REDISCOVERING LENA GROVE IN WILLIAM FAULKNER'S *LIGHT IN AUGUST*

by

J. HUNTER HOSKINS

(Under the Direction of Hugh M. Ruppersburg)

ABSTRACT

This study reinterprets Lena Grove's role in William Faulkner's *Light in August* by closely investigating the social conditions which produce the narrator's ideology. Previous criticism has stripped Lena of her subjectivity by denigrating her as a bovine earth mother or fetishizing her as a mythological earth goddess. This study, however, rights the discourse by showing that the narrator presents ample evidence of Lena's psychological development. It also argues that the critical misunderstanding of Lena stems from the critical misunderstanding of Faulkner's narrative voice.

INDEX WORDS: William Faulkner, *Light in August*, Lena Grove, Derrida, Marx, Frederic Jameson, André Bleikasten, Utopia, Postindustrialism, Lacan, narrative voice, Byron Bunch, Joe Christmas.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my father, John Hoskins, to my mother, Tam Martin, and to my sister, Laura Hoskins for their love and inspiration and for their faith in me. I am fortunate to have them.

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CHAPTER 1: HISTORICAL INDUSTRIALISM AND NARRATIVE NOSTALGIA

The nature of individuals thus depends on the material conditions determining their production.[i]

Allen Tate has famously argued that "[w]ith the war of 1914-1918, the South reentered the world—but gave a backward glance as it stepped over the border: that backward glance gave us the Southern Renascence, a literature conscious of the past in the present."[ii] This "backward glance[d]" re-entry into "the world" is the territory of much of Faulkner's fiction, including *Light in August* (1932).[iii] Unlike Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* (1936),[iv] which nostalgically mythologizes a South that never was, Faulkner's narrative critiques a very real Southern present of the 1930s;[v] it explores a new postindustrial, post-Reconstructed South: a South where Marx's maxim that "the tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living" proves true.[vi] Marx's maxim's pertinence here gains strength because in *Light in August* a discord exists between historic communal traditions and new modes of earning a living; the novel presents a society in flux in which individual citizens have little pretense of economic security and in which hierarchical divisions, economically and racially, are breaking down. It is precisely this flux that makes the community fetishize all the more its history and turn it into a rigid ideological code. Of all the major characters in this novel—Joe Christmas, Gail Hightower, Joanna Burden, Percy Grimm, Byron Bunch, and Lena Grove—only Lena (and potentially Byron due to his relationship with Lena) survives psychologically whole. *Light in August* investigates this New South that Lena's flexibility allows her to survive, for she becomes a community of one (or two within one), who never had a past worthy of mythologizing.[vii] She

becomes the lone light in the darkness of what Harold Bloom calls William Faulkner's "fourteen years of nihilistic splendor."[viii] Her light, however, is only relative to the darkness she encounters in Jefferson. Faulkner's bleak narrative landscape from *The Sound and the Fury* to *Go Down, Moses* begins of course in the mind of Benjy Compson, the "idiot," and ends with a curiously bitter Ike McCaslin. Of all the families in Faulkner's canon--the Bundrens, the Compsons, the Sartorises, the Sutpens, the Hightowers, and the Griersons—only Lena Grove still travels, transcending the narrative which attempts to contain her.

Michael Millgate has written that in *Light in August*

> the recurrent Faulknerian insistence upon the need to break free from the dead hand of the past takes on an additional urgency. To see the past as itself devoid of value and meaning is to remove the last justification for its perpetuation in the present, and it seems significant that some of the most disastrous actions in *Light in August* are performed by those seeking to compensate for lives not lived.[ix]

Joe Christmas like the others Millgate mentions is destroyed by both the past he knows in the orphanage and the past he "will never know."[x] Lena alone escapes Millgate's syllogism. Indeed, Lena succeeds precisely because of the historical economic conditions from which she arises. Ironically, being born into the Depression and into Doane's Mill is just Lena's luck. The social and material conditions into which she is born lead directly to her pregnancy and to her journey. Winners lose and losers win, to paraphrase Sartre. Derrida explains:

> There is an affinity, or at least a synchrony, between a culture of boredom and an orgiastic one. The domination of technology encourages demonic irresponsibility, and the sexual import of the latter does not need to be emphasized. It occurs against the background of a boredom that acts in concert

> with a technological leveling effect. Technological civilization only produces a heightening or recrudescence of the orgiastic, with the familiar effects of aestheticism and individualism that attend it, to the extent that it also produces boredom, for it 'levels' or neutralizes the mysterious or irreplaceable uniqueness of the responsible self. The individualism of technological civilization relies precisely on a misunderstanding of the unique self. It is an individual relating to a *role* and not a *person* [. . .] modern individualism, as it has developed since the Renaissance, concerns itself with the *role that is played* rather than with this unique person whose secret remains hidden behind the social mask.[xi]

Lena's "boredom" in Doane's Mill produces her irresponsible search for the orgiastic which in turn leads to her pregnancy and thus to her social mask as pregnant woman looking to reunite her family. This mask, or what Derrida also calls "inauthentic dissimulation," ultimately points towards Lena's authentic mystery, as opposed to the mythological status much critical discourse grants her. She develops this authenticity through an acquired understanding of responsibility defined as the ability to give of oneself: "What is given—and this would also represent a kind of death—is not some thing, but goodness itself, a giving goodness, the act of giving or the donation of the gift. A goodness that must not only forget itself but whose source remains inaccessible to the donee."[xii]

Lena Grove is absolutely unique in Faulkner's *oeuvre*; she achieves paradigmatic psychic health because she alone becomes a community of one, who lives life for herself and on her terms: a dialectical achievement made possible by the post-antebellum, postindustrial South from which she springs. Doane's Mill, the "less-than-village" from which Lena escapes under the pretense of finding the father of her imminent baby, has no history because it has no past and no

future, which obviates any need for nostalgia (5). Doane's Mill is a migrant "temp" town, new to the South. It was built to be destroyed. It is here where the narrator's nostalgia for the Old South meets Marxist critique in historicizing Lena. The narrator's critique, which modulates between nostalgia for what has been and rage for what has become of this New South, effectively leads to the critical misinterpretations Lena's role engenders. Critics therefore must understand this narrative voice; once the narrator's ideology and motivations are better understood, the critic may then begin to lift the veil the narrator has placed on her. The narrative indeed consistently presents and erases its own admission of Lena's strength. In the early chapters, the narrator's rage at the factories located in the country lead him to idealize the pastoral landscape in the middle distance, the land Lena traverses, between Doane's Mill and Jefferson. In the process, the pastoral imagery the narrator's nostalgia produces effectively erases Lena's arduous task, and the strength and awe this task should grant her, in a Utopian landscape. Whereas the narrator mythologizes the landscape and the scenes that occur within it, the critical commentary has swept up Lena, to her detriment, in this utopian nostalgia and thus has viewed her as both stupid and selfish or as a mythological earth goddess. Both characterizations reduce Lena's role not only in the narrative but in Faulkner's larger canon. By closely examining the narrator's language and using various philosophical critiques, this study attempts to better understand the narrative voice's ideologies and aims to reread and ultimately resituate Lena Grove in Faulkner's canon.

Sartre, in his much cited critique of Faulkner's metaphysics in *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), argues that

> Faulkner's vision of the world can be comparable to that of a man sitting in an open car and looking backward. At every moment, formless shadows, flickerings,

> vague tremblings, and patches of light rise up on either side of him, and only afterward, when he has a little perspective, do they become trees and men and cars.
>
> The past takes on a kind of super-reality; its contours are hard and clear, unchangeable. The present, nameless and fleeting, is helpless before it. It is full of gaps, and, through these gaps, the things of the past, fixed, motionless, and silent as judges or glances, come to invade it. Faulkner's monologues remind one of airplane trips full of air pockets. At each pocket, the hero's consciousness 'sinks back into the past' and rises only to sink back again. The present is not; it becomes. Everything *was*.[xiii]

Sartre here conflates Faulkner's metaphysics with those of individual characters such as Quentin Compson and the narrator of *Light in August*. The French existentialist correctly notes, however, that Christmas achieves "his terrible freedom" only once he accepts, and appropriates, his fate. Sartre, therefore, reads Christmas's tale as a freedom achieved through suicide, much like the freedom Quentin Compson achieves seven years earlier in *The Sound and the Fury*. Perhaps because her story does not fit his critique, Sartre does not mention Lena Grove in his discussion.[xiv] Save for the notable conflation of Faulkner's voice with the author's various narrators', Sartre's critique is useful, since it highlights the bleakness of the world Faulkner's characters inhabit. In a world where the recognition of freedom is the ability to choose to die, Lena Grove's survival is more than comic; it is remarkably unique.

Many commentators, including Sartre, forget that Faulkner uses an external narrative voice to mediate the narrative, a voice distinct from his own and with its own ideological and subjective voice. The narrative, therefore, is veiled from the reader until that narrative voice's

ideology (and how this ideology veils and shapes particular character representations) is better understood. The (re)telling of the events that become *Light in August* is the framing narrator's task and is not to be mistaken for William Faulkner, the creator of this narrative voice. After all, the narrative itself is a "retelling," a story in which the events have already taken place (494). The retelling is a framing device, a construct with a desire to turn past events into a unified, coherent present. The retelling is a repetition, a retrospective narrative told by a narrator shortly after the novel's events have taken place.[xv] While in *A Farewell to Arms* (1929),[xvi] Frederic Henry tells his story many years after the events he relates happened and thus is better able to come to terms with them, *Light in August's* narrator still rides in the "car" along with his readers.[xvii] The narrator develops and changes as his narrative progresses; in short, the narrator seems to better understand the characters he recreates as he tells his story. The manner in which he tells Lena Grove's story demonstrates this development: a dialectical relationship occurs between the narrator and the story he tells. Since most commentators do not recognize the narrator's development, they generally have misread Lena and her role in the story. Earlier critics such as Irving Howe reduce Lena to one-dimensional stupidity while more recent critics such as André Bleikasten and Irene Visser respectively mythologize Lena as an earth goddess or a "mendicant Madonna."[xviii]

In the short history the narrator gives of Lena, the framing narrator presents ample evidence of her ability to critique the cultural ideology from which she springs. Strangely, however, he also consistently attempts to erase this evidence. It is precisely her critical abilities that lead to her journey in the first place and that allow her to represent the "light" in "a story full of sound and fury."[xix] This paper's aim, then, is two-fold: 1) to show that Lena Grove's critical abilities allow her to forge her own autonomy from the rigid ideologies that destroy the novel's

other central characters and 2) to exploit this new reading of Lena as a means to better understand the central narrator's cultural ideology while shedding new light on *Light in August's* formal structure. In fulfilling this aim, this investigation traces Lena's escape from technical domination in Doane's Mill to her discovery of her authentic self she earns for herself.

