

CHAPTER 3

Dickens and Faulkner: Saving Joe Christmas

Katie Bell

[H]e didn't know what he was, and so he was nothing...

(William Faulkner, *Light in August*)

In one of the closing chapters of William Faulkner's 1932 novel *Light in August*, the Reverend Hightower acts as narrator and describes to himself, and thus the reader, the reasons for his wanting to move to Jefferson, Mississippi, as a young man. Throughout the novel, it has seemed that the Reverend had long ago arbitrarily picked the town of Jefferson from a map as a place in which to begin his ministry. In this chapter, however, he explains that he has harboured something akin to an obsession with ministering to the same town where his grandfather, an officer in the Confederate Army during the Civil War, lived and fought. Hightower feels that, if he can minister in Jefferson, he will be able to witness, both to physically see and to spiritually envision, the ghosts of his Southern forefathers. He thinks, 'But soon, as soon as we can, where we can look out the window and see the street, maybe even the hoofmarks or their shapes in the air, because the same air will be there even if the dust, the mud, is gone—' (Faulkner 363). Hightower's narration of his drive describes succinctly how Charles Dickens can be seen and felt throughout succeeding literature of the

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American South in the post-Civil War decades. For example, ghosts shape the protagonists' decisions in Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* in which Scrooge witnesses the apparition of Marley, who has procured for him a chance at redemption. By witnessing the ghost, which had 'sat invisible beside [Scrooge] many and many a day' without being seen, Scrooge is able to change his future and begin spiritually to 'walk abroad among his fellow-men' (CC 25, 23). Where Scrooge's visitations from apparitions act as a catalyst to move him to change his ways, Hightower's visions (to which the reader is never a witness) do not move him to such change. They instead act as an anchor, keeping him within the past; as Michael Millgate writes, Hightower is 'a non-participator, a man withdrawn from life and its sufferings' (*The Achievement* 130).

Like Hightower, many of Dickens's characters are 'living dead', stuck in withdrawn positions which are pre-epiphanic (by which I mean that they are paused in the moments before the inevitable realisation of epiphany). Faulkner and Dickens both focused on the pasts and presents of characters engaged in a spiritual war with themselves, as well as the world around them. For many of them, their decay and ruin is self-inflicted, a reaction to the heartbreaks of life. These well-known literary figures (more obvious examples include Miss Havisham and Magwitch of *Great Expectations* and, as mentioned earlier, Marley and Scrooge of *A Christmas Carol*) together form a prototype of 'living dead' characters that draws upon elements of the Gothic and grotesque traditions for its creations. As discussed in Chapter 4, neo-Victorian prequels have focused on exploring the unknown backstories of enigmatic characters like Miss Havisham. Miss Havisham's sufferings have been explored in these prequels, and these fictions have enabled the reader to witness Havisham's trauma, while we know full well what type of 'freak' she will later become. Michael Hollington asserts in *Dickens and the Grotesque* (1984) that Dickens has a complex relationship with the grotesque in his novels. This stems from various sources, but the end result is that Dickens's understanding of these grotesque traditions led to his creating literary representations of his community, representations that were easily categorised and understood by his readers. Miss Havisham serves as a more obvious example of how Dickens imbues his characters with elements of the grotesque, as she lives her life estranged from her community, hidden away in the dark corners of her rotting estate and actively seeking to be viewed as bizarre. Upon meeting Pip for the first time, Miss Havisham commands him to view her in all her grotesquery: 'Look at me. ... You are not afraid of a woman who has never seen the sun since you were born?' (GE 67). Hollington asserts that, especially in *Great Expectations*, 'a complex of ironies unfolds [and ultimately] Society as a whole ... is represented as an *exhibition* of freaks' (217 and 221, author's emphasis). Although Pip is in all ways a 'normal' child, he is surrounded by strange and peculiar characters from the outset: figures responsible for his upbringing. This proposed 'freak show' starts with Magwitch, the escaped convict who threatens Pip with death by cannibalism if he does not

comply with the criminal's demands. Then Pip's guardians, Joe and Mrs Joe, are introduced, and this couple exhibits two extremes of child-rearing. Mr Pumblechook is brought into the mix with his comic yet malevolent, never-ending, dogged questioning of Pip's mathematical knowledge. All of these humorously exaggerated figures in Pip's community are the opening act which introduces his visit to the crumbling, ghostly residence, Satis House.

The specific 'freaks' on which I will focus, those who experience a living death, are particularly compelling grotesque characters because they have chosen to remain psychologically fixed in the past, a type of living effigy of their own personal histories. When examined more closely, one can see that this is essentially the definition of a spectre in a ghost story. Ghost stories have long captivated public interest, as can be seen with the popularity of novels, films, and video games which capitalise on such subjects. The lure of this genre can be explained in one way by examining what these apparitions convey: their fascination lies in their ability to stay rooted within the past. Unlike the rest of us, they do not have to change and move into the unforeseeable future. Dickens himself, in one of his literary pieces in *All the Year Round* titled 'Nurse's Stories' (8 September 1860), states that he was compelled to listen to his childhood nurse tell him ghostly stories, by which he was both frightened and intrigued. Dickens was a writer of whom Faulkner was well aware, as his mother, Maud, had introduced a young Faulkner and his brothers to Dickens's works at home before they began attending school. When he eventually developed an 'indifference to education' and turned to informal self-education by reading, it was 'Shakespeare, Dickens, Balzac and Conrad' on whom he focused heavily (Minter 12).¹ These compelling Dickensian 'living dead' characters are recreated in Faulkner's texts and re-envisioned for the 20th century in the aftermath of the destructive and life-changing American Civil War.² Chapter 2 explores how, through the strong influences of Dickens's works, Nordic author Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson utilised figures made popular by Dickens in order to explore issues facing Norway at the beginning of the 20th century. I contend that Faulkner does something akin to this and utilises Dickensian 'freaks' to create his own characters which populate a poverty-stricken American landscape with undercurrents of racism and misogyny.

Many of Faulkner's characters have difficulty with the well-known Southern adage 'never forget'. Gavin Stevens (a character who appears in multiple novels, including the end of *Light in August*) observes in *Requiem for a Nun*, 'The past is never dead. It's not even past' (Faulkner 92). Millgate postulates that this remark is perplexing because it consists of two parts, first, that the past is, 'in a sense, never dead' and is therefore 'always sufficiently alive to haunt the present' ('History' 11). Second, Millgate notes that the past is not 'even past' because the South constantly relives it, glorifying its reconstructed history and winning 'the irremediable battles' ('History' 8). Quentin Compson (who, like Stevens, also appears in multiple novels) demonstrates this struggle as he works to overcome

his Southern legacy and to truly know himself in the present, but ultimately he cannot. At the end of *Absalom, Absalom!*, Quentin's college roommate Shreve (who, as Millgate points out, is 'a man unconcerned with his history' as he is from 'the newly settled prairies' of Alberta, Canada) asks the Southerner why he hates the South, to which Quentin replies, 'I dont [*sic*] hate it ... *I dont. I dont!*' (Millgate 'History' 1, Faulkner 378, author's emphasis). Millgate also writes that Faulkner's novels work to demonstrate 'that it is one thing to recognise that the past is not dead ... but that it is quite another thing to submit our lives to the control of that past, to insist ... upon reminding ourselves and others to never forget' ('History' 13–14). These Faulknerian 'living dead' figures, of which Quentin is one example, serve as the personifications of an obsession with remembering, and ultimately their epiphanies serve as tools to demonstrate the dangers of a static life lived in the mind.

