

**"«[H]ow he had grandfathered the devil's spawn» : the  
construction of masculinity in William Faulkner's *Light in  
August.*"**

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In "The Old people", a short story taken from Faulkner's famous collection *Go down, Moses*, Isaac McCaslin remembers the day he killed his first buck -thus becoming a man :

*"The boy did that -drew the head and the throat taut and drew Sam Father's knife across the throat and Sam stooped and dipped his hands in the hot smoking blood and wiped them back and forth across the boy's face." <sup>1</sup>*

An old Southern tradition implied that a young boy had to slit the throat of a wild animal, to plunge his hands into the fresh blood, and to be ritualistically marked and anointed with it, to be considered a true hunter, an adult, a peer :

*"Did he do all right, Sam ?" his cousin McCaslin said.*

*"He done all right," Sam Fathers said.*

*They were the white boy, marked forever, and the old dark man, sired on both sides by savage kings, who had marked him, whose bloody hands had merely formally consecrated him to that which, under the man's tutelage, he had already accepted, humbly and joyfully, with abnegation and with pride too" <sup>2</sup>*

That ritual indeed, in that scene, is performed under the "tutelage" of two father figures, one of whom is precisely and symbolically called Sam Fathers. It dates back to an old age, preceding civilization, since it reenacts the gestures of "savage kings", that "sir[e]" and "consecrat[e]" the boy whose name is Isaac : instead of sacrificing a young son, an animal prey will be preferred, just like in the Old Testament with Abraham and Sarah's miraculous offspring -except for the fact that, in this case, the ritual seems more pagan than Christian, all the more so as the narrator recalls that Sam Fathers is the son to a Choctaw chief and a Negro slave girl.

It goes without saying that killing a wild animal, that virile tradition of the old South, is a rite towards manhood, or masculinity. It is one of the essential steps in a process of man-building, so to say.

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<sup>1</sup> William Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses*, Vintage International Edition, London, 1996, p.117

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p.118

Such process is widely present in Faulkner's 1932 novel *Light in August*, in which "doc Hines" fulminates against his grandson, Joe Christmas. He laments about "how he had grandfathered the devil's spawn" <sup>3</sup>, and curses his grandson because of his miscegenated blood. From his point of view, doc Hines feels responsible for engendering an abomination, a criminal with mixed blood, hunted by everyone. As a patriarch, he thinks it is his duty to get rid of the problem, to preserve the honor of the family, of the old South, of the white race.

This call to infanticide, in a way, can lead the reader to focus on the male characters in the novel and on the theme of masculinity. The term of course is linked to manhood, the fact of becoming a man, but may go further. Masculinity may imply a male role model towards society and the others. It consists of values and principles, including (supposedly) moral authority, and mostly physical domination. It may remind one of the Roman status of the *paterfamilias* (in Latin, "father of the family", the old form of the genitive case, here *-as*, standing for the more classical form *paterfamiliae*) : as the head of the family, the husband has the upper hand on all the family decisions, and has a right of life and death over his wife and children -hence the importance of the upbringing of boys, who have to follow that virile tradition.

In *Light in August*, the theme of education is central, since the brutality of Christmas's adoptive father, Mr Mc Eachern, may largely account for Christmas's own violence -both physical and psychological.

It thus seems that Southern men in *Light in August*, to sum things up, are globally prisoners of their past, of their upbringing and education ; they look trapped into an artificial social construction of masculinity and may be forced into virile violence.

After noting that the male characters compose a large and diversified group in the novel, and that they face a tradition of violence that can lead them to gender domination, I will try to show briefly that those men (that are prisoners of their past) could be a metaphor of the old South brooding over their historical defeat.

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<sup>3</sup> William Faulkner, *Light in August*, Vintage International Edition, New-York, 1990, p.447 - all the references of pages indicated in between brackets are those of that edition

**The male characters** are of course central in the novel, and they form quite a large and diversified group.

Let us focus first on the three young men : Joe Christmas, Lucas Burch/Joe Brown, and Byron Bunch.

