

Language and the Status of the Real in William Faulkner's *Light in August*:

A Historio-cultural Study

LANGUE ET STATUT DU RÉEL DANS *LUMIÈRE D'AOÛT* DE WILLIAM FAULKNER:

UNE ÉTUDE HISTORIO-CULTURELLE

Noorbakhsh Hooti¹

Vahid Omrani²

Abstract: This study tries to bring a historio-cultural analysis of language and the status of the real in Faulkner's *Light in August*. The creation of Yoknapatawpha County implies a dualism central to the works of William Faulkner. Yoknapatawpha, Faulkner's fictional reconstruction of the American South and the land of his birth, expresses his dramatization of what he understood as reality. This involved an awareness of the distinction of a modern society, reified in its history and institutions from an older order of myth and tradition. The creation of Yoknapatawpha was "a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history." (Eliot, 1984, p. 201) This dualism of order and disorder, art and reality creates the dual perspective of Faulkner's fiction which views experience as at once meaningless and significant. This dichotomy helps to define the basic premises of Faulkner's fictional world by identifying the conflict between the autonomy of the artist and his immersion in history; his power to create an imaginary world free from the constraints of reality and the spatial and temporal coordinates that bind him to that reality. *Light in August* may be viewed as a significant attempt on Faulkner's part, at finding a way that could explore and dramatize the polyvalent significance of self, history and art in a modern world denied a fixed referential centre. The result is, what Bakhtin(1981) has called, a truly polyphonic novel that views reality as essentially multiple in nature.

Key words: Dualism; Faulkner; Eliot; Yoknapatawpha; Bakhtin; Dichotomy

Résumé: Cette étude tente d'apporter une analyse historio-culturelle sur la langue et le statut du réel dans *Lumière d'août* de William Faulkner. La création du Comté de Yoknapatawpha implique un dualisme au cœur de l'œuvre de William Faulkner. Yoknapatawpha, la reconstruction fictive par Faulkner de l'Amérique du Sud, son lieu de naissance, exprime sa dramatisation de ce qu'il a compris en tant que la réalité. Cela impliquait une prise de conscience de la distinction entre une société moderne, réifiée dans son histoire et des institutions d'un ancien ordre du mythe et de la tradition. La création de Yoknapatawpha était "un moyen de contrôler, d'ordonner, de donner une forme et une signification à un immense panorama futile et anarchique qui est l'histoire contemporaine."(Eliot, 1984, p. 201) Ce dualisme de l'ordre et désordre, de l'art et réalité crée la double perspective de la fiction de Faulkner qui considère l'expérience à la fois insensée et significative. Cette dichotomie permet de définir les prémisses de base du monde fictif de Faulkner en identifiant les conflits entre l'autonomie de l'artiste et son immersion dans l'histoire; son pouvoir de créer un monde imaginaire libéré des contraintes de la réalité et les coordonnées spatiales et temporelles qui le lient à cette réalité. Le roman *Lumière d'août* peut être considéré comme une tentative importante de Faulkner de trouver une manière qui pourrait

¹ Assistant Professor, Razi University, Faculty of Arts. English Department, Kermanshah, Iran
E-mail: nhooti@yahoo.com

² Lecturer, Lorestan University, Faculty of Arts. English Department, Khoram Abad, Iran

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explorer et dramatiser la signification polyvalente de soi, l'histoire et l'art dans un monde moderne refusant un centre référentiel fixe. Le résultat est ce que Bakhtine (1981) a appelé, un vrai roman polyphonique qui traite d'une réalité de nature multiple.

Mots clés: Dualism; Faulkner; Eliot; Yoknapatawpha; Bakhtine; Dichotomie

1. INTRODUCTION

Light in August asserts the realistic nature of the Faulknerian vision. Its multiple discourses construct different versions of reality viewed from different perspectives which complement as well as counterpoint each other. The Interaction of these versions of reality viewed from different perspectives constitutes the inner dynamics of the novel. The history of the real South and the Faulknerian meta-history of the mythic Yoknapatawpha are in a creative tension that envelope the novel. The image of a bipolar society, which is fissured from within, hangs like a spectre over the novel. Towner (2008, p. 35) believes "Connections abound in this novel between religion, sexuality, race, and gender, with each influencing the other in often unsettling ways."