When considering these 'living dead' figures, it is apparent that *Light in August* and *Bleak House* have strong connections. Both novels are concerned with the line between good and evil, lost souls, hauntings, and the search for identity. Millgate recognises this connection in his study *The Achievement of William Faulkner* (1966), but focuses on Faulkner's style in the opening of the novel and its narration of Lena Grove: 'and even the abrupt transitions to apparently unrelated material in the second and third chapters will not disturb anyone familiar with Dickens—with, say, *Bleak House*, or *Our Mutual Friend*' (124). *Bleak House* is centrally focused on the plight of Esther Summerson, an orphan who has been designated to be the companion of a ward of the Chancery Court, Ada Clare. However, other motifs in the novel include hidden pasts and secret documents. An insidious undercurrent beneath these prevalent themes is the presence of a ghost, both as a legend and later as an actual character within the novel, and this ghost is what I examine here. In the second instalment of *Bleak House* (April 1852), the ending chapter is titled 'The Ghost's Walk'. Taking Dickens's already-established penchant for ghost stories, it becomes clear that in the early days of this novel's serialisation he was capitalising on the public's interest in tales of gothic suspense to hook a readership, and he therefore introduces one of the novel's main characters, Lady Dedlock, in a manner similar to the depiction of a Victorian spectre. The Lady has a past that is shrouded in mystery, which is made all the more eerie as she is introduced alongside her country estate, Chesney Wold, and its ghost of the walk, thus paralleling the two by association. Upon discovering that the great love of her youth had been living in London and working as a legal manuscript writer, she secretly leaves the country, travelling into the slums of London to discern more information about her lover's last days. She finds Jo, an illiterate crossing sweep who happened to know her dead lover Captain Hawdon by way of a shared state of poverty. The Lady disguises herself in her servant's clothing and covers her face so that she may not be recognised, but the outcome of this disguise is that she appears to be a phantom to Jo, whose ignorance makes him susceptible to

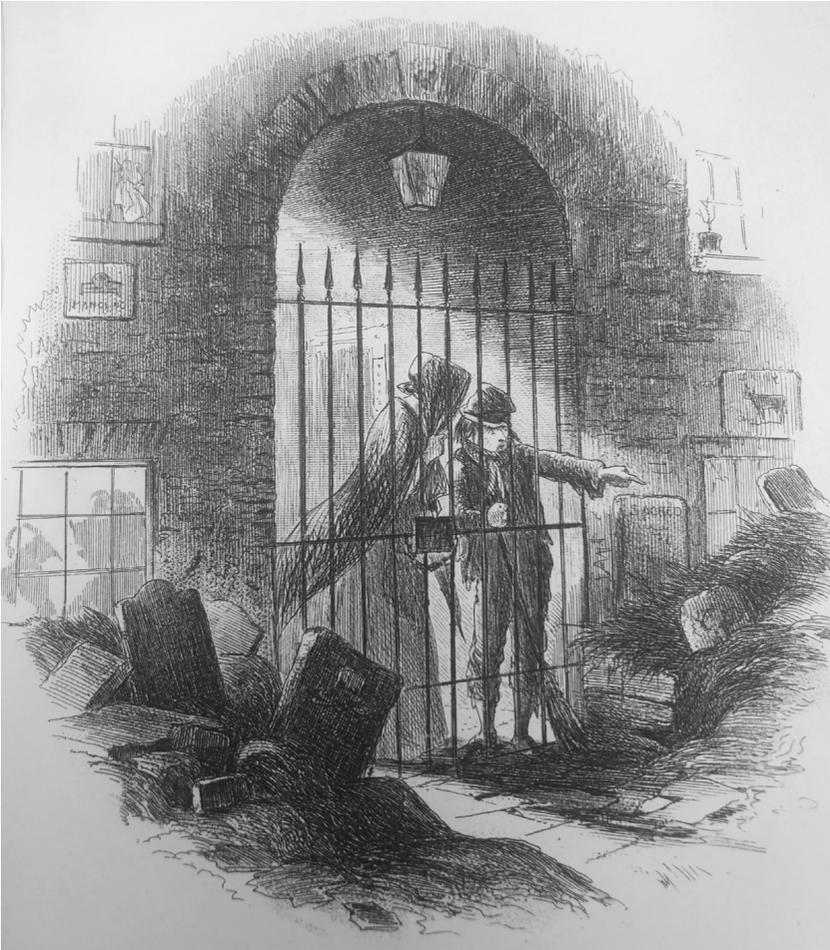


Figure 3.1: *Consecrated Ground*, etching by Hablot K. Browne (Phiz), 1853.
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believing his fears and superstitions. ‘Her face is veiled. ... She never turns her head. ... Then, she slightly beckons to [Jo], and says, “Come here!”’ (BH 276).

Dickens draws on aspects of the Victorian spiritualist movement, as well as his earlier ghostly characters such the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come from *A Christmas Carol*, for his representations of Lady Dedlock.³ In *Bleak House*, Dickens brings a phantom to life and creates a living and breathing ghost. Lady Dedlock is paralleled with her country house, Chesney Wold, which is ‘wrapped up in too much jeweller’s cotton and fine wool, and cannot hear the rushing of the larger worlds. ... [Chesney Wold] is a deadened world, and its growth is sometimes unhealthy for want of air’ (BH 55). The Dedlock estate is located in Lincolnshire, a place described as having ‘a stagnant river, with melancholy trees for islands in it’, and this does nothing to enliven the atmosphere of the ‘extremely dreary’ country house (BH 56). By association, Lady Dedlock becomes a part of the estate’s ‘mould ... cold sweat [and] general smell and taste as of the ancient Dedlocks in their graves’ (56). Having met and married Sir Leicester (no one quite knows how, because, as the narrator states, ‘she had not even family’), Lady Dedlock, then having ‘conquered her world, fell ... into the freezing mood’ (57). This ‘freezing mood’ is an indicator of the Lady’s choice to remain fixed, cold, and cut off from the world around her, much as the Dedlock estate is described; however, the Lady is not a spirit haunting this world because of unfinished business (a common plot motif in Victorian ghost stories). She is alive but has chosen to live her life as spiritually dead, and is therefore presented in the same way a spectre would be in order to convey this ‘living dead’ state to the readership.

Holly Furneaux discusses the literary relationship between the social deaths endured by women in the 19th century under coverture laws, and the prevalent fear which abounded in the mid-Victorian era of being subjected to an erroneous live burial. Furneaux explains that women who wished to marry suffered an ‘experience of being dead in life, or existing in a “living grave” under coverture laws, and authors like Mary Braddon (best known for *Lady Audley’s Secret* of 1862) used this fear of being buried alive as a way to further discuss, via metaphor in their novels, the ‘social death’ that women endured when marrying (438). When analysing Lady Dedlock through the lens of this aforementioned ‘social death’, it is clear that the Lady is suffering a form of this ‘living death’ in her marriage to Sir Leicester as well as in her choice to forsake her earlier life as Miss Barbary. Because she has had a child out of wedlock as Miss Barbary and consequently has worked to cover up that living part of herself (Dickens was likely drawing upon the same metaphor that Furneaux describes), the Lady feels she is outside of the loving and redemptive grace of God. Her sins, as she views them, involve having a sexual relationship outside of wedlock and also actively seeking to hide this past. Covering up one’s secrets is a subject upon which Dickens focused heavily, and *Bleak House* is a prime example of how he approached obfuscating the past. However, with Lady Dedlock’s confession to Esther that she is in fact the young woman’s ‘unhappy

mother', followed by the Lady's death (a self-sacrifice at the pauper's grave of her lover), she chooses to be saved by a universal God's love and therefore is redeemed (565).

