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研究

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**A Study of the Alienation in *Light in August* from the
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摘要

《八月之光》是美国作家威廉·福克纳创作的长篇小说，在作家营造的“约克纳帕塔法世系”中占有重要位置。小说通过杰弗镇十天的社会生活的描述，揭示了人类心灵深处的亘古至今的真实情感和牺牲精神。本文以存在主义为理论框架，运用主题分析的方法，探究了《八月之光》中个体异化现象，旨在探索个体异化的主要原因以及消除异化主要途径。《八月之光》通过讲述了与这三条人物线索相关的复杂人物关系，反映了当时美国社会由清教主义和种族主义所引发的个体异化现象，同时也体现了福克纳对人性以及人自身的关注。研究发现造成个体异化的原因分为外部原因和内部原因。外部原因主要是种族歧视主义、宗教狂热主义以及男权占主导地位的社会环境。内部原因主要有自我身份的不确定、责任的逃避以及自我封闭。而肩负责任、追求存在意义以及自我觉醒是本文提出的作为消除异化的主要途径。

本文共分为六部分。第一章为导论，简要介绍作者，文本，以及该作品的国内外研究现状；第二章详细介绍本论文的理论基础，存在主义异化观。第三章分析主人公与他人关系发生异化和自我异化，深刻展现主人公非人道的存在。第四章揭示被异化的矛盾根源，笔者进一步追寻主人公身在文化桎梏危机中的无望挣扎。第五章旨在探讨边缘化的主人公如何克服异化、实现自我觉醒。第六章总结作品凸显的存在主义深刻内涵，对人类存在关注的人文主义内涵和普遍的现实意义。

关键词：八月之光；存在主义；异化

ABSTRACT

Light in August is one of novels of William Faulkner which plays a crucial role in constructing his Yoknapatawpha saga. By describing a ten-day social life in a town named Jefferson, this story reveals authentic feelings and spirits of sacrifice that are existed in the innermost recesses of the souls of human beings. Based on the theory of Existentialism, this thesis explores the phenomenon of self-alienation in *Light in August* by adopting methods of theme analysis with a purpose of exploring the factors caused the alienation and approaches eliminating this phenomenon. According to the description of complex relationships among three main characters, the self-alienation caused by puritanism and racialism in American society is reflected in *Light in August*. At the same time, William Faulkner's concern about human nature and self are displayed in this novel. It is found that racial discrimination, religious fanaticism as well as patriarchal society are major external factors generating the self-alienation. In addition to these objective reasons, uncertainty of self-identity, avoidance of responsibility and self-imposed isolation are regarded as internal factors leading to the self-alienation. Accordingly, pursuit of meaningful existence, acceptance of responsibility and realization of self-awakening are put forward in this paper as solutions to eliminating alienation.

This thesis includes six parts altogether. The first chapter briefly introduces William Faulkner and *Light in August*, as well as overseas and domestic research of this novel. The second chapter presents alienation view of Existentialism on which this paper based. The third chapter illustrates the alienation and self-alienation of the characters in various living predicaments. The fourth chapter points out the roots of alienation—constraints of traditional culture, portrays the struggling against alienation. The fifth chapter puts forward some solutions for the marginalized characters to overcome alienation, eventually get self-realization. In the conclusion part, deep concern about man's existence and mental problems make this novel have profound existential significance and a universal, realistic significance to all human beings.

Key Words: *Light in August*; Existentialism; Alienation

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 William Faulkner and *Light in August*

William Faulkner was a Nobel Prize-winning novelist of the American South who wrote challenging prose and created the fictional Yoknapatawpha County, in his writing career William Faulkner created seventeen novels and ninety-one stories, New Albany, Union County, Mississippi is William Faulkner's birthplace where is stratified as a British society, the Sartoris as is depicted in his books are forced to humiliatingly compromise with the Snopes family which is described as a lower-class family, this vividly reflects the family history of William Faulkner's. No Faulkner biography can ignore Colonel William Cuthbert Faulkner, William Faulkner's great-grandfather who was a source of legend and glory for succeeding generations. Faulkner's father Murry represents a marked decline in his family's status coincided with the economic development of the south. Deeply influenced by the American Southern culture, William Faulkner's works are rooted in the Deep South. The famous Yoknapatawpha country of Jefferson is created based on the prototype of his hometown. "Faulkner was born into a world which, having dispossessed them of their former power and glory had now relegated them to a minor role. Circumstance bred in them both a proud resistance and a despairing defeatism. The brutality and ignominy of the present forced them, in their need to hold on to some sustaining pride, to look backward to past glories" (Backman, 1966, p.186). The civil war and the abolition of slavery shred their cultural and snobbish pretensions. For example, Plantations of the founders regard themselves as local aristocracy and the chivalric code of ethics and concept of the gentleman are outmoded during the childhood of William Faulkner.

