the four boys escape his flailing fists and stand watching him from outside the sawmill. Joe does not look back at them as he stands up and heads for home. Joe bathes his face in a spring before entering the house. Irrespective of the fact that Joe has refrained from committing what the elder McEachern considers to be the cardinal sin, sexual congress, McEachern nonetheless beats him on the assumption that Joe has sinned.

McEachern does not notice the missing heifer for two days; then he also finds the new suit hidden in the barn. McEachern confronts Joe about the missing cow, and Joe tells him she must be down at the creek. Joe reminds McEachern that the heifer belongs to Joe. McEachern insists they search the creek together for the heifer. As they search, Joe again reminds him that McEachern had given the cow to Joe as a gift. When it becomes obvious the heifer is not by the creek, Joe finally admits to having sold her. McEachern suspects that eighteen-year-old Joe has been cheated out of the full price of the cow, but Joe refuses to reveal the amount of money he received, or tell where it is hidden. Instead he lies and tells McEachern that he has given the money to Mrs. McEachern to put away. McEachern announces victoriously that he has finally caught Joe in the only two sins which Joe had not previously committed, lying and lechery. McEachern knows that Joe spent the money on a new suit, and assumes that he needs the suit for "whoring." (pg. 154) McEachern acknowledges Joe's manhood by fighting him man-to-man instead of whipping him with a strap. Later that night, Joe can hear Mrs. McEachern lying to her husband, insisting that Joe did give her the money to hide away.

Mrs. McEachern has always tried to be kind to Joe, ever since the night twelve years ago when McEachern had brought the little boy home to live. The woman had tried to carry the little boy into the house, but Joe had squirmed until she put him down so he could enter on his own two feet. She had sat him down and taken off his shoes, though as soon as the child realized what she was doing, he had pushed her hand away and removed them himself. She had then fetched a basin of hot water for him to relax his feet in, but Joe had assumed she wished to bathe him; he had never enjoyed the luxury of soaking his feet in warm water, and assumed because it felt so good that there must be something unpleasant, like a bath, to follow. As she had put him to bed that night, little Joe was still waiting for the unpleasantness which he assumed would come on the heels of her kindness. Now that he is seventeen, he can look back over those years and see the long string of clumsy attempts at kindness which she had attempted to provide. Mrs. McEachern always performed her kindnesses in secret, so that her husband would not find out, yet Joe knows that McEachern would not have cared.

Joe resents the efforts she has made over the years to stop McEachern from punishing Joe. Joe and McEachern both view the punishments as impersonal acts, until Mrs.

McEachern interferes and causes them to seem wrong. Occasionally, Joe thinks about telling Mrs. McEachern about his negro blood; to give her this horrible secret weight to carry in payment for her many attempted kindnesses. Joe resents her secret kindnesses, for he feels that she is the one who has made McEachern's beatings unbearable. Without her interference, the beatings are merely a fact of life; her attempts to prevent them have tainted the beatings with a sense of evil. Her affinity for secrecy makes even her most trivial actions feel wrong to Joe. One secret conspiracy involves her hiding money behind a loose board in the wall of Joe's attic bedroom. She had involved him in this secret to hide money from McEachern since he was a child. "It was not the hard work which he hated, nor the punishment and injustice. He was used to that before he ever saw either of them. He expected no less, and so he was neither outraged nor surprised. It was the woman: that soft kindness which he believed himself doomed to be forever victim of and which he hated worse than he did the hard and ruthless justice of men." (pg. 158)

Chapter 7 Analysis

Again, the narrative takes on a dream-like quality, skipping without warning from one time period to the next. This chapter is anchored in the present day, quite briefly, at the beginning, when the present-day Joe Christmas thinks about the day he became a man. Yet, there are three days presented in this chapter. In stream-of-consciousness style, Joe's memories skip from a day in his eighth year, to a day in his fourteenth year, and then lead on to a pivotal day in his late teens. These three days are connected only by the adult Christmas' stream-of-consciousness association. They all relate to his coming of age as he sees it. Perhaps more objectively, these memories demonstrate the far-reaching nature of his hatred for women. It would appear that the young Joe Christmas had a very tough life. The extreme cruelties to which he was routinely subjected are something he views as normal. It is the softness and kindness of women which he finds dangerous. Young Joe strongly believes that he cannot afford softness or kindness; he must remain tough to survive in his cruel world. There is a certain tragic logic to this viewpoint. If one truly believes, as Joe does, that the world is harsh and cold and will take advantage of any weakness, then one simply cannot afford the luxury of the "weaker" feminine emotions such as kindness, empathy or caring.

Modern day psychological wisdom holds that a child's character is fundamentally formed in the first three years of life. If that is indeed the case, then little Joe Christmas' character was already formed by the time he went to live with the McEacherns. Indeed, his refusal to accept the simple kindness of a foot bath supports this theory, for Joe refuses the foot bath only because it feels too pleasant, which makes him suspicious. At the tender age of six, Joe has already decided that life is not meant to be pleasant, and regards all kindness with hostility and suspicion. Certainly McEachern's cruel treatment of the boy contributes further to his psychological misdevelopment. Also, the fact that Mrs. McEachern's kindnesses are delivered furtively must further reinforce the boy's belief that kindness is wrong, and therefore must be offered in secret. The boy, however, has no sympathy for his foster mother; she has been married to a tyrannical, cruel and

physically abusive man for many years, and is emotionally incapable of helping young Joe in any meaningful way.

Joe takes on the abusive mentality of his foster father by blaming a fellow victim, Mrs. McEachern, for the fact that the beatings are wrong. As Joe sees it, the beatings are a normal part of life, and it is only her weakness which causes him to feel bad about being beaten. All in all, this chapter presents a desolate picture of Christmas' youth, and makes it clear that the child never had a chance of growing up to be anything but violent and ruthless. Yet, by presenting the young boy to the reader, the author at least manages to introduce sympathy for the adult Christmas, despite his murderous behavior.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Joe shimmies quietly down the rope which hangs from his bedroom window into the dark night below. He has had over a year of practice with the rope, and manages it easily. In the stable, he unwraps his new suit. It is not quite as he left it, and Joe realizes with anger that McEachern has found the suit. Joe dresses quickly, already late because of the fuss over the missing heifer. He has forgotten to wind his new watch, but instinct tells him he is running late. As he traverses the lane behind the house, he expects at any moment to see his girl's car drive by. He checks his useless watch again, and glances back at the house, wishing that McEachern would discover his absence and try to stop him. Finally, he sees the glare of headlights as her car approaches down the lane.

She is a waitress in a shabby restaurant in town. She is over thirty, but looks seventeen due to her slight, childlike build. The affair had begun when Joe was seventeen. Joe and McEachern had come to town together as they occasionally do. However, on this occasion McEachern had failed to pack a lunch, thinking his business appointment would take but a short time. The business keeps him longer than intended, and with exasperated reluctance, McEachern decides there is no option other than to take Joe to a restaurant. The place he chooses is unfamiliar to Joe, for it is tucked away on a back street with no sign to mark it. Everyone stares when they enter. McEachern orders food which can be eaten quickly, and drags Joe out the moment they've finished. Still, Joe has time to notice the tough-looking brassy-haired woman at the counter, a group of rough-looking men, and the tiny, childlike waitress. As they leave, McEachern advises him that this is the type of establishment which Joe should avoid in the future. Joe realizes that some other business is going on in the restaurant besides food service, but he cannot imagine what. McEachern refuses to explain.

For six months, Joe avoids the restaurant whenever they come to town, but his thoughts linger on the small waitress. He remembers how the men had whispered remarks in her ear as she passed them, and it irritates Joe that he is too napve to know what sort of remarks men make to women. One day after Joe turns eighteen, he and McEachern again visit town. Joe is given a dime and left to his own devices as McEachern keeps a business appointment. McEachern advises him not to waste the money, but muses that wasting money seems to be the only way young men learn its value. Joe takes the coin and heads straight for the diner. Joe sees the proprietor for the first time when he enters, the brassy-haired woman's husband. At the counter, Joe orders pie and coffee from the waitress, whom the proprietor calls Bobbie. Belatedly, Joe realizes that the pie alone costs ten cents. He returns the coffee which she has already poured. The brassy-haired woman objects, but Bobbie covers for Joe by saying that she had simply heard the order wrong. Joe is so ashamed at his faux pas that he refuses to go back to town for a while.

Instead, Joe passes his days working obsessively. McEachern notices and rewards Joe with a heifer of his own. Joe thinks that the heifer is more of a threat than a gift, but he accepts it, knowing he's earned this much at least. A month later, Joe goes into town again with McEachern. He has a half dollar in his pocket which Mrs. McEachern has given him. Again, McEachern leaves Joe alone for the afternoon in town, and Joe returns to the restaurant. Joe lays down his money and tells the brassy-haired woman that he owes the waitress, Bobbie, a nickel for the pie and coffee incident. After some public discussion, the proprietor refuses to accept the money, thinking Joe is attempting some kind of scam. The men laugh Joe right out of the establishment. However, moments later, the waitress rushes out to catch up with him. She is impressed by the simple kindness of his deed.

Joe's experience with girls has been rather limited. In fact, his only experience is of talking about girls with his teenage friends. He recalls one horrifying conversation in particular. One of the more experienced boys had assured the others that all women "'want to, [...] But sometimes they cant.'" (pg. 173) The boy goes on to explain, quite graphically, the concept of monthly menstruation. The boy paints for Joe and the others a picture of women being victims of "periodic filth." (pg. 173) Joe is so upset; he refuses to hunt with his friends for several weeks. He hunts alone instead, and one day, he kills a sheep. Joe kneels next to the dead sheep and plunges his hands into the beast's still-warm blood. Eventually, however, Joe recovers from the shock of the boy's words. He accepts the concept of menstruation, though he vows to himself that it will not happen to him. "*Not in my life and my love*."

When Joe meets the waitress for the first time, the Monday following his attempt to pay back the nickel, she tells him that she has miscalculated the timing of their date. By this time, Joe has forgotten the incident with the sheep's blood. She tries to explain that she is sick, and that she should return to her home, where she lives with Mame and Max, the restaurant proprietors. Joe does not understand what type of illness she has, and so Bobbie realizes then that Joe has never had a sweetheart before. Gently, she explains about a woman's monthly cycles. Joe is outraged. He strikes her and then runs away to the woods, where he vomits. The following Monday night, he meets her again. This time, he drags her forcibly into the woods for their tryst.

Joe keeps the rope coiled behind the same loose board in his room where Mrs. McEachern hides her money. It is too far back for her to see it or reach it, and Joe takes a perverse pleasure from using her hiding place. He does not tell her about the rope, for fear that she would insist on helping him hide it, and believing that she would make such a show of secrecy that McEachern would suspect something. He also begins to steal money from her secret hoard. Joe does not consciously realize that he is paying Bobbie in exchange for pleasure; he merely begins taking money each time he reaches behind the loose board to get the rope. The first time, he takes fifty cents and uses it to buy Bobbie a box of candy. Max and Mame give Bobbie a hard time about the candy, but Bobbie insists to them that she likes Joe, and that he pays her what he can. This only earns her more ridicule from her employers. Mame is irritated that Bobbie is giving it away. Bobbie insists her time with Joe is not cutting into Max's income. Mame warns her that small towns like this one won't tolerate such behavior for long.

Nonetheless, when Joe arrives, Max gives him his very first taste of alcohol, on the house. Once they are alone in Bobbie's room, she begins removing her clothes. Joe is shocked at the idea of having sex inside the house. Afterwards, they lie in bed, talking. She answers all of Joe's questions about the female body, and he listens with the avid curiosity of a child. In turn, he tells her about the female negro in the sawmill. Then, Joe tells her about his "nigger blood." Bobbie refuses to believe it and insists that he is lying. Joe begins visiting her in her room two nights a week. He is unaware that other men visit her, too. He continues to give her money, but he does not fully grasp that the money is in exchange for sexual favors. He considers it more like rent for the room in Max and Mame's house. Mrs. McEachern notices the missing money. She offers to give Joe money. After that, he stops taking her money and begins chopping wood to earn a few dollars.

On the nights they don't meet in Bobbie's room, the young couple meets outdoors. One night, Bobbie doesn't show up and so Joe goes to her house to find her. Watching from outside, Joe realizes there is a man in the room with Bobbie. He avoids her for two weeks, and the first thing he does when he sees her next is to strike her. She begs him not to hit her in the middle of a public street. She is crying, and Joe, who cannot remember the last time he cried, begins crying too, all the while continuing to hit her. When his rage is spent, she holds him and comforts him. Joe finally realizes that she sleeps with other men for money. In fact, he realizes he has known all along, without knowing that he knew. Within two weeks of this realization, Joe takes up smoking and becomes a regular drinker. He begins to socialize with the other customers at Max and Mame's, the ever-changing group of men whom he had first seen at the restaurant. Joe begins to refer to Bobbie as his whore in front of the other men, even in her presence. He begins escorting Bobbie to dances in the country. Joe wonders whether McEachern would be more upset by his relations with Bobbie or by the sinful dancing. Meanwhile, Joe continues to work hard during the day, as McEachern watches him with grudging approval.

Chapter 8 Analysis

The incident with the dietician and the janitor is afterwards compounded by McEachern's hateful view of women. Thus, Joe grows up to think of women as abominations. How frustrating it is for a young man to hate what he so desires, and hate himself for desiring it. It's interesting to note how young Joe disassociates himself from his actions. He refuses to allow the knowledge that Bobbie is a prostitute to enter his consciousness, for then he would have to confront the fact that he is committing the gravest of all sins, according to the man who raised him. Once Joe realizes he *is* indulging in lust with a prostitute, he begins to see himself differently. Having now engaged in behavior which McEachern considers purely evil, Joe feels free to loosen all other moral restraints or inhibitions he previously felt. He begins to drink compulsively and refers to Bobbie as his whore in order to impress the other carousing men who frequent the bordello. This rebellion, in which Joe attempts to become everything McEachern hates, is a natural result of Joe's anger at McEachern. McEachern beats Joe and treats him cruelly; and, therefore, Joe hates everything McEachern stands for,

even as another part of him honors the principles he was raised with. This other part inspires him to feel guilt and self-hatred for breaking McEachern's rules. Joe is young, hurt and hotheaded. He doesn't see the possibility of resolving his hatred. His self-hatred vies for dominance with his hatred of McEachern, and he believes he can only free himself from McEachern's harsh views by destroying McEachern. This internal conflict sparks the fiery showdown between Joe and McEachern which comes in the next chapter.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

McEachern lies in bed, working out the puzzle of Joe's secret activities. He knows the suit hidden in the barn has been worn, but cannot figure out when Joe is managing to sneak away. Just then, he sees a shadow slide by his window. He watches, enraged, as Joe sneaks up the lane and gets into an arriving car. Without even taking the time to properly dress, McEachern takes a horse and rides after the car. Four miles into the country, he discovers the lights and sounds of a dance. He enters the schoolroom which is being used to house the nocturnal dancing and runs toward Joe and Bobbie on the dance floor. He calls Bobbie a harlot and punches at Joe. Joe ducks the blow. McEachern continues to advance until Joe shatters a chair over his head. McEachern falls to the ground, bloody and still.

Joe doesn't stop to verify that McEachern is dead. He turns to Bobbie, who screams at him for bringing her to the dance and subjecting her to McEachern's ugly words. Joe announces to the room that he had told McEachern he would kill him some day. He follows Bobbie out the door, instructing her to meet him back at her house. She beats his face until he turns and runs, heading for McEachern's horse. As Bobbie's taillights disappear, Joe runs the horse hard towards home, exulting in his freedom from honor and lawfulness. Mrs. McEachern greets him at the house. He does not strike her, but pushes her aside and races upstairs to get her money from behind the loose board. She follows, and he tells her to remember that he never asked for the money. He will not ask, for fear that she would give it to him willingly. Instead, he takes the money and rides away.

The horse loses steam on the way back to town. Joe leaves it and runs the rest of the way. Expecting to find Bobbie packed and ready to leave with him, he knocks on the door. Max tries to block his entrance, but Joe races past him. In the upstairs hallway he sees Mame, standing next to her own packed bags. In Bobbie's room, he finds her and two other men. His racing mind doesn't take in their conversation, but they are discussing whether or not McEachern is dead. Max asks him straight out if he has killed McEachern. Joe says he does not know; he tells them he went straight home to get the money he and Bobbie will need to leave town and get married. He shows them the wad of coins and bills in his pocket. Bobbie screams at him and throws the money across the room. Joe is stunned, realizing that she does not intend to marry him. She screams that he has gotten her into a jam, and calls him a nigger. Joe is amazed. He has committed murder and stolen for this woman. The men move on Joe, and beat him senseless. He scarcely hears their complaints about him having ruined their nice setup. The household is packed and ready to leave for Memphis, as soon as they have beaten Joe to a pulp. Finally, Mame tells them they have done enough damage, and they stop.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Joe's childish fantasy of slaying the evil McEachern and riding off into the sunset with the girl is revealed to him, too late, as an unrealistic dream. Joe has clearly not been taught the value of human life, and as such, his adolescent fantasies quickly manifest in murder. He wants to beat McEachern, and expects to get the girl and the glory for doing so. He cannot understand why Bobbie is ungrateful; he has stolen and killed, and Joe tells himself he has done this for her. At no point did her individual needs enter his thinking. Young Joe is completely self-absorbed with his pain, and, as many have done before him, uses his pain to justify hurting others. His behavior in a more enlightened society may have been seen as a cry for help, but even so his adolescent world view in the body of an adult male killer is a dangerous combination.