Joe Christmas appears as an ambiguous character, as a Christ and Antichrist figure at the same time. His name is ill-ominous, "somehow an augur of what he will do" (p.32), a name that Mc Eachern considers a heathenish name (p.144). What is more, he is 33 years old, the age of Jesus. He is all the more ambiguous as he is white with "Negro blood", to use the expression uttered in the novel. He thus belongs to both communities without being integrated to either one. When dialoguing with the dietitian, the matron says he must be placed, sent to the orphanage for "niggers": "It's not his fault what he is" (p.134). Christmas has a dual personality :

*"he believed with calm paradox that he was the volitionless servant of the fatality in which he believed that he did not believe" (p.280)*

This contradictory statement encapsulates the complexity of Joe Christmas : he reckons that a "fatality" weighs upon him, but thinks that he can escape it or that he is one of its tools. In chapter 18, the sheriff wishes "to throw the scare of God into that durn fellow" (p.422), however Christmas's end seems to correspond to the latter's death wish, as if he had wanted to find a sort of redemption in that final scene. The detail of the unfired pistol implies it :

*"He crouched behind that overturned table and let them shoot him to death, with that loaded and unfired pistol in his hand" (p.449).*

As for Lucas Burch, he is a drunk coward, who does not have "overmuch personal courage", and who is "useful to anyone except himself" (p.270). He is a runaway, so to say : Lena looks for him and meanwhile he hides under a false identity (Joe Brown) and indulges into producing whisky illegally. His portrait is sufficiently sketched right from the beginning:

*"the Lucas Burches do not intend to be present when the need for it arises" (p.6).*

He "aint any good at anything" (p.38), except for meddling with anything : since it is never clearly stated that Joe Christmas killed Joanna Burden and set her house on fire, Lucas Burch is one of the suspects -the justice will quickly conclude that Christmas is the murderer and the arsonist since he has nigger blood. Burch is indeed the first and only person that the countryman finds drunk in the house (p.90, chapter 4), while Miss Burden is deadly wounded on the

floor upstairs, nevertheless he will soon come back to accuse Christmas in order to get the one-thousand-dollar reward (p.92).

To paraphrase another Southern writer, Flannery O'Connor, a good man is hard to find in *Light in August*. Still, there is one : Byron Bunch. He is humble :

*"I aint no better than nobody else"* (p.54).

He does his duty and more than his duty : when Lena is due, Byron has to go fetch the doctor (p.394). He is already in love with a woman pregnant with a baby that is not his :

*"Byron is already in love, though he does not yet know it"* (p.55).

When conversing with Hightower, he states that he believes in the good nature of man :

*"There are secret things a man can do without being evil"* (p.306).

He strongly contrasts with Lucas Burch and Joe Christmas, and, to put it in the Reverend's words : "For the Lena Groves there are always two men in the world and their number is legion : Lucas Burches and Byron Bunches" (p.317). Symbolically speaking, Byron will win over Lucas at the end.

Apart from the young men, there are the male figures of moral and family authority. Of course both father figures -Mc Eachern (brutal and rigid), and "doc Hines" (crazy), characterized by fanaticism, racism and violence- can be mentioned but shall be thoroughly evoked later on in that study.

Reverend Hightower is the most obvious father figure, of dignity and of ratiocination. He is embalmed by "the odor of goodness", about which Byron thinks : "Of course it would smell bad to us that are bad and sinful." (p.298) Not surprisingly, he has his flaws : he lives in denial, since he would not resign from his ministry after "the Memphis business", which is an euphemism to designate his wife's adultery and death (p.68). In that chapter (3), his congregation even compares him to Satan. He is guilty of hubris : the pun on his name, the fact that he is compared to an "eastern idol" and often sits erect (p.90) seem to corroborate that idea.

In connection to the father figures are the characters standing for law and order, such as the sheriff. He is a simple man, that does not talk much, always saying "Sho" as an answer. He shares the racial prejudices of the old South, namely when he orders "get me a nigger" in chapter 13 (p.290).