The idea that all humanity is able to gain redemption is a central theme of Dickens's works, as Vincent Newey argues. Newey notes that Dickens utilises a 'liberal humanism' in his works, which displaces the older, dogmatic rhetoric of puritanical Christianity (3, 19). The key idea about this form of humanism, Newey states, is that, although Dickens was Christian, 'Duty to God and concern for the state of the immortal soul have been succeeded by an insistent interest in healthy feelings and fruitful relationships with the outer world', and that these interactions with one's community are in fact what brings salvation (18). This 'liberal [Christian] humanism' is echoed by authors writing in the aftermath of the American Civil War, especially in the South. Joseph Gold's text on Faulkner and humanism mainly focuses on Faulkner's later works, but he argues in his introduction that 'Faulkner's humanism rests on a rock foundation of faith, almost of mysticism. ... [God] is available to all men at all times if they will throw over systems and act out of acceptance and love' (14). Gold quotes from Faulkner's 1955 lecture tour of Japan to demonstrate that Faulkner felt himself most aligned with humanism: 'Well, I believe in God. Sometimes Christianity gets pretty debased, but I do believe in God, yes. I believe that man has a soul that aspires towards what we call God ... the only school I belong to, that I want to belong to, is the humanist school' (Faulkner, quoted in Gold 7-8).⁴ A feeling of having committed wrongs which need to be accounted for, coupled with people who are stuck in horrors of stagnation, poverty, and disease, people who are caught up in their heritage and unable to disassociate themselves from their pasts, culminates in the desire for redemption, and Faulkner in particular is a writer who focuses acutely on this topic. Byron Bunch sums up this culmination of emotions and circumstances when he says,

Yes. A man will talk about how he'd like to escape from living folks. But it's the dead folks that do him the damage. It's the dead ones that lay quiet in one place and dont [*sic*] try to hold him, that he cant [*sic*] escape from. (*Light in August* 58)

With this statement, Bunch illustrates how the youth of the early 20th century fought to distance themselves from Civil War nostalgia. Arguably, the United States was founded on several horrors, the African slave trade and the genocide against the Native Americans, and Bunch here comments that these atrocities are haunting presences which ultimately 'do him the damage'.

In his final chapter in *Light in August*, the Reverend Hightower comments that he 'grew to manhood among phantoms, and side by side with a ghost', suggesting that his past and his Southern heritage were inescapable aspects of his childhood, as they were for many who grew up in the generations after the Civil War (356). He further narrates that he was never scared of the stories his

family's negro maid (who helped to raise him) told of his grandfather, who allegedly killed hundreds of men in the war, because he was just a ghost, 'never seen in the flesh, heroic, simple, warm' (359).⁵ Hightower continues his narrative by describing the difference between these ghosts and phantoms 'which would never die' (359). The ghosts of memory and loss, as well as the presence of evil (as just described by Hightower) hold powerful places in *Light in August*, as in all of Faulkner's works, and are epitomised in the character Joe Christmas. Although Christmas's true identity remains a mystery to the various communities through which he moves, the townspeople have decided early on that an aura of evil surrounds him and this idea is based upon his physical appearance and rumours about his 'mixed race' parentage. Christmas appears out of nowhere at the planing mill where Byron Bunch works, a stranger in the town with 'something definitely rootless about him' (25). There is something contemptuous about the way he looks, to which the other mill workers do not take kindly. He appears at the mill in order to apply for a manual labour position though he is dressed in clothes which denote that he is above such a station: 'decent serge, sharply creased [with] a white shirt ... a tie and a stiffbrim [*sic*] straw hat that was quite new, cocked at an angle arrogant and baleful above his still face' (25). As he goes to the mill office, the other workers in their 'faded and workstained overalls looked at his back with a sort of baffled outrage. "We ought to run him through the planer", the foreman said. "Maybe that will take that look off his face"' (25–6). Christmas remains a mystery to the Jeffersonians at the beginning of the novel: 'none of them knew then where Christmas lived and what he was actually doing behind the veil, the screen, of his negro's job at the mill' (29).

The purpose of the 'veil' that Faulkner tells us Christmas puts up is to keep his second job as a bootlegger hidden. However, this web of secrecy extends to Christmas's own past, and it is only when the narrative moves back into his memory that it becomes clear how harsh beginnings nurtured, or even planted, the evil within him which is the driving force of the novel. Of Christmas's childhood, the narrator tells us:

Memory believes before knowing remembers. ... Knows remembers believes a corridor in a big long gabled cold echoing building of dark red brick sootbleakened [*sic*] by more chimneys than its own, set in a grassless cinderstrewn-packed [*sic*] compound surrounded by smoking factory purlieus ... where in random erratic surges ... orphans in identical and uniform blue denim in and out of remembering but in knowing constant as the bleak walls, the bleak windows where in rain soot from the yearly adjacenting [*sic*] chimneys streaked like black tears. (91)

This passage, an introduction to Christmas's childhood in an orphanage, has a direct thread of connection to the opening of *Bleak House*. Dickens poetically writes of the fog and mud on the streets of London, which paints an

impressionistic picture of rot and pestilence, later to become a metaphor for the Court of Chancery, the cause of many a character's downfall in the novel. The omniscient narrator tells us that 'never can there come fog too thick, never can there come mud and mire too deep, to assort with the groping and floundering condition which this High Court of Chancery, most pestilent of hoary sinners, holds, this day, in the sight of heaven and earth' (*BH* 50). Faulkner often reused his phrases for certain character types. He chose to describe one of his most tragic characters, Joe Christmas, in a manner hauntingly similar to that of Dickens's Chancery Court. The wetness, grime, and dirt that are associated with the orphanage building become associated with the children it houses, just as the fog and mud become one and the same with Chancery Court, the essence of evil within *Bleak House*. *Nicholas Nickleby* is also a novel which discusses orphanages, or Yorkshire Schools as they were deemed in the north, and focuses acutely on the skeletal imagery of the children housed there. Nicholas's introduction to Mr Squeers's establishment, 'Dotheboys Hall', is one that shocks and appals him, but he is powerless to do much more than observe the scene:

Pale and haggard faces, lank and bony figures, children with the countenances of old men. ... There were little faces which should have been handsome, darkened with the scowl of sullen dogged suffering; there was childhood with the light of its eye quenched, its beauty gone, and its helplessness alone remaining ... and lonesome even in their loneliness ... what an incipient Hell was breeding there! (*NN* 97)

Hablot K. Browne's illustration (Figure 3.2) is another piece of evidence that reiterates the image of the orphans that Dickens wanted his readership to envision. Dressed in matching ragged uniforms, the boys line up for their weekly dose of brimstone, and their gaunt, skeletal bodies are all the more emphasised by this linear formation. One boy's emaciated face flows into the next, and it would appear that they fade into the walls and background of the Hall, forming a ghostly image that is striving to become invisible.

Christmas is also a ghostly child, but he stands alone and is different from the other orphans. The dietician whom he has accidentally observed in a compromising situation feels this difference more than anyone and seeks a way of having him removed from the orphanage by citing proof (however tenuous) of Christmas's race: 'Of course I knew it didn't mean anything when the other children called him Nigger. ... They have been calling him that for years. Sometimes I think that children have a way of knowing things that grown people of your and my age dont [*sic*] see' (*Light in August* 102). Once the matron believes Christmas is of mixed race, she admits that he cannot stay at the white orphanage and must be placed with a family. Much like *Oliver Twist*, Christmas is seen to be a threat to his fellow orphans, albeit for different reasons. It is Oliver's caretaker, Mr Bumble, who asserts that the orphan is unlovable, and, similarly,