Perhaps Joe might elicit some sympathy and be awarded a second chance, but certainly not without a lengthy prison sentence. At the tender age of nineteen, Joe has already sacrificed his future by becoming a killer. His crime of patricide is so severe that it is a stunning insight into Joe's hopeless view of his own future that he is so willing to throw it away. His fears of being persecuted for his negro blood are not groundless. By killing McEachern, he presents himself as a sacrifice to the racist justice of the powers that be.

Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Joe lies insensible for some time. Vaguely, he hears the household prepare to depart. He listens as they insist Bobbie take the money Joe brought. Mame tucks a banknote into Joe's pocket and stands guard to ensure the others don't steal that, too. The door closes, and they are gone. After a bit, Joe is able to sit up dizzily. Aware only of his need to get out of there, Joe wanders the house and fortifies himself with a shot of whiskey. With his body beginning to respond at last, Joe leaves the house and enters "the street which was to run for fifteen years." (pg. 210) From that night on, one street leads to another, and Joe's restless journey leads him from Oklahoma and Missouri to Mexico, and back north again to Chicago and Detroit, ending at last in Mississippi fifteen years later. Over those years, Joe tries his hand at various occupations: laborer, miner, prospector, gambler, and even a brief stint in the army, before he deserts and is never caught. He beds many prostitutes along the way. When he has no money to pay them, he simply tells them he is part negro, and the outraged women chase him away with no thought of payment.

One night, however, this plan fails to work. The prostitute, upon learning of his negro heritage, merely shrugs disinterestedly. In that moment, Christmas realizes that racial prejudice is not as strong in the north as it is in the south. When the prostitute presses him for money, Christmas responds by beating her nearly to death. He is sickened by the thought that there are white women who would knowingly sleep with a black man. For two years, he remains sick with this thought. Christmas remembers how he had once encouraged white men to call him a negro so that he could fight them. Now, living in Chicago, he lives amongst negroes and fights any black man who dares to call him white. He lives with a black woman as man and wife, and consciously tries to expel all white attributes from himself, trying to become fully black. However, he does not stay here; the street runs on until he is thirty-three years old.

At thirty-three, he finds himself back in Mississippi. He is in the outskirts of Jefferson, though he does not know nor care the name of the town. Hungry, he sees a large home, surrounded by several negro cabins. He asks the local negroes about the house, and learns that Miss Burden lives there all alone. He is surprised to learn that the local blacks look after her. Christmas watches the house until darkness falls, then approaches the kitchen door. It is unlocked, but Christmas doesn't realize this, for he's already found an open window and gains entrance through it. Inside, he raids the food in the kitchen, making no attempt to be quiet. The woman of the house enters the kitchen, holding a lit candle. She advises him in a cold voice that if it is only food he wants, he may have it.

Chapter 10 Analysis

This chapter offers a fascinating glimpse into Christmas' tortured thought process. His entire life he has been plagued by the contradictory nature of his dual heritage, unable to reconcile his black and white blood. In the south during the time he is growing up, black and white are considered oil and water. Whites will not accept Christmas, despite the fact that he looks to be one-hundred percent Caucasian, because they believe his African-American blood taints him, and makes him one-hundred percent black. African-Americans are treated as a sub-human species in the south, and thus Christmas finds no acceptance in the white community. By the same token, he is rejected by the black community, because he looks like a white man, and, quite understandably, the local black population does not trust white men.

Christmas is hardly a victim of unfortunate circumstance. He wallows in his status as an outsider, taunting the white community with his negro heritage; he instigates fight after fight to appease the anger inside him. Conversely, while living with the black community in Chicago, he taunts them with his white blood, fighting any man who dares to call him white. Thus, Christmas reveals to the reader his choice to remain an outsider. His anger is largely fueled by the injustice of his separation from society, and yet he actively encourages this separation. His own racial prejudice is simply too deep for him to accept himself because of the black bloodline which he hates and fears. Rather than feeling relieved and welcomed in the north where the white women do not reject him, he is sickened by this attitude of acceptance. Such acceptance contradicts every prejudice with which he was raised, and removes the reason for his anger. Christmas prefers to hang onto his anger rather than allow himself the societal acceptance he so deeply craves.

Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

In the soft candlelight, Miss Burden looks no more than thirty years old. Christmas will later learn that she is forty-one. They rarely speak, even after they become lovers, and so it is sometime before Christmas even learns that much. For a year, while he works at the planing mill, they rarely see each other by day. Every Saturday, she lays out a meal for him in the kitchen, but usually he is left to eat it alone. Over time, Christmas learns more about her. She corresponds frequently with various negro schools, and occasionally takes business trips to speak to the teachers and students. When Christmas learns of her commerce with negroes, he understands why the town ignores her, and realizes that he will likely not be bothered here at the Burden place. Even after a year of being lovers, she never invites him into the house, although she has given him the cabin out back for his own use. Christmas continues to enter by stealth, just as the first night, when he had forcibly taken her virginity. On subsequent nights, he has stolen into her bedroom, full of rage. Intent upon making her hate him, she instead appears to welcome his savage lovemaking.

After their second tryst, Christmas planned to leave. He took his only possession, his shaving razor, and left the cabin. However, his feet had guided him instead to the main house, where he found food laid out for him in the kitchen. "*Set out for the nigger,*" he had thought angrily. (pg. 224) He had taken each food-filled dish and thrown it against the wall. The next day, a Friday, Christmas had gone to work for the planing mill. He had not eaten since the previous Wednesday, and did not eat again until Saturday night, when he receives his first pay from the mill. For six months, he avoids the main house, taking his meals in town each night after work. He waits for Miss Burden to send for him, but she never does. Finally, one night, he returns home and finds her waiting in his cabin. She speaks about herself at great length, and Christmas realizes that all women are the same. "Whether they are seventeen or fortyseven, when they finally come to surrender completely, it's going to be in words." (pg. 227)

Miss Burden tells him that she was born and raised in the main house, and although her kin is up north in New Hampshire, she has never left Jefferson for any length of time. She tells of her family history, speaking of Calvin Burden, the son of a minister from New Hampshire named Nathaniel Burrington. Calvin had run away from home and settled in Missouri with his new wife. Having flirted with Catholicism, Calvin returns to Methodism upon the birth of his son. There is no Methodist Church in St. Louis, so he preaches to his family in his parlor. Calvin is vocal about his hatred of slavery and slaveholders, and one day kills a man in an argument over slavery. He is forced to take his family and leave St. Louis. He settles out west, where he has three more children, all daughters, before his wife dies. There is also no Methodist Church here in the west, and so he continues to preach each Sunday in his family parlor up until the time his son, named Nathaniel for the boy's grandfather, runs away from home.

Fourteen-year-old Nathaniel leaves and does not return for sixteen years. Through messengers sent by Nathaniel, his father and sisters learn that he has a woman and a child. The father, Calvin, and his daughters eventually move a hundred miles further west, yet Nathaniel still manages to find them after a long search. He shows up with his woman and child, and his father's first reaction is to pull out a strap and threaten to beat Nathaniel for running away. Nathaniel tells his father to stop, pointing out that his young son is watching from the wagon. When Calvin sees Nathaniel's woman, he is stunned at how much she resembles his dead wife, Nathaniel's mother. Her name is Juana, and their son is named Calvin, after his grandfather. Over dinner, Nathaniel explains that they have come home to be married. In the southwest, where they've been living, there are no Methodist priests, only heathens and Catholics. Their little son, Calvin, is part Mexican, although his grandfather, the elder Calvin, believes he is black. Miss Burden explains to Christmas that this younger Calvin had been her half-brother. He was killed when he was twenty years old in an argument over slavery.

Miss Burden divulges the details of the shooting. Both young Calvin and his grandfather Calvin had been killed together, right here in Jefferson, by a local war hero. The people of Jefferson hated the Burdens because they were Yankee foreigners and against slavery. The Burdens had only moved to Jefferson after the Civil War, with a government commission to help the recently freed negroes. When her brother and grandfather were killed, Miss Burden's father, Nathaniel, had to hide the graves to keep the angry townspeople from desecrating them. Miss Burden herself was born fourteen years after her half-brother Calvin's death. Her father had remarried by this time, after burying his first wife, Juana, in the hidden family burial plot. Miss Burden believes he would have left Jefferson at that time if not for the fact that his father, wife and son are all buried here. Miss Burden's mother had been a mail order bride from New Hampshire, and she hardly remembers her father.

Her primary memory of her father is the day he took her to see the family's hidden burial ground. On that day, Nathaniel had explained to her that she, along with all white people everywhere, have been cursed by God to suffer for the sins the white race has committed against the negroes. She had envisioned white babies born under the shadow of a black cross. Her father had told her that she could not escape from that shadow; the only thing she can do is struggle and rise, and raise the shadow up with her.

Christmas' only question regarding this detailed family history is why Miss Burden's father didn't kill the man who shot the son and grandfather. Miss Burden realizes that that is what Christmas would have done. She asks about his family history, and he reiterates that all he knows is that he is part black. She asks him how he knows this, and he responds that he actually doesn't have any verification of being part black. "'If I'm not, damned if I haven't wasted a lot of time.'" (pg. 241) After some thought, Miss Burden tells him that her father likely did not kill the man who murdered his family, because her father had understood that men are bound to behave as is considered right by the land where he is born and raised.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Christmas' description of his relationship with Miss Burden echoes his troubled relationship with his foster-mother. He never refers to Miss Burden by either her first or last name; he only uses "she" or "her." The scene in the kitchen when he throws her crockery and homemade food against the wall echoes the spiteful way young Joe, as a child, had treated his foster-mother's offerings of food. Joe had decided at a very young age never to accept anything from a woman. Any kindnesses shown to him by women feel threatening, and he is afraid to accept them. This defiant independence is not limited to his relationships with women. Joe is always looking for the catch when anyone gives him anything. For this reason, he refuses to accept Byron Bunch's offer of food when Joe first begins working in the planing mill. Joe is penniless at that time, and yet would rather starve than accept food from either Byron or Miss Burden. He seems to believe that accepting any sort of kindness would indebt him to another human being, a situation he likens to slavery. Given the horrifying way Joe has been treated by authority figures, his need to feel fully independent is an understandable reaction. Unfortunately, human beings are by their very nature, interdependent, and thus Joe's stubborn pride keeps him isolated from the world at large. It prevents him from succeeding in any of his endeavors except shady, back-door liquor dealings.

The author uses his penchant for flashbacks to flesh out the characters associated with Joe Christmas. Since Christmas' view of Miss Burden is rather limited, Faulkner has this character tell her own story through a historical narrative of her family history. This technique allows the author to explore her character and also provide detail and context for her relationship to Christmas. Her family's historic interest in equal rights for African-Americans is an indication to the reader that Christmas has finally found a woman who will accept him for who he is, and who does not feel his future is bleak, simply because he has black blood. Christmas' reaction, in this chapter, to this eye-opening point of view, is one of stubborn defiance. When they discuss the validity of his African-American heritage, Christmas tells her that if he is not black, he's surely wasted a lot of time. It stands to reason that Christmas has thrown away his future as a direct result of his belief that he has negro blood. This revelation again underscores Christmas' internal prejudice and self-hatred.

Ultimately, Christmas will come to resent Miss Burden for her acceptance of his heritage. Rather than uplifting him with her lack of prejudice, she threatens to upset everything he's ever believed, which is that he is worthless, because he is black. To accept Miss Burden's supportive viewpoint now would mean that Christmas would have to face the fact that his self-destructive behavior was unnecessary all along. It is clear in this chapter that a part of Christmas would like to believe in and accept Miss Burden's love. He is continually drawn to her, and remains with her for reasons he does not understand. Yet, Christmas may well have traveled too far down the path of self-destruction to turn back. It will be Miss Burden's challenge in subsequent chapters to encourage him to care about himself, her, and their future together.

Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

The conversation about family history launches the second phase of Christmas' relationship with Miss Burden. Christmas continues to work at the factory by day, but now he takes his meals alone in Miss Burden's kitchen. At night, they meet in her bedroom. She speaks to him about her day, but he considers the details of her life trivial, and assumes she thinks of him as infrequently during the day as he thinks of her. At night, they regularly engage in sexual relations, which Christmas likens to falling into a sewer. As if making up for lost time, the forty-something spinster enjoys talking dirty. Christmas notices that she is falling in love with him, and she begins to throw fits of jealous rage, although she never obtains proof of the other women he is indeed betraying her with. She tests his love by insisting he visit a hollow tree each day, to check if she has left a love letter. When he misses a letter, she is furious with him for not bothering to check the tree. She makes dates with him in the letters, instructing him where in the house he can find her hidden that night. Like a thief in the night, Christmas searches the dark house, often finding her in closets, empty rooms, or even outdoors in the shrubbery. Her behavior verges on nymphomania. In fact, within six months, he considers her behavior to be utterly corrupt.

Christmas finds her sexual appetites shocking, and begins to feel that he is sinking into a dark pit. Every day he thinks to leave, but something holds him back. This second phase of their relationship gradually merges into a third. By this time, they have been lovers for two years. Christmas still works at the planing mill, but unbeknownst to Miss Burden, he is also selling whiskey on the side. Most likely, she would not have objected to his whiskey business any more than Mrs. McEachern would have objected to the activities he hid from her as a boy, but Christmas comes to realize that he has a need to hide things from women. Gradually her nymphomania tapers off; Christmas realizes that her insatiable desire for sex is an instinctual response to the fact that the autumn of her life is almost upon her. She begins to talk of children, and their sexual trysts now take place only in the bedroom as if they were a married couple. The wild nights of nymphomaniacal perversion are gone. Christmas refuses to have a child with her, but when she asks him why not, he realizes there is no reason. He could marry her and live in peace and security for the rest of his life. Then, he realizes that if he agrees to lead that kind of life, he will be denying all the thirty years that he has lived thus far.

After Christmastime, she announces she is pregnant. She waits a month to be sure, and when she skips her menstrual cycle, she is certain of the pregnancy. Christmas' response is to avoid her until February, when he finds a note from her on his bed in the cabin. He realizes he has only been waiting for her to come to him. He intends to spend one last night with her before leaving town. However, instead, she initiates the third phase of their relationship. She refuses to sleep with him, and instead asks him if he realizes he is wasting his life. Miss Burden offers to turn over all her business affairs to him. Her plan is to put him in complete charge, and she will be his assistant. Together,

they will carry out her work with the negro schools. Christmas is horrified by her plans, and it is only later that he realizes she had not mentioned the expected baby.

By now, Christmas has taken on Brown for a partner, and is afraid that the unreliable Brown will find out about him and Miss Burden and cause trouble. Christmas sees her only once over the next two months, to tell her that Brown will be living in the cabin. Christmas expects her to take this as a challenge; he assumes she will think he's living with Brown to keep her away. Every day he finds a way to get home before Brown, expecting to find her waiting in the cabin for him. Every day he finds it empty, until one day he finds a note on his cot. He is relieved, assuming that she has given in, and is willing to resume their sexual relationship without any strings. Believing he has the upper hand, he doesn't bother to read the note. He expects that they will laugh together over their foolishness that night, and that she will never again try to plan a life with him beyond their nightly trysts. Brown enters while Christmas is shaving and dressing for his date. Curious, Brown secretly follows him to the main house before revealing his presence. Discovered in the act of meeting Miss Burden, Christmas punches Brown until Brown runs away.

Inside the kitchen, Christmas leaves the unread note on the table and proceeds to the bedroom. Her clothes and her attitude are severe; Christmas realizes he should have read the note. She informs him that she has gotten him accepted at a negro university, where he will receive free tuition. After graduation, he can learn the law from her negro lawyer in Memphis, and then she will turn over all her finances to him to manage. She even offers him the possibility of embezzling the funds in her charge, offering to help him replace the money so no one will know. All he has to do is visit the negro college and tell them that he is part black. Christmas has heard enough. He tells her to shut up. Then, he tells her she has gotten old. She slaps him fast, and he punches her hard. Picking her up, he says that she obviously is not carrying a child, and never was pregnant at all. "You just got old and it happened to you and now you are not any good anymore." (pg. 262) He releases her and she falls to the bed. She looks up through the blood on her face and tells him maybe it would be better if they both died.