District attorney Gavin Stevens is a recurrent character of Faulkner's fiction and appears in *Intruder in the dust* as the expected lawyer of Lucas

Beauchamp - falsely accused of shooting and killing a white man. A bit like the Reverend, he talks too much and is used to ratiocinating. Of course he talks instead of acting efficiently, and has false intuitions. His presentation by the supposedly impersonal narrator is characterized by a sarcastic accumulation of seemingly positive titles :

*"Gavin Stevens though had a different theory. He is the district attorney, a Harvard graduate, a Phi Beta Kappa."* (p.444)

His speech is reported with similar sarcasm in the same passage (chapter 19) : he says "I think" three times, adds "I imagine" or "I think".

It is impossible to end this brief overview of the main male characters of the novel without focusing a while on Peter Grimm, who is the head of the citizens' legion patrolling in Jefferson to see to it that law and order are respected. His family name first is doubly symbolical. On the one hand, it might remind us of the Grimm brothers, the famous German authors of tales of the early 19th century : that possible literary reference means that Peter Grimm is a character from the past, who, like Hightower, was born too late :

*"He was too young to have been in the European war, though it was not until 1921 or '22 that he realised that he would never forgive his parents for that fact"* (p.450)

On the other hand, it obviously sounds like "grim", which is a suggestion of the potential danger that the man represents. Precisely, he adopts a virile and martial posture and is openly racist, which the narrator subtly mocks through the use of free indirect speech, with no punctuation, repetitions and hyperboles :

*"and a belief that the white race is superior to any and all other races and that the American is superior to all other white races and that the American uniform is superior to all men"* (p.451)

To sum up that first part, it thus can be seen that *Light in August* offers a variety of very different male characters, ranging from severe fathers and policemen to chatterboxes, and cowards, not to forget trigger-happy criminals - except for the "unfired pistol" at the end. Only a few are honest and hard workers , such as Armstid Winterbottom in chapter 1 or the furniture repairer in the final chapter (21). The rest of the male characters are often marked by violence and urged into it, if one may venture to say so.

Most of the male characters in the novel face a **tradition of violence** that can lead them to gender domination.

Joe Christmas, mostly, undergoes a humiliating upbringing that will eventually provoke his rebellion. Mr Mc Eachern wants to instill Christianity in him through whipping : "You would believe that a stable floor, the stamping place of beasts, is the proper place for the word of God. But I'll learn you that, too.", Mc Eachern tells his adoptive son (p.149). Mc Eachern is defined as a "ruthless man", obsessed with the Bible (p.152). He constantly gives orders and is himself guilty of hubris when he states : "The true virtues are work and the fear of God" or "He will eat my bread and he will observe my religion" (p.144-145), words that are reminiscent of the famous words uttered by Jesus-Christ. The fact that Mc Eachern uses those words parodies the Last supper and assimilates him to an Antichrist figure.

Such ruthlessness will finally trigger Christmas's Faustus-like rebellion, so to say, when he hits his adoptive father with a chair at the party, leaving him dead. Retrospectively, Joe Christmas is proud of it : "on this day I became a man", he keeps on thinking (p.146). On that crucial day, he felt quite the same feeling, made of pride and hatred : "Stand back! I said I would kill him some day ! I told him so !" (chapter 9, p.206-07). The narrator, in the same page, indicates that it was an act of transgression :

*"exulting perhaps at that moment as Faustus had, of having put behind now once and for all the Shalt Not, of being free at last of honor and Law"*

Like Doctor Faustus, Joe Christmas has gone beyond all respect and filial love : he is intoxicated with self-pride, and violates the Biblical 5th commandment ("Honor your father and your mother") and the 6th commandment ("Thou shalt not kill").

This hubris is confirmed by the scene of the turmoil with black people at the African-American church : because of the extremist education he received, Christmas rejects religion and hates prayers. He is namely obsessed with the fact that Joanna Burden included him into her daily wishes : "she started praying over me" (p.104). At the black church, when he goes to the pulpit, and seizes Brother Beddenberry, he is compared to Satan and "curse[s] God louder than the women screeching" (p.322-323).

Given the situation, it is not surprising, therefore, to witness common acts of violence against women.

The woman, first, is considered a despicable creature : she is often called "whore", "bitch" or under the name of Jezebel. Chapter 12 even offers a periphrasis for prostitutes :

*"he goes to Memphis, to see other women bought for a price" (p.262)*

The vague expression "a price" implies that the price can vary, and that it can be negotiated. It is thus very clear that women are generally considered as sexual objects.