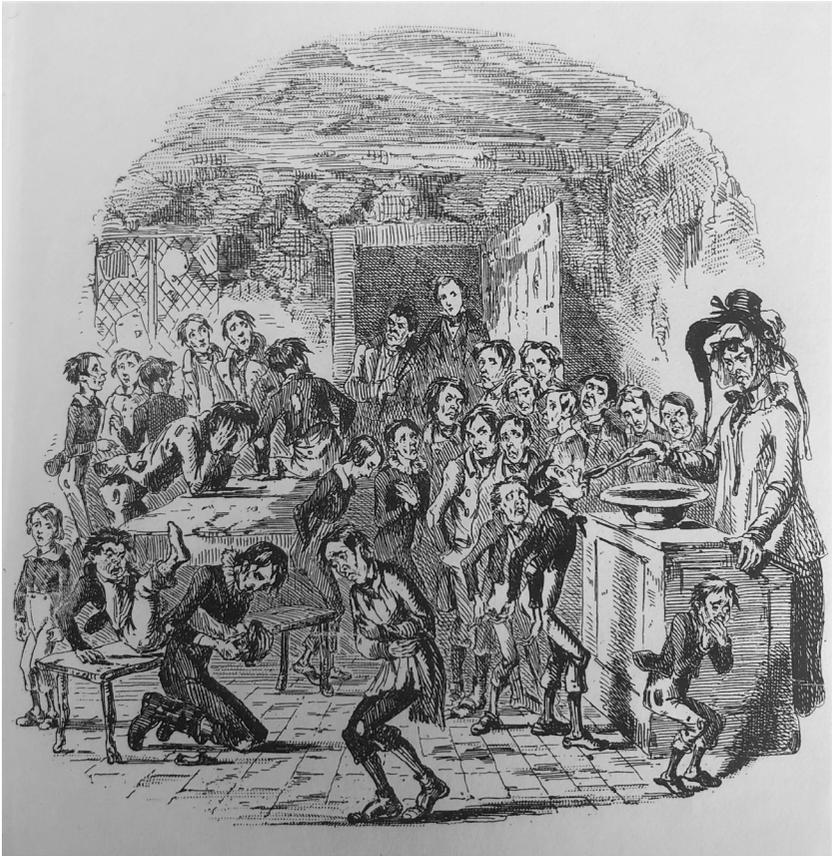


Figure 3.2: *The Internal Economy of Dotheboys Hall*, etching by Hablot K. Browne (Phiz), 1838. Image copyright and related rights waived via CC0.

it is the person who is supposed to care for Christmas, the dietician of the orphanage, who declares that he is a 'little nigger bastard' (96). Likewise, Oliver is told by his caretaker that he will be sold by the parish as an apprentice at the price of 'three pound ten! ... all for a naughty orphan which nobody can love' (OT 24). Early childhood memories of being turned out from adoptive homes that should be safe places of shelter haunt these orphans and imprint upon them their supposed 'differences' from their social peers.

At the orphanage, Christmas fades at will 'like a *shadow* ... another in the corridor could not have said just when and where he vanished, into what door, what room' (*Light in August* 91, my emphasis). Thomas McHaney asserts that there is an association between ghosts and the reoccurring twilight and shadows in Faulkner's works. Twilight and fading light are particular to certain characters within *The Sound and the Fury*, and McHaney states that, through the repetition, twilight becomes a Wagnerian leitmotif and is subsequently associated with the consciousness of those characters. That Faulkner actively chooses to align Christmas with shadows in his earliest childhood representations further asserts the child's innate ghostly nature.⁶ The dietician mistakenly thinks Christmas is hiding in her room to spy on her sexual relationship with an orphanage doctor; in actuality he is stealing her toothpaste to eat because of its sweet flavour, finishes the entire tube, and becomes ill. The dietician is 'stupid enough to believe that a child of five not only could deduce the truth from what he had heard, but that he would want to tell it as an adult would' and it is she who feels threatened by his knowledge of her wrongdoings and is haunted by his 'still, grave, inescapable, parchmentcoloured [*sic*] face, watching her' (94). All of the latter adjectives serve as more evidence of Christmas's perceived ghostliness, as his 'grave' and 'parchmentcoloured' face both denote a sense of sombre blankness. Christmas remains an enigma throughout the story, for, even when the reader learns of his isolated childhood spent in an orphanage and with an abusive adoptive family, his personality seems unknowable.⁷

From his introduction towards the beginning of the novel, an adult Joe Christmas is presented as the antagonist of the story both with the horrible things he does (the list is long and includes murders done with his bare hands) and the way in which he is physically presented. This attention to Christmas's physicality differentiates Faulkner from other writers of modernist fiction who actively choose not to focus on their characters' physical descriptions. With *Light in August*, Faulkner veers from the modernist movement in this respect, and writes this text using techniques more aligned with novels of the realist and naturalist movements, such as describing the characters' physical attributes and having those descriptions hint at their personalities. Faulkner himself, in a letter to his friend and editor Ben Wasson, wrote that *Light in August* was 'a novel: not an anecdote; that's why it seems topheavy [*sic*]' (Faulkner, quoted in Millgate 'A Novel' 31). Millgate speculates that the 'topheavy' quality originated from Faulkner having packed 'the novel with an extraordinary number and range of characters and of main and subsidiary narrative sequences,' a

literary quality typically attributed to Dickens's works and others writing in the mid-Victorian era ('A Novel' 32). *Light in August*, then, varies from a typical Faulknerian work: in his other novels, Faulkner concentrates acutely on a small number of central characters and their public and private emotions and inner dialogues. It is a distinctive text because Faulkner was attempting to veer from his more 'anecdote'-based writing and sincerely put forth his efforts to write what he felt was 'a novel'. This endeavour required an attention to the physical presentations of his characters, as well as laying out their personal histories as he measured himself against the achievements of other great novelists.⁸

Faulkner presents Christmas as a malevolent stranger who appears in Jefferson without warning. Christmas's demeanour and physical appearance culminate in his being read by Jeffersonians as a person with questionable motives. At the height of Christmas's bootlegging business in Jefferson and before he allegedly murders Joanna Burden, we are given insight into a day of his life, which he spends mostly isolated in the woods near Burden's house. In the evening, he walks into town, which by nine o'clock is mostly deserted. The narrator describes him as looking '*more lonely than a lone telephone pole in the middle of a desert ... he looked like a phantom, a spirit, strayed out of its own world, and lost*' (*Light in August* 87, my emphasis). This sketch of Christmas is reminiscent of the orphans of Dotheboys Hall in *Nicholas Nickleby*, boys who are 'lonesome even in their loneliness' and who form a group of phantasmal entities with a gloomy presence (NN 97). With this description, Faulkner explains that it is Christmas's loneliness that subsequently causes him to be assigned to the realm of phantoms and the 'living dead', much like the orphans of Dotheboys Hall. Christmas passes a 'negro youth [who] ceased whistling and edged away [from Christmas] looking back over his shoulder' (*Light in August* 87). During Christmas's adolescence, he adopted a way of smoking a cigarette without touching it. He keeps a lit cigarette dangling 'in one side of his mouth', from which the smoke billows up and obscures that side of his face (25). Because Christmas's face is almost always half hidden by smoke, the result is that he is hardly ever fully seen, which draws upon the representations of well-known apparitions of Victorian ghost stories such as Marley. When Scrooge first sees Marley it is as a knocker on the former's front door. Scrooge at once sees and does not see the ghost: 'Marley's face. It was not in impenetrable shadow, as the other objects in the yard were, but had a dismal light about it. ... As Scrooge looked fixedly at this phenomenon, it was a knocker again' (CC 17). Marley's hair was 'curiously stirred, as if by breath or hot air', implying that, in order to appear to Scrooge, Marley must be encased in his ('its' is the assigned pronoun) own atmosphere, even though the rest of the scene is motionless and ordinary (CC 16). Christmas's self-made atmosphere of cigarette smoke coupled with his 'inherently vicious' nature culminates in his being perceived as ghostly due to literary cues borrowed from Dickens (Millgate *The Achievement* 125).