CHAPTER 2: INDUSTRIAL ANGST: LENA, THE NARRATOR, AND THE CRITICS

Malcolm Cowley correctly argues that Faulkner:

> aimed at a sort of dramatic impersonality [. . .] in all his novels. In the same way that it is Quentin Compson, 'not Faulkner,' who passes judgment on Colonel Sutpen, it would be Isaac McCaslin, not the author of *Go Down, Moses*, who believes that the Southern land has been cursed by injustice to the Negroes' and later it would be Gavin Stevens, not the author of *Intruder in the Dust*, who speaks for the Southern liberals.[xx]

Likewise it would be the central narrator, not William Faulkner or Lena Grove herself, who leads Bleikasten to believe that Lena moves "in the timeless time of eternal recurrence," and that "[nothing] can hurt her," and that there is "[n]o need even for her to fight to achieve her ends."[xxi] That nothing does (seem to) hurt Lena does not mean that the potential for harm never existed. Lena's brother, for example, verbally abuses her by calling her "a whore," and her ne'er do well lover, Lucas Burch (Joe Brown), leaves her pregnant and alone in a community that so disdains pre-marital sex and unwed mothers that it attempts to write them out of history.[xxii] Whatever comfort, peace, or "absolute serenity" she may possess by narrative's end, she has labored for, has decided upon, and has appropriated for herself.

Over the years the critical response to Lena has generally been negative. Heretofore most commentators have reduced Lena's extraordinary success to her supposed stupidity, ignorance, and naiveté on the one hand or—more recently—commentators as strong as André Bleikasten have fetishized her as representative of a mythological goddess on the other. Olga Vickery, for

instance, correctly notes that "each person [Lena] meets sees not her but an image of what he believes her to be, and that image is at least partly predetermined by the convention that identifies virginity with virtue."[xxiii] She errs, however, by arguing that "[c]ertainly, the real Lena, more than slightly stupid and more than slightly selfish [is] unworthy of the dreams and the devotion [she] inspire[s]" (40-1). Textual evidence abounds suggesting that Lena is not stupid and that the only devotion she inspires belongs to Byron, which stems from his own fetishization of her. While Lena-as-Earth-Goddess has become a critical cliché, Cleanth Brooks, the original normative Faulknerian, claims that the title Earth Goddess "is a little highfalutin for Lena" and that her serenity "has frequently been put down to sheer mindlessness, and Lena, to be sure, is a very simple young woman."[xxiv] Irving Howe argues that Lena

> stands for the outrageous possibility that the assumption by Faulkner and his cultivated readers may be false: --the assumption that suffering finds a justification in the growth of human consciousness. For Lena is and does 'right' with a remarkably small amount of consciousness or suffering, neither of which she apparently needs very much; she is Faulkner's wry tribute to his own fallibility, a tribute both persuasive and not meant completely to persuade.[xxv]

Donald Kartiganer furthers Howe's argument by adding that "[i]nsofar as consciousness is concerned and the modernists' grasp of life as a struggle toward full awareness, Lena Grove is the character least relevant, for she is herself barely conscious at all."[xxvi] Alexander Welsh mistakenly avers that Lena's creator "does not allow [her] the wit to do more than biologically reproduce herself and that she does not occupy the same level of representation as the heroic characters, both of whom are conceived in the ironic mode."[xxvii] Welsh's critical mistake, however, is that he ascribes thoughts and intentions to Faulkner that rightly belong to the pre-

enlightened Hightower, who concludes that Lena is "*The good stock peopling in tranquil obedience to it the good earth: from these hearty loins without hurry or haste descending mother and daughter*" (406). Indeed, Judith Wittenberg further discredits Welsh's claim by noting that

> Hightower's warm regard has a nether side, however, for he is tacitly circumscribing Lena's potential by viewing her as biologically determined: childbearing may be personally gratifying for a woman, even as it fulfills the need of the human race to perpetuate itself, but it is only one aspect of the female experience–as Lena herself seems to recognize when she seeks to evade or at least delay her female fate by engaging in travel and seeing the world.[xxviii]

Wittenberg's crucial point here is that Lena chooses her own course; she knows her motivations are greater than simply wanting to find Lucas Burch or a father to her child (though those aims might motivate her too).

These dominant critical stances, however, degrade Lena's extraordinary self-reliance. Note how Bleikasten strips Lena of any responsibility for her actions:

> Lena is but another name for *natura naturans* [. . .] Nothing can hurt her. No need even for her to fight to achieve her ends. Her ends are in her beginnings, the harvest is in the seed, it is all a matter of growing and ripening. Lena has just to wait, and her patience is inexhaustible. Her destiny bears her along, and she bears it within herself, like the child soon to be born.[xxix]

Bleikasten, perhaps recognizing his own fallacy, argues that *Light in August* is a "male fiction":

> female characters have to be imaginatively reappropriated and reshaped according to the demands of male desire. A woman cannot be apprehended in her unique, irreducible individuality; she must be made to stand for something else, something larger, [. . .] so as

> to be more effectively diminished. Lena is both a real woman [. . .] and a metaphorical woman, an unmarried pregnant country girl and 'the still unravish'd bride of quietness,' even as the urn is at once an image of fertility, a symbol of the work of life, and, through Keats's intercession, a paradigm of the work of art. Denied as desiring body and dissociated from the 'act of darkness,' which would jeopardize her mythic purity, she is, at least in the first pages, a mother *not yet* a mother, still at one with her child: the ideal mother, the mother ideal, the-mother-to-be, suspended out of time, prior to birth and death, a pure mirage of 'inwardlighted' stillness and togetherness.[xxx]

Bleikasten, attempting to further justify his reading (while still conflating his own reading with that of the narrator's), claims that "the celebration of Lena in the role of earth goddess is in fact little more than a precarious rite of exorcism [. . .] Take off the fair mask of light, and all that is left is the stark enigma of spawning flesh" and gestures towards the narrator's inability to "sustain [. . .] the pastoral note."[xxxi] Much textual evidence proves otherwise; the narrator, rarely, if ever, celebrates Lena in such a role. Rather, in contrast to the linguistic rage the mechanization of the landscape elicits from him, the narrator's celebration of the land between town and country elicits his highly stylized pastoral language. The narrator sees the wagons, the mules, and the people within this space much like a visual artist. In effect, he creates a Utopian landscape to compensate for the angst Doane's Mill creates within him. It is this landscape that he celebrates and fetishizes, not Lena Grove. It is Bleikasten's desire to create an all too clean binary between Lena and Joanna Burden which allows the narrator's eloquence to seduce him

> In the symbolic pairing of Lena and Joanna, one recognizes once again two halves of the same old myth. Their antithetical and complementary relationship in the novel's pattern refers us once again back to the gesture of division, which, since Faulkner's beginnings

> as a novelist, has been the hall mark of his representation of the feminine. Lena and Joanna are opposites like day and night, sun and moon: one is wise, the other mad; one is fertile, the other barren. Womb and tomb, refuge and abyss, Eve and Lilith, once again. While Lena is a gratifying image of the good mother, Joanna is a terrifying image of the bad one. Both have their iconographic referent: for Lena, it is the Virgin and Child, the reassuring *Madonna col bambino*, as Western painting and sculpture have celebrated her since the thirteenth century; for Joanna, the devouring and castrating woman, it is the head of Medusa [. . .] an emblem the more appropriate as it refers to a woman punished with monstrousness for a forbidden sexual encounter.[xxxii]

Bleikasten further hedges his interpretation by again blaming the narrator's supposed need to "exorcise" Lena's femininity: "With Faulkner, more often than not woman turns out to be merely a male self's other, the phantasmal projection of his repressed desires and unacknowledged fears. Only on rare occasions—in Faulkner's rendering of Addie Bundren, for instance—is her otherness acknowledged as the otherness of another's self."[xxxiii] As Deborah Clarke argues, however, Bleikasten "persists in reading Lena primarily as an earth-goddess, rather than elaborating on the implications of that reappropriation."[xxxiv] Bleikasten's insistence on simple binaries,[xxxv] his own critical desire to couple Joanna Burden's yin with Lena's yang, leads to his misunderstands of the narrator's ideological aim: the celebration of the middle distance between town and country. Not only does no one in the novel, save for Byron Bunch, view Lena as representative of "mythic purity," the narrator's "pastoral note" emanates from his anxiety towards to the dying pastoral landscape between town and country rather than any anxiety he may have towards fertile femininity.

In a recent attempt to reconfigure Lena's role in the novel, Irene Visser calls Lena "one of the most mysterious and most underestimated of William Faulkner's fictional creations."[xxxvi] While Visser rights the discourse a bit by noting that Lena is "fully autonomous" and "fully sensitive to her own and others' deepest needs," dubious though the latter claim is, she ultimately (re)mystifies Lena à la Bleikasten by substituting Christianity for Hellenism: "Lena's mystery resides in her almost instinctive spirituality; a natural serenity and innate 'holiness.'" With Lena, Visser argues, "Faulkner create[s] a mendicant Madonna, a begging saint."[xxxvii] Visser, it seems, (mis)appropriates Lena's "characteristic phrase," [that] 'the Lord will see to it'"—which Lena actually invokes only once[xxxviii]—as evidence of Lena's sincere faith in a supernatural protective force. After all, as evidenced by her conversation with Martha Armstid and others on her journey, Lena has a rather sensitive understanding of the culture she must navigate (not to be confused with "the a-moral scheming of a social parasite," which Olga Vickery suggests).[xxxix] Visser, in short, correctly notes "the [textual] references to Lena's intelligence," but uses such evidence simply to repurpose the claims of those commentators, such as Bleikasten, who want to put Lena in the noumenal mythic, rather than using such evidence to demythologize or demystify Lena in the phenomenal realm of human life (or a representation thereof). Her success is not due to destiny and she is certainly not impervious to pain but rather to her own *élan vital* and her own labor.