When it is not the case, a woman is expected to correspond to a certain social model of submission, or at least of domestic responsibility : for instance, when Armstid meets Lena, pregnant and alone on the road in chapter 1, looking for Lucas Burch, he immediately thinks that Lena has "seceded" from the woman race. He knows "what Martha would say" (p.14-17). Precisely, Martha, whose name can sound symbolical, since it was the name of George Washington's wife, reminds Lena of her duties :

*"You stay where you are. I been doing this three times a day for thirty years now." (p.17)*

Martha considers it normal for a woman to stay at home, to get the food prepared, to do the house chores : this is the place where she has power and where she can get respect, in a legitimate way. Apart from that, women are associated with "sinning" and "bitchery". This is what the janitor, whose eyes are "blind wide open ice cold fanatical", in chapter 6, keeps on saying : he talks about "womanfilth" and repeats "answer me, Jezebel!" (p.128 and 132). Mc Eachern uses the same insults against the waitress in chapter 9 : "away, Jezebel !, Harlot!" (p.204).

Women, who are said to be nymphomaniac, are all the more despised as men are generally completely ignorant of how the female body works : boys even hit girls for having their period. They do not get an authentic sexual education, and the references to women's biology only consist of vague allusions and euphemisms :

*"They did not know that all girls wanted to, let alone that there were times when they could not" (p.185)*

The description of menstrual periods is as vague : "It's something that happens to them once a month". And when women are not available, they are guilty of "tantalis[ing]" them, in the boys' opinion :

*"It moved them : the temporary and abject helplessness of that which tantalised and frustrated desire ; the smooth and superior shape in which volition dwelled doomed to be at stated and inescapable intervals victims of periodical filth." (p.185)*

Once again, the female body is alluded to through disparaging words ("filth, abject" ...).

As for the relationships between men and women, they are hardly described in romantic terms : the best example is when Max and Mame are mocking the waitress and 17-year-old Joe Christmas when he comes to fetch her, using a sarcastic reference to Romeo and Juliet in chapter 8 (p.192). The remark is not only humourous or sarcastic, it is even racist, since the waitress is white, and Joe Christmas is said to be a "nigger" since he has nigger blood.

Furthermore, Christmas is trapped into virility, so to say, and rejects Mrs Mc Eachern's affection out of man's pride : he starts to hate her because "she is trying to make [him] cry" (p.168-169), which implies that, for him, crying is not virile.

To sum it up, his relationship with the waitress in chapter 8 encapsulates that culture of male chauvinism : he is compared to a young stallion (p.178), vomits when she tells him she's sick (p.188). He strikes her afterwards and publicly calls her "his whore" (p.198).

Still, men are criticized by women throughout the novel. Firstly, by Martha, who criticizes Armstid's choice to bring Lena to their home : "You men. You durn men" (p.16). Secondly, by Mrs Beard in chapter 18, when she tells Byron :

*"You men", she said. It aint a wonder womenfolks get impatient with you. You cant even know your own limits for devilment. [...] But if you had more than mansense you would know that women don't mean anything when they talk."* (p.419)

In Mrs Beard's views, men are so proud and rational that they are unable to understand women. On top of that, they are daredevils, which Armstid, a man himself, admits right at the beginning of the book :

*"A man. All men. He will pass up a hundred chances to do good for one chance to meddle where meddling is not wanted. He will overlook and fail to see chances, opportunities, for riches and fame and welldoing, and even sometimes for evil. But he wont fail to see a chance to meddle"* (p.24)

Men are characterized by their capacity to "meddle", to proudly mind other people's business.

The plot is also marked by the obsession of sexual frustration. The character of the Reverend's wife is particularly interesting and relevant in that matter. She becomes crazy and goes to the sanatorium then comes back, then



leaves again from time to time, to end up being found dead at a hotel in Memphis (p.64-68). The preacher - who mingles God and the galloping horses of the Civil War- is apparently incapable of satisfying her sexually. Byron does not blame her for leaving her husband :

*“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”* (p.62)

The clergyman eventually admits his own mistakes : "So this is love. I see. I was wrong about it too." (p.481). He recalls the first years of his marriage, and his wife's face, full of "eagerness", "hunger and desperation". Hightower is a man of the past, obsessed with "that fine shape of eternal youth and the virginal desire which makes heroes" (p.483), which makes him unable to understand his wife. At first, he is obsessed with an ideal of purity, but he even questions the Bible at the end, thinking "how false the most profound book turns out to be when applied to life" (p.482).