Several Dickensian phantoms appear in their texts set apart from the natural environment of the everyday. The phantom of 'The Haunted Man and the

Ghost's Bargain' (1848) and the ghosts that haunt Toby Veck in *The Chimes* (1844) are two additional examples which appear in this manner, although Dickens puts a stronger emphasis on their shadowy natures than he does with Marley. In his creation of these phantoms, Dickens was drawing on his long-established interest in mesmerism. His belief in and practice of mesmerism spanned several decades of his life, beginning in the late 1830s when he came under the instruction of Dr John Elliotson, a physician and practising mesmerist at the University College Hospital in London. Much of the science of mesmerism is based on the belief that living beings are surrounded by an invisible fluid and this fluid can be tapped into and manipulated by the mesmerist. Although Dickens was not a spiritualist, many of mesmerism's cardinal beliefs have been inculcated into the ever-changing practice, and Harry Boddington writes about his mesmerist predecessors in a 1947 text on spiritualism. He states, 'What was called a universal fluid by Mesmer was merely another name for what is now called aura when it is invisible and psychoplasm when solidified' (211). Boddington further asserts that 'In clairvoyance ... the sight of spirits is limited to the plane of consciousness wherein they dwell,' meaning that the spiritualist or psychic will only be able to view a spirit in the entity's own 'spirit world' or dimension which can certainly account for the idea that a spirit would appear to the living in its own climate (308). Reading Dickensian ghost stories with this aforementioned auric fluid of mesmerism in mind, it becomes clear that the author was utilising mesmeric terminology in creating his ghostly characters, depicting them encased in their own bubbles of space in order to denote their having come from an unearthly place. Once this relationship between mesmerism and Dickens's ghosts has been established, it is clear that Faulkner picked up on the specific way in which Dickensian phantoms were written, and he depicted Christmas as encased in his own smoky atmosphere, further denoting the character's presence as phantasmal. At the very least, we comprehend that Christmas is someone to be avoided, which is conveyed with the 'negro youth's' reaction to Christmas's being ominous and otherworldly. As this youth edges away from Christmas on the street in town, readers familiar with Dickens's works are again reminded of Jo's fearful reaction to seeing a veiled Esther Summerson: 'I had not lifted my veil. ... The boy staggered up instantly, and stared at me with a remarkable expression of surprise and terror' (*BH* 485). In the confusion of his fever, he mistakes Esther for Lady Dedlock, whom his mind has turned into a spectre that he must perpetually accompany to 'the berryin [*sic*] ground' (485).

After the phantasmal introduction to Christmas in town, the narrative allows access into his memory to see what shaped and grew the perceived evil within him. Despite the innocence of childhood, which is asserted in the New Testament and is emphasised in Christmas's case by his namesake, Christmas cannot escape the dogmatic rhetoric of Protestant Christianity that dominated the South and focuses on 'original sin.'⁹ Dickensian characters that also embody this more Calvinistic approach to Christianity are prevalent throughout his

works, and it is worth mentioning that it is Miss Barbary, Lady Dedlock's sister, who raises Esther in secret and imprints upon her the notion of having been born into sin, and that sin is therefore an inescapable factor of her life. This is the main construction of Esther's mental prison, from which she works to be released throughout the novel. Christmas too works throughout the novel to escape from this self-made prison, but unlike Esther he seeks his release through acts of violence (a trait which Flannery O'Connor, another author of the Southern Gothic genre, utilises in many of her pieces). The janitor of Christmas's first home, the orphanage (in actuality his biological grandfather, Doc Hines), who spirits him away once his mixed race is discovered, is convinced that Christmas is evil: 'I know evil. Aint [*sic*] I made evil to get up and walk God's world? A walking pollution to God's own face I made it. Out of the mouths of little children He never concealed it' (*Light in August* 98). Although Hines and Christmas had never exchanged more than 'a hundred words [Christmas] knew that there was something between them that did not need to be spoken' (*Light in August* 105). Hines's attention to Christmas comes out of a sense of having done evil of biblical proportions, an Old Testament theme that humanity is born into sin, and Christmas's mere existence (in Hines's mind) is his punishment. Hines is also drawn to Christmas because of the circumstances of his birth; because Hines's daughter committed a sin in having Christmas with a supposed 'black man' out of wedlock, Christmas is assumed to have inherited his mother's and father's sin of lust, as well as being of mixed race, which to Hines equates to an ability to perpetuate evil.

Christmas's troubled childhood continues when he is adopted by the McEachern family, who promise that the boy 'will grow up to fear God and abhor idleness and vanity despite his origin' (*Light in August* 109). His new caregivers further imprint a sense of hopelessness upon a young Christmas, and their belief in humanity's inescapable original sin propels him down a path of negativity sought out of retaliation and despair. It is in the McEachern house, a place where physical and emotional violence takes the place of love, that Christmas's desire to withdraw from humanity is cemented. An adolescence spent in the company of Mr McEachern, a religious bigot similar in character to Esther's aunt Miss Barbary, leaves Joe unable to understand love or to delineate between good and evil. Alexander Welsh writes that Christmas had 'two oppressive adoptive fathers ... of a peculiarly Calvinist stamp,' and being raised by these men resulted in moulding Christmas into 'a killer' (128). When Joe is just eight, McEachern beats him for not being able to memorise biblical verses. The beatings are cold-blooded and, to Joe, seem to be more of a ritual than an emotion-filled reaction to what McEachern views as Joe's stubbornness.¹⁰ The fact that his adoptive father cannot muster any feelings, positive or negative, while beating his son suggests that there is never any emotion expressed for him by McEachern. Mrs McEachern secretly brings Joe a tray of food after her husband leaves the house that evening. Her clandestine feedings are done out of love and pity for the boy, but they are also performed out of a self-serving

need to form a relationship with her adopted son, to build a bridge of connection between herself and someone else apart from her abusive husband. Joe's reaction to the secreted food is to throw it on the floor in the corner, breaking the plates. This refusal is a learned reaction because Joe, who has never experienced a bond with another human being outside of a violent one, is 'constituted as to be unable to accept love or pity' and has no other emotional means with which to react to the food offering (Welsh 126). So we see that it is the physical violence inflicted upon Joe while living with the McEacherns that raises him and makes him into 'a man' (*Light in August* 111).

As Faulkner said in his lectures to graduate students, Christmas is not born 'bad' as Hines believes, but is made 'tragic' because of the actions of others.¹¹ Years later, Joe remembers his private reaction to Mrs McEachern's spoiled food in the corner of his room after she leaves. It is a Jungian archetypal memory for Joe in that it is one that shapes his consciousness and is one of his founding memories: 'he rose from the bed and went and knelt in the corner ... and above the outraged food kneeling, with his hands ate, like a savage, a dog' (*Light in August* 118). For Christmas, food, sex, and women are confusedly tied together in his mind, and he cannot understand one without the other. Food invariably recalls the memory of eating the dietician's toothpaste at the orphanage. Like a row of toppling dominos, this brings to mind the sexual encounter he accidentally witnessed there. When Mrs McEachern tries to give Christmas food, his adolescent mind relives early childhood experiences of secret eating, witnessing a sexual encounter, then vomiting and being found out. The young Christmas feels that these events caused him to be exiled from the only home he had known, another dark milestone in a long line of traumatic incidents. Never having known and therefore understood what the New Testament tells us is the grace of God's love, Joe's concept of Christianity, and arguably his world, is shaped around violence and an Old Testament God who doles out punishments as McEachern does. Christmas's isolated childhood, coupled with his subsequent physical representation as an adult in Jefferson as described earlier, culminate in his phantom-ness; he exists within our world, yet outside of it, as he is human but without humanity.