There is a greater sense of the wrenching and deforming of the human heart in Faulkner's novels which convey a deep sense of oppression and withdrawal. The physical and spiritual violations throughout his life did not prevent William Faulkner from being a moralist. As Thomas L Mc Haney states: "Faulkner experienced the effects of many crises, both national as well as regional: two world wars; a severe economic depression; a deteriorating Mississippi political situation; the cold war, with

its posturing and atomic scares; and the struggle of African Americans to obtain equal rights".(1967, p.76). As a humanist, William Faulkner puts much emphasis on the living condition of human beings. He strongly condemns the poisonous effects that extreme religious doctrines exert on human-beings. As a brilliant novelist, William Faulkner focuses on the inner world and social life of the southerners in their spiritual wasteland. Born in southern society, most of his novels express his own dilemma which is the most notable manifestation of William Faulkner's existentialist thought.

When Industrial Revolution in American finished in 1930s, the original agricultural ways of production of Southern part has gradually been replaced by the modern industrial production mode. Invasion of Northern modern industry into the traditional Southern plantation economy leads to the southerners' frustration for the reason that these social changes harms their respect and original faith, which reminds them of the decay of the Deep South.

As a separated nation of the United States, the Southern people bear so much mental damage for the reason that they inevitably were regarded as foreigners. Not only does the South originally have its own economic mode, culture traits, life styles and moral system, the South even has its language, which possesses obviously different pronunciation in comparison to the rest area of America. These common features of the South easily contribute to a kind of nostalgic imagination. Unrealistic thoughts took up many southern people's mind that their hometown would be filled with harmoniousness and happiness without the war. This mental distortion could also be found everywhere in the Southern culture. The Southern people even attempt to use Bible to give a reasonable explanation for slavery system. According to the Bible, Ham and his offspring were cursed by his father, Noah, to be his brothers' slaves for the reason that Ham saw the naked body of Noah. However, as the Southern economy decayed step by step by capitalism and commercialism, the original plantation was no longer regarded as the economic pillar. Not only was the slavery after the Civil War but also moral values in South America gradually started to collapse.

Out of author's struggles with society and self was born the novel which came out of a time of spiritual isolation and introspection; evince a deeply rooted feeling of

estrangement which marks Faulkner's return to the subject of alienation. In this novel, leading characters are trapped in a web of prejudice about religion and race, and are forced to succumb to the absurdity when facing the grudges and frustration, collisions and conflicts. Dehumanized by isolation, pressure from the society shapes them into grotesques. Being exiled by the society and kept on the edge of the society, this is also a vivid portray of William Faulkner's own quest for existential significance when striving for life. "Faulkner has let us see our modern and complex problems mirrored in a simpler and more primitive world, *Light in August* is, in some respects, a bloody and violent pastoral." (Brooks, 1963, p.175) William Faulkner is credited as an innovator of creating multidimensional characters, with creative powers of inventiveness and imaginative energy.

He created the vast scope of characters with dramatic tension and grotesque quality. As for writing skills, William Faulkner was good at alternating internal and external views of characters, endorsing sense of suspension with the shift in time and narrative, using of symbolism. Technique of reminiscing, numerous cinematic flashbacks and experiments with structure are always used to reveal a tremendous amount of implications. William Faulkner claimed in "The writer has a very great responsibility. The writer is the person that will record man's endeavor, the course over the years, the centuries by which man has improved his lot to get rid of suffering, in justice. The writer's responsibility is to tell the truth-to tell the truth in such a way that it will be memorable." (Faulkner, 1976, p.1)

Published in 1932, the story takes almost 500 pages of the book with luxuriant plots which full of plenty of complicated implications. The previous title *The Dark House* refers to the evils and the darkness in the society where characters of the story lived. If they represent the "darkness", Lena symbolize the light and bright sunshine, the author utilize contrast to interweave plots. The figures of the absurd world in the novel also reflect the perplexities of people in modern society. The society where Faulkner lived was full of fierce conflicts with the results of complex and contradictory thoughts easily appearing. "Nostalgia and flight are central to American life and literature: the American flees the raw and uncongenial present for a mythic and desired past." (Morris,