She begins leaving notes regularly on his cot. When he meets her at the house, they no longer meet for sex. Inside her room, he finds her now in constant prayer. She tells him if he doesn't want to go to school, he needn't, but she will still give him her affairs to run. He refuses each time she offers. Neither of them surrenders, yet they find they cannot leave each other alone, either. One night, she asks him to kneel and pray with her. He refuses, but he agrees to stay while she prays. She rises and stares at him. She can see that his answer hasn't changed. "'Then there's just one other thing to do,'" she tells him. (pg. 265) Thinking back on this, Joe tells himself that she had said it herself, so therefore he has to do this thing. Two nights later, he knows it is time. He enters the house through the kitchen and climbs the stairs. In the bedroom, she tells him to light the lamp. He says they don't need light, but she insists. He stands over her in the dark, holding his razor, but almost against his own will, he sets it down on the table and lights the lamp. She asks is he will kneel with her in prayer, insisting that the request comes from God, not from her directly. He refuses, twice. Then, her right hand comes out from under her shawl, and he sees the gun.

Christmas stands in the middle of the road and flags down a passing car. To his surprise, it stops for him. A young man and woman shrink from him in fear as he gets in their car. The girl begins to wail, but the young man hushes her, saying it's their only chance. The boy drives reckless and fast towards the destination Christmas has chosen. The boy turns off the road, insisting to Christmas that he is only taking a short cut. Their fear and desperation disquiets Christmas, and he insists they stop the car. The boy does, rather suddenly, and before Christmas is even clear of the running board, the car peals off down the road. Only then does Christmas become aware of the fact that he's been holding the gun this entire time. The gun has already been fired once tonight; he pulls the trigger and fires it into the bushes. It had contained only two bullets, he realizes, one for him and one for her.

Chapter 12 Analysis

Just as in previous chapters, in Chapter 12 Christmas disassociates himself from his actions to avoid taking responsibility. He is so unaware of himself and his own actions that he doesn't realize he is holding a gun until after he hijacks the vehicle driven by the young couple. This is similar to his previous refusal to acknowledge that Bobbie was a prostitute, and also echoes his thoughts from Chapter 5, immediately before the murder. In Chapter 5, Christmas had thought of the murder as "something" which was "going to happen" to him. In fact, he had been so disassociated in Chapter 5 that he felt even his feet moved without his volition. He blamed the traitorous road for leading him to Freedman Town, not himself for choosing to follow it.

The road analogy further highlights the author's symbolic use of roadways in Christmas' life. Christmas runs away from everything; his first reaction is always to hit the road. The depth of his attachment to Miss Burden is evident by the fact that he stays. Christmas is unwilling, or perhaps unable, to acknowledge his feelings for her. However, by not hitting the road, he demonstrates an inner knowledge of having found a safe harbor. To Christmas, Miss Burden and her property represent an opportunity to finally get off the road. She offers him a home, in any manner he will accept it. He can continue living in the negro cabin if he prefers not to get too close, or he can move into the main house and take over the reigns of her business affairs. This ultimate step is more than Christmas can psychologically accept; he is too conditioned to turn away from his own best interests. He thinks of all the time he has wasted on his lonely road, and refuses to let go of his anger, because that would cause him to realize how much of his pain he has brought on himself. Therefore, his refusal to entertain his best interests puts him on a collision course with Miss Burden, who in the autumn of her life is determined to finally achieve her own.

Unlike Christmas, Hightower and Byron Bunch, who voluntarily choose and accept their outcast status, Miss Burden is intent on achieving the life she desires and deserves. By denying her this life, Christmas helps her raging hormones drive her to a state of wild despair, in which she sees a suicide pact as her only way out. She sees Christmas as her last chance at love, home and hearth. As a fellow outsider, he can fulfill her needs and she his. She is too beaten down to consider that she might find a better husband

than this man who treats her with violence and disgust. When menopause signals the end of her dreams to have children, she feels that all is lost, and desperately plans their mutual demise. Miss Burden's actions are more a cry for help than a persistent pattern of cruelty; such as, Christmas demonstrates. In any case, their mutual obsession reaches a fever pitch in this chapter, and the outcome of this domestic drama will drive all of the ensuing action in the novel.

Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Before the sheriff arrives at the Burden place, a gathering crowd has already begun to conjecture about the murderer. The assumption and unspoken hope is that some negro has committed the murder and hopefully ravished the body, too. The fire truck arrives, but is useless to put out the fire as there is no water supply to hook up to the hoses. The townspeople are eager to take vengeance for the white woman's death, even though she had been a virtual stranger and a nigger-lover, too. The sheriff does not realize the fire was intentionally set until the countryman finally remembers the drunken man he saw in the hallway of the burning building. The sheriff calls for his deputy to bring him a nigger. The lawmen grab a random black man and drag him into the cabin to be questioned. The sheriff wants to know who lives in the cabin. The negro is uncooperative until the men begin beating him with a strap. Finally, he mentions Christmas and Brown, and the sheriff nods his approval; he had already known this. The sheriff returns to town, and the crowd clears out after him.

In the bank vault, they find the dead woman's final instructions to contact her lawyer in Memphis and her nephew in New Hampshire. The sheriff carries out the instructions, despite the fact that the lawyer is a negro. By that evening, everyone in town has heard that the nephew is offering a thousand-dollar reward for the capture of the murderer. By nine o'clock, Brown shows up in the town square looking for the sheriff. He gives up Christmas as the murderer and claims the reward. After Brown is locked up for safekeeping in the jail, the sheriff orders a pair of bloodhounds from a nearby town. They arrive on the early morning train. At the cabin, the bloodhounds refuse to enter the woods; they stand at the cabin door and bay. That night, a boy and his father visit the sheriff to tell him about how the boy's car had been hijacked near the scene of the murder by a man with a gun. They take the dogs to the spot in the road where the boy had let Christmas out of the car. The dogs find the pistol. The men let the dogs loose, hoping they'll pick up Christmas' trail. Instead, the dogs get lost. By the time the men find them, it is Monday morning.

Monday brings a heat wave, and by Tuesday evening when Byron enters Hightower's house, the heat has made the unwashed bachelor's home and clothes smell terrible. Byron believes this is the odor of Hightower's goodness, and that it only smells bad to Byron, because he is bad. Byron tells Hightower that he plans to move Lena into the cabin on the Burden property so that she can have her baby in peace. Hightower asks if Lena has heard about the murder and Brown's bootlegging business yet. It has been three days since the fire, and he doesn't imagine Byron can keep it secret any more. Byron admits that Lena has known all along Brown is no good. She had indeed heard the bootlegging rumors days ago, and she had already realized that Brown had changed his name so Lena wouldn't find him. Lena knows all this, and yet she still believes that the Lord will arrange for her family to be together when the baby is born. Hightower asks if Brown knows that Lena is in town. Byron replies that Brown has been

too busy helping the sheriff and dogs hunt for Christmas, intent on getting the reward money. Byron admits that Lena does not know yet that Brown is being kept in the jail, or that he was the man who fingered Christmas to the sheriff.

Lena decides to move into the cabin, believing it to be Lucas Burch's house. Byron figures it's the closest thing to a house Burch/Brown has, so she might as well stay there. Hightower says the matter is settled, then. Lena will live in the cabin until she gives birth, and then Byron will inform Brown that she is there. Byron responds that Brown will certainly run when he hears the news. Hightower notices the triumphant look on Byron's face before he can hide it. Hightower warns him about coming between man and wife. Byron tells him they are not married. Even so, Hightower says they are married in the eyes of God, and certainly in Lena's eyes. Byron thinks that if Brown can get the thousand-dollar reward money, he might actually marry Lena. However, Hightower is not fooled; he knows Byron wants Brown to run so that he can have Lena to himself. Byron begs him for his advice, but Hightower responds that Byron is already being helped by the devil.

The next day, walking home from the store, Hightower muses that the devil is also helping Christmas. He had learned at the store that Christmas is still on the loose, although the sheriff has found his trail. Walking home in the heat, Hightower is upset at the thought of being dragged back into the life of the town he has avoided for so long. Later, as he sits alone at the window, he sees Byron turn in at his gate. Byron carries himself differently, "*As though he has learned pride, or defiance,*" thinks Hightower. (pg. 294) Byron's attitude is that of someone who has made a decision which he knows his friend will not support. He tells Hightower that he has moved Lena to the cabin, and that Byron is camping out a short distance away to keep an eye on her. Hightower begs him to leave town. Hightower points out that Byron's only two options are sin or marriage, and he knows Byron is too good to sin by being with Lena without marrying her. Byron defends Lena as a woman who has been hurt and betrayed. Hightower considers her damaged goods and begs Byron not to sacrifice his life by marrying a woman who has already slept with another man, and carries his baby. Byron says that it is Lena who has been sacrificed, but Hightower insists that the suffering of women pales next to the suffering which women have caused men. With nothing more to say, Byron leaves. Hightower wishes he had not given up the habit of praying. He considers praying now, but instead picks up a Tennyson book and escapes into the story.

Chapter 13 Analysis

Byron's thoughts about Hightower's odor, the odor of goodness, highlight the paradoxical moral dilemma in which Byron finds himself. To live in Jefferson under the perverse moral mores of the times is a paradox in itself, as the author demonstrates in this chapter. What is considered good, just and right by the people of Jefferson is often in conflict with what the human spirit considers good and just and right. Take for example the lawmen's treatment of the local man they confine for questioning. As far as the sheriff is concerned, there is only one interchangeable African-American citizen; he tells his men to go grab a negro, meaning any black person will do, and then proceeds

to torture him for information which is already common knowledge. It's obvious that the black man has nothing whatsoever to do with the crime, and is not suspected of anything. This kind of behavior - by lawmen, no less - lends confusion by to the entire town about what is considered good and evil. It even lends credibility to the reasoning behind Christmas' murderous rage.

Byron sees Hightower as a good man; a man of God who wants nothing more than to stay out of trouble. When it comes to women, however, Hightower's harsh attitude only serves to confuse Byron's sense of justice. Byron feels Lena has been treated unjustly by the man who abandoned her, and believes he can take on the role of loving husband and father to her child. Lena's faith in God seems rewarded by Byron's sudden depth of feeling for her. Byron, unlike the child's father, has scruples and is capable of supporting a family. Byron's scruples are confused, however, by Hightower's advice. Hightower, whom he admires, tells him that Lena is damaged goods, and that Byron should hold out for a virgin. He makes Byron feel that his feelings for Lena are wrong. Byron agrees to respectfully disagree, and continues to count on his friend Hightower's loyalty.

Byron is good to a fault, and has a very hard time not following the advice of a man of God. The smelly odor of unwashed bachelor socks and dirty dishes which permeates Hightower's house is something people would naturally shrink from. However, Byron convinces himself it is the odor of goodness, and that he, Byron, is simply not a good enough man to appreciate its exalted bouquet. Fortunately, Byron's sense of self is strong enough that he is ultimately able to follow his heart rather than Hightower's cold advice. Later in the novel, the author will develop Hightower's character further, exposing his poor relations with women, and thereby supporting Byron's decision not to take a bitter old man's advice.

Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

The deputy informs the sheriff that a woman is living in the cabin, and that Byron Bunch is camped nearby in a tent. Lena has told the deputy the whole story of her journey to find Lucas Burch, and the deputy informs the sheriff that Joe Brown/Lucas Burch is the father of her expected child. The sheriff says he doesn't intend to tell Brown about Lena at this point.

In the middle of the night, a negro arrives at the sheriff's home to tell him that a white man interrupted church services and terrorized the black congregation. The man is holed up in the church now, and unbeknownst to the negro messenger, he has already killed one of the men in the congregation. The congregation stakes out the church, but they do not see Christmas slip out into the night. The next morning, the sheriff arrives with the bloodhounds. Inside the church, he finds an insulting note from Christmas addressed to the sheriff. They find Christmas' tracks outside and follow them a long ways to a negro cabin. Inside the cabin, they find a black woman and her baby. She tells them that a man had traded his shoes for hers that morning near the church. The sheriff suspects he's holed up in the cotton house right next to the church. In fact, Christmas had only paused in the cotton house long enough to lace up the shoes the woman had given him.

Christmas believes the shoes smell of negro, and with them on his feet, he feels that his black blood is at last transforming him into a negro. He is barely coherent as he escapes through the woods. Each time he stops to ask for food, he is recognized and shunned. This is how he knows he is still close to Jefferson. He drifts in and out of sleep as he wanders. He forces himself to eat rotten fruit and hard corn to keep alive, and vaguely recalls eating real food at a table surrounded by terrified negroes. He muses to think they would have been afraid of a fellow negro. He has no idea which day of the week it is. Finally, he meets a stranger on the road who does not recognize him. The stranger offers him a ride to nearby Mottstown, where the stranger is from. In the wagon, Christmas relaxes at last and sleeps. When they arrive at Mottstown, Christmas is surprised to realize that he is still within the small circle from which he began running thirty years ago. He can feel the blackness rising up his legs from the negro shoes he wears.

Chapter 14 Analysis

Christmas believes he is undergoing a process of personal transformation. When he puts on the pair of black men's shoes, which he borrows from the woman, he feels that his black blood is finally manifesting itself in the physical world. His entire life he has felt like a black man, and had behaved in the manner a prejudiced white man expects a black man to behave. He has been at war with the two, seemingly irreconcilable, sides

of himself. To live in a society of pure segregation as half black and half white is to be always an outsider, regardless of which society he tries to merge with. However, that was only the case in the southern states. Up north, Christmas had found a very different reaction to his heritage. Instead of embracing his newfound acceptance in the north, Christmas returned to the land of his birth to live out his days as an outcast. He rubs his African-American blood in Caucasian men's faces, but refuses to admit to Miss Burden's negro college that he has any negro blood, even though it would get him free tuition.

Joe does not see his internal conflict as a psychological struggle; to him it is a physical problem. The black blood in him is to blame for every bad thing he's been and done. Interestingly, the white lawmen, in a later chapter, will echo that belief that the crimes were caused by the black blood, and the white blood is responsible for every good thing Christmas does. The source of Christmas' prejudice against his own blood is evident in the society around him. Even Miss Burden understands that men are bound to act in a manner consistent with the land of their upbringing.

Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

An old couple, named Hines, lives in Mottstown. They arrived thirty years ago. For the first five years, Mr. Hines worked in Memphis, and only came home once a month. The town knows little about this fanatical man; they never really understood what type of work he did in Memphis. Nonetheless, when he left the Memphis job and settled down with his wife in their home, the locals hired him to do odd jobs. Eventually, they learn that Hines preaches in negro churches. A younger man would have been crucified for such a thing, but Hines is old and apparently insane, so the citizens of Mottstown leave him alone. The Hines' live primarily off the charity of negroes, who supply them with food. Mrs. Hines is never seen outside the house, but Mr. Hines, or Uncle Doc as he is known, can often be seen on the town square, speaking strange and nonsensical ravings. Later, the town learns that the preaching Uncle Doc has been doing in negro churches is about the racial superiority of the white race. The negroes believe he is crazy, and thus supply him with charity.

On the Friday when Christmas is captured, Uncle Doc is overcome with violence when he hears the news. He forces his way through the crowd and beats the already bleeding Christmas with a stick. When the others drag him away, he orders them to kill the bastard. Two of the townsmen escort him home. They see Mrs. Hines for the first time when she opens the door. Her face expresses shock when they tell her Christmas has been caught. Without even thanking them, she takes her husband inside. As the men leave, they comment that it appears the Hines' know Christmas personally. Inside the house, Mrs. Hines confronts her husband, forcing him out of the stupor into which he has fallen. She says she hasn't troubled him with questions in thirty years, but now she must know what happened to Milly's baby.

Mottstown is abuzz with the gossip about Christmas, the nigger who looks like a white man. The gossip is that he killed a white woman in Jefferson, and then strolled into Mottstown in broad daylight. A man named Halliday recognized him, and Christmas hadn't even bothered to deny his identity. Halliday yelled for help and beat Christmas until Uncle Doc showed up and tried to beat him, too. Christmas was taken to the jail to await transport to Jefferson, while Uncle Doc stood on the street corner trying to stir the crowd into lynching Christmas. Soon after the townsmen had taken Uncle Doc home, he returned to town to continue stirring up trouble against Christmas. Before anyone could do anything, his wife had shown up, dressed in her Sunday best. She ordered her husband to take a seat on the bench in the square, and to the town's amazement, he complied. Then, she went to the jail, asking to see Christmas. The deputy told her only the sheriff could give such permission. He sent her to the sheriff's house, even though the sheriff was actually at the jail the whole time. Mrs. Hines went to the house, and by the time she returned to the jail, the Jefferson sheriff was already there to remove Christmas. She pushed her way through the crowd, and then just stood there, staring.

After Christmas is escorted back to Jefferson, she and her husband go to hire a car to drive to Jefferson. The town gossips can tell that both husband and wife are intent on seeing Christmas, though their motives appear to be in conflict. It is as if she is trying to stop Doc Hines from doing something. The price of the rental car is too high, and so the couple goes to the train station. They wait patiently from four in the evening until the two a.m. for a train bound for Jefferson. Mrs. Hines waits quietly, but crazy Uncle Doc occasionally breaks out hollering about "'Bitchery and abomination.'" (pg. 341)

Chapter 15 Analysis

The author again assigns a voice and a personality to the town of Mottstown, as he did earlier with the town of Jefferson. This conceit not only helps convey the collective sentiments regarding the Christmas murder case, but it is also an efficient method of furthering the plot exposition. The author has revealed, through the town's gossip, that the Hines' have some connection to Christmas. At the end of Chapter 14, Christmas realizes that the road he has traveled for thirty years has brought him full circle back to where he started. That realization leads directly into the introduction of the Hines' in Chapter 15, and together these two chapters foreshadow the author's intent to reveal the truth about Christmas' origins.

Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

Byron finds Hightower asleep in his back yard. Byron wakes him and asks if he's heard that Christmas has been caught in Mottstown. Byron tells Hightower that Christmas is in the Jefferson jail, and that he is all right. Hightower accuses Byron of selling out Christmas to help his pregnant girlfriend's lover get the thousand-dollar reward. Hightower begins to cry. He chastises Byron for causing him to get involved with the events of the town after all these years of isolation. Byron is sorry to have done it, but he insists that Hightower has a duty as a man of God. Hightower reminds him that he has been stripped of that title. Byron reminds Hightower that he made his choice to be a man of God long before Byron was even born. Then, he tells his friend about Christmas' grandmother.

At the moment between dusk and darkness, Hightower sits in his window listening to the music of his former church. With every note, he recalls what he would have been doing at that particular point in the sermon. As he hears the Protestant music, Hightower reflects on how the religion has taught the congregation to revere death and crucifixion. "*And so why should not their religion drive them to crucifixion of themselves and one another?*" In the music, he seems to hear their plans to crucify Christmas. It seems to him that they will do this gladly, and he believes they must. If they allow themselves to pity Christmas, they will be filled with intolerable self-doubt, and might even recognize the need to pity themselves. Just then, he sees Byron arrive with Mr. and Mrs. Hines.

Mrs. Hines still wears her Sunday best. She cannot bring herself to say what she has come to say. Byron prompts her gently, and finally begins to speak for her. Christmas, he tells Hightower, is their daughter's child. Mr. Hines spirited the child away right after it was born, and she has never known until now whether the child had survived. Doc Hines breaks in and begins gleefully relating how he took the baby. He speaks incoherently about the other children calling Christmas a nigger, and about the dietician. Byron apologizes, saying it was impossible to leave Doc Hines behind tonight, because he keeps trying to incite the mob to lynch Christmas. The woman speaks up at last. She says that for fifty years, her husband has been violent. On the night their daughter, Milly, was born, he had been locked in jail for fighting. After Milly's birth, Mrs. Hines convinced him to move away from the city, hoping to keep him out of trouble so that he would be a fit father to their child. Here, Byron picks up the thread of her story to save some time. He explains that when Milly was eighteen, she had an affair with a man from a traveling circus. When Doc Hines found out about her "bitchery and abomination," he had gone out and caught them together.

Milly told her father that her lover was Mexican, but Hines knew he was black. He shot the man in cold blood and brought Milly back to the house. Here, Mrs. Hines resumes the story, telling Hightower she tried to stop her husband from going after Milly, but he had beaten her. When Milly and Doc Hines returned to the house, Doc Hines told his

wife that she bore him a whore. They realized Milly was with child, and Doc Hines went out to find a doctor to perform an abortion. He was unable to find any doctor, and Mrs. Hines thought that God had conquered the devil. Meanwhile, Doc Hines was let off for the murder, because the circus owner testified that Milly's lover had indeed been part nigger, not Mexican. Mrs. Hines begged her husband to move to another town where Milly's baby would have a chance, since there was no proof other than the circus owner's word that the father was black. Doc Hines was overcome with crazed violence, however, and wound up in jail until it was almost time for Milly to give birth. When he got out of jail, his quiet demeanor again gave his wife hope that God conquered the devil.

When Milly went into labor, Mrs. Hines sent her husband out for the doctor. He left, but when she went to the door to look for his return, she found that he was sitting on the stoop the entire time. He told her the devil can gather his own crop. She tried to escape out the back to fetch a doctor, but Eupheus hit her with the barrel of his gun and sent her back inside. He stood in the hallway and watched silently as Milly died in childbirth. That night, he disappeared without a word, leaving her to take care of Milly's baby. Twice he sent money, and she prayed that he had a change of heart and intended to make a home for them and their grandbaby somewhere. However, one day while she was out chopping wood, he stole the baby, leaving a note for her on the bed. After Christmas, he returned home without the baby, refusing to tell her if little Joey was alive or dead. Eupheus only told her that he is the instrument of God's will, and that the baby was an abomination. Eupheus took a job in Memphis, and her hope was renewed, thinking that he had the child stashed somewhere in the city. She sewed baby clothes for Joey and gave them to her husband to take, but she never found out if Joey received the clothes or not, or if he was indeed alive. After a while, he moved them to Mottstown. She begged to see the baby, and he told that Joey was dead.

Hightower listens in amazement. Doc Hines speaks again, saying that he carried out God's will. The Lord tells Doc Hines that it was no accident the people at the orphanage named the baby Christmas when they found him on the doorstep on Christmas day. This sacrilege was part of God's plan. The dietician was also part of God's plan. Once little Joe Christmas was sent away from the orphanage, God told Doc Hines that his work was done. But one night, Doc Hines cried out that he could feel the bastard's evil; and God told him he still had more work to do.

After telling his story, Doc Hines relapses into his stupor. Hightower asks what they expect him to do about any of this. The woman begs for a chance to get to know her grandson. Hightower, beginning to panic, insists that Byron tell him what they want. Byron asks him to provide an alibi for Christmas. He wants Hightower to pretend that Christmas was having an affair with him, not Miss Burden, and that Christmas was with Hightower the night of the murder. The town, insists Byron, would believe this story, and it would set Christmas free. Hightower admits that they would believe it, but he shouts that he will not do it. Byron realizes his shouts are directed at God, attempts to convince God to lift this burden from Hightower. Hightower orders them all out of his house.

Chapter 16 Analysis

Hightower's meditation on the concept of crucifixion at the beginning of this chapter underscores one of the author's central themes. William Faulkner has written Christmas as a Christ figure, with an emphasis on the aspect of sacrifice. Hightower muses how the churches glorify crucifixion, and therefore, he forgives the town for what he feels is their crucifixion of Joe Christmas. Hightower himself was beaten and tied to a tree by the town's local KKK years ago, and as a fellow minority, he can empathize with what Christmas must feel, due to the unrelenting persecution from the town.

In this chapter, the question of Hightower's sexual orientation is raised. This question sheds additional light on his inability or unwillingness to satisfy his wife, and also explains the town's treatment of Hightower. A southern town during this era would have no more use for a homosexual than for black people, especially as their spiritual leader. Rumors of Hightower's homosexuality might well have sparked his expulsion from the church, even if no one ever made that the reason of record. Byron's request for Hightower to sacrifice his own reputation to save Christmas' life seems too much to ask, as far as Hightower is concerned. However, Byron knows that Hightower is fundamentally a decent man, and will feel compelled to help right the fundamental injustice done to Christmas and to his grandmother.

Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

Lena's child is born the following morning. Six hours after leaving Hightower's, Byron finds himself there, again, to ask a large favor. He breaks in and makes his way through the darkened house, led as if by an unseen force, directly to Hightower. Byron thinks ironically that both Lena and Hightower would believe he was being led, but Lena would say by God, and Hightower would say by the devil. Byron experiences remorse for involving Hightower, but wakes him regardless and asks him to take his medical book to the cabin to deliver the baby. Before Hightower can even reply, Byron is gone, again trusting to Hightower's innate sense of responsibility to his fellow man.

Byron walks through the town of Jefferson, thinking rapidly. He curses himself for not having arranged for a doctor to be on hand. He knows now that he will have to tell a string of lies to the doctor to get him to come, and Byron is not a good liar. Without even realizing it, his feet make the decision for him. He goes to the house of the doctor who had officiated at the Hightower's previous delivery of the stillborn negro baby. The doctor is a fussy old man, and takes a long time to dress. They arrive just as the infant's first squall greets the world. The doctor congratulates Hightower on having better luck this time around, and then reproaches Byron for bothering to get the doctor out of bed since Hightower was already there.

The doctor assumes the old man and woman by the bed are the grandparents. Mrs. Hines asks the doctor to see to Milly, and calls the baby Joey. Meanwhile, Byron has remained outside the door. The baby's first cry has unleashed his pent up emotions. Suddenly, Byron realizes that he had not arranged for a doctor, because he has been in denial about the fact that Lena was carrying another man's child. He tells himself if he had fully realized the fact, he would have left town. Meanwhile, inside, Hightower is satisfied that things are under control. The old man is asleep, and Mrs. Hines keeps guard over the baby.

Outside the cabin, Hightower realizes that Byron is gone. Irritated that Byron is forcing him to walk the two miles back home, Hightower sets off in poor spirits. By the time he gets home, however, he realizes that he actually feels better than he's felt in a long time. He is proud of having beaten the doctor to a successful delivery, and realizes that there is life in him yet. He takes a book into the back yard and promptly falls asleep. He thinks again of Lena and the baby. He knows Lena will have more children, by Byron this time, and he feels sorry for Byron. He shaves, dresses, and then walks the two miles back to the cabin, enjoying the walk. He spares a thought for Miss Burden, who died just days before life returned to her home. Lena is disappointed when he enters; she had been expecting Brown. The old couple is gone, back to town, Lena says. The old man had slipped out while Mrs. Hines slept, and when she woke she had gone after him. Lena tells him she has not named the baby boy yet, and Hightower realizes that she is waiting to see if Brown will acknowledge their child.

Hightower asks Lena to let Byron go instead of forcing him into living with a woman who has brought another man's child into the relationship. Lena says the choice is Byron's whether to go or stay. Lena tells him that she had refused Byron's marriage proposal. Hightower realizes that she will continue to say no until she has had a chance to see Brown. In tears, Lena says that Byron had come by this morning, refusing to look at the baby, and had asked if tonight would be a good time for him to bring Brown. Crying, Lena reproaches Hightower, saying that he is worrying her for nothing, when she feels certain that Byron has left her for good. Hightower puts a hand on her head, even as he silently thanks God for the fact that Byron has abandoned Lena. Hightower walks to the planing mill and is told that Byron quit that morning. They tell him Byron is in town, where Christmas is to be hung that very day. Hightower is upset that Byron left without saying goodbye to him.

Chapter 17 Analysis

New life comes to several of the characters in this chapter. Lena, of course, has her newborn child. Hightower finds himself unexpectedly satisfied by his morning's work delivering the child, and enjoys being out of the house for the first time in years. He has begun to participate in his own life for the first time in years, thanks to Byron, Lena, Christmas and the Hineses. Mrs. Hines, too, seems to be experiencing the birth of hope as a result of the birth of Lena's child. Having been beaten down and kicked around by her crazy, violent husband for years, she is filled with renewed hope of seeing her grandbaby Joey again.

The only sour note amidst this newfound hope comes from the men. Upon being confronted by Lena and Brown's son, Byron feels he's been taken for a fool; he thinks Hightower was right about Lena all along. Meanwhile Hightower dispenses his unwelcome and judgmental advice to Lena, instructing her to leave Byron alone. The thought of Byron marrying Lena and fathering children by her is repulsive to Hightower, and he feels sorry for Byron. Similarly, Doc Hines is lurking in the background with his crazy rantings about Bitchery and Abomination. The reader knows he is fully capable of punishing another young woman with death for giving birth to a child out of wedlock. Lena does not know Doc Hines allowed his own daughter to die in childbirth and then stole the child from his own wife, but she does not relax until he leaves the cabin. Thus, it is the male characters, not the female, who judge Lena. This underscores the author's early point that the men of society set harsh rules of conduct for women, which they are not expected to follow themselves, and then blame the women for forcing one another to adhere to the rules.

Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

In town, Byron is told he will have to wait until the Grand Jury lets out before he can speak to the sheriff. He spends the time feeling sorry for himself for having to take care of another man's whore. He goes to see his landlady, undecided if he's moving out or not. However, she has already heard the talk about him living in a tent next to Lena's cabin, and has already rented his room to someone else. He tells her she has no right to say anything bad about Lena. She acknowledges that most of the gossip in town about her and Byron is being generated by women, but she tells him "that women don't mean anything when they talk. It's menfolks that take talking serious. It aint any woman that believes hard against you and her." (pg. 397) The landlady claims to understand the situation better than Byron. She says that the women in town could've settled the Christmas matter in ten minutes, though it's taking the men days. She also says that Brown will surely receive the reward for no other reason than the sheriff will feel guilty for having wrongly suspected him of murder. Byron admits that's the case, and also admits that he is leaving town, which she seemed to know even before he made up his mind.

When the sheriff comes out, Byron explains about Lena and the child. The sheriff agrees to send Brown out to the cabin in the company of a deputy that evening, but insists that Brown not be warned who or what awaits him there. The sheriff assumes Byron intends to leave town now that Brown and Lena are reunited, and Byron tells him he is heading up to Memphis. That evening, Byron hides nearby and watches as the deputy arrives at the cabin with Brown. The deputy sends Brown in alone. Byron saddles his mule and hits the road. He stops to look back at the crest of a hill, just in time to see Brown run out the back door of the cabin, unnoticed by the deputy waiting in front. Unwilling to let Brown get away, Byron gives chase.

Earlier, when the deputy picked up Brown at the jail, he told Brown that the reward money was waiting for him at the cabin. The deputy pushed him into the cabin, telling him his reward was inside. Lena watches the shock on Brown's face give way first to outrage, then terror. His eyes dart about the room, seeking escape. After a moment, Brown smiles and says Lena must have gotten the message he sent her to come join him. His voice dies under her steady gaze. She tells him to come over and look at the child. Reluctantly, he takes the chair she offers him. Lena tells him there is a preacher nearby, and asks him what kind of work he is doing at the planing mill. He tells her he's quit the mill, and complains about how poorly he was treated there, and how they worked him like a nigger. She tells him she has faith in him, but wants to know when they will marry. She has more than herself to worry about now, she reminds him. He stalls, saying he's working on getting the reward money. After that, he trails off, unable to say the word marriage. Pleadingly, he tells her he is very busy with the reward money, and has to go work on that. Finally, she deliberately releases him. Unable to

keep lying under her steady gaze, he tiptoes to the window, giving her one last look before vanishing.

Brown flees like a hunted animal through the woods. He reaches the train tracks and pauses for a moment. Then, he runs to a nearby negro cabin and pays a young boy to take a message to town. He writes out a note asking the sheriff to give the reward money to the messenger, wrapped up in paper so the messenger will not know what he carries. He tells the boy to bring the message to the top of the grade which runs along the railroad track. Brown goes to wait in the trees atop the grade. Along the way, the boy sees Byron pass by. When Byron asks about Brown, the boy tells him about the other white man waiting atop the grade by the railroad tracks.

Brown talks to himself as he returns to the railroad tracks. He tells himself there is no way the negro boy will succeed in getting the money from the sheriff and bringing it back to Brown. Filled with feelings of frustration and impotence, he decides to wait for the messenger, although he is certain he will never see that reward money now. He speaks aloud to himself that all he wanted was to see justice done. Suddenly, from behind him, Byron's voice tells him to stand. Byron is considerably smaller than Brown, and the fight lasts only two minutes before Brown leaves Byron lying in the weeds. After a while, Byron hears a train whistle and struggles to sit upright. He wipes the blood from his face and watches as Brown leaps onto the passing train and vanishes with it. He stands there, imagining what he will say when he returns to Lena. A man passing by in a wagon interrupts him with the news that Christmas has been killed.

Chapter 18 Analysis

Again in this chapter, the author accentuates his premise that women are treated unfairly and subjected to a societal double standard. Faulkner implies that men blame women for this double standard, although it is imposed by the men themselves. Byron's conversation with his landlady is an amusing recap of this premise. Byron, who had moments before been thinking of Lena as a whore and of the baby as another man's leftovers, ironically admonishes the landlady for making assumptions about Lena's character. The landlady informs him in no uncertain terms that the women of Jefferson see nothing wrong with his relationship to Lena. She implies that women have better common sense and are less impaired by false moral arguments than men. In fact, she claims the town's women could have resolved the Christmas matter in no time, while the men continue to dither about how to handle it.

The men's actions throughout the rest of the chapter support her theory. First, the sheriff and Byron agree that the best thing is for Byron to leave town and abandon Lena. Byron's heart rebels against this, however, for he feels sufficient responsibility to Lena to wait and watch how Brown will react to the news of his fatherhood. Once Brown confirms Byron's low opinion of him by escaping out the window, Byron gives chase. In that day and age, shotgun weddings were not uncommon, and the men of the town, not the women, would likely have forced Brown to marry Lena if he had been caught. By

giving up the advantage of surprise and allowing Brown to escape, Byron leaves open the possibility of him marrying Lena and stepping into the void left by the natural father.

According to the landlady, the women of the town have already approved of Byron and Lena's union, being in a better position than Byron to understand Lena and the baby's needs. As the landlady implies, the townswomen could have saved everybody some time; they've already accepted the fact that Brown is no good, and have approved Lena's marriage to Byron. It seems a kinder alternative than punishing her further for past mistakes. Thus, the men's idea of morality proves to be impractical and unfeeling to the needs of a family, whereas the women, deemed judgmental by the men, are quickest to support a positive resolution for Lena, the baby and Byron. It follows that the women of Jefferson would likely show far more mercy to Christmas and his grandmother than the lawmen have in mind.

Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

The gossip around the dinner tables in Jefferson that night centers on Christmas' escape, and why he chose to take refuge in Hightower's house. Some think it was pure chance, others say it was a smart move, because no one would have suspected he was there had he not been seen sneaking across the back yard to the kitchen door. The District Attorney, Gavin Stevens, has another theory. Stevens had run into an old Harvard friend at the train station, while escorting Mr. and Mrs. Hines to their train. Stevens assures Mrs. Hines that Christmas' body will be shipped to them in the morning, and then rides back to town with his old friend and tells him the story. Stevens' theory is that the grandmother had convinced Christmas to seek sanctuary at Hightower's, hoping somehow to save him.

Stevens thinks the birth of Lena's baby had given Mrs. Hines hope that Christmas could be saved, and thanks to Byron Bunch, she had found in Hightower a willing ear to hear her story. Mrs. Hines had whispered instructions to Christmas in jail earlier today, even while her husband stood outside stirring up the mob to lynch his grandson. Stevens believes that Christmas had found hope through his grandmother, and thus had taken the opportunity to escape when he saw it. However, Stevens thinks Christmas' black blood ultimately prevented him from escaping. Yet, says Stevens, it was his white blood that prevented him from shooting the policemen who came to Hightower's house and shot Christmas dead.

A young man named Percy Grimm has lived in Jefferson his whole life. Though he is a member of the National Guard, he was born in peacetime, and was denied his opportunity to go to war and see the action he so dearly craves. When Christmas is brought back to Jefferson from Mottstown, Percy announces the need to preserve law and order. He forms a platoon out of the local American legion post and places himself in command. Despite the sheriff's protests, Grimm and his men keep an armed watch around the jail. After forty-eight hours, Grimm and his men are convinced that they are the law, and no longer listen to the sheriff's protests. Grimm enjoys the admiring glances his uniform and gun win him from the townspeople. The sheriff ignores Grimm's advice about guarding Christmas, since DA Stevens has told the sheriff that Christmas will plead guilty to avoid the death penalty. When Christmas makes a run for it, Percy Grimm is suddenly filled with the joy of finding his life's purpose.

He and the men pursue the fugitive, but Grimm alone seems to know how Christmas thinks, and manages to intercept him when everyone else is looking elsewhere. Grimm is filled with joy when Christmas eludes him the first time; his quarry is worthy of a man like Grimm. It is Grimm who sees Christmas run into Hightower's house, and he summons his men to accompany him inside. They burst in, completely ignoring Hightower's protests that Christmas is innocent and was with him during the night of the murder. Grimm corners Christmas in the kitchen, behind an overturned table, and

empties his revolver into the table. Grimm leans over the table, sees that Christmas is not yet dead, and takes out his knife. Percy Grimm castrates the still-living Christmas, and watches the black blood shoot out of his body through his loins.

Chapter 19 Analysis

This chapter describes the blinding prejudice of the local lawmen, both appointed and self-declared. The District Attorney, despite being a Harvard graduate and man of the world, subscribes to the same ignorant theory about black and white blood which has caused Christmas to become a murderer in the first place. Stevens has no respect for African-Americans, and thinks Christmas' black blood makes it okay for Stevens to treat him as less than an animal. Stevens believes he is being merciful when he promises to ship Christmas' dead body back to his grandmother the following morning. As the District Attorney, he obviously does not care to examine the evidence, facts and background of the case before rendering judgment. Christmas has black blood, and therefore he gets the death penalty or at best, life in prison, without any kind of a fair trial.

Stevens thinks it was Christmas' white blood which prevented him from killing Percy Grimm, though from what the reader has learned about Grimm, he appears to be far more dangerous than Christmas. At the time this novel was written, many literary critics conjectured, probably rightfully, that Grimm's character depicted the problem of fascism. Today, with the advent of criminal and psychological profiling, a man like Grimm might be rejected by the military. Grimm's avarice for bloodshed and heroism is known to lead to abuse of power. In fact, in today's society, Grimm's desire to achieve glory and fame through murder more closely resembles the FBI profile of terrorist extremists than the profile of a fascist. In either case, Grimm's brand of extremism was as dangerous in the nineteen-thirties as it is today.

Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary

The final light of afternoon fades into night as Hightower watches. He remembers watching the light fade as a young man, fresh from the seminary and new to Jefferson. He never even told his wife, back when they were still in love, how the light had seemed audible to him. Hightower was an only child, and his father refused to own slaves. So, during the war, Hightower's mother had eaten only the meager food she was able to grow herself in the garden. Hightower blamed his father for the fact that his mother became an invalid, due, Hightower believed, to malnutrition. At age twenty-one, his father, too, was a minister, preaching at a Presbyterian church far out in the hills. His father, Hightower's grandfather, laughed when he had heard. During the Civil War, his father served, wearing his minister's frock coat in lieu of a uniform. After the war, his mother packed the frock coat away in the attic, where eight-year-old Hightower found it. The coat bore the scars of war, and made an indelible impression on the boy.

Young Hightower wondered how many Yankees his father killed, and began to take an interest in his grandfather, whom, according to the family's negro cook, killed hundreds of Yankees. Hightower's grandfather died twenty years before Hightower's birth, and even when alive, he never came to visit Hightower's parents, because the grandfather could not accept the fact that his son was an abolitionist. Hightower's father, unlike his grandfather, disliked drinking, violence and slavery. The father learned to be a doctor during the war, and practiced as a civilian surgeon afterwards. The grandfather had always been a thorn in his side, but despite their differences, the grandfather gave Hightower's parents his own house and negro slave. After the war, his father freed the slave, but she returned and insisted on living with them as their cook, once she realized that the elder Hightower was not going to return. Through her, Hightower learned about his grandfather's death.

The cook's husband, also a slave, loyally accompanied the grandfather to war, and after the grandfather's disappearance, the slave refused to believe anyone would dare kill a Hightower. The slave was killed for attacking a white man who dared say such a thing, leaving the cook a widow. The grandfather, they eventually learned, was shot and killed while riding a horse through the town of Jefferson.

When Hightower enters the seminary, he is intent on being posted to Jefferson. At the seminary, Hightower is snared by one of the minister's daughters. She is older than he is and intent on finding a husband who will take her as far from seminary life as possible. For two years, they exchange romantic notes in a hollow tree. When she finally mentions marriage, Hightower is taken aback. Marriage to him is a state of living death, similar to his parents' marriage; he always thought of his parents as two ghosts haunting his home. She speaks of escaping the seminary, and tells Hightower she can help him land the post in Jefferson. She plots and plans and succeeds in getting him the post. Once they are married, the calculation recedes from her face, but so too does the

passion. However, his passion to see Jefferson at last supersedes all. He recalls the story to his new wife, of how his grandfather, not even an officer, led a handful of men into Jefferson, which was then occupied by the Yankees. They set fire to ammunition and stores, and could have ridden safely out of town had the starving men not stopped to steal chickens from a henhouse. The negro cook liked to think that the bullet that killed the elder Hightower came from the gun of a soldier's wife, guarding her hens, but no one ever knew for sure. To Hightower, his grandfather became an emblem of reckless, laughing, mythic heroism.

His wife tried to keep Hightower from babbling this story to the new residents of Jefferson. Hightower thinks now that perhaps he was wrong. He was too caught up in his selfish desires to notice that the people of Jefferson took their church seriously. He feels now that he let them down. Hightower believes that the problem with the Church is its leadership, and he chides himself for serving that faulty leadership, and using the people of Jefferson to obtain his personal desires, instead of meeting their desperate need for spiritual fulfillment. "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." (pg. 462) Now as he sits in his window, his thoughts continue against his wishes. He realizes that he was the instrument of his wife's destruction. His own disgrace and isolation came as a welcome relief, allowing him to live like a ghost, as his parents had done. His mind tortures him with the faces of the townspeople, Byron, Lena, and Christmas. Memory weighs upon him so heavily he fears he must die. At last he hears them, "the wild bugles and the clashing sabers and the dying thunder of hooves." (pg. 467)

Chapter 20 Analysis

Having already equated the end of Miss Burden's childbearing years to the dying light of summer in Chapter 12, the author provides additional symbolism in this chapter to convey the theme of the novel's title. Hightower's description of the final, dying light of day as audible is symbolically accurate, for Hightower sees and hears a lot more in that moment of light than others would notice. That final spark, that dying ember of each passing day, contains for Hightower a silence filled with the ghosts of the people and things he has loved and lost. That brief moment for him is timeless, as the moment of conception or the moment of death. Indeed, he feels the moment of his own conception as inextricably linked to the moment of his grandfather's death, which occurred in the final moment of daylight on a day many years ago. So, Hightower sits in his window in Jefferson, watching and listening for that final light of day. One wonders if it is the music of his former church, resounding in the dusk, which calls to him. However, in this chapter, the reverend reveals that what he hears is the sound of the bullet which killed his grandfather. This brief moment between dusk and night embodies the entire scene as Hightower has depicted it in his mind: the horses, the young men, and the waning light of August.

Chapter 21

Chapter 21 Summary

A traveling furniture sales and repairman returns home to his wife with a strange story about his trip. At a gas station, he tells his wife, he had seen a man, woman and child in need of a ride. The salesman agrees to take them as far as Jackson, Tennessee. The couple tells him they are just traveling around, without a specific destination in mind. The woman rides up front with the baby while the man climbs in the back of the truck. Initially, he assumes the couple is married. However, he talks to the woman during the ride and learns more about her. Her baby was born three weeks ago in Jefferson. The salesman had heard about the nigger in Jefferson who got killed for murdering a white woman. When he mentions it to her, the woman stops talking immediately, as if her man had told her not to discuss it. When the salesman stops for the night, the man drops hints until the salesman offers to let them sleep in the back of his truck while he camps by the fire. When the man announces that only the woman will be sleeping in the back of the truck, the salesman realizes that something strange is going on between them.

The salesman also notices that the man has a desperate look on his face, as if he is working himself up to do something. In the darkness of their bedroom, the salesman's wife asks what the man meant to do, and the salesman responds that he's already shown her once tonight, and maybe he'll show her again later. The salesman continues telling his wife the story. That night, when they thought the salesman was asleep by the fire, he heard the couple talking. That's when he'd realized they're not married. In fact, the couple is on the road searching for the father of her child. The man tries to dissuade the woman from continuing the search. The woman reacts as if she knows she has this man on the hook, and doesn't even need to bother to respond to his marriage proposal one way or the other. The man had walked away then, but the salesman figures he was working up to making a sexual pass at the woman. He can hear the woman go to sleep, and it is quite some time later when the man returns. The salesman is rooting for the man now, and listens as the man climbs into the truck. A few minutes later the woman wakes up and tells the man he should be ashamed of himself for trying such a thing. She sends him away as if he were a little boy.

The salesman is mortified for the guy. He hears the man disappear into the woods, and by daylight, he still has not returned. The salesman makes breakfast, expecting the man to return at any moment. When the woman wakes up, she doesn't even bother to look around for the man. She packs up her things and gets in the back of the truck, completely unconcerned about the man's absence. The salesman is concerned that people will talk because he's riding around alone with a strange woman and her baby. He keeps looking back, hoping to see the man pursuing them.

When the truck rounds a curve, they find the man waiting at the side of the road. The salesman is surprised, but the woman seemed to know all along she had only to wait, and he would return. The man greets the woman by announcing that he's come too far

with her now to quit. The woman responds that nobody told him to quit. The salesman laughs, and shares his theory with his wife. He doesn't think the woman had any intention of finding the father of her child. He believes she just wants to travel a little further before settling down with the man, because she knows that once they stop traveling, she'll be settling down for good. When he announces that they are entering Saulsbury, Tennessee, the woman reacts with pleasant surprise. '"My, my. A body does get around,'" she says with a smile. (pg. 480)

Chapter 21 Analysis

With this relatively light-hearted recounting of Byron and Lena's story, William Faulkner ends this otherwise tragic novel on a hopeful note. Lena has discovered the joy of travel, and is enjoying her youth for the first time with hope for the future. Byron is still over-thinking everything rather than fully enjoying his burgeoning love affair with Lena, but his demonstration of loyalty in this chapter leads the reader to think the young couple may find a way to live happily ever after, after all. They are penniless and on the road as Christmas had been all his life. However, unlike Christmas, both Lena and Byron are stubbornly committed to seeking out happiness rather than despair.

Characters

Joe Christmas

Much of the novel is devoted to an artistic and psychological study of Joe Christmas' character. He is the central figure, and plays both the role of sacrificial lamb and hot-blooded murderer. On the sacrificial lamb side of the scales, Christmas is thrown to the wolves the moment he enters this world. His violently insane grandfather prevents anyone from going for a doctor as Christmas' mother dies in childbirth. Christmas' grandmother is powerless to prevent her daughter's death, or to stop her husband from abducting the newborn baby. The grandfather, Eupheus Hines, dumps the baby on the doorstep of an orphanage on Christmas day, then spends five years working incognito as the orphanage's janitor, while keeping an evil eye on Christmas. When the innocent five-year-old witnesses something he doesn't understand, the orphanage's female dietician becomes convinced the young boy is trying to blackmail her for catching her in a sexual tryst. Ignorant to the boy's innocence, she conspires with the janitor to label Christmas a negro and have him sent to a negro orphanage. Whether or not the boy has any negro blood in him is never proved or disproved. Nevertheless, it becomes the reason for all the subsequent persecution and scorn which is heaped on Joe Christmas.

On the other side of the scales comes the concept of personal responsibility. Although Joe Christmas has been unfairly persecuted, beaten, labeled, bullied and tormented by prejudiced whites throughout his life for supposedly having black blood, he has brought an equal or greater share of torment down on himself. Raised to hate "niggers," Joe cannot accept his heritage. He shares the prejudices of his tormentors, and refuses to see any positive qualities in himself because of his bloodline. He certainly takes no pride in his ethnicity, but as a rebellious young man, he enjoys throwing his heritage in the faces of those who might be offended by it. Joe has been rejected by many women for telling them about his heritage. He quickly begins to use this as a way to avoid paying prostitutes. When he finds an accepting prostitute in the northern states, Joe is horrified to think that a white woman would voluntarily sleep with someone like himself. He moves back down south where he can feel secure in his rejection.

It is this rejection of anyone who would deign to accept his negro blood that leads him to want to kill Miss Burden. Misogynism plays into this choice as well, for Christmas has a deep and abiding hatred for women. However Miss Burden is particularly threatening because she urges him to stop throwing his life away due to bitterness and hatred. She begins praying over him and encourages him to accept his ethnic roots and take advantage of free tuition at a prominent negro college. Her reward for such love, support, and acceptance is his hatred. How dare she deny the validity of his prejudice against negroes? By accepting him, she is demonstrating her acceptance of his black blood, and this infuriates Christmas to a murderous rage. Later, desperate and on the run, his long-lost grandmother is returned to him, which gives him hope for the first time of a future. He has never had a blood relative, especially a female, or anyone at all upon whom he believed he could rely. Yet, he believes her, and heeds the advice she

whispers to him in the jail. By this point the author has developed such hope that the grandmother will finally get to know her long-missed grandbaby, and that the adult Christmas will somehow be improved by the experience. However, it is already too late, and his grandmother's escape plan ends in a hail of bullets and genital mutilation.

One hates to imagine what goes through Christmas' mind as he watches himself being castrated by Percy Grimm. The author certainly does not say. Christmas dies in a fountain of his own blood, violated and denied refuge. Christmas has sought refuge over the years in prostitutes, booze, violence and anger; more recently, while on the run, he made abortive attempts to seek sanctuary in a negro church, and with a negro family in a cabin in the woods. Only his grandmother has ever offered him a chance for sanctuary, by directing him to Hightower's. The tragedy is her love comes too late to help Christmas, and her advice gets him killed when he might have had only a life sentence. One hopes that it meant something to Christmas to know that she had tried to save his life. His grandmother is the first person he ever allows to try and save him.

Byron Bunch

Byron Bunch is a man afraid of his own demons, and afraid of taking the emotional risks necessary to live a full life. Byron spends as much time as possible at the planing mill where he works, hoping to avoid trouble. Byron defines trouble as any kind of emotional involvement with his fellow human beings. He lives in a hard era, during a time in which most of the countryside is impoverished and struggling with social intolerance. Thus, it makes sense that Byron wishes to avoid contact with his fellow human beings; he has only to look around him to see the pain, trials, and tribulations which result from social and financial entanglements. When he's not at the mill, he spends his time either in church, or with his friend, the ex-Reverend Hightower. Byron considers Hightower's home safe because Hightower, in his fall from grace, has been shunned by the community, and is no danger to Byron's self-imposed isolation.