The other character suffering from sexual frustration is Miss Burden. Joanna Burden is a spinster, described as "a Yankee a lover of Negroes" (p.46). She has connections with many African-American schools, as if she wanted to atone for her family's racist conceptions : at four she goes to see the family graves with his father, who tells her about "the black shadow on whites" :

*"A race doomed and cursed to be forever and ever a part of the white race's doom and curse for its sins"* (p.252).

As if to make up for her family's extremism, she is stuck “in the wild throes of nymphomania” (p.259). She corresponds to Christmas -he that becomes the lover of her spinster’s bed (p.232)- since she suffers from schizophrenia, and seems to have a dual personality :

*"A dual personality : the one the woman [...] a horizon of physical security and adultery if not pleasure ; the other the mantrained muscles"* (p.235).

Christmas has the impression that their roles are inverted : "it was like I was the woman and she was the man" (p.237). Since he has the impression of being deprived of his virility in that matter, he overcompensates and hates her, keeps telling himself that she had never invited him inside the house proper (p.234), intends to despoil her virginity and thinks : “I’ll show you, I’ll show the bitch” and "I have made a woman of her at last" (p.236-237), before admitting "How little I know about women", on the same page.

The final mutilation (chapter 19) of Joe Christmas by Peter Grimm symbolizes this tradition of virility. It is a racist act of course ("That nigger, Christmas. they killed him", p.442), but not only : Peter Grimm wants to revenge the honor of white blood by depriving Christmas of his virility, as he was accused of raping Joanna Burden : "Now you'll let white women alone, even in hell", Grimm says (p.464). Grimm uses a bloody butcher knife to mutilate Christmas, performing an act traumatizing for the memories of the witnesses surrounding him : "when they saw what Grimm was doing one of the men gave a choked cry and stumbled back into the wall and began to vomit" (p.464).

To conclude that part, it seems clear that Hines and Mc Eachern appear as *paterfamilias* who have the upper hand on the family decisions : Hines kidnaps the child, Mc Eachern takes Joe's education completely in charge and dominates his wife, just like Hines. All this cycle of physical and psychological violence finally triggers gender violence, as well as racist acts, which are, in the case of Grimm, also linked to the sense of honour of the unvanquished, to racism and segregation and the defense of white supremacy. One should not reduce the identity of the old South to that grim character of course, still it could be added that the male characters could be a metaphor of the old South.

It can be thought that those characters, men that are prisoners of their past, might be **a metaphor of the old South** brooding over their defeat. They are prisoners of outdated traditions, unable to adapt to modernity. This global incapacity makes them too proud and violent.

In *The Paris Review* (spring 1956), Faulkner stated : "There is no such thing as was, because the past is", by which he meant that you are doomed to inherit from your past, whether you like it or not. This overwhelming and constant presence of the past can be seen in the circular structure of the novel, intertwined with various leitmotifs, namely that of the house burning, that directly appears in chapters 1 and 2, and in the rest of the book. The fact that when Lena arrives in Jefferson and sees Miss Burden's house burning (p.30) obviously creates some suspense for the reader, who is eager to know more about what happened.

Besides, it goes without saying that the novel is a detective story, as it is often the case in Faulknerian fiction -it will still be the case in *Intruder in the dust*. Several enigmas entice the reader's curiosity : on the whole, where is Lucas Burch (whom Lena is looking for) ? Who killed Miss Burden (whose house is burning) ? Where is Joe Christmas (who is suspected of being an arsonist, a rapist, and a murderer) ?

It can be added that the circular structure of the plot is reinforced by the series of analepses through which the action proceeds : for instance, chapters 6 to 10 deals with Christmas's past, and a few pages (15, at least) are devoted to Miss Burden's past in chapter 11 (p.240-255), when she tells Christmas about her past, and her 40 years spent in Jefferson. All this thus creates an impression of closure : the past is constantly present, it is not past but constitutes the essences and identities of every character in the novel.