1963, p.24). Doctrine of predestination leave Joe in an ethnic vacuum, Hightower has been trapped in the dubious heroics of his grandfather. Racism, puritanism and fanaticism transferred the Joanna Burden into woman who was deprived the right of a normal female. “Why Yoknapatawpha novel achieve such a great success, it is because they have a life force, which comes from their ‘southerners,’ because they have a solid basis of the ‘southern life’, Faithfully and deeply revealing the society and history of the south, on which they further uncover the universal problems of the Western Civilization” (Xiao, 1997, p.101). Southern writers are extremely good at describing this local color from its rural background, its “backwardness”, and its isolation. In southern writing, sensitive southerners are likely to feel lost in the modern industrial world. In Faulkner’s times, Great writers always reveal complicated ideology in their works that southern people, suffering disharmony spiritually, are still in their delusion of going back to the past one day. Especially for those who experienced the turning point of a historical period, were further influenced by the power of reality. Integrating all 15 novels of the Yorknapatawpha saga, critics conclude that Faulkner divides the American southern history into five stages: the first stage is about the European invasion and occupation, as well as their oppression and exploitation on American Indians. The second is the record of ecological damage from the invaders. The next stage describes slavery and the related economy, which is reflected in the southern plantation around the slavery system. The fourth stage is mostly around the Civil War when the southerners are controlled by the northerners. The last stage is about the decline of southern aristocratic families, as well as the wane of the whole South. On the one hand, Faulkner depicted evils and darkness of the south in his novels, his legend is not merely about the daily trivial and historical events of the southern society, he uncovered and criticized all the evils that is anti-humanist. On the other hand, he also showed much concerns about modern men’s’ existence.

1.2 Purpose and Significance of the Study

This novel is called “an allegory of modern dilemma” which provides the interpretation for the existence of human beings. Eccentricity and paradox of

predicament represent the very core of the Southern experience. *Light in August* comprises a particular subdivision in the context of the development of Western literature in the twentieth century. The alienation of the urban masses, the vast progress of technology and the threats posed against the individual by standardization have contributed to the disappearance of self. Due to the constraints of traditional culture and customs, the human nature was deeply deformed. The world protagonist faced was full of disillusionment that reduced to nothingness which was outstanding characteristics of human existence.

Conveying a deep sense of oppression and wrenching, Faulkner has cried out against whatever oppresses the human spirit. The thesis shows Faulkner's reveal of the poisoning and destructive suppression of human nature. Sartrean existentialism extremely concerns the nature of human existence. The center theme of Sartre's epistemology is freedom and responsibility. Similarly, Faulkner lays emphasis on the meaning of life by advocating freedom in his novel. The main argument of Sartrean existentialism is to live a meaningful life in the meaningless world. As a humanist, William Faulkner never ceases to expose and criticize a variety of forces against humanism. He considers about the destiny of human out of high responsibility, his special and deep insight into the life of American South, his attention to living predicament is expressed profoundly. Sartre makes an insightful observation of the world, he devoted his whole life in striving for human freedom. Faulkner's humanitarian thoughts which emphasize personal values and the intact human nature resonate with existentialism. In the address in Stockholm, Faulkner once claims that however desperate the living circumstances are, man will endure. Faulkner's novels prove humanist ideal in depth and is inseparable from his existential philosophy.

Faulkner emphasizes the fatal influence of Puritanism in his work, and cultivates positive characteristics of mankind. While Faulkner is concerned with how human can find way out of difficult situation and face the current situation. Camus holds the view that: "Faulkner is the only real tragedy writer in our time. He offers us an ancient but new subject: the blind is staggering along with his destiny and responsibility. That's the only tragedy subject in our time." (Wagner, 1968).

This thesis aims at examining the essence of being and meaning of existence as well as revealing Faulkner's humanistic concern about the fate of mankind and his eternal faith in men as well, intends to probe the new breakthrough in helping readers understanding the theme thoroughly.

1.3 Literature Review

Faulkner's novels and his unique writing style have raised numerous concerns from critics and schools of criticism throughout the world. The researches on the novel abroad cover various aspects.