In *Light in August* Faulkner does not digress into an analysis of Southern history as he does in *Go Down, Moses* or in *Moses* or in *Absalom, Absalom!* Instead he focuses on the dialectic produced by the subjective and objective dimensions of history. Thus Christmas' identity crises or Hightower's imprisonment in his self-created myth of his grandfather's heroism parallels the analogue history of the Old South but those are also potent novelistic images of that reality—individuals functioning in a bipolar society preoccupied with honour and shame, victory and defeat, white and black. In this novel the history of the land is internalized in the self-history, is realized and enacted in the biographical mode of existence. *Light in August* focuses on characters who are trying to define, or are in the process of re-defining, or are in the confusion about their own identities. This confusion somehow has led to a sort of boredom. According to Toohey (2007, p. 129):

Anyone who has ever experienced boredom of anything more than the simple frustrated variety will have felt that awful intrusion of the self between, as it were, one's emotional being and the world around, between sensation and volition. The indisputable painfulness of this condition is heightened by an oppressive sense of almost otiose inner self. Boredom, in its more intense phases, is built upon the self's sense of estrangement from the world around it. Perception is therefore directed relentlessly and sharply inward but in a dulled fashion outward.

Overall the characters find themselves impelled to assimilate the burden of history— of the individual *self* and of the land—with the reality of the present moment. In the process they constitute their own methodologies.

This mystified history of the *self* and that of the land are continuums which interact with and inter-animate each other. Faulkner rewrites narrative using poly-vocal and poly-modal narration, fusing different perspectives and novelistic images to arrive at a reality that can accommodate the binary stories of Joe Christmas and Lena Grove, Percy Grimm and Garvin Stevens, the reality of Hightower and that of Byron Bunch and finds a figurative validation in what Wesley has called "the triptych conclusion of the novel." (1984, p. 675)

Light in August raises some fundamental questions about the status of the 'real' in Faulkner's fiction. The creation of Yoknapatawpha emphasizes the power of the human mind to arrange reality through the creative use of language. Yoknapatawpha is a word-oriented world that confronts "the myth of reality by mythifying it in turn to produce an artificial myth." (Barthes, 1973, p. 147) As Barthes has noted, this reconstituted myth is, in fact, a mythology, a counter-myth that subverts reality by recreating it. It is the artist's way of countering the dominant myths of a culture that turns reality into an empty signifier and imposes upon it a signification convenient to its own needs. The history of Yoknapatawpha is created and shaped by the imagination of artist. To Faulkner fictional structure was simply an attempt "to reconcile imagination and pattern." (Gwynn & Blotner, 1959, p. 52)

In *Light in August* this process corresponds to the subversion of the determinants of the novel as a genre—plot, linear narrative and character development. In *Light in August*, Faulkner emerges as a modern writer, whose subversion of the mimetic tradition led him to rewrite narrative not univocally but contrapuntally, using episodic representation and multiple perspectives, shifting among different plots and characters. Faulknerian discourse cannot be reduced to a fictional rendering of objective reality; it tries to establish a dialogical contact between the subjective and the objective that questions the very notion of the unity of a work of art.

Howe argued that "In *Light in August* a new voice is heard, partly Faulkner's own and partly, as it were, an over-voice speaking for the memories and conscience of a people. . . . [T]his voice records the entire Yoknapatawpha story." (qtd. in Fargnoli, Golay, & Hamblin, 2008, p. 156)

In *Light in August* the scripting of different and various voices are punctuated by theatrical tropes. These different and voice-zones are located at different distances from each other and arranged as dialogic counterpoints, they share an essentially ambivalent relationship with the discourse in which they are embedded—the novel as a whole. In such a

conflicting situation it is hard to get away from the trap of duality of self. The only way to gain a peaceful self is to have a free atmosphere where dialogues are exchanged with mutual honest and respect. As Spranger asserts:

the equation of the dialectic of love with the dialectic of personality means that the self reaches its highest point, its moment of greatest integration, only in the moment of love, which is precisely the moment when it gives itself up. Or, in other words: only by losing itself, can the self gain itself. (qtd. in Bishop, 2009, p. 174)