Reading Lena as a mythological figure, ironically, puts her in the same eternal realm that the narrator reserves solely for Joe Christmas, who rises "soaring into [the town's] memories forever and ever," a realm the latter only achieves after having been violently murdered and ultimately castrated (465). Most commentators, by removing agency from her, weaken Lena. Unlike Christmas, however, Lena leaves Jefferson much as she had originally found it, taking

with her only Byron Bunch, who remains just outside the town's consciousness. Unlike Christmas, her presence will not linger nor will it haunt the town. When she leaves, so does the communal remembrance of her. That she affects the narrator's memory enough for him to relate her story and to mythologize her by adding her to Keats's Grecian urn emphasizes her effect is personal rather than communal. Joe Christmas haunts; Lena only fleetingly lingers. That she does not haunt is her gift.[xl] She is not even interested in lingering for very long. When she leaves a place no one seems to notice and no community, not even her family, seems to care. In a narrative which contains such horrific violence and so little hope, Lena's journey is remarkable. Bleikasten's insistence then that "Lena comes to us, comes back to us from the plumbless depths of a time before time, prior to the nightmare of history, a time slow and simple, ruled by the regular rhythms of mere alternation" demonstrates that he too has fallen under the same spell that caught Byron Bunch and the narrator, until they both wake from their stupor.[xli] Those in her immediate realm, such as Harry Armstid and Winterbottom, even in the narrator's Utopian pastoral middle distance between town and country, do not see Lena as representative of anything other than a woman "young, pregnant, and a stranger" (9).

Rather than coming from a "time before time," it is the very actuality of time, her knowledge that her baby's birth is imminent, along with the very real economic conditions and the actually existing sociological forces, which force her journey. Rather than coming "prior to the nightmare of history," she escapes a very actual nightmare resulting from history which manifests itself as the "less-than-village," Doane's Mill. Much as late-capitalism's television advertisements show the end product (a pair of tennis shoes, for example) yet never show the labor which produces the product, the narrator's Utopian vision of the pastoral middle distance between Doane's Mill and Jefferson veils the labor from Lena's trek and diminishes the

historical conditions from which she comes. His Utopian vision is of such strength that it threatens to erase the narrative immediately preceding the scene. This idea then that Lena is a timeless earth goddess comes from the linguistic anxiety of the external narrator rather than from Lena herself; her relationship with Byron Bunch attests to her rejection of being put on a pedestal. As his story progresses, however, the narrator produces slippages, which undercut this attempt. What is more, the narrator realizes this himself at the end of the novel.

Indeed, the first glimpse of Lena that the narrator has--this reader and critic of Keats, Tennyson, Balzac, and of epic poetry, this social commentator from the upper classes--undercuts the idea of Lena's timelessness as he plops her down before us *in medias res* by referencing her very awareness of time and distance: "*although I have not been quite a month on the road I am already in Mississippi*" (3). Far from presenting an unthinking vegetable, much less a goddess "coming back to us from a time before time," the narrator's very first description of her collates her name with "thinks" and "Thinking" and firmly places her geographically and temporally (3). The narrator's choice of which of her thoughts to present strips the journey of its difficulty as Lena simply focuses on her amazement. Her pride and wonder is well earned, but it is also the result of hard-earned labor: a month on the road, much of it on foot, for anyone is no mean task, especially a pregnant woman. He further places her in time by presenting her history.

Unlike the other histories he mediates such as those of Christmas, Joanna Burden, or the Rev. Gail Hightower, all tangled in uncertainty and plumbed with rigorous investigation, the narrator presents Lena's history concisely (in four pages) with no interpretative gesture.[xlii] He gives no grand allusions to Goddesses, urns, and Romantic poetry in his version of her history. This retelling of Lena's history denotes the narrator's ability to tell his story objectively, an ability he loses as the first chapter progresses. Just as easily, and with as little self-awareness, he

begins to recount Lena's background and makes known his Balzacian influence as he editorializes on the Doane's Mill factory and gradually slips into a linguistic rage of Faulknerian fireworks signified by the lengthening sentences and the creation of pejorative compound nouns as the paragraph progresses:

> All the men in the village worked in the mill or for it. It was cutting pine. It had been there seven years and in seven years more it would destroy all the timber within its reach. Then some of the machinery and most of the men who ran it and existed because of and for it would be loaded onto freight cars and moved away. But some of the machinery would be left, since new pieces could always be bought on the installment plan—gaunt, staring, motionless wheels rising from mounds of brick rubble and ragged weeds with a quality profoundly astonishing, and gutted boilers lifting their rusting and un-smoking stacks with an air stubborn, baffled and bemused upon a stumppocked scene of profound and peaceful desolation, unplowed, untilled, gutting slowly into red and choked ravines beneath the long quiet rains of autumn and the galloping fury of vernal equinoxes. Then the hamlet which at its best day had borne no name listed on Postoffice Department annals would not now even be remembered by the hookwormridden heirs at large who pulled the buildings down and burned them in cookstoves and winter grates. (4-5)

The narrator's ideology here closely mirrors that of the narrator of "A Rose for Emily" (1931),[xliii] who also rants against the inexorable march of postindustrialism represented by the cotton gins.[xliv] It is a curious historical moment where nostalgia for the pastoral landscape of the fading Southern agrarian economy (unplowed, untilled) couches itself in a virulent Marxist critique of

postindustrial capitalism.[xlv] Curiously, as the narrator's history of Lena progresses, his anxiety towards the changing social conditions becomes clear: Doane's Mill, rather than Lena Grove, becomes the focus.

The narrator describes Doane's Mill as a place with a closed future of endless repetition comprised of those "men" who do not exist nor work for themselves, of men who do not even work for those who "run" the mill. Note that the "men," both those who "work in it" or "run it," actually work "for it" and "exist because of and for" this machinery, not for other human beings. For the narrator, this machinery comes to life with a death drive all its own: planned obsolescence. The narrator fetishizes the mill as a life force that births hamlets and people to feed it, and it in turn is governed by something greater than itself, something the narrator cannot name. When this controlling force exits, like a soul leaving the human body, the men who work for it salvage any machinery of value and leave the rest behind like so much dead flesh, "gaunt, staring, motionless," while their "hookwormridden heirs" salvage what remains like vultures. This unnamable force, discussed only in the passive voice ("would be left," "could always be bought"), is postindustrial capitalism, the narrator's real anti-Christ: a totalitarian force from which no human can escape, save for Lena, who opts out.[xlvi] It also, importantly, flattens hierarchies: Capitalism is the master of both the white and black citizens.

It is this flattening of the economy that leads to the nostalgia of many of the whites in the novel, including the narrator's propensity to mythologize Lena's journey. The narrator is part of this culture, but he is not part of the working class.[xlvii] He is a reader of high literature and tells his story from that educated viewpoint. Like Faulkner's contemporaries, the Southern Agrarians, the narrator belongs to the same class, albeit an American version, as Ford Madox Ford's Christopher Tietjens in *Parade's End* (1924-28),[xlviii] one that belongs to a disappearing agrarian,

pastoral landscape, which the new industrial economy dooms to obsolescence. It is against the visionary backdrop of a capitalistic, postindustrial dystopian holocaust in Doane's Mill that the narrator fetishizes the scene containing Lena's journey because it nostalgically recalls the disappearance of the pastoral scene of which she is a part. That this holocaust is imaginary is all the more pertinent: though the narrative's events have already taken place, other textual referents make clear that the impending Doane's Mill closing "in seven years more" is the narrator's prediction, a science fiction of sorts.[xlix] This imaginary holocaust, this closed circle of sevens (fourteen years of nihilistic splendor!) leads directly to the linguistic anxiety turned to Utopian vision the narrator presents as he describes Lena's entry into Jefferson.

Commentators such as Olga Vickery, who view Lena as selfish or oblivious, underestimate Faulkner's nihilism in this period. It is Lena's gift that she does not intend to revitalize those who are receptive to her; indeed, her disinterestedness makes her gift pure. As a young child, she is highly conscious of the gaze of the Other, but the very real gaze her pregnancy elicits does not concern her. Brian Richardson has rightly noted that Lena is "impervious to the community's designations of her."[l] She therefore tells Mrs. Martha Armstid that "after a while I reckon I just got too busy getting this chap up to his time to worry about what my name was or what folks thought" (20). In *Light in August*, those who consciously try to teach inevitably fail, as teaching implies some ideological motivation on the part of the teacher (see McEachern, Grimm, Mr. Compson, etc.).

Lena's development, from the young pre-teenager who needs her community's approval and from the young woman who attaches herself to the dissembling Burch, to the more experienced adult who educates Byron Bunch in how to love, is quite remarkable. Derrida—in a study on the Czech philosopher, Jan Patočka—argues that "infinite love (the Good as goodness

that infinitely forgets itself) [has] a logic that at bottom has no need of *the event of a revelation or the revelation of an event*. It needs to think the possibility of such an event but not the event itself."[li] Therefore, he continues, there exists "a nondogmatic doublet of dogma, a philosophical and metaphysical doublet, in any case a thinking that 'repeats' the possibility of religion without religion."[lii] The end result then is one of "responsibility," which can only exist

> On the condition that the Good no longer be a transcendental objective, a relation between objective things, but the relation to the other, a response to the other; an experience of personal goodness and a movement of intention. That supposes [. . .] a double rupture: both with orgiastic mystery *and* with Platonism. On what condition does goodness exist beyond all calculation? On the condition that goodness forget itself, that the movement be a movement of the gift that renounces itself and, in order to *become finite*, become incarnated in order to love the other, to love the other as a finite other. This gift of infinite love comes from someone and is addressed to someone; responsibility demands irreplaceable singularity [. . .] it also requires that, being good and through goodness, one forget or efface the origin of what one gives.[liii]

Derrida's point here is that in order for a gift to be a gift or for love to be love then the one who gives does so under no pretence of "calculation." In describing the development of Lena and Byron's relationship, the narrator describes a movement that parallels Derrida's idea of a gift that "forgets itself." This idea is crucial in the context of *Light in August* because it is what separates Lena and her success from every other character in the narrative. Everyone from Doc Hines to Joe McEachern to Percy Grimm is motivated by an ideology that consciously, and often violently, imposes itself on others. Lena's gift is that she gives without intention.