In addition to that aspect, it is possible to feel the weight of historical defeat, of dead sins, through what might be called the themes of phantoms, shadows and ghosts -the terms are used as synonyms in the chapters, and are recurrent.

It is specifically the case with the Reverend's daydreams : the minister "sees himself a shadowy figure among shadows" (p.487). In that chapter (20), the obsessive motif of the wheel of thinking is particularly significant : Hightower's thoughts are spinning a yarn, so to say : he goes on brooding over the past, as if he was haunted by the ghost figures of Southern civil war soldiers. The wheel might remind us of the wheel of goddess Fortuna, standing for destiny. It is also reminiscent of the circles of eternal pain in Dante's *Inferno* (the well-known first part of *the Divine comedy*). To sum it up, the Reverend is blocked in the past, whether he likes or not : chapter 20 (p.474-480) enumerates the three phantoms Hightower grew up with : his mother (a cripple), his father and the enemy, and, last but not least, the third one : freedom. He is fully aware of that undeniable fact :

*"I skipped a generation, it's no wonder that I had no father and that I had I already died one night twenty years before I saw light" (p.478)*

One of the final chapters thus seems to deliver the Reverend's final epiphany :

*"But there are more things in heaven and earth too than truth" (p.479)*

This is an obvious reference to the famous words uttered by Hamlet to Horatio :

*« There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,  
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy. »<sup>4</sup>*

Still, there is an important difference here from the original : what does truth stand for ? It seems to allude to the Holy Scriptures, which means that, as I wrote before, Hightower is questioning his Biblical education.

The end of chapter 20, that describes Hightower's auditive hallucinations, is rather pessimistic : there is no escape for the Reverend's obsession. He is stuck in the past (the Civil War), just like the rest of the old South :

*"it seems to him that he still hears them : the wild bugles and the clashing sabres and the dying thunder of hooves" (p.493)*

The different references to colonel Sartoris are another aspect of that obsession with the past. Colonel Sartoris is another shadow of the ancestors. He is responsible for killing members of Miss Burden's family, an event which Joanna Burden evokes with much sarcasm :

*"So I suppose that Colonel Sartoris was a town hero because he killed with two shots from the same pistol an old onearmed man and a boy who had never even cast his first vote. Maybe they were right. I don't know." (p.249)*

The last two sentences indeed sound sarcastic. They are complete antitheses with what precedes : Colonel Sartoris is expected to be the town hero, but the killings he did were the massacres of innocent and defenseless people. To top it all, the official reason put forward to account for the fact that Joanna Burden's father never killed the Colonel, "was because of his French blood" (p.255). It adds to the comic aspect of certain Southern traditions, like the excessive respect due to supposedly noble ancestors.

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<sup>4</sup> William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, I, 5, l.167-8

The third obvious legacy from the past are the uniforms, whether they are religious or military. Two characters are deeply concerned by those poisoned gifts from the past. Peter Grimm, whose uniform, along with the decorum of his platoon, are “scraps of his dreams” (p.457). Besides, Hightower discovers and takes the garment of his grandfather, a dark blue garment which is highly symbolical too : it is a present from the past, from his grandfather and from beyond the grave, and, even though it is seen by a young boy, it is too big for him, which means the reverend might not be fit for the job.

*"it seemed unbelievably huge, as though made for a giant ; as though merely from having been worn by one of them, the cloth itself had assumed the properties of those phantoms who loomed heroic and tremendous against a background of thunder and smoke and thorn flags which now filled his waking and sleeping life" (p.469)*

The hyperbolic comparison to a giant, the metaphorical reference to phantoms and the lexical allusions to the Civil War, clearly indicate that that garment is a poisonous heritage.

To finish, the last poison that intoxicates the old South, in Faulkner's view, is the weight of religious fanaticism.