In *Problem of Dostoevsk's Poetics*, Bakhtin finds it fallacious to reduce Dostoevsky's protagonists "to finalizing definitions, to find without fail a specific monological authorial." (1984, p. 229) On the other hand, Bakhtin emphasizes the novel's dependence on the "living mix of varied and opposing voices, developing and renewing itself," (1981, p. 49) as the pre-dominant verbal mode of the novel. These "multiform elements in style and the variform dimension in speech and voice" (p. 49) are stressed by Bakhtin, insists Sumway, "since he considers the opposing centripetal and centrifugal natures of language not as a system of grammatical categorizes but as partaking and expressing a world view." (1989, p. 256) The multiple narratives of *Light in August* represent a reality that is fluid. Thus the two main character-zones of the novel, Christmas's and Lena's remain separate and antithetical, each qualifying the other and in the process acquiring an ironic over tone. If the novel insists anything it is that life transcends and resists definition, that incomprehensibility is a part of life's complexity. The novel is full of speculation, confusion and negation. The narrative voices do not necessarily locate the casual chain of human action and motivation. This narrative uncertainty is a part of novel's reflexive design. Faulkner believed in the plasticity of experience and this is why in his art too, he consciously strove to break down rigidly and boundary, in the process, widening the generic scope of the novel.

2. ARGUMENT

In dramatizing the duality of the self and the world, Faulkner transforms it from a static opposition into a dialectic that symbolizes the antinomies of experience: life and death, order and chaos, action and inaction, illusion and reality, communication and its failure. Lena Grove travels the road "with the untroubled unchaste of a change of season" (Faulkner 1967, p. 47) carrying the seed of life; Joe travels the road running away from himself and others toward death; Joe's rape of Joanna and his self-destructively violent nature are powerfully qualified by the fanatical violence of Percy Grimm; Hightower, conversely, opts for a life of non-action, living and re-living the myth of his grandfather's heroism; Joanna's imprisonment in the puritan-ethic of a patriarchal society is related to Doc Hines' obsession with sex and sin. The juxtaposition of the contraries of experience projects a binary universe that continually divides and fragments that mystifies reality according to its own needs and forces it on the individual, frustrating his attempt to evolve a counter-mythology of his own.

In this context the reality of Joe Christmas is the most complex novelistic image of *Light in August*. It has an ambivalent relationship with the discourse in which it is embedded. The history of Joe Christmas, intrinsically related to that of the land of his birth, constitute an image of alienation both communal and personal—the isolation of a multi-caste society and that of a trapped individual. Joe is primarily a man without identity; his fabled Negro blood renders him an outcast in both the black and the white world. As Byron observes, "there was something definitely rootless...as though no town, no city was his, no street, no walls, no square of earth his home." (Faulkner, 1967, p. 27-henceforth Faulkner) Christmas is reduced to an empty signifier, literally as well as figuratively. Others mythify him and try to absorb him into their own fiction making process. Doc Hines fulminates about his being the seed of evil; it is he who precipitates the myth about Christmas' being a Negro at the orphanage. The dietician eagerly consumes the myth because it makes it easier to project upon Joe her own guilt-laden personal fictions, as is done by Joanna Burden at a later stage of Joe's life. His foster parent, McEachern thrust upon the child Joe a dehumanized Calvinistic ethic of sin, damnation and punishment. As Waddington says in *Reading Faulknerian Tragedy*,

All their fictions are informed by the underlying logic of actions-by-proxy epitomized in the Christian drama by original sin and vicarious purifying sacrifice. Joe's social status as an illegitimate orphan...who is putatively black corresponds to their Calvinistic versions of original sin, or the curse of predestined damnation. (1989, p. 155)

Joe's very existence becomes tantamount to a cultural anomaly, by being neither black nor white he defies his culture's absolute 'either-or' categories and consequently fails to fit into the dominant culture's master-pattern. Because Joe accepts the governing myths of his culture that denies the individual his right to 'be', he can interpret his situation only according to its dictates. The myth of his culture relentlessly transforms history into nature, forcing the individual to accept its mythical fabrications as the natural order of things, turning appearance into reality. As Barthes says, "myth has the task of giving a historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal." (1973, p. 155) Myth, continues Barthes, "removes from things their human meaning so as to make them signify a human insignificance. The function of myth is to empty reality." (ibid)