CHAPTER 3: THE MIDDLE DISTANCE: THE NARRATOR'S PASTORAL UTOPIA

Marx, following Shakespeare, argues that capital "makes brothers of impossibilities [. . .] it is the fraternization of impossibilities. It makes contradictions embrace."[liv] The narrator shows how this "fraternization" happens in his American South as he contrasts the inexorable destruction of Doane's Mill with the pastoral landscape upon which Lena travels between the town and country. The middle distance is the scene that catches the imagination of the narrator. This scene is after all the one in which Bleikestan reads Lena coming "back to us from a time before time." The problem here with the narrator's vision, however, is that it represses and halts the future in its attempt to erase the present; hence the urn is written as an aesthetic utopian vision.[lv] The narrator here consciously turns to Bergsonian duration (*durée*), where past and present become atemporal or timeless in order to make his views on industrialism clear. Note how he juxtaposes the industrialized machination of the "the mixed train" as "it appear[s] out of the devastated hills with apparitionlike suddenness and wailing like a banshee [. . .] like a forgotten bead from a broken string" as it "shriek[s] through" the mechanical wasteland of the countryside of Doane's Mill with the mules and wagons that "hang suspended in the middle distance forever and forever [. . .] like a shabby bead upon the mild red string of road" (5, 8). This juxtaposition is his attempt to replace, if not erase, the train of industrialization with the mules and wagons he associates with the pastoral. The land, the people, and the roads connecting the village and the city, produce his nostalgia and his most peacefully grandiloquent language. The land between town and country produces his Utopian vision; Lena is the synthesis. She is both a product of rural industrialization and its solution as she opts out of this exchange as she travels within it.

When describing the Doane's Mill factory and the train, the narrator's language becomes bombastic, but when describing Lena's journey from the village to Jefferson, his language majestically slows and his literary precursors shift from the prose of Dickensian English realism and Balzacian French naturalism to the poetry of the English Romantics and the philosophy of Bergson in *Creative Evolution* (1907).[lvi] Whereas the train shrieks like a forgotten bead on a broken string, the wagon in Lena's sight "seems to hang in the middle distance forever and forever, so infinitesimal is its progress, like a shabby bead upon a mild red string of road" (8). It is not Lena that is so much fetishized as it is the road, the journey, "the middle distance," between the town and the country, which the narrator attempts to freeze in timelessness. While Bleikasten believes it is the narrator's anxiety towards the feminine which forces the critic to objectify Lena, it is rather the narrator's anxiety towards postindustrial capitalism which misleads Bleikasten.

In order to demystify Lena from the mythic, the narrator's utopian vision must be unpacked. As the narrator writes his utopian vision, his language turns plastic as if he were writing the scene in the same manner that Frederic Jameson suggests Van Gogh paints "Ein Paar Barnschuhe" (1886). The comparison is useful here because both the narrator and Van Gogh attempt to veil rural poverty and misery in a pastoral Utopian compensation. Jameson, in his *Postmodernism: or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), reinstitutes the labor and social conditions which produce and shape both the shoes and whomever wears them. to show Van Gogh's ability to see the shoes *for themselves as they really are* before the painter veils that rural poverty through artistic coloring into a Utopian gesture:

> In Van Gogh [those shoes], those initial raw materials, are [. . .] to be grasped simply as the whole object world of agricultural misery, of stark rural poverty, and the whole

> rudimentary human world of backbreaking peasant toil, a world reduced to its most brutal and menaced, primitive and marginalized state [. . .] the willed and violent transformation of a drab peasant object world into the most glorious materialization of pure color in oil paint is to be seen as a Utopian gesture, an act of compensation which ends up producing a whole new Utopian realm of the senses, or at least of that supreme sense—sight, the visual, the eye—which it now reconstitutes for us as a semiautonomous space in its own right, a part of some new division of labor in the body of capital, some new fragmentation of the emergent sensorium which replicates the specializations and divisions of capitalist life at the same time that it seeks in precisely such fragmentation a desperate Utopian compensation for them.[lvii]

The narrator's "pastoral note" attempts to bury the reified fragmentation he sees in Doane's Mill in its own Utopian compensation, one that reverses Van Gogh's: "So much so is this that in the watching of [the approaching wagon] the eye loses it as sight and sense drowsily merge and blend, like the road itself, with all the peaceful and monotonous changes between darkness and day, like already measured thread being rewound onto a spool" (8). That "the eye" is subjectless collapses the reader, the speaker, and Lena into one subject. The scene then fulfills what Ernst Bloch calls "expectation-affect,"[lviii] which leads to a "block" that resists the future: "this anxiety before the future, this flight from the new, finds a conceptual rationalization in the myth of absolute presence, in the notion that there exists something like a plenitude of being and that for this reason something like a full and self-contained present instant of time is ontologically possible."[lix] It is precisely this "plenitude of being" that commentators read Lena as embodying when in actuality it refers to the narrator's anxiety over the onslaught of fragmented postindustrial capital forms and the cultural changes this onslaught brings. This anxiety is like

Bloch's "hypostasis of the present," which "ends up in the long run by glorifying the past; and the most stubborn philosophical version of the myth an absolute presence turns out [. . .] to be the Platonic doctrine of anamnesis, of memory as a return to lost sources of plenitude before birth."[lx] There is then in this Utopian scene something of Hegel's Absolute Spirit, which as Jameson notes "ultimately aims not at reconciliation with the world but at its total absorption, at the complete digestion of the world in all its contingency and otherness, its transformation into the self and into pure subjectivity."[lxi] Lena's material conditions, such as her shoes, however, continue to disrupt the Utopian.

Two different pairs of shoes, in fact, help define Lena while disrupting the Utopian compensation: the pair she puts on as a little girl when entering the town with her father (discussed at length below) and the pair she receives from her brother and takes with her on her journey. In describing the latter pair, which importantly bookends his vision of the urn, the language of the narrator once again attempts to erase her labor in a Utopian gesture:

> She carried a palm leaf fan and a small bundle tied neatly in a bandanna handkerchief. It contained among other things thirtyfive cents in nickels and dimes. Her shoes were a pair [. . .] her brother had given her. They were but slightly worn, since in the summer neither of them wore shoes at all. When she felt the dust of the road beneath her feet she removed the shoes and carried them in her hand. (6-7)

The narrator again romanticizes Lena's material conditions, softening the image of a destitute and very pregnant young woman, by writing her in the same way that Gershwin's songs romanticize Porgy and Bess ("Oh, I got plenty o' nuttin' / And nuttin's plenty for me").[lxii] The result then erases the fact that she and her brother never wear shoes in the summer and that Lena removes her shoes when she is on smooth land to conserve their use-value. Instead the narrator

slips into a romantic *natura naturans* image of the peasant "in touch" with the land, as if she wants to feel "the dust of the road." Even more suspicious is that the narrator makes the same erroneous judgment about Lena's shoes he had earlier claimed her father had made. What is more, the narrator undercuts his own Utopian gesture by contradicting himself as Armstid's wagon approaches Lena: "She went on out of sight, walking slowly, the shoes unlaced about her ankles, until she reached the top of the hill a mile beyond. Then she sat down on the ditchbank, with her feet in the shallow ditch, and removed the shoes" (7). The first image of Lena removing, always removing, her shoes as she walks towards Jefferson serves as abstract theory as the narrator presents it in the present simple tense which connotes a constant fact (even if he contradicts himself) whereas the second image serves as praxis (the contradiction). The praxis, therefore, makes the abstract and romanticized Utopian gesture all the clearer, since he initially states that Lena always removes her shoes but then later states that she walks with her shoes on.

The first image crescendos with the image of the urn which further erases the material conditions of Lena's journey:

> She has been doing that [removing her shoes as she walks] now for almost four weeks. Behind her the four weeks, the evocation of *far* is a peaceful corridor paved with unflagging and tranquil faith and peopled with kind and nameless faces and voices: *Lucas Burch? I dont know of anybody by that name around here. This road? It goes to Pocahontas. He might be there. It's possible. Here's a wagon that's going a piece of the way. It will take you that far*. (7)

The contrast between Lena's peaceful remembrance of her journey is striking since in actuality the voices she recalls are not extraordinarily helpful. They do not go beyond what normal social protocol requires. Thus the narrator here describes Lena's psychological and subjective

rewriting of her own journey, his language only further enhances his own Utopian gesture. Such descriptions of Lena's journey's lead critics such as Bleikasten to strip the difficulty from her journey. The narrator's eloquence turns the simple into the mythological and misdirects critics from the importance of such passages: the glimpse they afford of Lena's psychological state. The fact is that during the last month Lena has traveled a far distance, mostly on foot, all the while being pregnant. The people Lena meets along the way and who are shown to the reader such as those mentioned above or the Armstids do little to help her. That she subjectively views her travels as "peaceful" is extraordinary and is crucial to her survival. In the passage cited above it is no wonder that the narrator selects Pocahontas (of all his choices), a town referencing the American myth cloaked in misogynist romance. The point here is that the narrative continually undercuts every mention of Lena's material conditions because they disrupt the narrator's Utopian vision in the same way that Van Gogh's painting attempts to compensate for the material conditions of the shoes he depicts.

Since previously critics such as Bleikasten have understood the narrator to preserve the urn and the timelessness of the scene solely for Lena, the narrator's totalizing vision of this landscape is often overlooked. After all it is *via* simile that he places the wagons, the mules, and their drivers on the urn with Lena; he does not privilege her over the others in the referenced image: "she advanced in identical and anonymous and deliberate wagons as though through a succession of creakwheeled [the wagons] and limpeared [the mules] avatars, like something moving forever and without progress across an urn" (7).[lxiii] With the urn's image the narrator hypostatizes the present as he simultaneously glorifies the past in a Utopian vision as he attempts to synthesize subject and object as well as speaker and reader. Further driving this point home is that the narrator continually tropes timelessness in "the middle distance" of the land between

town and country. He describes the progress of Will Varner's wagon and its association with Lena in a way remarkably similar to his description of Armstid's encounter with her: "The wagon moves slowly, steadily, as if here within the sunny loneliness of the enormous land it were outside of, beyond all time and all haste" (27). Note, too, the following similar disruption of the Utopian landscape before the narrator reinstitutes it once again: "Apparently he has never looked at her, not even when she got into the wagon. Apparently she has never looked at him, either [. . .] The wagon goes on slow, timeless. The red and unhurried miles unroll beneath the steady feet of the mules, beneath the creaking and clanking wheels" (28, 29). Amidst this "timeless" scene where the narrator's language slows in its grandiloquence, fragmentation, labor, and capital continually disrupt. The narrator's ideology having now been exposed for its nostalgia, Lena—like Van Gogh's shoes—may finally be seen *as she really is* (in that Heideggerian sense).