Nonetheless Byron soon finds out that, try as he might, it is very difficult to avoid living one's life. In fact, trouble - as he describes it - finds him one day when he feels safest. On the day of the big fire at the Burden place, most of the town and all of Byron's co-laborers abandon their work and gather to watch the fire. Avoiding this temptation, Byron remains at the mill, working alone, and feeling perfectly secure in his isolation from society. Yet, on this very day, Lena Grove arrives at the mill and irrevocably alters his life. Byron falls in love at first sight with Lena. She is pregnant by another man, a shiftless co-worker of Byron's, who has no interest in taking a wife. Given the social mores of this era, all of these facts most definitely spell trouble. However, Byron's good heart goes out to Lena, a kind and faithful woman who is at the mercy of the rogue man who helped her get into this fix. Suddenly, Byron finds himself entangled in just the sort of trouble he's always hoped to avoid, and worse, finds himself dragging Hightower back into society in order to advise Byron on how to cope with the situation.

Byron is fundamentally a decent man, yet the strict, judgmental teachings of the local churches during this era are often in conflict with the heart's definition of goodness.

Byron wishes to marry Lena and provide a home for her and her soon-to-be-born babe. Given the fact that the baby's husband lied to Lena, abandoned her when he learned of the pregnancy, and went so far as to change his name to avoid being found by Lena, it seems obvious to Byron that he will not be hurting the man by marrying Lena. However, Byron feels torn by his desire to do what he feels is right, which is to stand by Lena, versus what the church says is right, which is to force her ex-lover to marry her. As far as church and society go, this is Lena's only possible salvation. Should the father of her child not marry her, she would be shunned by every decent person in town as a harlot and a fallen woman. Byron's gentle heart tells him Lena doesn't deserve such a fate. However, no one in town, not even his friend Hightower, agrees with him.

Lena's deep faith in God and family seems to have been answered by Byron's appearance in her life, yet Byron's faith teaches him that marrying her is wrong. In the end, the goodness in his heart wins out over the prejudice of the town, and he decides to follow Lena to the ends of the earth if necessary in order to win her hand in marriage. Ironically, his strength of character, which gives him the ability to make his own choices even if they contravene church doctrine, fails him when it comes to his relationship with Lena. As the couple's relationship develops, it becomes clear that Lena is the dominant figure, and Byron the passive follower, as they travel together down the road of life.

Joe Brown, A.K.A. Lucas Burch

Joe Brown is known around Jefferson as a loud-mouthed, gambling man of weak moral character. He lives moment to moment, and thinks nothing of blowing his weekly earnings on a card game. Although he is the father of Lena's child, Joe Brown lacks the maturity to sustain a family. He is both unwilling and incapable of saving the money required to set up a stable household. At the planing mill, where he briefly works, he is lazy and shiftless. Brown puts more effort into pretending to work hard than into actually working. He travels from town to town, working at various mills to earn a little pocket money, but never settling down. He is loathe to accept responsibility, and back in Doane's Mill, when Lena tells him she is with child, he soothes her with a string of empty promises, then skips town and changes his name to avoid fatherhood. The idea of being responsible for a wife and child terrifies Brown so much that he is willing to sacrifice the thousand dollar reward for Christmas' capture in order to avoid being forced to marry Lena.

Brown's willingness to sell out his friend and business partner, Joe Christmas, is another indication of his selfish personality. When Brown learns that Christmas is part negro and that he is having an affair with Miss Burden, Brown's sly mind stores that information for some future time when he might be able to use it for personal gain. Once Brown begins working for Christmas bootlegging illegal whiskey, rumors about their illegal activities run rampant through the town of Jefferson. Christmas, a cautious and discreet man, had managed to run the business for years without getting caught, but Brown's loud mouth and tendency to brag quickly bring their bootlegging activities into public consciousness. After Christmas kills Miss Burden and Brown learns about the reward money, he sells out his partner in crime, hoping to claim the reward. Initially, the sheriff refuses to

believe Brown, based on his reputation for lacking integrity. However, Brown tells everyone about Christmas' negro blood, and this is enough to convince the prejudiced citizens of Jefferson that Christmas must be the murderer, and that Brown is a credible witness, purely by virtue of being a white man. However, in the end, Brown is not rewarded for selling out his partner in crime. Thanks to Lena's presence in the town, Brown is forced to flee before he can collect the reward money.

Reverend Gail Hightower

Hightower is one of the many social outcasts who populate the judgmental town of Jefferson, Mississippi. Hightower was raised by parents whom he thinks of as ghosts. He did not have an active family life. Not only was his mother an invalid for most of his childhood, but his father appears to have been emotionally absent. Ironically, the adult Hightower seeks exactly this sort of half-life for himself. He is emotionally absent with his wife and with his congregation. Although it is the townspeople of Jefferson who banish him from society, Hightower admits to himself years later that he had wanted to be cast aside and exiled, so as to live as a ghost like his parents. Hightower's only passion in life is the iconic death of his grandfather. During the Civil War, the elder Hightower, a warlike man of action, had bravely led a charge into the opposing army's teeth to blow up ammunition stores. His success in this bold campaign will forever inspire his grandson, even though moments later the grandfather had been shot to death while stealing chickens from a coop to feed himself and his hungry men. The fatal shot had rung out in the final moments of daylight in the very town of Jefferson where his grandson comes to live many years later.

Young Hightower, a seminarian, campaigns for the position of reverend at a church in Jefferson. He marries a young lady well-connected within the seminary and uses her to help him obtain the coveted Jefferson post. Once he has the position, Hightower makes no further effort to care about either his wife or his new congregation in Jefferson. Rumors about Hightower's deviant sexuality abound in the town as his wife is driven to indulge herself with other men in the nearby city of Memphis. Her public breakdown and subsequent death in an apparent suicide leap from her Memphis love nest result in Hightower's disgrace. The town seems to blame him for the fact that his wife has "gone bad," and believes he was either unable or unwilling to meet her needs. Whether this was pure Jeffersonian prejudice against his possible homosexual orientation, or a true reflection of Hightower's indifference to his fellow human beings, remains unclear in the novel. In any case, Hightower is no more able to meet his congregation's needs for spiritual fulfillment than had he met his late wife's emotional and physical needs.

When the reader meets Hightower, twenty-five years have passed since his very public disgrace. He has spent those years in near-total seclusion, which he admits to enjoying. Like Byron, Hightower fears the messy entanglements of human relations. He feels safer by avoiding society. Yet, Byron's love for Lena drags Hightower back into the thick of things in Jefferson. Older and wiser now, Hightower realizes that there is still life in him, and that he has not become a ghost after all. In many ways, Hightower has grown over the years, and he plays a positive role in the birth of Lena's child, and in Christmas'

ill-fated escape attempt. However, his hatred for women remains strong, and causes him to oppose Byron's quest to win Lena's heart. The reasons for this hatred are hinted at, but not revealed, leaving it up to the reader to decide the genesis of Hightower's misogynism.

Lena Grove

While religion plays a loud and vocal role in the novel, Lena's quiet, persistent faith trumps the prejudicial proselytizing of the local churchgoers. Most of the characters, like Byron and Hightower, spend much futile effort worrying about what is right and what is wrong. Lena, on the other hand, allows her simple, powerful faith to lead her to the happy ending she desires. Lena is given little voice by the author; only the first chapter is entirely devoted to her point of view, and her thoughts are visited briefly by the narration later in the book. Thus for most of the novel she is treated like an object; someone to be manipulated, moved around, and dealt with as others see fit. She is not well developed as a character, since she is seen primarily through the eyes of the other characters. Yet, Lena's quiet faith ensures that her will prevail throughout the novel and especially in the end. Thus her character is the quiet but strong note of hope which William Faulkner interjects into the otherwise dark world of his novel. Her eventual triumph over her dire circumstances appears to reflect the author's belief that in the end, once the hustle and bustle of human worry has faded, goodness and life will triumph.

McEachern

Throughout the story, author William Faulkner conveys the idea that society's men are the enforcers of cruel, extreme, judgmental religious principles, stemming from male-dominated churches. McEachern is a perfect example of such a man. He imposes his twisted, judgmental mindset on his wife and foster-child. McEachern cruelly beats both young Joe and Mrs. McEachern, and works them both like slaves for his personal gain. Worse yet, McEachern routinely justifies his cruel behavior by citing the Bible. McEachern has actually convinced himself that he is a righteous man, and far more forgiving than God. McEachern teaches Joe that God is a cruel tyrant, and that fearing God is the best thing a man can do. Actually, McEachern seems to have God mixed up with himself, for it is McEachern who is the cruel tyrant. Unfortunately when cruel tyranny is mixed with religion and morality, tragic confusion is the natural result. Young Joe comes to believe that all morality and religion is cruel and intolerable. Because McEachern is so cruel, Joe naturally comes to hate everything McEachern stands for. Since McEachern cloaks himself in the righteousness of religion, Joe believes that McEachern's morality is correct. Joe learns from McEachern that God is intolerant and life is intolerable. The strict code of conduct which McEachern enforces on Joe with frequent whippings is too harsh for any young boy to tolerate.

When Joe rejects McEachern's teachings; he rejects all morality and religious feeling along with them. Joe grows up to believe that he is an evil sinner because he has fallen short of McEachern's impossibly ascetic standards. Once Joe believes himself damned,

he loses all hope for his life and future, and sets out to defy everything McEachern stands for. Already a hopeless sinner in McEachern's eyes, Joe figures he has nothing to lose by becoming a murderer as well. In the heat of the moment, he brings a chair down on McEachern's head, possibly killing the man. By destroying McEachern, Joe is attempting to liberate himself from the impossible code of conduct McEachern espouses. Although that is the last the reader hears of McEachern, it is clear from Christmas' subsequent actions that McEachern's beliefs still linger in his head, and he continues to rebel against them long after McEachern is presumed dead.

Mrs. McEachern

Mrs. McEachern, Christmas' foster-mother, is a woman beaten down by her cruel, violent, intolerant, and judgmental husband. She, like Christmas, is a victim of Mr. McEachern's ire. She is so cowed by her cruel husband that she makes only infrequent, weak attempts to protect young Joe from his foster-father. Perhaps her lack of strong opposition to McEachern's cruel treatment of the boy has something to do with Christmas' hatred of her. However, Christmas believes he hates her because of her opposition to the beatings he receives at his foster-father's hands. Christmas, even as a young boy, is already a hard-hearted man in the making. He embraces his foster-father's cruelty as a normal part of life. Only Mrs. McEachern's relatively sane viewpoint rankles Christmas. By treating him with kindness and futilely opposing the beatings, Christmas feels that she is trying to weaken him and make him unfit to stand up against the cold, cruel treatment heaped on him by the world.

Uncle Doc (Eupheus Hines)

Eupheus Hines is a man ruled by insanity, cruelty and prejudice. His hatred for African-Americans is exceeded only by his hatred for women. According to his wife's credible tale, Eupheus has always been a volatile, violent man; whatever good qualities he has have long since been overshadowed by his inner demons. Despite the fact that he is unfit to be a husband, father, or hold a job, Eupheus takes it upon himself to pronounce "God's" judgment on the helpless women and children in his life. When he finds his daughter, Milly, in bed with a dark-skinned man, all of Eupheus' worst fears are realized. Ignoring Milly's protests that her lover is part Mexican, Eupheus kills the "nigger" who dared defile his daughter. Subsequently, he labels Milly a whore and refuses to fetch a doctor when she gives birth to her dead lover's child. Eupheus convinces himself that he is doing God's work by letting Milly die in childbirth, and later, by placing her evil seed into an orphanage.

Eupheus steals the baby from his wife and leaves home without a word. For thirty years, he tortures his wife by refusing to tell her the whereabouts of the baby. Only after Christmas is in custody for murder does Mrs. Hines learn what her husband had done. It was Eupheus who started the rumors at the orphanage about Christmas' black blood. These damaging rumors caused Christmas to be placed in a foster home, where the foster father was more interested in obtaining a negro slave than a son to raise.

Eupheus continues to hate Christmas for thirty years, and even as his wife seeks clemency for their murdering grandson, Eupheus Hines keeps vigil outside the jailhouse, encouraging the crowd to lynch Christmas.

Bobbie

Bobbie is a waitress by day in an establishment which is a flimsy cover for a secret brothel, where she works at night. She is Joe Christmas' first lover, and his inability to pay more than a few pennies for her services does not bother her, because she truly likes him. The reason why she likes him is unclear, because Joe beats her frequently. However, Bobbie is used to being beaten up and mistreated by men, so she likely does not find anything unusual in Christmas' behavior. Only when Christmas gets her in a jam by killing another man in public while out on a date with her does she turn against him. Eighteen-year-old Christmas, in his youthful ignorance, assumes the thirty-something waitress will run away with him to escape the law, but receives a rude shock when instead she throws his marriage proposal in his face and allows her companions to beat and rob him.

Miss Atkins

Miss Atkins is the dietician at the orphanage where young Joe Christmas is placed by his grandfather. Initially, Joe Christmas is only aware of her peripherally, as a symbol of feminine sweetness. He finds her rosy complexion every bit as attractive as he finds the sweet-smelling pink toothpaste in the dietician's bathroom. The dietician is a young woman with a healthy sexual appetite, but young women in this era risk losing their jobs and reputations if word gets out that they have engaged in premarital sex. Thus when she finds five-year-old Joe hiding in her room during one of her sexual liaisons, she is consumed with fear and paranoia that the child will tell her boss what she has done.

The dietician is ignorant of the ways of children, and does not realize that little Joe is far too young to correctly interpret the meaning of the sounds he hears her making with her paramour in the bedroom. Miss Atkins attributes the knowledge and motivations of an adult to the innocent little boy, and thus she expects him to use his knowledge of her affair to his advantage. When he refuses to accept the bribe she offers, she assumes he intends to torment her with his knowledge of her dangerous secret. Expecting Joe to tell her boss, and bring about her dismissal and disgrace, the dietician sets out to destroy her young enemy. She is the one who reveals the supposed fact that Joe is partially African-American. This revelation alters the course of Joe's entire life, and the hurried adoption she arranges based upon this revelation is akin to selling the boy into slavery. Thus, the role she plays in his life is in many ways directly responsible for his subsequent hatred of women, as well as his own self-hatred and self-destructive behavior.

Objects/Places

Doane's Mill

Doane's Mill is the tiny town in Alabama where Lena lives with her brother. Her cross-country trek to find Lucas Burch is the first trip she's ever taken away from home.

Miss Burden's House

Miss Burden is born and spends her entire life in this large, colonial style home which pre-dates the civil war. It is here where Christmas finds her one night, after breaking into the kitchen in search of food. The bedroom is the scene of their violent love affair, and ultimately becomes the scene of her murder as well. After she is murdered by Christmas, Brown sets fire to the main house hoping to cover his partner's tracks.

The Cabin

The slave cabin is on Miss Burden's property and is where she allows Joe Christmas to live once they become lovers. Christmas runs his whiskey business using the cabin as headquarters, and when he takes Brown on as a partner, Brown becomes his roommate in the cabin.

Jefferson

Jefferson, Mississippi is a hotbed of racial intolerance. The small town's history is littered with dead bodies of people who have been killed in disagreements about slavery.

Hightower's House

Hightower's house is a private sanctuary to which he retreated twenty-five years before the opening of the story, after being disgraced as a minister. From his window, he can still hear the music of his former church each Sunday. His home is a sanctuary for Byron Bunch as well, who visits Hightower regularly over the seven years he lives in Jefferson.

The Planing Mill

The planing mill in Jefferson is where Byron Bunch, Joe Christmas, and Joe Brown first cross paths. Lena and Byron meet at the mill as well. By the end of the story, all three

men quit their jobs at the mill, though their mutual association continues until the end of the novel.

The Razor

Christmas' razor is his only possession, and also becomes a murder weapon when he uses it to kill Miss Burden.

The Medical Book

One of the many books on Hightower's shelves, the medical book is used by Hightower on the two occasions when he is called to deliver babies.

The Thousand Dollar Reward

Offered by Miss Burden's nephew for the capture of her murderer, this reward money is avidly sought by several men in the towns of Jefferson and Mottstown. Joe Brown nearly wins the reward money, but in the end he chooses to sacrifice the reward in order to avoid having to marry Lena and claim responsibility for their child.

The Dietician's Toothpaste

Little Joe Christmas' fascination with this pink, tasty toothpaste leads him into more trouble than he could have imagined. Its pink sweetness is intertwined in the young boy's mind with the rosy, feminine face of the dietician. Although he is too young to realize it, the toothpaste symbolizes femininity and sexuality, and his initial positive response to it is psychologically healthy. After he is punished cruelly as a result of his fascination with the toothpaste, little Joe Christmas' associations with femininity and sexuality become warped and angry.

Social Sensitivity

Through a fictional community's response to those who defy its values, Light in August dissects Southern, and sometimes American, values regarding race, sexuality, regional origin, and religion, as the story moves from the turn of the century to the 1920s. In Joe Christmas the community of Jefferson, Mississippi, faces a man unsure of his racial origin, who rebels against any attempt to make him fully black or white. In Joanna Burden the community faces a woman whose family supported the abolitionist movement and continues to support Negro causes. In Gail Hightower the community faces a minister whose identity is trapped in a romantic Civil War fantasy which so overshadows the present that he fails to recognize the needs of his wife and his congregation. In Lena Grove the community faces an unwed pregnant woman supposedly pursuing the man who seduced and abandoned her.