Joe encounters the passivity of his situation by assuming responsibility for it, "thirty years that I have lived to make me what I chose to be." (Faulkner, p. 251) He thinks that "he has chosen the savage and lonely street" (p. 243) of his perpetual flight of his own volition. His violence is part of this denial of passivity. Hence Joe is both the actor and the

victim in the drama of Joanna Burden's rape and murder. The internal and external antagonism between Joe and Joanna is part of the binary orientation of Faulkner's novelistic discourse, the dichotomous arrangement of male and female, white and black, mind and body. Joe fears women and sexuality:

On all sides, even within him, the bodiless fecund: mellow voices of Negro women murdered. It was as though he and all the man-shaped life about him had been returned to the lightless hot wet primo-genitive Female. He began to run. (p. 107)

Joe shuns the female world symbolized by the black women, yet seeks sexual gratification with Joanna, all the while resisting Joanna's sexual domination and his own submission to that dominance. Joanna, too, exercises her sexual choice with an ingrained feeling of guilt. Her subconscious craving for sexual expression is counter-pointed by her conscious condemnation of it. The patriarchal puritanical mindset conditions Joanna to suppress her natural physical expression and prevents her of attaining a psycho-sexual wholeness. Thus instead of murmuring Joe in a meaningful way she fragments him further. Joanna, unable to come to terms with her sexuality, hovers between the two extremes of celibacy and nymphomania. And after her menopausal crisis when she reverts to spinsterhood she refuses to free Joe. Her insistence on prayer as a deliverance from sin echoes that of McEachern's.

Joe consistently rejects the larger religious drama that envelopes him, he accepts McEachern's corporal punishment but rejects the religious intonations; he refuses to be a mere player in Joanna's drama of sin and repentance. To Joanna, like her abolitionist grandfather, the word 'negro' is an abstraction; her cry "Negro! Negro!" (p. 245) reduces Joe to the level of an abstraction—a subhuman entity, when she forces Joe to live her own myth of a black lawyer, Joe refuses the role as given. Joe's beheading of Joanna is an illusory attempt on Joe's part to free himself from the dominance of women, codified religion and sex embodied by Joanna.

The discourse of Joe Christmas is not merely one of the needs for recognition, which Kaplan (1997) identifies as one of the most important tropes of modern fiction but—as Taylor in *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition*—“of the condition in which the attempt to be recognized can fall.” (qtd. in Kaplan, 1997, p. 153) The reality of a public world that encloses the subjective world of Joe and sets up a counterpoint to it continually thwarts his need for self-definition. Christmas's own attempt to analyse his situation brings out this dichotomy:

I have been farther in these seven days (following the murder of Joanna) than in all the thirty years, he thinks. But I have never got outside that circle. I have never broken out of the ring of what I have already done and cannot undo. (Faulkner, p. 321)

And then the quasi-omniscient narrator focuses on “the black shoes, smelling of a Negro that mark on his ankles, the gauge definite and ineradicable of the black tide creeping up his legs, moving from his feet upward as death moves.” (ibid) Like-wise, Joe's realization that all he wanted was peace when juxtaposed against the agitated run that has been his life, results in a startling sense of dislocation: “That was all I wanted, he thinks, in a quiet and low amazement, that was all for thirty years. That didn't seem to be a whole lot to ask in thirty years.” (p. 313) It is a characteristic of the Faulknerian counter-myth to insist that Joe's attainment of peace can only coincide with the irony of his death.

Christmas solicits death; his actions in Mottstown imply a ritualistic self-sacrifice. He visits a barber, buys himself a new outfit. Even at the moment of his death he does not resist it. “He crouched behind that overturned table and let them shoot him to death, with that loaded and unfired pistol in hand.” (p. 425) At the moment of his death, Joe figuratively becomes the black cross whose shadowy burden humanity continues to bear, Joe Christmas at the moment of his death is transformed from a passive signifier of social myths to a potent counter-myth. His death at the hands of Percy Grimm demystifies the dominant structures of his culture, for the culture and its history precipitate the murder. To the members of the community who witness his death, he becomes a reality that cannot be denied:

For a long moment he looked up at them with peaceful and unfathomable and unbearable eyes. Then his face, body all seemed to collapse, to fall in upon itself, and from out of his pale body like the rush of sparks from a rising rocket; upon that black blast the man seemed to rise soaring into their memories forever and ever. They are not to lose it, in whatever peaceful valleys, beside whatever placid and reassuring streams of old age, in mirroring faces of whatever children they will contemplate old disasters and newer hopes. It will be there, musing, quite, steadfast, not fading and not particularly threatful, but of itself alone triumphant. (pp. 439-40)