The narrator cannot sustain this Utopian vision, furthermore, because capital and labor and the ensuing reification, capital's product, continually resurface in the form not only of Lena's pregnancy, but also in such instances as the failed business exchange for the cultivator between Winterbottom and Armstid, in the latter's reaction to Lena, in Martha Armstid's "not plump and not thin, manhard, workhard" body, and in Lena's shoes (16). The narrator here mimics writers like Rabelais and Goethe, writers who, Bakhtin argues, "attempt to resurrect the ancient wholeness and exteriority" of Greek Romance: "A mute internal life, a mute grief, mute thought, [which] were completely foreign to the Greek [. . .] There is no mute or invisible core to the individual himself: he is entirely visible and audible, all on the surface [. . .] This is the defining characteristic of the remarkable and immediate exteriority we find in the classical individual and in his life."[lxiv] The discord between the narrator's desire to mythologize this

pastoral landscape forces him to freeze such scenes onto Keats's urn, which in turn exteriorizes the characters he writes on it with his Modernist understanding of the "internal life" of the modernity. Thus he attempts to make Lena both a representative figure in plastic artistic forms while simultaneously making her individual by presenting her interior thinking. The narrator's attempt to write the scene in terms of Greek Romance fails, then, due to the social and historical period in which his story is told. Notice, for example, that in the narrator's attempt at "total absorption," labor once again reveals itself: "The wagon now has a kind of rhythm, its ungreased and outraged wood one with the slow afternoon, the road, the heat" (13). In trying to synthesize the wagon, the road, and the heat in a totalizing vision, Faulkner's synthesis of subject and object (in the personification of the 'wood') results in fragmenting fragmentation of the wagon into its constituent parts. The wagon's components become the sum total of it smaller parts, which human labor has harvested, shaped, and composed (in a factory like Doane's Mill) that must be cared for (ungreased) or it, the thing itself, becomes "outraged," a curious trait for an inanimate object to feel in such a Utopian pastoral landscape.

While Armstid and Winterbottom's failed exchange literally serves the plot by having Lena and Armstid cross paths, the exchange itself bears importance for two reasons. 1) It gives the reader a chance to see a demythologized Lena, "young, pregnant, and a stranger," through the eyes of her contemporaneous peers as they compare her to a mule: "She's hitting that lick like she's been at it for a right smart while and had a right smart piece to go yet" (9), and 2) the failed exchange is a postindustrial capital exchange which disrupts the Utopian vision of "timeless unhaste" (10). Their failed exchange does not deserve detailed analysis here, but for the present purpose, it further disrupts the Utopian. What is more, once Armstid finally decides against

buying Winterbottom's cultivator, the Utopian vision resurfaces until Armstid and Lena finally meet.

The narrator's emphasis here again is on the scene itself rather than Lena as he invokes timelessness once again, as evidenced by the oblique reference to the urn. The language here again misdirects the reader's attention from Lena's and Armstid's interiority as the narrator attempts to write them into mythological otherness:

> And no one could have known that [Armstid] had ever looked at [Lena] either as, without any semblance of progress in either of them, they draw slowly together as the wagon crawls terrifically toward her in its slow palpable aura of somnolence and red dust in which the steady feet of the mules move dreamlike and punctuate by the sparse jingle of harness and the limber bobbing of jackrabbit ears, the mules still neither asleep nor awake as he halts them. (11)

Once again the narrator's vocabulary, most significantly his choice of "progress," which foregrounds the plastic placidity of the urn ("somnolence" and "dreamlike," "crawls"), yet modifies the wagons "crawl" with "terrifically," disrupts the Utopian master narrative--as does the narrator's ensuing description Lena's clothes as Armstid approaches her.

Not only does their encounter disrupt the Utopian master narrative; it further contradicts Bleikestan's reading of Lena's journey. Note how the narrator again buries her labor in the following passage: "From beneath a sunbonnet of faded blue, weathered now by other than formal soap and water, she looks up at him quietly and pleasantly: young, pleasantfaced, candid, friendly, and alert" (11). The sentence's dependent clause recalls the labor and difficulty of her journey, but the independent clause attempts to erase the labor with positive, if banal, adjectives. Further erasing the Utopian compensation, Armstid "does not descend to help her" get into the

wagon, which is of course a clear statement of disrespect (11). Though she once again describes her journey as "tiring afoot," the narrator attempts to erase her statement, stripping her once again of her subjectivity (before Armstid asks her how far she has come): "Apparently Armstid has never once looked full at her. Yet he has already seen that she wears no wedding ring. He does not look at her now" (12). She is, through Armstid's eyes, nothing more than a young pregnant yet unwedded girl. Note again the narrator's description of Lena's reply to Armstid's query: "She expels her breath. It is not a sigh so much as a *peaceful* expiration, as though of *peaceful* astonishment. 'A right good piece, it seems now. I come from Alabama'" (12 italics mine). Lena, pregnant and unwedded, not only disrupts the narrator's Utopian landscape; her presence threatens Armstid. The repetition of "peaceful" dominates the perception many critics have of Lena even though the narrator here uses the adjective only to portray Lena's subjective, psychological state, for she shortly thereafter states: "Folks have been kind. They have been right kind" (12). Of course the reader has just witnessed Armstid's cool disdain for her and her condition. He helps her from a sense of duty rather than out of any kindness. What is more, Armstid himself hardly believes her claim, especially as it pertains to women: "Womenfolks too?" (12). Her present is peaceful not because of some supernatural force and certainly not from stupidity but because she does not expect or need anything more than she receives. Thus her recent past is "a peaceful corridor," and her present is also peaceful. In contrast, Joe Christmas's past haunts him; thus his present is chaotic and his future is a narrow, pre-ordained fate, which he already considers past. Consider the narrator's description of Joe prior to the murder of Joanna Burden: "he believed with calm paradox that he was the volitionless servant of the fatality of which he believed that he did not believe. He was saying to himself *I had to do it* already in the past tense; *I had to do it. She said so herself*" (280).

CHAPTER 4: LENA'S STATE OF MIND: *ÉLAN VITAL*

Though Lena's pregnancy collapses both the future and the past into her present consciousness, it is her longing for life, *élan vital*, which leads to her pregnancy, which was, after all, unplanned. Her desire to live in the present is not necessarily "her nature," as many critics assume, but rather a choice she makes driven by the alternative—a living death—within Doane's Mill. Her pregnancy, then, is purely a symptom of her *élan vital*, a longing for life the narrator displays in his brief recounting of her history. This is not to suggest that she consciously or intentionally becomes pregnant, but simply that her desire for experience leads to it. Her pregnancy symptomizes the void she needs to fill: *élan vital*. In Lucas Burch, Lena tells Martha Armstid, she finds "a young fellow full of life" that "likes folks and jollifying, and who is liked by folks in turn" because "he is a hand for laughing and joking" (19). She later tells Varner that she believes Lucas will be at the planing mill in Jefferson, because he "always did like excitement. He never did like to live quiet. That's why it never suited him back at Doane's Mill. Why he—we [note the developing subjectivity] decided to make a change: for money and excitement" (25). Her slippage from the third person singular "he," to the first person plural "we" further illustrates her growth. By beginning with "he," Lena has admitted to herself—at this point in the narrative—the truth about Lucas, which she seemingly had not been able to do prior to her journey (exemplified by her discussions with her brother) nor during her stay at the Armstids. That she catches herself mid-sentence and switches to "we" most likely signifies not that she is deluding herself nor that she cares what the Armstids think of her, but rather that she

is performing her role. As Varner is a stranger, and Lena a single, pregnant woman, who has already suffered the not-so-subtle questioning, if not mild disdain, of the Armstid family, the path of least resistance is to wear the mask of a woman going to find her soon-to-be husband.

Lucas's nature, as an outsider to the community, attracts Lena, because she knows that Doane's Mill had sucked the life from her parents and is in the process of destroying her brother, from whom the mill has stripped "[s]oftness and gentleness and youth (he was just forty) and almost everything else except a kind of stubborn and despairing fortitude and the bleak heritage of his bloodpride had been sweated out of him" (6). In Lacanian terms, her search for Lucas Burch is a *meconnaissance*; though she may believe she is searching for Lucas, she actually discovers she "had just made up her mind to travel" (506). Lena, therefore, while still in Doane's Mill, never desires motherhood; she desires "*jouissance*," which results in her pregnancy. Indeed Lena's pregnancy results, ironically, from her attempt to avoid her sister-in-law's fate, who was pregnant "half of every year."[lxv] Like a Lacanian subject, she reacts against the material conditions she inhabits. Lena, the narrator makes clear, is also keenly self-aware as a pre-teen of her social status as an inhabitant of Doane's Mill. While it is her attraction to "excitement" that gets her pregnant in the first place, it also is a necessary condition for her growth. It allows her to undertake her heroic journey.

In the novel's second paragraph the narrator reveals this burgeoning self-awareness by showing Lena's belief in herself as an Other to the community, the unnamed "town," to which her father would bring her. When her father would take her into town, Lena:

> would put on the shoes just before the wagon reached town. After she got to be a big girl she would ask her father to stop the wagon at the edge of town and she would get down and walk. She would not tell her father why she wanted to walk

> in instead of riding. He thought that it was because of the smooth streets, the sidewalks. But it was because she believed that the people who saw her and whom she passed on foot would believe that she lived in the town too. (3-4)

Lena, at twelve years old, projects an imaginary "gaze of the other" onto herself. Lena's privileging of her shoes, heretofore neglected in the critical discourse surrounding the novel, contrasts with the pair of shoes she takes off in Armstid's wagon. Unlike Van Gogh's peasant laborer's shoes, which represent use-value, Lena's shoes here represent surplus-value, excess, fashionably worn to cloak her rural reality with a sign of relative urbanity. Factory labor obviates any use-value her shoes otherwise might possess. Her family did not wear shoes in the house as evidenced by "the naked floor worn smooth as old silver by naked feet" (4), and the narrator recounts that the shoes Lena owned when she departs Doane's Mill "were a pair of [her brother's, which] were but slightly worn, since in the summer neither of them wore shoes at all" (6). Within five pages, the narrator contrasts Lena (younger than twelve years old) walking into town in her shoes because "she believed that the people who saw her and whom she passed on foot would believe that she lived in the town too" with the pregnant Lena (now around twenty years old) who "when she felt the dust of the road beneath her feet [. . .] removed the shoes and carried them in her hand" (6-7).