Like Christmas, Hightower is another of the 'living dead,' stuck in the personally constructed prison of his mind. As Christmas was imprinted negatively by the stewards of his childhood, so too Hightower describes an adolescence filled with emotional coldness at the hands of his father. Hightower remembers his father as a lonely figure who 'had been a minister without a church and a soldier without an enemy' and therefore 'combined the two' and became a doctor (*Light in August* 356). In this narration, Hightower decides that his father 'had become not defeated and not discouraged [by life in the South], but wiser. ... As if he came suddenly to believe that Christ had meant that him whose spirit alone required healing, was not worth the having, the saving' (*Light in August* 356). We come to learn about Hightower through small glimpses like these, caught here and there between the main action-heavy plot

concerning Joe Christmas. Jeffersonians describe him as tangling religion and his own family heritage together in an indecipherable mush, that he was 'born about thirty years after the only day he seemed to have ever lived in—that day when his grandfather was shot from the galloping horse—' (*Light in August* 48). This tangling of the past and present culminates in forming another type of self-constructed mental imprisonment for Hightower. He constructs this self-punishment similarly to Christmas, Lady Dedlock and Esther of *Bleak House*. The Lady believes in the truth of her sin, and it is this belief structure that creates the frozen life she currently lives. The same can be asserted of Christmas and Esther as their respective upbringings in violent and dogmatic Christian homes formed for them their truths. Hightower constructs his reality through stories of his past heritage as well as a carefully cultivated understanding of the Church: 'He had believed in the church too, in all that it ramified and evoked ... if ever there was shelter, it would be the church; that if ever truth could walk naked and without shame or fear, it would be in the seminary' (*Light in August* 359).

Coupling Hightower's narrative with Christmas's death makes the significance of the latter's demise more clear, in that to gain a greater understanding of Christmas's death, one must understand Hightower's story. As mentioned earlier, it is through Lady Dedlock's confession of her past transgressions to Esther (namely that she had Esther out of wedlock and then unknowingly abandoned her to live a cold adolescence with her sister, a religious zealot) and her death that she is able to have a spiritual redemption. This redemption comes to her through the forgiveness offered her by both Esther and her widowed husband, Sir Leicester Dedlock. Although he is 'invalided, bent, and almost blind' he rides past the Dedlock mausoleum with his attendant George, then 'pulling off his hat, is still for a few moments before they ride away' (*BH* 928). Archbishop Dr Rowan Williams noted that Dickens's view of forgiveness is seen in the mercy and compassion Sir Leicester exhibits for his deceased wife. In Williams's bicentenary speech in 2012, he argued that in Sir Leicester 'we have something of the hope of mercy. Almost silent, powerless, Sir Leicester after his stroke, dying slowly in loneliness, and stubbornly holding open the possibility that there might be, once again, love and harmony'. It is the Lady's death that changes the lives of the characters around her, enabling this compassion to be felt, and it is in this that another correlation between the two works can be identified.

As with Lady Dedlock, Christmas's death and its aftermath are central to the text. The events leading up to Christmas's murder are narrated by Gavin Stevens, a district attorney who is from a family 'who is old in Jefferson' (*Light in August* 333). If for no other purpose, Stevens's specified heritage lends credence to his speculations on Christmas, because his status as a *real* Jeffersonian provides him with a platform for theorising an accurate portrayal of the situation. Stevens makes his first appearance as a character in this one chapter, explaining to a visiting friend from Harvard (who, like the reader, is an outsider to

this story) why he thinks Christmas fled to Hightower's house. Some in town explain the odd choice of refuge as 'Like to like' (again, another allusion to Christmas's and Hightower's perceived similarities as outsiders) but Stevens, the narrator tells us, 'had a different theory' (*Light in August* 333). While he acknowledges that he does not think anyone could piece together what truly happened, Stevens opines that what drove Christmas to Hightower was a belief that the minister could offer him 'sanctuary [from] the very irrevocable past [from] whatever crimes had moulded and shaped him and left him high and dry' (*Light in August* 337). Stevens further speculates on the internal argument he believes Christmas's mixed blood has during his escape, speculating that Christmas's 'black blood drove him first to the negro cabin [and] his white blood ... sent him to the minister [that it was] his black blood which snatched up the pistol and the white blood which would not let him fire it' (*Light in August* 337). While Dickens was not the first to pen racial stereotypes in Western literature, he does describe Neville Landless of Ceylon in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870), who has recently immigrated to England, as having 'something of the tiger in his dark blood'; and he demonstrates this internal rage when he fights with Edwin Drood shortly after meeting him (70). Helena Landless, the twin sister of Neville, shares his complexion but is exempt from this wild rage because of her feminine nature and ability to adopt the domestic knowledge imparted to her by Miss Twinkleton's school and her English friend, Rosa. Although armed, Christmas chooses not to fire his weapon at anyone; instead, Stevens relates that 'he crouched behind that overturned table and let them shoot him to death, with that loaded and unfired pistol in his hand' (*Light in August* 338). Stevens's belief is that Christmas wanted to continue to defy the 'black blood' within him, which surely (according to Stevens) would have pushed Christmas to use the pistol.

Christmas is the victim of a gruesome death at the hands of town vigilantes who shoot and then castrate him after his escape from the town jail. Like Lady Dedlock, it is through death that Christmas is released from the 'cage' that is his 'own flesh' (*Light in August* 122). Christmas lies dying on the floor of Hightower's kitchen, where he has sought refuge after his escape. In the following profound scene, his soul is released from the prison of his body, where it was trapped, both enduring and doling out evil throughout his life:

For a long moment he looked up at them with peaceful and unfathomable and unbearable eyes. Then his face, body, all, seemed to collapse, to fall in upon itself, and from out the slashed garments about his hips and loins the pent black blood seemed to rush like a released breath. It seemed to rush out of his pale body like the rush of sparks from a rising rocket; upon that black blast the man seemed to rise soaring into their memories forever and ever. ... It will be there, musing, quiet, steadfast, not fading and not particularly threatful [*sic*], but of itself alone serene, of itself alone triumphant. (*Light in August* 349–50)

His eyes are 'peaceful' yet 'unfathomable and unbearable' as his body collapses inward like a deflating balloon and his blood gushes out of him. His body becomes 'pale,' further emphasising his ghostliness and the release of his spirit. Mark 15:37–15:39 details the death of Christ and narrates that a centurion who stood near Jesus as he died 'saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost [and] he said, Truly this man was the Son of God'. The witnesses of these deaths (Christmas's and Christ's) are subconsciously moved to feel a profound awe at these scenes. With this depiction of Christmas's blood jetting forth while his body collapses, there is another correlation between Christmas and Christ. Christ's blood is mentioned throughout the New Testament, but John 1:7 particularly details that it is the blood of Jesus Christ that can permanently cleanse us of our sins. By writing that Christmas rose 'into their memories' and will continue to remain there 'triumphant,' Faulkner makes it clear that Christmas's larger purpose is to be a sacrifice for the greater salvation of humanity. Christmas's death scene is rife with metaphorical allusions which point to the imprint his consciousness makes upon the four men in the room and upon the Jeffersonian community as a whole. Christmas, like Christ, does not commit a literal suicide, but is murdered at the hands of those who wish to repudiate him; however, it is through his death that these same citizens are offered salvation.