Yet by making Joe's death self-contained reality and not an instrument of significant change, Faulkner stresses the fact that the community remain mere spectators, they are unable to become religious witnesses, unlike Reverend Shegog's congregation in *The Sound and the Fury* where the community becomes an active participant in the Christian drama of redemption through sacrifice. This is part of Faulkner's inversion of the myth of Christianity. Christ re-defined human identity while Christmas is a man without identity; Christ stressed the quality of men, Christmas has to function in an unequal and bipolar society. It is stressed by the visual picture of Joe who appears to be white in the Negro church where he is perceived to be the very image of Satan. This inverted cultural drama is substantiated by the dichotomous arrangement of the true religion of man symbolized by the figure of crucified Christ and the negative dimension religion has required by getting codified into inflexible, dehumanized patterns symbolized by Hines, McEachern and Burden. It has become death-oriented, “not love, not love, forbidding it to others.” (p. 347)

The role of witness that the community fails to assume falls upon Hightower. Hightower is the novel's witness; he embodies the action-observation dichotomy symbolized by the word 'witness' who is both the agent and the patient, Hightower is a compulsive fiction-maker. His subjective fiction-making parallels Faulkner's. By using the church pulpit to propagate his private myth of his grandfather's glorious death instead of the shared narrative of Christianity, Hightower invites the community to participate in his myth. Though Faulkner sees the limitations of Hightower's personal fiction, he nevertheless acknowledges the reality of it as a potent novelistic image. As Bakhtin says, "The image of another's language and outlook on the world simultaneously represented and representing is...typical of the novel; the greatest novelistic images (for example, the figure of Don Quixote) belong precisely to this type." (1981, p. 45) Hightower anticipates the failure of his mythology and his consequent banishment from community, yet in that very failure he locates a kind of triumph and overriding of conventions. His grandfather's death while stealing chickens is for him a triumph of non-conformism, a kind of mockery of death. Moreover, Hightower's vision of his grandfather is not a mere re-living glory, "I have been a single instant of darkness in which a horse galloped and a gun crashed." (Faulkner, p. 465) He is both the writer and the player in this perpetual drama of death and negation of death. Instead of renewing the communal narrative of Christianity, Hightower makes a travesty of it. Hightower's attempt to defy death by transforming the moment of his grandfather's death into a kind of eternal present that can be perpetually re-created, renders him a prisoner in life. He becomes an image of alienation. However, there is a moment towards rehabilitation. Through Byron's mediation, Hightower gets to participate both directly and vicariously in the lives of others.

The event of the birth of Lena's son rejuvenates him, "life comes to the old man yet" (p. 383), he says of himself. He reads Shakespeare's *Henry IV* instead of the self-obsessed verse of Tennyson, which was his staple reading. And his re-orientation towards life seems complete when he perceives in Lena's baby a link with posterity. For the first time his belief in immortality finds a concrete human embodiment. He also feels oneness with nature, "feeling the intermittent sun, the heat, smelling the savage fecund odour of the earth, the wood, the loud silence." (p. 384) But Hightower's most significant attempt to come out of his self-enclosed myth is his acknowledgement of responsibility in his wife's death. He sees for the first time that he has been the "author and instrument of her shame and death." (p. 462) This leads to self-knowledge by destroying his illusion of being a self-contained entity, "If I am the instrument of someone outside myself." (p. 465)

Yet it remains doubtful whether Hightower's re-orientation toward life can be termed a spiritual renewal. Hightower's visionary wheel in which the past and the present merge with the faces of the major characters of the novel and space and time coalesce can only be called a partial epiphany. In his epiphany, the reality of human suffering is qualified by the fantasy about his grandfather.