Though her pregnancy forces a very real gaze upon her, it also eventually liberates her from the gaze, as she tells Martha Armstid.[lxvi] The pregnancy, then, initiates her dialectical development from object to subject. The narrator, of course, is the primary gazer and mediates her story. The form of his narrative is telling in this regard, since Lena's story opens and closes the novel, yet the narrative also deemphasizes her role in the story proper. Slavoj Zizek argues that "narrative as such emerges in order to resolve some fundamental antagonism by rearranging

its terms into a temporal succession. It is thus the very form of narrative which bears witness to some repressed antagonism."[lxvii] In stark contrast to the highly self-conscious flagging of the other personal histories the narrator recounts, he seems to slip unconsciously into Lena's background in the novel's exposition as if the telling of Lena's "*thinking*" about how "fur" she has come from Doane's Mill reminds him of it. He offers no grand allusions to goddesses and urns and Romantic poetry in his version of her history because he has not yet fetishized her; he has not stripped her of her subjectivity by placing her in the rarefied air of the symbolic. This unconscious, not yet self-aware retelling of Lena's history denotes the narrator's ability to tell his story objectively, an ability he loses as the first chapter progresses.

Into his recounting of Lena's history, the narrator curiously slips the future. This slippage indefinitely extends the narrative's temporality. The slippage also gives further insight into Lena's character since in Lacanian terms history is written from a future vantage point. That Lena's recollections, as the narrator presents them, are infused with humor is of paramount importance in understanding her development:

> For almost half of every year the sister-in-law ['labor- and childridden'] was either lying in or recovering. During this time Lena did all the housework and took care of the other children. *Later* she told herself, '*I reckon that's why I got one so quick myself.*' (5 Emphasis added)

The narrator here reports like a Lacanian analyst.[lxviii] Lena's memory is informed or rewritten from the future, as the "*Later*" makes explicit, and, therefore, speaks to her psychological state at the time of the remembrance, which is beyond that contained in the narrative. That Lena reflects upon her historical cardinal event—the pregnancy which leads to her journey—with humor strongly contrasts with the perceptions that Christmas, Hightower, Burden, and Grimm have of

their own respective histories. Significantly, Lena, along with the furniture dealer, is the only character who recollects her past with humor. Lena and the furniture dealer are *Light in August's* only psychologically healthy characters.

The encounter between Martha Armstid and Lena, which Phillip M. Weinstein characterizes as "a comic ballet of cross-statements," deserves elaboration at this point because it further reveals Lena's humor.[lxix] The precedent that makes Lena's humor clear is set at the Armstid home. While telling her story to the Armstids, Lena states:

> I told [Lucas] I would not expect him to write, being as he aint any hand for letters. 'You just send me your mouthword when you are ready for me,' I told him. 'I'll be waiting.' It worried me a little at first, after he left, because my name wasn't Burch yet and my brother and his folks not knowing Lucas as well as I knew him. How could they?'

It is in her final question that the narrator again displays Lena's wry humor. The query moves in an instant from being a rhetorical question designed for eliciting sympathy to being a rhetorical *inside* joke, for immediately after she poses the question, "[into] her face there comes slowly an expression of soft and bright surprise, as if she had just thought of something which she had not even been aware that she did not know" (20). The sentence's first clause is presented as a stable, objective fact; the second clause, however, is the narrator's unstable, subjective attempt to understand and convey the essence of Lena's surprise. The narrator's explanation lends itself to Lena's revelation that, although she indeed knew him better than her brother had, her brother, ironically, understood Burch's *essence* better than she had, for he had recognized Burch's type: a "sawdust Casanova." Lena here not only recognizes the sexual nature of the relationship she shared with Burch, for she also rhetorically jokes about it.

The narrator further emphasizes Lena's retroactive humor (which psychologically rewrites the past) by contrasting it with her psychological state while she was still in Doane's Mill. At twenty years old and after eight years of boredom in Doane's Mill, Lena "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'" (5-6). Although Judith L. Sensibar argues that this Lena-thought is meant to be a joke (Sensibar's Lena is exclusively comic) the narrator most likely means for it to be sincere, as if she were saying: "Damn."[lxx] Whereas the narrator prefaces her previous thought with "Later," here he prefaces her thinking with the past simple "said," which dates it around the time of her discovery that she had become pregnant. Sensibar is certainly correct, however, that unlike Joe Christmas, "Lena has no qualms about daring to open doors and windows leading to her sexual and emotional growth. Nor, once she opens them and slips through, does she ever look back to blame or regret."[lxxi] It is not until she begins her journey by exiting the house for the last time through the same window she exited to meet Lucas Burch that she is liberated enough, confident enough, to laugh at herself. There are two ways to understand the significance of Lena's choice to exit through the window. After all, "[s]he could have departed by the door, by daylight. Nobody would have stopped her. Perhaps she knew that. But she chose to go by night, and through the window" (6). She chases her past into the future and in so doing she positively reconfigures her past.

Two weeks after her brother—stripped of his "[s]oftness and gentleness and youth and almost everything else" by the factory labor he must do to survive—discovers her pregnancy, Lena leaves Doane's Mill in search of Lucas Burch. The narrator says: "she climbed again through the window. It was a little difficult, this time. 'If it had been this hard to do before, I

reckon I would not be doing it now,' she thought" (6). Once again, Lena displays her wry, ironic wit.

Prior to her escape through the window, the narrator gives further insight into Lena's character. While her brother has a "kind of stubborn and despairing fortitude," she has "that reserve of patient and steadfast fidelity" (6). Indeed, embedded within despair is the lack of hope, which in turn leads to a predetermined and unchanging future, much like Christmas's constricting projection of the "corridor." Lena, however, remarkably avoids writing her future before it happens; by doing so, she allows events to write themselves fluidly in the ever-present. By perceiving her history with humor she both positively re-writes her past and also writes her present. The *was* writes the *is* retroactively. The novel's exposition demonstrates this.

Note the present perfect grammatical structure of her latent sub-conscious thought as Lena sits "beside the road, watching the wagon mount the hill toward her, [. . .] Thinking": "*Although I have not been quite a month on the road I am already in Mississippi, further from home than I have ever been before. I am now further from Doane's Mill than I have been since I was twelve years old*" (3). The present perfect structure necessarily embeds the *was* into the *is* and thus obviates nostalgic desire. Indeed, in his depiction of Lena Grove, the narrator gives an example of "man's original flavor," a woman who clearly thinks, but not "too much." She accepts life's flux once she escapes the mechanical boredom of Doane's Mill for the fluidity of the road. For example, the narrative opens with her thinking: "'I have come from Alabama: a fur piece. All the way from Alabama a-walking. A fur piece' [. . .] *although I have not been quite a month on the road I am already in Mississippi, further from home than I have ever been before. I am now further from Doane's Mill than I have been since I was twelve years old*" (3). The narrator presents two different forms of Lena's thoughts: the conscious thought set in single

quotation marks, and the unconscious thought set in italics.[lxxii] By beginning the narrative with both Lena's ordered, conscious thought as well as the unordered, unconscious thought, the "external"[lxxiii] narrator gives the reader a snapshot of Lena's mind, from her unconscious to conscious thought. In effect, the narrator presents the reader with an opportunity to understand how Lena thinks. Her unconscious awe of her present situation manifests itself as a self-deprecating self-awareness. This strength allows her to continue her journey rather than being stultified by becoming awestruck at her momentous task.

It is a mistake to overlook the challenge Lena has undertaken. The conscious and voluntary decision to leave a known situation—even an unappealing one— to embark on a journey into the unknown is not only daunting; it is a heroic. As Hightower later explains to Bunch, "a fellow is more afraid of the trouble he might have than he ever is of the trouble he's already got. He'll cling to trouble he's used to before he'll risk a change" (75). The external narrator allows the reader—by displaying Lena's unconscious thought translated into her conscious thought—to intuit her own (unconscious) amazement that she has done so. Rather than focusing on the act of leaving, she focuses on how far she has come. In effect, she temporally privileges (as demonstrated by her use of the present perfect form, "I have come") present time. Furthermore, the present perfect tense structure implies a past as well as an unfinished action, which suggests that she anticipates further travel.

Hugh Ruppersburg points out that "I have come from Alabama" is "the first line of the well known Stephen Foster song 'O Susannah!,' whose first stanza begins: I have come from Alabama / With a banjo on my knee / And I'm bound for Louisiana / My true love for to see."[lxxiv] While Lena certainly shares the same anticipation of seeing her "true love" as the speaker in the song, Lena—at this point in the narrative—is not aware of the irony that Lucas Burch does not

share the same anticipation. She is aware, however, that she will arrive, not with the songster's banjo, but with her own baby on her knee. Thus, the first-time reader of the narrative simply sees Lena as an excited, yet materially poor, Alabamian traveling towards an unknown destination. Retrospectively, however, the careful reader should see not just a naïve young woman but one with a certain, self-deprecating humor. Indeed, Lena's humor signifies a healthy mind.