From his self-sacrifice Christmas gains release from the imprisonment of living death that he has been enduring. Christmas comes to an epiphany while he is in hiding that what he has been searching for in all his 'thirty years' was peace, 'to become one with loneliness and quiet that has never known fury or despair' (*Light in August* 249).¹² Once again, Christmas and Twist, as outsider orphans, share a similar longing for peace. During Oliver's apprenticeship to the undertaker Sowerberry, 'he wished, as he crept into his narrow bed, that that were his coffin, and that he could be laid in a calm and lasting sleep in the churchyard ground, with the tall grass waving gently above his head' (*OT* 38). Although Oliver does not die in his novel, he wishes for an end to the constant battle that is his life. Christmas's struggle for peace in his 'thirty years' is the result of a lifetime of ill treatment but is also another shadowing of Christ's life and Passion. Like Lady Dedlock of *Bleak House*, Christmas is doomed by his past; he feels unable to escape his history and so does not attempt to create a better future. Whereas Lady Dedlock gains a place in society by marrying Sir Leicester, she does so through deceiving him about her illegitimate child and greater past love for Captain Hawdon. While the Lady is certainly not actively evil (as some would claim Christmas is), there is a shared pattern in the loss of hope that drives both to isolated states lived outside of their respective communities. The Lady's reaction to her perceived estrangement from society is to be 'bored to death' by everyone and everything (*BH* 56). She seeks a way to turn away from the world and to become mentally stagnant, thus shutting out her memories of loss. Conversely, Christmas's detachment culminates in his actively seeking a war with the world around him. These characters' reactions to tragedy are different but their respective isolated states are eerily similar:

neither can escape the turmoil of his/her past and remain trapped, so much so that their histories keep them from living. Although, in both style and plot, it is a drastically different novel to any he had written before, *Light in August* is one of Faulkner's 'greatest achievements ... and is central to any evaluation or understanding of his career as a whole' (Millgate 'Introduction' 12). Arguably by using realist narrative techniques in the novel and being less experimental, Faulkner was able to fully convey the greater effect his central characters' story lines had upon their communities. Before *Light in August*, Faulkner focused with an acute clarity on the innermost thoughts of a handful of characters, but with this novel, he broadened his scope to depict eloquently the traumas of being an outsider.¹³

The interest we have in the plight of the 'other' comes from our own desire to be witness to such haunting and grotesque characters, to fully see the spectacle of the 'freak'. In her introduction to *Freakery*, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson states that 'By challenging the boundaries of the ... natural world, monstrous bodies [appear] as sublime, merging the terrible with the wonderful, equalising repulsion with attraction' (*Freakery* 3). Dickens expressed this same odd coupling of emotions through David when he meets the detestable Uriah Heep in *David Copperfield* for the first time. David is both repulsed and fascinated by Uriah; he does not wish to be in his company, yet he cannot keep away and even goes so far as to invite Uriah into his own home so that he might gain a closer look at Uriah's 'freakishness'. Dickens has written several times on this equalisation of 'repulsion with attraction', as Garland-Thomson calls it, and referred to the feeling as 'the attraction of repulsion', citing it as being a part of human nature (Dickens 'Letters on Social Questions: Capital Punishment'). Hollington defines the grotesque in just these terms, as 'contradictory sensations ... the romantic, the fantastic or the gothic com[ing] into collision with the 'real' world ... to produce the paradoxically mixed and contradictory art of the grotesque' (24). Garland-Thomson further asserts that mainstream society is drawn to want to view the 'freak', so as to feel 'comfortably common ... by the exchange' (*Freakery* 5). If this discourse on the freak in recent years is applied to the outsider characters in Dickens's and Faulkner's works, it is clear that these figures have purpose in their grotesquery: they help to fulfil 'mainstream' society's desire to feel a sense of safety in their own bodies, the view of the 'other' rendering them happily 'normal' by comparison. These 'living dead' characters provide the perfect canvas upon which to paint a grotesquely beautiful depiction of these 'others' for the rest of society to gaze upon.

Millgate notes that Faulkner did not only want 'to tell the stories of [the characters] but also, and perhaps primarily, to show the impact of these stories upon the people of Jefferson' (*The Achievement* 126). It is important to note that this theme (the potential impact of one person's life upon his/her community) is another which is often associated with Dickens. Millgate makes the point several times that the reader, also an outsider to the community, is brought into the story to join the social community of Jefferson which has condemned

Christmas 'on sight' (*The Achievement* 125). However, Millgate asserts that this verdict of Christmas's 'inherently vicious and worthless' nature must be amended when the reader is given insight into Christmas's adolescence (125). He summates that the greatest strength of the novel is 'the passion of its presentation of Joe Christmas ... and the way in which we, like all the characters in the book, are irresistibly swept into the vortex of Christmas's restless life and agonising death' (137). As the narrative moves to describe Christmas's troubled past, the reader, the sole witness to these memories, is moved to reassess his/her previously formed conceptions of Christmas, and is made to empathise with him despite his wrongdoings. Once empathy is successfully felt for Christmas, a tie is formed between him and those who condemned him, and the narrative completes its critique that the 'other' may not be so different from the supposed 'norm.'

Christmas is aligned with what Garland-Thomson refers to as 'the sight of an unexpected body', especially in his death scene, as he 'attracts interest but ... also ... disgust' (*Staring* 37). Christmas disrupts our expectations of societal normalcy, which 'is at once novel and disturbing', and this disruption 'forces us to look and notice' (Garland-Thomson *Staring* 37). Taking what Garland-Thomson asserts in her works, the communities in these texts desire to form a united front before which characters like Christmas and Dedlock are pushed further outward and ostracised, in order to feel a sense of normalcy in their own bodies as was mentioned, and this group formation becomes a force that is an entity and a character unto itself. Welsh remarks that 'The community comes alive, just as it does in *Oliver Twist*, when there is a fire to watch and a murderer to be hunted down. ... Faulkner's satire of the inhabitants of Jefferson ... is acute and reflective' (134). Faulkner creates this social satire, which is purposely contrasted to the phantasmal outsider Christmas, in order to move the reader to see a parallel between his/her previously held judgements and those of the community. The inevitable outcome is that the reader becomes troubled by his/her attitudes and begins to question the previously held opinion of Christmas's inherent evil nature. Lady Dedlock and Joe Christmas share with Christ the experience of being repudiated by their 'normal' communities. The self-sacrifice that both of these unconventional characters perform in their respective novels provides the catalyst for humanity's growth and perseverance. Faulkner spoke of this drive to persevere in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech in 1950: '[humanity] is immortal ... he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance. The poet's, the writer's, duty is to write about these things. It is his privilege to help man endure by lifting his heart' (Faulkner, quoted in Welsh 138). This statement is strikingly similar to the opening preface of *Household Words*, written by Dickens on 30 March 1850. Dickens writes that the publication's aim is to 'tenderly cherish that light of Fancy which is inherent in the human breast; which, according to its nurture, burns with an inspiring flame, or sinks into a sullen glare, but which (or woe betide that day!) can never be extinguished' (Dickens 'Preliminary' 1). Both Dickens and

Faulkner can be seen to have shared the sense that it was an author's duty to show his/her world what the human spirit could accomplish: 'To show to all, that in all familiar things, even in those which are repellent on the surface, there is Romance enough, if we will find it out' (Dickens 'Preliminary' 1).

Both authors demonstrate the importance of looking below the 'repellent ... surface' in their depictions of those who are spiritually entombed. These characters, who, as Faulkner said, are victims of their own minds, or their 'fellows, or [their] own nature[s], or [their] environment[s]'; are repudiated by their communities but they are still very much a part of those same communities (Faulkner, quoted in Gwynn and Blotner 118). The result of this observation is that there can be no 'normal' collective without an 'outsider' because, as polar opposites, they define each other. Lady Dedlock finds peace through dying alongside the grave of her great lost love, Captain Hawdon (Nemo). Esther describes how '[s]he lay there, with one arm creeping round a bar of the iron gate, and seeming to embrace it ... my mother, cold and dead' (*BH* 868–9). Through self-sacrifice (the Lady banishes herself from Sir Leicester and Chesney Wold with all of their upper-class comforts) and a rather gruesome death (which can be seen as suicide), she gains her salvation at the grave of Hawdon. Even more importantly, Esther and the community which had forced the Lady into social exile are able to share in her salvation through witnessing the death. Christmas's death is much more grisly than Lady Dedlock's, but there is a shared state of epiphany and salvation in which the community jointly shares.