For a community that defines itself as white, Christian, Southern, and either virginal or married, William Faulkner has arranged tests of its humanity that are, in effect, diagnoses of human weakness. Unlike Joe Christmas, Gail Hightower, and Joanna Burden—all of whom are violently rejected by the community—Lena Grove, pregnant and unwed, elicits sympathetic treatment from the town. Because Lena accepts the community's judgment and turns the other cheek, her community judges to treat her with compassion. In rebelling against community values, Joe Christmas, Gail Hightower, and Joanna Burden suffer isolation and punishment.

In Light in August, as in many of his novels, Faulkner mixes some comedy with the overwhelming tragedy of the stories.

While the fates of Gail Hightower and Joanna Burden are painful, the plight of Joe Christmas, from birth to death, is powerfully tragic. The only relief from the tragedy that pervades the novel is the comic story of Lena's peregrinations with her suitor-protector Byron Bunch which opens and closes the novel. With the psychological acuity of the great Russian novelist Dostoevsky, Faulkner helps his readers examine the connections of racial bias, sexuality, and religion through the interactions of his nearly seventy named characters. Though some critics have challenged the novel's unity, few deny its power.

Techniques

Stylistically, Light in August is easier to read than some of Faulkner's other novels.

It does not have, for example, the time shifts of The Sound and the Fury or the multiple narrators of Absalom, Absalom! However, Faulkner has written a novel with three major characters—Joe Christmas, Joanna Burden, and Hightower—with three strains of action and multiple flashbacks into their past lives. While the roughly ten-day action in the present traces events from the time of Joanna's murder to the murder of Joe Christmas, Faulkner exercises considerable skill in attempting to keep his novel moving and its plots integrated.

The first three chapters—dealing respectively with Lena, Joe Christmas, and Hightower—are held together by a common narrative point-of-view character, Byron Bunch. Byron is also used to describe Christmas's racial background to Hightower and Lena's entry into Jefferson in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 deals with the day before Joanna's murder and uses Joe as a point-ofview character to determine where the action is to take place. Chapters 6-12 are a flashback of Joe's past; he enters Jefferson in Chapter 10, while Chapters 11-12 describe Joe's relationship to Joanna and her background and the immediate aftermath of her murder, although never does Faulkner describe the deed itself.

Chapters 13-20 return the action to the town and Hightower. While Joe's activities during his pursuit are described, his plight as an assumed black rapist and murderer in the South is clear to him, the town, and Hightower—he is to be lynched, and his body is to be desecrated. Much of what Faulkner is trying to do in these chapters is to present problems for Hightower to respond to through the agency of his friend, Byron—Lena's pregnancy and the expected birth of her child, Byron's love for her, Doc and Mrs. Hines's contradictory wishes for their grandson, and Joe himself when he escapes temporarily to Hightower's house. Through Byron's intercession, Hightower temporarily loses his immunity to life's joys, such as Lena's giving birth, and griefs, such as Joe's death and castration. Faulkner uses Hightower to provide recognition of the significance of the novel's action. In Chapter 21, told from the perspective of the furniture dealer in bed with his wife, Faulkner once again presents the story of Lena and Byron, making her begin and end the novel with the comic hopefulness of their love story and eventual marriage.

Faulkner connects the circumstances and fates of his characters in several ways. He uses recurring motifs like giving money to characters, such as Mrs. Armstid's gift of her egg money to Lena, the dietitian's bribe to Joe, and Mrs. McEachern's encouragement of Joe to take money from her hoard in his room. Blows to the face to and by Joe occur several times, and several are delivered by Doc Hines. Characters successfully pursue their victims in the dark and find them unerringly, as if they are agents of Fate, such as McEachern's pursuit of Joe at the dance or Doc Hines's ability to seek out and kill Milly's lover.

Objects such as the Burden house or a window are used to link the destinies of several characters. Joe and Lena creep from home through windows, and Hightower's constant position at dusk is by a window overlooking the street. The urn image from Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" is used to describe women's menstrual imperfection in Joe's mind, while at the same time, the image indicates the serene perfection of Lena's travel "moving forever and without progress across an urn." Other repeated images seem to define characters, so that Lucas Burch is usually described as a nervous animal, Hightower is usually bathed in sweat, and Joe Christmas is a shadow who dresses in dark pants and a white shirt as a symbol of his racial confusion.

Faulkner also gives superficial similarities to the circumstances of his leading characters, so that both Lena and Joe are orphans and have left their families. The names of Joe and Joanna pair them, but so too does their possible mixed racial heritage through Mexican relatives. Hightower and Joanna are both seen as outsiders by Jefferson.

Probably the most significant set of symbolic parallels in the novel is Joe Christmas's connection to the Christ story, with Lucas Burch as his Judas, and Percy Grimm as one of the Roman soldiers who ends his life. Of course, the Christ parallels in the Joe Christmas story deal only with Christ's sacrificial death. Faulkner even arranges a possible resurrection through the birth of Lena's child, whom Mrs. Hines thinks is her grandson Joe Christmas, which even confuses Lena. Unlike Christ, however, Joe Christmas is usually associated with death—even his actions are related in the past tense, while Lena and those associated with her values, such as Byron in the novel's later chapters, are usually described in the present tense. Faulkner may not have totally succeeded in integrating his novel, but he certainly attempted to create structures that would bring it together.

Themes

Themes

Gail Hightower recognizes the forces that control the lives of so many characters in Light in August. After he has been forced back into life by delivering Lena's baby and attempting to save Joe Christmas, Hightower meditates by his window, listening to music from a church in which he used to preside: Listening, he seems to hear with it the apotheosis of his own history, his own land, his own environed blood: that people from which he sprang and among whom he lives who can never take either pleasure or catastrophe or escape from either, without brawling over it. Pleasure, ecstasy, they cannot seem 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?

The idea of people being crucified and, in turn, crucifying others is a key to the emotional melodrama and tragedy of the novel, in which the major characters—except for the comic, life-affirming characters, Lena and Byron—are victimized by others and, in turn, victimize themselves and others. This victimization is the result of binary, either/or, thinking about such matters as race, sex, eating, and religion. The favored terms in these matters are white over black, male over female, fasting over eating, and saved or elect over damned.

Gail Hightower, Joanna Burden, and Joe Christmas are each cast in the role of childhood victim and victimizer. Faulkner develops the role most fully in Joe Christmas, less fully in Joanna Burden, and least fully in Hightower. Joe is victimized by his grandfather, Doc Hines, and his foster father, Simon McEachern. Doc Hines is particularly important, since he is a religious fanatic who unites his religious fundamentalism with white racial supremacy and disgust at female sexuality. Simon McEachern is a mountain of ice, but he never connects race and religion. At the orphanage Doc isolates Joe with his gaze and leads Joe to connect damnation and rejection by others with being black. The dietitian makes the connection of race, justice, and sex in Joe's mind when she calls him a black bastard after he uncomprehendingly witnesses her affair with the intern. Instead of punishing Joe for eating her toothpaste, as he expects, she rewards him. Simon McEachern's fanaticism make being damned more attractive to Joe than being elect or saved. Although Joe resists McEachern, he also resists his foster mother's surreptitious offerings of food and mercy from her husband's male religious justice. Joe's pursuit of sexuality, whether with the black girl in early adolescence or later with Bobbie Allen, helps unite damnation with being black in his mind.

Bobbie echoes the dietitian in calling Joe a Negro after McEachern insults her by calling her a harlot. Fifteen years later, Joanna tries to force Joe to pray, renounce sexuality, and declare himself a Negro—unwittingly duplicating the influences of Doc Hines and McEachern; and Joe rebels as he did before. To declare himself Negro, when in truth he

does not know what he is, challenges Joe's whole life. Love, food, and security are not sufficient to make Joe give up the burden of his life. Joe's razor thrust at Joanna is an echo of his blow to McEachern's head years before.

Joanna's background resembles Joe's. Her grandfather, Calvin Burden, is similar in his influence to Doc Hines. Both are brawlers concerned with being saved or damned, but they differ on race. Joanna's father, grandfather, and brother believe that white people must martyr or crucify themselves to improve the lot of black people, although they would agree with Doc Hines that black people can never be the equal of white.

Since Joanna is female, she must act as her male relatives do and thus deny her sex by taking a male political role with black people. While Joe can't begin to live until he decides what he is, black or white, and thus does not live, Joanna can't begin to live until she accepts a femininity she has rejected for political aims that for her are religious. Like Joe, Joanna fluctuates between absolutes. By voluntarily having a relationship with Joe, whom she identifies as a Negro, Joanna damns herself. When Joanna points a pistol at Joe, compelling him to pray, she has renounced femininity and totally reverted to the intolerance of her grandfather, father, and brother. While Joanna's relatives resisted slaveholders before the war and white supremacists after, they nonetheless were as intolerant as those among whom they lived. Joanna's attempt to shoot Joe is an act that is a part of their influence, their values. For Joanna, having Joe admit he is a Negro and having him work to improve black people's lives is part of her salvation; but for Joe, admitting he is a Negro is damning, since he has been influenced by the racial and religious absolutism of Doc Hines and the religious and sexual absolutism of McEachern. As alter egos of one another, neither Joe nor Joanna can flee the other.

While Calvinistic determinism poisons the lives of Joe and Joanna, an imaginative vacuum is the cause of Hightower's undoing. With a father who was fifty at Hightower's birth and a mother he only remembers in bed, ill and dying, Hightower is emotionally adrift until an old Negro servant, Cinthy, fills his imagination with stories of his grandfather's bravery and his raid on a chicken coop in Jefferson that ended in his death. His grandfather's lively spirits, as seen in Cinthy's stories, make the Civil War past seem more real to him than the present. Hightower's choice of the ministry as a career only accentuates his flight from reality, especially since he sees the church as a protection from the real world. Because Hightower's desires are trapped in the past, he ignores both his congregation and his wife, sacrificing both to his imaginative vision of his grandfa.ther's deeds. Hightower's lack of desire for his wife leads her to extramarital affairs and her eventual suicide, and his congregation, outraged, removes him from the pulpit. With an annuity from his father's estate, however, Hightower can live for the imaginative moment of his grandfather's charge at dusk while sitting at an upstairs window of his house. His primary link to the world is Byron, who, until, he meets and falls in love with Lena, is nearly as much an evader of life as Hightower.

But, while Byron can lead Hightower to life, after Byron is gone, Hightower is once again alone with the romantic fantasy of his grandfather's deeds. Faulkner may be trying to dramatize, through Hightower's obsession, an early twentieth-century Southern white

obsession with the glories of the South before the Civil War, much as Margaret Mitchell did later in Gone with the Wind.

He does something similar with Quentin Compson in The Sound and the fury and Absalom, Absalom!, but for all Faulkner's intent, many readers find the emotional justification for Hightower's obsession unconvincing. Hightower, however, is an important character in the novel, since he is the only one able to understand the significance of the action with respect to Joanna Burden, Joe Christmas, and the town's almost choreographed desire to lynch or ostracize the outsider.

The love story of Lena and Byron is a counterbalance to the three melodramatic or tragic stories of Joe, Joanna, and to some extent, Hightower. While matters of race and religion deform the lives of Joe and Joanna, Lena—and later Byron, who follows her—leads an instinctual life anchored in the present, free from religious and racial taboos. Faulkner describes her in his figurative language as a pregnant earth mother and fertility goddess but cloaks her in the blue of the Virgin Mary. She accepts life, while Hightower, Joanna, and Joe Christinas resist it. Byron, the only major character without a past, must choose between the clock- and work-dominated life he has known and the life-accepting existence led by Lena. His choice, and their eventual marriage, is the light in August, the trace of comedy in a largely tragic story.

Racism

The theme of racism is the very crux of the novel *Light in August*. A Mississippi author, William Faulkner chooses to take on his state's chilling racism problem through the personal histories of his fictional characters. Published in 1932 and set in what was then modern-day, Faulkner has only to trace his characters back three generations to the Civil War and the official end of slavery. Racism and the lingering effects of slavery can be found throughout the story, and most notably in the central character of Joe Christmas. Christmas believes he has an African-American bloodline through his father's side, and although this fact is never confirmed, it shapes Christmas' entire life. He is literally at war with himself, as his Caucasian side treats his African-American heritage with violent contempt. A man labeled black who looks white has nowhere to go in this violently segregated society. Briefly, it appears Christmas has found acceptance in white civil rights activist Joanna Burden's arms, but her acceptance of African-Americans as equals only causes Christmas to treat her with contempt. Christmas represents an era in which society is so fundamentally divided along racist lines that neither society nor Christmas has any desire to heal the division. Christmas' only response to his mixed heritage is to destroy himself. In this quest, he echoes the insane ravings of his biological grandfather, who considers Christmas an abomination and the spawn of the devil because of his mixed heritage.

Other characters in the novel, deeply touched by the theme of racism, are Joanna Burden and the former Reverend Hightower. Miss Burden's family has abolitionist roots going back three generations, before the term abolitionism had even been coined. Her family moved to Jefferson in the first place because of a government commission to

help the freed slaves. The Burden's radical views about racial equality upset the town, and everyone in Jefferson was glad when her grandfather and brother were shot down in the middle of the street over an argument about racism. Miss Burden's father felt so persecuted for his beliefs that he'd hidden the graves of his father and son to prevent the townsfolk from desecrating them. Years later, the Harvard educated District Attorney of Jefferson still recalls the killing of the Burden men, for which he had congratulated the shooter. Ironically, this same D.A. comes against Christmas with the full power of the justice system for killing Miss Burden. Had Christmas been a white man charged with killing a black woman, he likely would have received a very different form of justice from the racist D.A.

Ex-Reverend Hightower's father was against slavery like Miss Burden's father. However, rather than taking up his father's cause the way Miss Burden took up her father's, Hightower grows up to resent his father's anti-slavery views. Hightower blames his mother's death on the fact that his father refused to own slaves. Thus, his mother, during the Civil War when Hightower's father was away, was forced to starve on the meager supplies she could grow in her garden, without the help of a slave. Hightower is sure that the malnutrition which paralyzed her could have been avoided if his father had not stubbornly refused to own slaves. Paradoxically, despite his racist views, Hightower becomes a victim of the local Ku Klux Klansmen, who tie him to a tree, beat him, and frighten off any black servants who might consider working for the former minister. Perhaps it is this experience which allows Hightower to feel sympathy for Christmas in the end. Hightower redeems himself by offering Christmas sanctuary and an alibi, even though his help comes too late to save the wanted man.

Misogyny

Just as in recent history when a rapist could get off the hook for claiming that his victim's mini-skirt enticed him, the men of the intolerant faith portrayed in the novel blame women for all temptation and sin. It is not the men's fault if they are tempted to engage in carnal relations with women outside of wedlock; it is the women's fault for being so soft, and forgiving, and sexy, and loving, or, in a word, tempting. Society's violent and judgmental temperament managed to demonize a woman's best assets, and in many respects continues to do so today. The misogyny so prevalent in the novel, sponsored by the Calvinist religious principles of the town of Jefferson, Mississippi, is analogous in nature to a thief claiming that the gold was so shiny it deserved to be stolen. Women learned quickly to cover up their physical and intellectual assets, or risk losing them along with their reputations and chances for a decent life.

Women like Mrs. McEachern and Mrs. Hines endured husbands who beat them, endangered their children's lives, and blamed innocent babies like Joe Christmas for their own hateful views. Worse, the children were brought up to revile and disrespect their mothers. Married women had no recourse other than endurance, and were easily victimized. Unmarried women like Lena were even worse off, condemned by society for the actions of the men who preyed on them. Abusive men like McEachern were utterly unaware that their behavior was wrong, because it was largely approved by the

religious institutions of the day. Ironically, kind-hearted men like Byron were discouraged from providing love and support to women in trouble. It was okay to give a handout or a lift to Lena, but the men in the novel insist that it is wrong to marry her. Even Byron, Lena's hero, is affected by these attitudes. Upon the birth of her baby, Byron begins to think of her as a whore, and another man's whore at that.

Fortunately, the author interjects a little hope for relations between the sexes by having Byron overcome his misogynistic thinking by the end of the novel. Even in this harsh, unforgiving setting, Lena's faith is rewarded as Byron decides to stay with her and give her the love and support she and baby need.

Religious/Social Intolerance

Religious and social intolerance are interlinked in this novel because of its setting. Religious institutions have historically and throughout the world held great sway over social customs, particularly in isolated rural areas like the one depicted in the book. Eras marked by severe poverty, as the Depression era, are susceptible to tyrannical leadership, be it political or religious. In the rural south and other parts of the United States, Calvinist preachers dictated an often strict, judgmental, and unforgiving social standard. Women, the cause of original sin and the 'weaker sex,' were an easy scapegoat for the male power hierarchy of the local churches. Another easy target of social intolerance and favored scapegoat was the population of African-American locals, less than three generations removed from slavery.