CHAPTER 5: THE SUBLIME GIFT: LENA AND BYRON

The narrator describes Bunch as a man who "[i]f there had been love once, man or woman would have said that Byron Bunch had forgotten her. Or she (meaning love) him, more like [yet still] fell in love contrary to all the tradition of his austere and jealous country raising which demands in the object physical inviolability" (49). From Lena, Byron learns that his "tradition" is nothing more than a construct. The narrator in describing the development of their relationship draws from the comedic tradition of *As You Like It*, exemplified by Rosalind and Orlando. David Bevington explains:

> Rosalind wants Orlando to know that women are not goddesses but frail human beings who can be giddy, jealous, infatuated with novelty, irritatingly talkative, peremptory, and hysterical (4.1.142-149) [. . .] Orlando must be taught that love is a madness (3.2.390), and he must be cured, not of loving Rosalind, but of worshiping her with unrealistic expectations that can lead only to disillusionment.[lxxv]

Lena's experience with Burch has taught her that "unrealistic expectations" do "lead only to disillusionment." She also has the example of her brother and Martha Armstid to draw upon. Furthermore, like Orlando, Byron sublimates women into inviolable goddesses. It is not until the birthing of the baby that Byron realizes that Lena is not "timeless" nor a "Goddess." The narrator explains the moment:

> And then, just outside the cabin door where he had stopped, he heard the child cry once and something terrible happened to him [. . .] He knew now why he neglected to engage a

> doctor beforehand. It was 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. 'Yet I did know, believe,' he thought. 'I must have knowed, to have done what I have done: the running and the lying and the worrying at folks.' Yet still he did not believe. He knew now that when he ran to the cabin and looked in, he expected to see her sitting up; perhaps to be met by her at the door, placid, unchanged, timeless. But even as he touched the door with his hand he heard something which he had never heard before. It was a moaning wail, loud, with a quality at once passionate and abject, that seemed to be speaking clearly to something in a tongue which he knew was not his tongue nor that of any man [. . .] He had never seen her in bed before and he believed that when or if he ever did, she would be tense, alert, maybe smiling a little, and completely aware of him. But when he entered she did not even look at him. (398-399)

Prior to hearing the "wail" Byron had entirely fetishized Lena as an "unchanged, timeless" Goddess. But Lena's wailing labor forces Byron to humanize her; it forces Byron to see her as she really is. Rather than being "completely aware of him,"

> she did not even seem to be aware that the door had opened, that there was anyone or anything in the room save herself and whatever it was that she had spoken to with that wailing cry in tongue unknown to man. Her hair was loose and her eyes looked like two holes and her mouth was as bloodless now as the pillow behind her, and as she seemed in that attitude of alarm and surprise to contemplate with a kind of outraged unbelief the shape of her body beneath the covers, she gave again that loud, abject, wailing cry. (399-400)

For the first time, Byron sees not some Bleikastenian "phantasmal projection of his repressed desires and unacknowledged fears," but rather he sees "her otherness acknowledged as the otherness of another's self." It is an otherness that he cannot comprehend—indeed, Lena's own "outraged unbelief" suggests that even she sees herself as an other—but Bleikasten's argument that removing the mystical veil from Lena reveals only a "stark enigma of spawning flesh" seems a bit hyperbolic. The image of Lena that he witnesses shocks him into a better understanding of his relationship to her, and finally forces his acceptance of the truth. Byron finally to admits to himself that Lena is not a virgin and that Burch is the father of the baby. In contrast to McEachern's violently didactic method of educating Christmas, Lena, in effect, educates Byron here without ever saying word:

> *It was like it was not until Mrs Hines called me and I heard her and saw her face and knew that Byron Bunch was nothing in this world to her right then, that I found out that she is not a virgin* [. . .] *It was like me, and her, and all the other folks that I had to get mixed up in it, were just a lot of words that never even stood for anything, were not even us, while all the time what was us was going on and going on without even missing the lack of words. Yes. It aint until now that I ever believed that he is Lucas Burch. That there ever was a Lucas Burch*. (401-402)

Importantly, Byron learns this lesson for himself. This is Lena's gift of goodness that effaces itself. Once Byron recognizes Lena for what she is, he is able finally to act. He realizes that language, in effect, is repression and dissimulation. He realizes that communication does not require language, but intuition: "*while all the time what was us was going on and going on without even missing the lack of words.*" Once he realizes this, he gains control of his actions; rather than feeling pulled to act, he acts freely. Prior to this moment, Byron's moral code, which

he learned from the ideologies of his region and his religion, led him to protect Lena. Now, however, Lena, without intention, has liberated him to act for himself.

Lena's maturation also becomes clear: for the first time in the narrative, Lena speaks and is listened to. For the first time in the narrative, she becomes a necessary force. In contrast to the earlier scene where Armstid interrupts Lena and imposes his own narrative on her,[lxxvi] Hightower recognizes her strength when he says to her regarding Byron:

> Let him go. Send him away from you [. . .] You are probably not much more than half his age. But you have already outlived him twice over. He will never overtake you, catch up with you, because he has wasted too much time. And that too, his nothing, is as irremediable as your all. He can no more ever cast back and do, than you can cast back and undo [. . .] Send him away. (411)

Unsure of the impact she has had on Byron, she has rejected him. Thus, when Hightower asks her to do so, she says: "That aint for me to do. He is free. Ask him. I have not tried once to hold him [. . .] I can say no more than I have said. And I said No to him five days ago [. . .] He said for me to marry him. To not wait. And I said No [. . .] Yes. I would say it now" (411-412). This moment reinforces all the more the gift that effaces itself. Since it seems clear that her fondness for Bunch is growing, her sacrifice is all the more powerful. Note how she tearfully informs Hightower:

> '[Byron] just stood there, and then he went away [. . .] And you worry me about if I said No or not and I already said No and you worry me and worry me and now he is already gone. I will never see him again.' And [Hightower] sits there, and she bows her head at last [. . .]

Furthermore, it is clear that she no longer loves Burch, and when their meeting is finally arranged she only asks him his intentions for the baby's sake. "I got a right to worry now," she says to Burch (433). Furthermore, she does not look at him when she asks "[w]hen will it be?" or says, "I never worried. I knowed I could depend on you" (431). She knows the answers to her question, and it is reasonable to assume that her statement of trust is simply a turning of the screw on Burch's conscience. The narrator implies as much when he states that "[i]t was as if she held him there and that she knew it. And that she released him by her own will, deliberately" (432). Rather than feebly break down, however, believing that Byron is gone forever and that Burch has reneged on his responsibility, she says to herself, "profoundly," and contrary to Bleikasten's claim that everything comes easily to Lena: "Now I got to get up again" (432).

What she does not know is that Byron now realizes he loves her. He thinks to himself believing that he has lost her:

> It seems like a man can just about bear anything. He can even bear what he never done. He can even bear the thinking how some things is just more than he can bear. He can even bear it that if he could just give down and cry, he wouldn't do it. He can even bear it to not look back, even when he knows that looking back or not looking back won't do him any good [. . .] And Byron Bunch he wouldn't even have to be or not be Byron Bunch [. . .] He did not realize that he has come so far and that the crest is so high. (423-424)

Once he thinks this, he becomes closer to Lena's metaphysical equal. By transcending Hamlet's binary, Byron becomes *himself*. He realizes that his name is merely a way that others define him. He realizes that the others are like the trees, which "are oblivious to him: 'Dont know and

dont care'" (424). He learns what Lena learned when she names herself to Martha Armstid. Thus when he sees Burch running away from Lena, he knows what he must do:

> without anything in him now which had not been there two weeks ago, before he ever saw her. The desire of this moment is more than desire: it is conviction quiet and assured; before he is aware that his brain has telegraphed his hand he has turned the mule from the road and is galloping along the ridge which parallels the running man's course when he entered the woods. (426)

What is more, note that the narrator states that Byron "was not thinking about Lena at all; she was as completely out of his mind as if he had never seen her face nor heard her name" (426). With this Byron acts for himself without intention: he gives "a gift that renounces itself." He is now in the process of learning what Lena already knows: just as Lena, if she had allowed herself to think it, knew the chances of reuniting with Burch were slim, Byron knows that he cannot physically vanquish Burch, that he will lose the fight. But like Lena, he has learned that supposed ends are not the point of the quest, but rather the point is the act itself, the attempt: "But I can try it. I can try to do it" (426).

Once the reader realizes, as Byron has, that Lena is not a "timeless" goddess, but simply a humorous, self-confident, and self-aware woman, he or she is more attuned to Lena's personal development. She becomes much more than a mystical Earth Goddess. Indeed, as has been noted, the narrator himself bears much responsibility for the misreading of Lena's story. Through his retelling of the story, however, the narrator also learns from Lena. Perhaps because of the narrator's own awareness of this, he recuses himself from concluding her tale, as if he realizes that he too has fallen in love with her and has lost his objective stance. In order to regain

objectivity, he delegates the conclusion to the furniture dealer, who is not in danger of falling in love with Lena.

6: THE FINAL CHAPTER: A NEW READING

The novel's final chapter has caused critics much consternation, largely because the narrator introduces a new character to conclude the story, a furniture salesman who had returned from Tennessee to his wife. The commentary that *Light in August's* ending generates generally claims that introducing this new character disrupts the novel's unity, while also suggesting that the "comic" ending lessons the dramatic impact of Christmas's death. As François Pitavy reasons, however, the argument that the ending "hardly unifies the book"[lxxvii] seems beside the point in a novel such as *Light in August*.[lxxviii] Faulkner's ending, rather, emphasizes the narrator's self-discovery of his own ideology. By essentially recusing himself from the role of narrator, he not only gives his audience a new perspective on Lena and Byron, he extends the narrative's temporality; he allows the narrative, and Lena, to extend indefinitely into the future. Indeed, the narrator here overtly admits that he too is veiled from the truth because he too has only heard the story from someone else. This ending emphasizes not only Lena's escape from Doane's Mill and her maturation into a mother, but also her liberation from the narrative itself. The narrator effectively admits that she has left his domain and that he can now only speculate what will become of her. Indeed, he does not even try to limit her possibilities. The narrator, in introducing the reader to the traveling repairman, says of him:

> Perhaps the reason why he found it interesting and that he felt that he could make it interesting in the retelling is that he and his wife are not old either, besides his having been away from home (due to the very moderate speed which he felt it wise to restrict himself to) for more than week. (494)

Thus the narrator makes it clear that his replacement is already very much in love and that he and his wife are still very much physically attracted to each other, which gives further credence to his replacement's objectivity: an ability that he himself recognizes he has lost. Thus he gives us a new perspective on Lena, one which is fascinated by Lena, her baby, and Byron but also a perspective much more objective since the repairman is clearly very much in love with his wife. Indeed, one cannot imagine a more playful and normative sexual encounter in Faulkner's canon than the one between the furniture dealer and his wife. His description of Lena as a strong woman clearly in control of her situation does not threaten him at all:

> I just lay there and [Byron and Lena] talking, or him talking, not loud. He hadn't even mentioned marriage, neither. But that's what he was talking about, and her listening placid and calm, like she had heard it before and she knew that she never even had to bother to say either yes or no to him. Smiling a little she was. But he couldn't see that. He knew that he had just given her one more chance and that now he had got himself desperated up to risking all. I could have told him that he was just deciding now to do what he should have done in the first place" (501).

Even the objective, unbiased repairman intuits Lena's affection for and patience with Byron as he continues his development. Indeed, she is so in control that when he stealthily attempts to climb into her bed, the repairmen says that he

> heard one kind of astonished sound she made when she woke up, like she was just surprised and then a little put out without being scared at all, and she says, not loud neither: 'Why, Mr Bunch. Aint you ashamed. You might have woke the baby, too [. . .] You go and lay down now, and get some sleep. We got another fur piece to go tomorrow' (503).