Here the complex status of the narrator should be briefly evoked : the narrator of *Light in August* seems to be external, impersonal, neutral. But the narrator is not that objective of course : we have previously noted, for instance through the description of Peter Grimm or Gavin Stevens, that the use of hyperboles, of accumulations, of disparaging terms, and, first and foremost, the use of free indirect speech and direct speech question that illusion of neutrality. In that matter, the narrator of *Light in August* resembles the narrator of Flaubert's *l'Education sentimentale*, where the same devices are used : the apparently impersonal narrator quotes the words of the characters who, doing so, discredit themselves.

This can be well seen in doc Hines' speeches, which are full of hubris :

*"He knowed. Old Doc Hines knowed. He had seen the womansign of God's abomination already on her, under her clothes." (p.374)*

The repetition of “knowed” in that passage clearly shows that we are in the presence of free indirect speech, and that the character is guilty of hubris. The same aspect is obvious in doc Hines' direct speech :

*"I am the Lord God's abomination, and I am the instrument of His will." (p.380)*

*"He is still walking my Earth" ; "He's a pollution and a abomination on My earth" (p.386)*

Doc Hines thus thinks he is a prophet of God, that he is a tool for divine vengeance. He even thinks that the Earth belongs to him, as if he was God himself. Unsurprisingly, his description in chapter 15 is not positive : "a dirty little old man with a face that had once been either courageous or violent [...] preaching the superiority of the white race", full of "insanity" (p.342-343). As I noted in my introduction, Hines wants to hit and even kill his grandson, whom he refuses to recognize as a white person, or a human being : "he said that he had a right to kill the nigger" (p.350). Such an extreme attitude is blamed by Mrs Hines his wife :

*"That was his vanity and his pride. But I told him it was because the devil was in him" (p.372)*

Along with such extremist declarations, it is important to emphasize the importance of darkness throughout the novel, forming a contrast with the title and with some characters, especially Lena, associated with nature and sunlight. It is a well-known fact that the primitive title to the novel was supposed to be *Dark House* : therefore, it is no surprise that the plot should mainly take place in dark sceneries, namely when, in chapter 5, Joe Christmas walks into the Negro section, ironically called, in those drab days of racial segregation, Freedman town (p.115). In that passage, darkness is linked to a kind of regression to savagery :

*"It was as though he and all other manshaped life about him had been returned to the lightless hot wet primogenitive Female" (p.115)*

Christmas here seems to lament the expulsion from the womb, he has a feeling of a paradise lost, as if he had originated "from the bottom of a thick black pit" (p.114). But trying to return to the heart of darkness, to that hot wet section, will lead him to sexual violence.

Still, there is gradually more light at the end, like a light of hope, a light (a birth), in August, precisely, when the characters discover "the rich foliage of August" (p.414) in chapter 17. The novel plays on that contrast between light and darkness. A passage encapsulates that opposition of imageries, right in chapter 5 :

*"It seemed to him that he could see the yellow day opening peacefully on before him, like a corridor, an arras, into a still chiaroscuro without urgency." (p.115)*  
The novel is globally on that stance, it follows that pattern : that of "a still chiaroscuro", to quote the narrator's words.

It would be impossible not **to conclude** that short study without referring, one more time, to Byron and Lena. They embody the light of hope in *Light in August*, they are the least despicable and the most positive characters. They offer the reader a glimpse of optimism, if one may venture to say so. Byron, who bears a so Romantic surname, gets to know the ordeals of love and the adventures of courting, even if such a courting is a parody throughout the novel... He lies to Lena to protect her (chapter 4, p.81), Hightower wants Byron to leave, and at first prevents Lena from accepting the help from Byron, by refusing his marriage proposal (p.410). Byron is invaded by a “clawed thing”, “lurked inside” him, which is the feeling of love, the love he does not recognize in the first place, that is eating him up and tearing him apart (p.398). Despite their quarrels, the two of them will end up together in a half-comic happy end, when Byron is standing at the side of the road, waiting to be re-accepted by Lena :

*"I done come too far now", he says. 'I be dog if I'm going to quit now"*  
*" 'Aint nobody never said for you to quit', she says." (p.506)*

The furniture repairer, who relates their burlesque trip to his wife in chapter 21, will have the final word here :

*"Yes, sir. You can't beat a woman" (p.506).*

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