The religious intolerance of the times scarred the lives and reputations of many women. Characters like Doc Hines spout off about women's Bitchery and Abomination, and even the relatively sane Reverend Hightower believes women like Lena are sinful and that they deserve all the hatred and spite society sees fit to mete out to them. Growing up in this morass of church-sponsored intolerance, Christmas quickly learns to hate women. He likens making love to his mistress, Joanna Burden, to falling into a filthy sewer.

Christmas' hatred and disgust for the natural process of menstruation is one of his many justifications for beating his first girlfriend, Bobbie. Christmas is raised by a religious fanatic, McEachern, who attempts to quite literally beat his own intolerant brand of religion into Christmas' mind and soul. From this violent, darkly religious upbringing, Christmas learns that the world is a hard, cruel place, and that there is no room in it for mercy or kindness. Christmas feels threatened by the kindness of women like Joanna Burden and Mrs. McEachern, who seem to subvert the natural order of cruelty in life through their attempts to show mercy. It is small wonder that a nation so beaten down by religious and social intolerance would suffer a great Depression.

Style

Point of View

Light in August is narrated alternately from various characters' points of view. While much of the story is narrated by these characters in the first person, an omniscient third party narrator quietly guides the story along, without intruding upon the story. The third person narrator's function is to help tie together the various third person narratives; at no point does the omniscient narrator become a character or develop an independent persona. The major viewpoints in the story come from the characters of Byron Bunch, Reverend Hightower and Joe Christmas. However, the collective consciousness of the small towns of Jefferson and Mottstown are also introduced as characters with defined viewpoints. It is through this literary conceit that the author is able to combine his many storylines into one coherent narrative. Additionally, by giving these two towns a narrative voice, the author is able to convey town gossip and reflect the local society's opinions about the major characters, Byron, Lena and Christmas. Despite being a major character, Lena is given little voice in the novel. The story of her life is told, judged, and decided by the men of Jefferson, leaving her little say in her own future.

The author is known for his stream-of-consciousness narrative technique, and indeed this technique is demonstrated repeatedly in *Light in August*. Joe Christmas' narration, particularly, uses the stream-of-consciousness style. Like many of the other characters, Christmas is an unreliable narrator. He is out of touch with his emotions, needs and motivating drives. Thus, much of what the reader learns about Joe Christmas must be inferred from the sequence of his stream-of-consciousness thoughts. For example, in Chapter 7, Christmas muses on the day he became a man. That statement is followed by three unconnected days, recollected in stream-of-consciousness style. The reader can infer that the unrelated events which occur on those three days from Christmas' youth are indeed connected in Christmas' mind; he sees them as turning points in his coming-of-age. The content of those memories increase in importance given that they sum up the type of man Christmas has become. Faulkner's narrative technique forces the reader to engage his or her own thought process to better understand the characters. This almost incidental style of exposition is characteristic of a master author, and provides a much more satisfying experience than reading a story with simplistic, direct exposition.

Setting

The setting of *Light in August* is critical to understanding the characters and their motivations. Originally published in October of 1932, the novel was considered modern literature, and addressed social concerns in Depression-era America. However, at the time the novel was published, the country was still in the throes of the Depression and, therefore, the novel is not a historical explication of the era; it is directly tinged with the dark worldview and social unrest of the Depression. In examining several generations of

personal family histories for all of the major characters, Faulkner is looking back in time to examine how the country and its people arrived at such an ignominious state. The Depression was not the only social problem at this time. It was accompanied by the ascendancy of the Ku Klux Klan in the southern states, less than a century removed from slavery.

The poverty of the Depression seems to encourage the poor white males in this novel, set in the rural south, to take out all their frustrations and failures on their black neighbors. Joe Brown's character shows that regardless of how little money, success or credibility a white man in Jefferson attains, so long as racism rules society, the white man can always feel superior to someone. This black-white conflict acts as a backdrop for Faulkner's theme of crucifixion. Faulkner personalizes the generational effects of slavery by tracing his characters' families back to their grandparents, who lived in the Civil War era. This war ended shortly before Christmas' evil grandfather, Eupheus Hines, came of age. Had Hines not been raised at the tail end of slavery's legality in the United States, he might not have grown to view African-Americans as the devil's spawn. Then again, he might just have found some other excuse to kill; it's a wonder Mrs. Hines has survived. The author draws no conclusions from the history he traces, but rather allows the reader to draw his or her own lessons from history.

Language and Meaning

Author William Faulkner pulls no punches with his language in *Light in August*. He describes a bleak and desolate landscape with carefully selected words. He describes racism with racist words, or rather, the racist characters in the book use the racist words. Similarly, the misogynistic characters use both biblical and foul language to describe women. Faulkner's characters are often harsh and cruel; they live in harsh and cruel times; they use harsh and cruel language. However, not every character in the book thinks and speaks in foul ways, at least not all of the time. The reader is treated to a variety of viewpoints, and language ranging from offensively cruelty to poetic flight to charming, amusing and homespun commentary, such as Lena's description of Brown's face when he is confronted with their baby: "She just lay there, propped on the pillows, watching him with her sober eyes in which there was nothing at all - joy, surprise, reproach, love - while over his face passed shock, astonishment, outrage, and then downright terror, each one mocking in turn at the telltale little white scar, while ceaselessly here and there about the empty room went his harried and desperate eyes. She watched him herd them by will, like two terrified beasts, and drive them up to meet her own." (Chapter 18, pg. 406) Any modern day film actor would be proud to pull off a performance, which communicated as clearly as Faulkner's words do, the terror of a weak man confronted with responsibility.

Structure

Light in August is divided into twenty-one chapters. It is not a linear narrative, except in a rough sort of outline or overall story arc. The story begins moments before the murder

of Miss Burden, which brings on the final showdown of Joe Christmas' life. However, the story begins with Lena, who at that time has no connection to Christmas and has never even heard his name. As her story progresses in the present day, detailed flashbacks take the reader from her early youth to the present. The flashbacks are stream-of-conscious style, and gaps in the backstory are gradually filled in as her memory is called back to the formative events of her life. Joe Christmas also spends much of his thoughts in the past. His memories are better understood by his subconscious than by his conscious mind. "Memory believes before knowing remembers. Believes longer than recollects, longer than knowing even wonders." (Chapter 6, pg. 111) Thus the narration of his backstory is directed by his subconscious mind, which is almost an independent character in itself. Because of Christmas' tendency to disassociate from himself and the events in his life, his subconscious mind tends to drive the action in his life. Thus the novel becomes structured by the subconscious associations of one of its major characters. This unusual structure contributes to the dream-like quality of the prose.

Due to the frequent starts and stops in the action caused by numerous, detailed, even chapter-length flashbacks, the novel's structure takes on an almost diffident quality. The structure resembles country manners, pacing and style. It is akin to Byron Bunch's approach to sharing bad news: he starts in the middle, gets nearly all the way to the point, then skips back to the very beginning of the story as if to ease the blow by explaining every detail. It is a reluctant form of storytelling, as if William Faulkner does not want to give the readers such bad news. Perhaps this is why the before and after of Miss Burden's death is told, but the actual murder scene is omitted. This is vastly different from many modern novels and films which substitute gore for plot. Hightower's description of Byron in Chapter 6, as having "that countrybred diffidence which is courtesy," is also an appropriate description of the novel's structure.

Quotes

"She had lived there for eight years before she opened the window for the first time. She had not opened it a dozen times hardly before she discovered that she should not have opened it at all. She said to herself, 'That's just my luck.'" Chapter 1, pg. 3

"*I dont know what Martha's going to say* thinking, 'I reckon I do know what Martha's going to say. I reckon womenfolks are likely to be good without being very kind. Men, now, might. But it's only a bad woman herself that is likely to be very kind to another woman that needs the kindness'" Chapter 1, pg. 10

"'She ought not to started praying over me. She would have been all right if she hadn't started praying over me. It was not her fault that she got too old to be any good any more. But she ought to have had better sense than to pray over me.' He began to curse her." Chapter 5, pg. 99

"He did not always know their names, but he could cock his hat as they did; during the evenings behind the drawn shades of the diningroom at Max's he cocked it so and spoke of the waitress to the others, even in her presence, in his loud, drunken, despairing young voice, calling her his whore." Chapter 8, pg. 187

"And always, sooner or later, the street ran through cities, through an identical and well-nigh interchangeable section of cities without remembered names, where beneath the dark and equivocal and symbolical archways of midnight he bedded with the women and paid them when he had the money, and when he did not have it he bedded anyway and then told them that he was a negro." Chapter 10, pg. 211

"When he saw her next, he thought, 'My God. How little I know about women, when I thought I knew so much.'" Chapter 11, pg. 222

"He said quietly: 'You're old. I never noticed that before. An old woman. You've got gray in your hair.' She struck him, at once, with her flat hand, the rest of her body not moving at all. Her blow made a flat sound; his blow as close upon it as echo." Chapter 12, pg. 262

"'No woman who has a child is ever betrayed; the husband of a mother, whether he be the father or not, is already a cuckold. Give yourself at least the one chance in ten, Byron. If you must marry, there are single women, girls, virgins. It's not fair that you should sacrifice yourself to a woman who has chosen once and now wishes to renege that choice. It's not right. It's not just. God didn't intend it so when He made marriage. Made it? Women made marriage.'" Chapter 13, pp. 298-299

"They all want me to be captured, an 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." Chapter 14, pg. 319

"He never denied it. He never did anything. He never acted like either a nigger or a white man. That was it. That was what made the folks so mad." Chapter 15, pg. 331

"Old Doc Hines saw him go away in the buggy and he went back to wait for God and God come and He said to old Doc Hines, 'You can go too now. You have done My work. There is not more evil here now but womanevil, not worthy for My chosen instrument to watch.'" Chapter 16, pg. 365

"He knew now why he neglected to engage a doctor beforehand. It is because he did not believe until Mrs Hines called him from his tent that he (she) would need one, would have the need. It was like for a week now his eyes had accepted her belly without his mind believing." Chapter 17, pg. 377

"*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.*" Chapter 18, pg. 394

"His face was rocklike, calm, still bright with that expression of fulfillment, of grave and reckless joy." Chapter 19, pg. 436

"He can remember how when he was young, after he first came to Jefferson from the seminary, how that fading copper light would seem almost audible, like a dying yellow fall of trumpets dying into an interval of silence and waiting, out of which they would presently come." Chapter 20, pg. 441

"'I done come too far now,' he says. 'I be dog if I'm going to quit now.' And her looking at him like she had known all the time what he was going to do before he even knew himself that he was going to, and that whatever he done, he wasn't going to mean it." Chapter 21, pg. 479

Adaptations

According to James B. Meriwether in The Literary Career of William Faulkner, the motion picture rights to Light in August were sold, but no motion picture based on the novel has yet been made.

Key Questions

In Light in August Faulkner explores Southern, and sometimes American, values regarding race, sexuality, regional origin, and religion.

1. Faulkner's early title for the manuscript of Light in August was "Dark House."

Why is this title appropriate? Is the final title of the novel more effective than the original?

2. In early drafts of the novel, the story began with Hightower, not Lena Grove.

What is the effect of having Lena begin and end the novel?

3. Byron Bunch is one of the few important characters in the novel who does not have a past. Even Lena, who is almost a symbolic character, has one.

Why do you think Faulkner does this?

How would the novel change if Byron's life was traced from birth or childhood, as it is for other major characters?

4. Robert Heilman, in Tragedy and Melodrama, sees tragic characters torn between the contradictory impulses and values of a dilemma. No right choice exists, but choices must be made. He sees melodrama as a deterministic situation in which characters are under the control of other characters or are swept up in natural or historical events over which they have no control. In melodrama, which can be political, unlike tragedy, one might wish to reform the social inequities, such as racism, that ruin a character's life. Are the fates of Joe Christmas, Joanna Burden, and Gail Hightower tragic or melodramatic?

5. Describe the comic actions in Light in August. How do they mix with the overall tragic or melodramatic action involving Joe Christmas, Joanna, and Hightower?

6. Jim Crow laws, passed after the Civil War, usually in the South but not exclusively so, were supported by the "separate but equal" Supreme Court decision of Plessy v. Ferguson in 1896. Brown v. Board of Education in 1954 challenged this doctrine, but Faulkner's Light in August, in which the present action is set in the Prohibition era, appears to challenge this sense of justice as well.

How does Faulkner attack the dominant racial ideology of his day?

7. In the character development of Hightower, Christmas, and Joanna Burden, Faulkner ties together religious upbringing, sexuality, and race. Try to estimate the relationship of these forces in each of these characters. Are the formulations the same for all three?

What are the differences?

8. How well does Light in August hold together? Does it seem unified or disjointed? Does your esthetic judgment affect your sense of the novel's power?

9. Faulkner has created about seventy characters in Light in August. What tricks of characterization does he use to work in so many characters?

10. What are the connections to the Christ story in Light in August? What is Faulkner's purpose in drawing a partial parallel between the life of Christ and the life of Joe Christmas?

11. Using Light inAugust and other Faulkner novels as your focus, discuss how political a great writer can be.

Topics for Discussion

Why does Byron know he can count on Hightower's help despite Hightower's insistence that he does not want to get involved? Use examples from the narrative to explain.

Of all the injustices committed against young Joe Christmas, which do you think most shaped his character? Why?

Cite at least three examples of how Christmas is sacrificed by society. Cite three more examples of how Christmas contributes to his own demise, omitting the obvious example of the murder.

Discuss the ways in which Christmas is prejudiced against African-Americans. How does this prejudice contribute to his self-hatred?

Why does Christmas take such perverse pleasure in throwing both his foster-mother's and Miss Burden's food against the wall? Why does he resent the women afterwards for the fact that he chose to go hungry?

The author suggests that Hightower may be homosexual, and demonstrates that regardless of his sexual orientation, Hightower dislikes the female gender. Discuss these two issues, along with any other factors which might have led Hightower to oppose Byron's relationship with Lena.

Which character in the novel do you find to be the most sympathetic, and why? Explore how your views about this character match or differ from how the other characters view this person.

Literary Precedents

As a victim of Southern racial, religious, and social mores, Joe Christmas cries out for social reform in a way that does not appear in Faulkner's earlier novels, The Sound and the Fury, As I Lay Dying, and Sanctuary. In many interviews with students and teachers, Faulkner has described reading the work of Charles Dickens every year, and though many of the narrative and symbolic features of Light in August seem closer to another Faulkner favorite, Joseph Conrad, Dickens's great social novels, such as Bleak House, might have served as models for Light in August. Like Dickens, Faulkner was dealing with a large group of characters in Light in August, and some of the tricks of caricature that Dickens employed to make his action manageable seem to be used by Faulkner, such as his symbolic naming of characters—Joe Christmas, Lena Grove, Gail Hightower, and Byron Bunch. These names recall similar characters by Dickens, such as Krook, Lady Dedlock, Tulkinghorn, Turveydrop, and Mrs. Jellyby in Bleak House. While Dickens politically attacked the evils of the Chancery Court in England by describing what happens to its victims, Faulkner does something similar with race and religion in the stories of Joe, Joanna, and Hightower in Light in August.

With this novel, Faulkner is already moving away from the stream-of-consciousness technique, inspired by James Joyce, that he used in the first two narratives of The Sound and the Fury and in As 7 Lay Dying. In Light in August the narrative point of view, when Byron is serving as narrator, is close to Conrad's, especially with participatory character-narrators such as Marlow in Heart of Darkness, one of Faulkner's favorite works by Conrad. Readers can see in Light in August a closer integration than in previous Faulkner novels of third-person narration with spoken language or unspoken thoughts. Such handling of narrative point of view provides Faulkner with the flexibility of third-person narration and the psychological immediacy of his characters' inner lives.

Related Titles

Several characters in Light in August appear in other Yoknapatawpha novels and short stories. Joanna Burden's relatives appear briefly in The Unvanquished, where they are shot by John Sartoris, and many characters Lena encounters on her journey to Jefferson appear in The Hamlet and other Snopes short stories and novels. Gavin Stevens appears in the Snopes trilogy, Knight's Gambit and Intruder in the Dust, as well as a number of short stories, although usually in a more sympathetic role.

Faulkner treats racial bias in several novels, but especially in Go Down, Moses; Absalom, Absalom!; and Intruder in the Dust.

A collection of linked short stories that compose a novel, Go Down, Moses focuses on the McCaslin family from the pre-Civil War era to shortly before World War II. Ike McCaslin, who becomes aware that his ancestors not only owned slaves but enslaved their own children begotten by slaves, attempts to live free from this stain; but he is only partially successful. Absalom, Absalom!

shows the extremity of the color line as four character-narrators examine the Sutpen family before and after the Civil War, and the racism that separated father from son as well as brother from half-brother. Intruder in the Dust, which is set around World War II, is a racial melodrama, in which a black man, Lucas Beauchamp, is framed for murder and nearly lynched. Saved by a white adolescent and an old woman, Beauchamp is more acted upon than acting. More than any of Faulkner's other novels including Light in August, Intruder in the Dust graphically describes the action of the townspeople and the psychology of lynching.

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