Whereas, before her journey, she did not have the ability to recognize Burch's essence, she does so now. Indeed, the dealer tells his wife that he "was downright ashamed to look at" Byron. Some critics, such as John Lutz, outrageously take this as the dealer's implication that "Byron has some 'right' to do what he wishes with Lena: her body ought to be an open field for him to inscribe his desires upon."[lxxix] Christopher LaLonde argues that the dealer is trapped in misogynistic discourse and that the latter views Lena in the late 19th century tradition of the "woman trickster."[lxxx] More attuned readers, however, should understand that the dealer simply sympathizes with the quite normal embarrassment that anyone feels with rejection. On the contrary, Lutz and LaLonde diminish Lena's strength and self-awareness. She has chosen Byron as a companion. The repairman's retelling of Byron's failed seduction suggests that Lena is not only unafraid of Byron, but that she is the dominant figure in the relationship. Though Byron clearly still finds Lena sexually attractive, Lena no longer is interested in the orgiastic for its sake alone. Her travels fulfill the lack, the *élan vital*, she searched to find with Burch.

What is more, readers of *Light in August*, at this point in the narrative, should be acutely aware of subjective opinions and their ensuing fallacies. Whatever opinions the dealer may have about Lena should be looked at as simply his opinion, but the events he subjectively interprets should be viewed as having taken place and interpreted against the already known facts, of which of course the dealer is ignorant. Equally importantly, Byron's attempt to sleep with Lena demonstrates that he is learning from her. Thus, she, perhaps coyly, chastises Byron's attempt to sleep with her. It is not Byron's desired "end" that disturbs her here, but rather the "means" by which he goes about it. Upon Byron's return, he says to her: "'I done come too far now [. . .] I be dog if I'm going to quit now'" (506). Lena responds, much to the repairman's delight: "'Aint nobody never said for you to quit'" (506). The furniture dealer, of course, cannot see the full

irony of Lena's statement, for having herself been the pursuer she can certainly relate to Byron's quest. Lena, too, never quits.

8: LENA'S VICTORY

Some commentators, most notably Doreen Fowler, reason that Lena's victory is "hollow." Fowler argues that "Lena is merely trying to prolong the preoedipal phase [. . .] that is, eventually she will be suppressed by patriarchal culture."[lxxxi] It is true that Lena is trapped within male discourse, but these same commentators do not see how Lena shapes this male discourse and ultimately escapes beyond it. She has yet to succumb to "patriarchal culture." Unlike the horribly failed relationship between Christmas and Joanna Burden in which Christmas realizes that "[he] was like [. . .] the woman and she was the man," Lena's demonstration that she can live on her own terms obviates the need for such gender distinctions. Such distinctions do not much concern her (235). Far from a "hollow" victory, Lena's victory is her fulfillment defined by no one but herself. Joy is her victory. Despite having no money, having no husband, having no home, while mothering a fatherless child through the great depression, Lena still smiles as she travels towards the unknown. She has labored for this victory in psychological fulfillment. Moments, such as her encounter with Mrs. Hines, have taught her that how others perceive her is out of her control. The challenge, rather, is to be at peace with oneself. This acquired inward serenity allows her to rewrite her past, which softens the hardships she has suffered. Whereas most characters in the novel allow the past to write their future, Lena reverses this by allowing her present to rewrite her past.

When the narrator, in describing Lena's life in Doane's Mill, recalls that Lena "later [. . .] would say to herself *That's just my luck*," he grants her a life beyond the temporal world contained within the novel. No other character (save for Christmas) is given such privilege. He grants thoughts and life to her beyond his text which colors her actions throughout the rest of this novel. Deborah Clarke astutely notes that "from the very start of this novel we see the failure of

male imagination to understand the female psyche. In some ways this failure makes Lena one of the most threatening figures in the text [. . .] Once again, [. . .] Faulkner displays an awareness, generally attributed to women writers, of such marginalization and that he attempts to write beyond it."[lxxxii] This narrator, the creator of this "male discourse," develops an awareness of the dangers of didacticism and of imposing one's own desires and needs on another. His narrative contains countless examples of the dangers of such actions. Lena, however, never imposes her desires upon another person. She, therefore, lives in a perfectly balanced economy.

Doreen Fowler asks, "Where in Faulkner's fiction do we find a woman who is young, sexual, unashamedly feminine, and also capable of ratiocination?" Careful readers of Faulkner's fiction know they may find one in Lena Grove. With no intention, she teaches the narrator and those who are receptive to her the "otherness of another self." In such a nihilistic landscape, Lena's hard earned joy is nothing less than heroic.

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[i] Karl Marx, "The German Ideology" in The Marx Engels Reader, ed. Robert C. Tucker, 150 (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2nd ed, 1978).

[ii] Qtd. in Carol S. Manning, "Southern Women Writers and the Beginning of the Renaissance" in The History of Southern Women's Literature. ed. Carolyn Perry and Mary Louise Weaks, 242 (Baton Rouge: LSU, 2002).

[iii] William Faulkner, Light in August (New York: Vintage International, 1990). All subsequent references come from this edition and will hereafter be made parenthetically.

[iv] Margaret Mitchell, Gone with the Wind (Avon: New York, 1973).

[v] See the work done on the basis for Joe Christmas, the lynching. Critics agree that Chapter 1 is set on a Friday and Saturday in August, 1932.

[vi] Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte" in The Marx Engels Reader, ed. Robert C. Tucker, 595 (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2nd ed, 1978). "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living."

[vii] This is also the same literary terrain that Ford Madox Ford traverses in his tetralogy, Parade's End (New York: Penguin, 2001).

[viii] Bloom argues that this period "rang[es] from 1928 to 1942." Harold Bloom, "Introduction" in Modern Critical Interpretations: Light in August, ed. Harold Bloom, 6 (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1988).

[ix] Michael Millgate, "'A Novel: Not an Anecdote': Faulkner's Light in August" in New Essays on Light in August, ed. Michael Millgate, 46 (Cambridge University Press. Cambridge: 1987).

[x] Faulkner says in Faulkner in the University, eds. Frederick L Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner (Charlottesville: UVA press, 1955) that Christmas's "tragedy was that he didn't know what he was and would never know, and that [. . .] is the most tragic condition that an individual can have—to not know who he was" (118).

[xi] Jacques Derrida, The Gift of Death, Trans. David Wills. (Chicago: Chicago Press, 2005), 35-6.

[xii] Derrida, 41.

[xiii] Jean-Paul Sartre, "On the Sound and the Fury: Time in the Work of Faulkner" in Faulkner: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Robert Penn Warren, 89 (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1966). Furthermore, in a 1952 interview with Loic Bouvard, Faulkner indirectly contradicts Sartre's critique: "I can move these people around like God, not only in space but in time too. The fact that I have moved my characters around in time successfully, at least in my own estimation, proves to me my own theory that time is a fluid condition which has no existence except in the momentary avatars of individual people. There is no such thing as was—only is. If was existed there would be no grief or sorrow." Lion in the Garden: Interviews with William Faulkner (1926-1962), ed. James B. Meriwether and Michael Millgate, 255 (New York: Random House, 2nd Printing, 1968).

[xiv] Sartre's critique though unintentionally highlights her success. Sartre, however, seems to mistake Faulkner's definition of "was," for Faulkner's "was" never is stable; it is defined from the present.

[xv] See Donald Kartiganer, "Faulkner's Art of Repetition" in Faulkner and the Craft of Fiction: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 1987, ed. Doreen Fowler and Ann J. Abadie (University of Mississippi Press: Jackson, 1988).

[xvi] Ernest Hemingway, A Farewell to Arms (New York: Scribner's, 1957).

[xvii] For the information regarding narrative distance, I am indebted to James Nagel's, "Catherine Barkley and Retrospective Narration," in Critical Essays on Ernest Hemingway, ed. George Monteiro (New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1994), 161-74.

[xviii] Irene Visser, "Faulkner's Mendicant Madonna: The Light of *Light in August*," Literature & Theology, 18 (2004), 38-48.

[xix] André Bleikasten, The Ink of Melancholy: Faulkner's Novels from The Sound and the Fury to Light in August, 276.

[xx] Cowley, 18-19.

[xxi] Bleikasten, 276.

[xxii] See Eula Varner in Faulkner's, The Hamlet: A Novel of the Snopes Family (New York: Vintage, 1956, 3rd Edition).

[xxiii] Olga Vickery, 38. For a more in depth discussion of Faulkner's use of multiple narrative perspectives, which often represent the community's views on particular individuals, see Hugh M. Ruppersburg, Voice and Eye in Faulkner's Fiction (Athens: University of Georgia, 1983).

[xxiv] Cleanth Brooks, "The Community and the Pariah" in Twentieth Century Interpretation of Light in August, ed. David L. Minter (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1969), 65.

[xxv] Qtd. in Donald Kartiganer, pg. 32. Elsewhere, Howe, while describing Lena as "good unruffled vegetable," adds that "[t]o think of Lena as an agent of traditional morality is to graze the notion that goodness is contingent upon a low level of intelligence." Irving Howe, "from William Faulkner: A Critical Study," Twentieth Century Interpretation of Light in August, ed. David L. Minter, 98 (Prentice-Hall: New Jersey, 1969).

[xxvi] Donald Kartiganer, "The Meaning of Form in *Light in August*" in Modern Critical Interpretations: Light in August, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1988), 32.

[xxvii] Alexander Welsh, "Prevailing and Enduring" in New Essays on Light in August, ed. Michael Millgate (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 141.

[xxviii] Judith Wittenberg, "The Women of *Light in August*" in New Essays on Light in August, ed. Michael Millgate (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 105

[xxix] Bleikasten, 276.

[xxx] Bleikasten, 282.

[xxxi] He mentions the interruption of Doane's Mill, the smoke emanating from Joanna Burden's house, and Byron Bunch's viewing of Lena giving birth as examples of this. [0]

[xxxii] Bleikasten, 298.

[xxxiii] Bleikasten, 284-85.

[xxxiv] Deborah Clarke, Robbing the Mother: Women in Faulkner (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1994), 156.

[xxxv] I am here indebted to Hugh Ruppersburg for this observation.

[xxxvi] Visser, 38

[xxxvii] Visser, 40 and 47.