In stark contrast to the tragic reality of Christmas and Hightower is the pastoral idyll of Lena Grove and Byron Bunch. Lena's story provides a framework to the narratives of Joe and Hightower, creating a moral ambience that generates irony and affirms the multidimensional element of Faulkner's narrative art. Lena walks the tragic world of Christmas as an embodiment of contentment. Lena's subjective perception of her own situation contrasts sharply to the objective reality of her situation—she is an unmarried woman in an advanced state of pregnancy, travelling alone. She is so enamoured in her own fiction of finding out the father of her child that she effectively neutralizes the potential antagonism of a patriarchal society. The linearity of Lena's journey and her absolute certainty of achieving her goal are immune to disruption. Yet Lena's contentment resides on a tendency to refuse to acknowledge a reality that is not agreeable to her—Lucas's betrayal of Lena and his refusal to accept the responsibility of Lena and his refusal to accept the responsibility of Lena and her child. In fact, the world of Lena and Byron cannot escape the implications of the complex human realities that define the stories of Joe Christmas and Hightower.

It is to be noted that *Light in August* ends as a continuing discourse between the reader and the furniture dealer who narrates the journey of Lena and Byron. The furniture dealer is a compulsive fiction-maker and his anecdote about Byron and Lena is an instance of his own subjective fiction-making, replete with his own world-view about love and life in general. His prophecy about Lena and Byron's future together, remains just that, a prophecy. The tensions that characterize the relationship of Joe and Janna and immobilize Hightower are transformed by the furniture dealer to mere human follies that do not prevent "the good stock peopling...the good earth." (p. 384)

The sexual tension between Joe and Janna finds an echo in the deferred physical union of Byron and Lena. Moreover, Byron's Quixotic assumption of the role of self—proclaimed protector of Lena that frees him from his reclusive stance and engages him in worldly action, is ironic. Lena's baby objectifies to Byron her lost virginity. Though he stays with Lena—"I'd be a dog if I quit now" (p. 479)—the child is forever there to undermine his utopia. Further, Lena's baby links the novel's narratives of alienation. Mrs. Hines perceives him as an incarnation of Joe; he further parallels Joe in his status as a potential Christ-figure—with Byron as surrogate father, his family is an image of the holy family of Christ. Hightower, too, views him as his link with posterity. He is a receptacle for the legacy of the past and the promise of the future, renewal and deconstruction. Lena and Byron's linear journey is permanently disrupted by the tonal complexity of the narratives of Christmas and Hightower.

In arguing the dialogic relationship of myth, history and narrative, which produces the Faulknerian counter-myth, it is important to stress the process by which Faulkner reverses conventional signification. The triad of word, meaning and reality is stretched to its limit. The word 'nigger' is one of the most enduring myths of Yoknapatawpha. The novel subjects the word to a relentless scrutiny until it reveals the dehumanizing societal pattern that has created it. The fact that Christmas appears to be white enhances the irony of the whole situation and turns the word into an abstraction, "He don't look anymore a nigger than I do." (p. 330) By blurring the distinction between appearance and reality, Faulkner makes the word tantamount to the guilt-consciousness of the human race. Likewise, by superimposing their gender archetypes of Lilith and Eve on Joanna and Lena, Faulkner stresses both the historical continuity of the cultural stereotyping of women and the ongoing cultural drama of suppression of the female voice. By an ironic reversal, the symbol of the cross, the image of crucified Christ has been appropriated by codified religion, which uses it to perpetuate the status quo. Faulkner de-mythifies the dominant myths and reveals the historical reality that forms the bases of such cultural constructs.

The range of voices that compose the novel varies from the chameleon-like voice of the quasi-omniscient narrator who dons different guises in the different character-zones of the novel to the cryptic voice of Joe marked by the suppressed confusions, tensions and antagonisms that torment him; from the self-obsessed rhetoric of Hightower's fantasy to the simple, earthy and colloquial dimension of Lena's speech; from the mechanized voice of McEachern to Doc Hines' monomaniac ranting; from the sonorous church music to the voices of the townspeople of Jefferson. All these voices are in dialogic contact with each other and shape Faulkner's doubly-oriented discourse—simultaneously representing and being represented.

