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***SHADES OF PASSING: THE DIALECTIC OF IDENTITY IN  
PHILIP ROTH'S THE HUMAN STAIN AND WILLIAM FAULKNER'S  
LIGHT IN AUGUST***

**Keywords:** transition of the Self; Lacan; self-image; passing; race; racial identity; Faulkner; Roth

**Abstract:** The paper takes a closer look at the phenomenon of racial passing as form of cultural transition: as transformation of identity, i.e. as changing of the Self in William Faulkner's *Light in August* and Philip Roth's *The Human Stain*. The aim of the paper is to try to show the way the two main characters, Joe Christmas in *Light in August* and Coleman Silk in *The Human Stain*, pass as white, the reasons for it, and, in the end, the consequences of their actions. The interesting point is that even though the writers of the novels are decades apart and despite the many differences in the lives of the two tragic black heroes, both Joe Christmas and Coleman Silk end up the same way – dead after passing for white and after being involved in sexual relationships with white women. Both characters seem to undergo an identity crisis as a result of their racial ambiguity, which they obviously cannot overcome.

In *Light in August* Joe Christmas is an African-American male often perceived by society as white. Even though some 70 years have passed since Faulkner's novel, it still appears that whiteness is the most important element of an ideal and desired identity, as shown in Philip Roth's *The Human Stain*, where Coleman Silk, again an African-American, passes for white in the 1990s. Though both novels show the characters during various periods of their lives, and in various life situations as well, we will see the different reasons and similar consequences of their 'passing' as forms of cultural transition.