Millgate asserts that 'What *Light in August* does explore ... is the central Faulknerian theme of the past's relation to the present ... [a past] from which society can never hope to free itself but from which the individual must never cease struggling to escape' ('A Novel' 44). Both Dickens and Faulkner were working with a Christian version of humanism, which states that, through a universal love and a belief in the importance of humanity itself, deliverance can be obtained by anyone, no matter how dark their earthly lives. Vincent Newey notes that Dickens's 'plan of salvation can be the more clearly understood against the backcloth of Puritan conversion narrative', such as *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), stating further that Dickens's texts replace 'one ideology (old-style religion) with another (humanism)' (19). For his children in 1849, Dickens wrote a chronicle of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ titled *The Life of Our Lord* (published in 1934). It is interesting to note what Dickens chooses to leave out of his children's education about Christ: the more mystical details such as the Immaculate Conception and transubstantiation are glossed over. Instead, the foci are Jesus's adult life: the miracles he performed and his Passion. Dickens tells his children that Jesus chose his disciples:

from among Poor Men, in order that the Poor might know—always after that; in all years to come—that Heaven was made for them as well as for the rich, and that God makes no difference between those who

wear good clothes and those who go barefoot and in rags. The most miserable, the most ugly, deformed, wretched creatures that live, will be bright Angels in Heaven if they are good here on earth... . (*Life of Our Lord* 33)

The above is crucial to an understanding of Dickens's concept of the Christian faith. Lady Dedlock and Joe Christmas gain this love despite their pasts, and to Dickens and Faulkner all of humanity is capable of achieving the same. In 1957, a University of Virginia student observed to Faulkner that, in *Light in August*, 'much of the action seems to stem from almost fanatical Calvinism' (quoted in Gwynn and Blotner 73). The student further asked that, if Faulkner favoured an 'individual rather than an organised religion', would it be correct to say that he believed 'that man must work out his own salvation from within rather than without?' (73). Faulkner's reply was simply, 'I do, yes' (Faulkner, quoted in Gwynn and Blotner 73). Jesus tells his followers that he is 'the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life' (*King James Bible*, John 8:11). Dickens firmly believed that Jesus's purpose as a human man on this Earth was to demonstrate that all people are equal in the eyes of God, and, therefore, how one treats others in his/her community, is of the utmost importance: 'TO DO GOOD always—even to those who do evil to us. ... If we do this ... we may confidently hope that God will forgive us our sins and mistakes, and enable us to live and die in Peace' (*Life of Our Lord* 122). Despite the ghosts of their pasts, Lady Dedlock and Joe Christmas find the light of Christ and attain salvation through death, sharing that redemption with the societies which had rejected them, much as the New Testament tells us that Christ died so that mankind might gain salvation.

Endnotes

- ¹ As referenced earlier, Joseph Blotner's catalogue of Faulkner's libraries shows that Faulkner owned two large volume sets of Dickens (one housed at Rowan Oak and the other at his cottage in Charlottesville, Virginia). Blotner asserts that 'Not one of these books contains any comments or interlineations from his hand. [Faulkner's] special favorites, however, are marked not only by inscriptions by also by duplicates. ... These were among those books which he read in youth and reread throughout his life, dipping into them for the sake of the characters, he used to say, as one would go into a room to visit an old friend' (8–9).
- ² According to biographers, Faulkner was an avid reader throughout his youth: 'although he never finished high school he read omnivorously ... the extent and depth of Faulkner's reading should never be underestimated' (Millgate 'Introduction' 2). Additionally, Millgate asserts 'Faulkner's familiarity with English and European literature has often been ignored or

underestimated by American critics, and the result has sometimes been not simply a misunderstanding of the nature and sources of many of his images and allusions but an insufficiently generous conception of the whole scale and direction of his endeavour' (Millgate *The Achievement* 162).

³ I have written about Dickens's ghostly characters and the ways in which they are represented in my master's thesis, 'Dickens, Decay and Doomed Spirits: Ghosts and the Living Dead in the Works of Charles Dickens' for the University of Leicester, 2013.

⁴ This statement is taken from *Faulkner at Nagano* (1956).

⁵ Faulkner recycled from his own life the close relationship between a young boy and his nursemaid for his character Hightower. One of Faulkner's biographers, David Minter, writes that the Falkners' [original spelling] maid, 'Mammy Callie' provided a very real source of familial love and affection to the Falkner boys when they were growing up in Oxford. Caroline Barr was born into slavery and, although she was '[u]nable to read or write, she remembered scores of stories about the old days and the old people: about slavery, the War, the Klan, and the Falkners' (13). Additionally, the nurse/child relationship is one that was also a major source of entertainment in Dickens's childhood, as is recorded both in his many biographies and in the instalment of 'The Uncommerical Traveller' mentioned earlier. Harry Stone wrote that the Dickens's maid, Mary Weller, had a similar impact upon the Dickens children with the occult horror stories she would tell her young wards. Mary had 'a baleful imagination that embroidered and personalised everything that she related. Dickens proved an ideal audience, and [she] practised on him endlessly' (Stone, quoted in Haining 4).

⁶ See McHaney, Thomas. *Literary Masterpieces: The Sound and the Fury*. The Gale Group, 2000, pp. 72–3.

⁷ In a graduate course on American Fiction at the University of Virginia, Faulkner says that Christmas's 'tragedy' was that 'he didn't know what he was, and so he was nothing ... the most tragic condition a man could find himself in [is] not to know what he is and to know that he will never know' (Faulkner, quoted in Gwynn and Blotner 72).

⁸ Millgate theorises that Faulkner 'in writing *Light in August* ... set out to lay claim, once and for all, to the status of a major novelist ... [it would be] a 'big' novel capable of standing alongside the greatest novels of the past' ('A Novel' 41). Millgate comes to this conclusion based on Faulkner's own recollections of writing this work: "I was deliberately choosing among possibilities and probabilities of behavior and weighing and measuring each choice by the scale of the Jameses and Conrads and Balzacs" (Faulkner, quoted in Millgate 'A Novel' 41). This drive of Faulkner's to have *Light in August* stand next to its literary predecessors explains his choices in examining the details of Christmas's and Hightower's lives more closely.

⁹ The New Testament speaks of the innocence of children several times, most notably in the Gospel of Mark, when Christ demonstrates the impor-

tance of children by saying: ‘Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God’ (*King James Bible*, Mark 10:14).

- ¹⁰ In *Writers and Critics: William Faulkner* (1961), Millgate also acknowledges McEachern’s ceremonial behaviour towards his adopted son, writing that Christmas achieves knowledge of his identity through the ‘episodes of violence [which] have an almost ritualistic aspect’ (46). Millgate asserts that the outcome of this behaviour is that ‘Christmas hates McEachern, but at least he acts predictably, according to the code of behavior that is as clearly defined as it is inflexible’ (46).
- ¹¹ In another University of Virginia lecture, Faulkner further spoke about Christmas, saying that, ‘his only salvation in order to live with himself was to repudiate man-kind, to live outside the human race. And he tried to do that but nobody would let him, the human race itself wouldn’t let him. And I don’t think he was bad, I think he was tragic’ (Faulkner, quoted in Gwynn and Blotner 118).
- ¹² The search for peace is also broached in *Sanctuary* with Horace Benbow, who quotes the Percy Shelley poem ‘To Jane: The Recollection’ (1792–1822). Horace Benbow ‘began to say something out of a book he had read: “Less oft is peace. Less oft is peace”’ (Faulkner *Sanctuary* 206–7).
- ¹³ In a *New York Times Book Review* from 9 October 1932, J. Donald Adams wrote of *Light in August*: ‘That somewhat crude and altogether brutal power which thrust itself through [Faulkner’s] previous work is in this book disciplined to a greater effectiveness than one would have believed possible in so short a time’ (Adams, quoted in Millgate ‘A Novel’ 13).

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