Multiple voices coincide with multiple perspectives and a fragmented time-scheme. Our first images of Lena constructed by the omniscient narrator are qualified by Armstid's impression of her, which foreshadows that of Byron Bunch. We first encounter Joe through Byron and then are given the chronotopic recapitulation of Joe's existence, as Bakhtin says, "The image of man is always intrinsically chronotopic." (1981, p. 85) We have Gavin Steven's subjective rationalization of Joe's situation as black-white dichotomy that undermines the complex human reality of Joe's being. The end of the novel is narrated by a surrogate-narrator. These voices and perspectives break down the definitiveness of authorial omniscience and assert the fluidity of experimental reality that is refractive and multiple. As Faulkner says, "the aim of every artist is to arrest motion which is life and hold it fixed so that 10 years later, when a stranger looks at it, it moves again since it is life" (1968, p. 253) This dialectic of dynamism and inertia is the governing artistic principle of the novel, embodied by the central image of the novel, that of the road with which the novel begins and ends, the road that Christmas travels in circles and the road that stretches out before Lena in an uncomplicated linearity; the road through which Percy Grimm pursues Christmas. As Bakhtin notes in *The Dialogic Imagination*:

On the road the spatial and temporal series defining human fates and lives combine with one another in distinctive ways, even as they become more complex and more concrete by the collapse of social distances. The chronotope of the road is both a point of new departures and a place for events to find their denouement. Time, as it were, fuses together with space and flows in it (forming the road); this is the source of the rich metaphorical expansion on the image of the road as a course, the course of life'...the course of history and so on, varied and multileveled are the ways in which road is turned into a metaphor (1981, p. 244).

The Faulknerian counter-myth of *Light in August* corresponds to a de-mythification of history. Faulkner views history not as a narrative of past events but as a continuum that envelops the past and the present and affects what men do or suffer. For beyond the question of the documentation of history, is the question of the cultural interpretation of history that process of cultural osmosis through which precipitations of history enter the experiential reality of the individual, the fragmentation wrought by history along racial lines destroys Joe Christmas internally and externally; the heroic code of ante-bellum south penetrates Hightower's fantasy and alienates him from society and meaningful human action; the Calvinistic dogma robs Doc Hines and McEachern of their essential humanity and reduces them to the level of automations; the cultural script with its deterministic assignment of role-models destroys Mrs. Hightower and Joanna Burden. This ironic interplay between the subjective and objective dimensions of history transforms the Faulknerian meta-history of Yoknapatawpha into an "artificial mythology" (Barthes, 1973, p. 155) that is counter-mythical in intent. Faulknerian meta-history functions as a repository of the experiential reality of a race that reflects, scrutinizes and explores the people's self-image. In Faulkner's fiction the history of the land and that of the people are never to be separated. Within this moral and aesthetic ambience the characters of *Light in August* become the living metaphors of the reality that surround strata of reality the novel encompasses and articulates. Thus, the separate plot paradigms of Christmas, Hightower and Lena are arranged as counterpoints in a dialogic relationship with one another.

Light in August scrutinizes the precepts of individualism and genealogy that are the basic components of human history; which Lester considers to be "conservative constructions, identity, autonomy, race, tradition, lineage, breeding, exchange of value, class, gender, isolation and difference." (1988, p. 141) Just as Lacan's concept of the gaze seeks to explode the myth of a unified subject by stressing the conceptual double-image that the individual sees in the mirror that provokes simultaneous attraction and repulsion, Faulkner, too, destroys the notions of unity and symmetry of fiction by creating a reality that is fragmented and multiple, in a continual dialectical contention with itself. And this is what makes *Light in August* a cultural testimonial.

As Rueckert (2004, p. 74) says:

The whole fiction, of course, is a bringing to light, an uncovering and a revealing, a moving, as so many of Faulkner's fictions are, from surfaces to deep inwardness to surfaces again; from present to past and back into the present again; it is an imagining into light of the dark interiors of selves, of the dark truths of human existence; it is a descent into and return from the darkness and terrors of hell.

3. CONCLUSION

By focusing upon the characters to come to terms with the flux that is life, the study displays the transaction between the human mind and the objective world. This in turn mirrors the creative process. The artist, too, is caught up in the dialectic of the self and the world; the work of art offers the artist's personal vision for public scrutiny. The artist's counter-myth is to interact with the personal myths of the readers and society. The process is what makes writing a cultural act. In *Light in August*, Faulkner relates the artist's trans-creation of reality to man's attempt to extract a meaning from and impose a pattern upon human life which is also an attempt at self-definition. Faulkner reveals the essential futility of such an endeavour. Yet he never denies the fact that the attempt itself is significant and is a fundamental human need. Finally In this paradox the study reveals how Faulkner locates the irony of history and that of the human situation.

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