1.3.1 Study Abroad on *Light in August*

Since the publication, this novel has aroused widespread critical concerns. The 1930s witnesses the beginning of the systematic study, critics commented on the intricate narrative structure of the novel, the author of *review of Sanctuary*, Henry Seidel Canby praises the extraordinary force and insight, full of compassion in the novel. J. Donald Adams calls the novel an astonishing performance in *New York Times Book Review* in 1932. James T. Farrell and Herschel Brickell object to the style of repetitiousness and words coupling, Evan Shipman in *New Republic* is critical of extravagant style, attacks it a willful misleading of the reader. Frederic Thompson praising in Catholic journal *Commonweal*, "he has the supreme genius of being able to invest even humble people and little things with a sudden, strange immediateness; they suddenly stand out in naked objectivity in the preternatural light and stillness of space-time. They have the thrilling drama of simple being that the average person is able to appreciate only at rare moments. And the sensitiveness and range of Faulkner's perceptions is amazing." (1932, p.139). Even George Marion O'Donnell commends the novel's texture and narrative technique. Richard Church claims in *Spectator* *Light in August* as "a great book, burns throughout with a fierce indignation against cruelty, stupidity, and prejudice", For Richard Aldington, the novel is a "passionately honest dissection of the dark places in the human soul." (1933, p.226). Jacob Isaacs in *Annual Register* calls the novel *a triumph of pre-envisaged management and inevitable construction*. (1933, p.73) American critics James W. Linn and Houghton W. Taylor

make a deep analysis on the novel's narrative techniques, counterpoint of the plots and characters. Conrad Aiken shows the appreciation of fictional form. Warren Beck and Joseph Warren Beach focus on the narrative pattern in the fiction. Maxwell Geismar argues that *Light in August* embody the double hostile obsession with the woman and Negro. Richard Chase's *The Stone and the Crucifixion: Faulkner's Light in August* (1948) explore the symbolic interpretation of the novel. Phyllis Hirshleifer (1949) offers a fuller and sounder reading of the fiction in *As Whirlwinds in the South: An Analysis of Light in August*.

Since 1950s, several important studies appear, critics begin to explore the tragic elements of the novel, involve the personal and social background of the author. Faulkner's southern society has been a permanent and central concern of American criticism. Professor William Van O'Connor in *The Tangled Fire of William Faulkner* (1954) points out the opinion that the minister's refusal to help the jailed Christmas was Faulkner's means of criticizing doctrinal Christianity. Longley, John L. Jr.'s *Joe Christmas: The Hero in the Modern World* (1957) discusses Christmas as alienated modern protagonist. Professor Frederick J. Hoffman announces the duality of the race problem and of Calvinist harshness in Joe Christmas's formation in his critique of *Light in August* (1961). Ilse Duso Lind holds the view that on religious fanaticism as a motivation of the novel's characters in *The Calvinistic Burden of Light in August* (1957). Nilon Charles H makes a deep analysis of Faulkner's treatment of Negro characters in *Faulkner and the Negro* (1965). Alfred Kazin in *The Stillness of Light in August* (1958) revolves around the antithesis between Lena Grove and Joe Christmas. C. Hugh Holman's *The Unity of Faulkner's Light in August* (1958) emphasizes the positive values of the Christian symbolism in the fiction. Olga W. Vickery's *The Novels of William Faulkner*, published in 1959 the first book-length series of studies on criticism, suggests major character were scapegoats ritually sacrificed, stresses the tension between the private selves and public roles. Cleanth Brooks in *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country* (1963) offers a close analysis on the relationship between the characters and the community, emphasize the function of community, concludes the negative aspect of Jefferson society. Thomas L. McHaney objects overemphasize the

function of the community. Michael Millgate's chapter in *The Achievement of William Faulkner* (1966) commented the genesis of the fiction and the mythic framework.

In the 1970s, the Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha Conference began to be held, more extended and detailed treatment of the novel are produced. Francois Pitavy's *Faulkner's Light in August* (1970) is a comprehensive study which includes the novel's themes, style, techniques, characterization. *Light in August: A Critical Casebook* published in 1982, in addition to early essays also includes the Sister Kristin Morrison's *Faulkner's Joe Christmas: Character through Voice*, pieces from the late 1970 and early 1980s, they are *The Fragile Thread: The Meaning of Form in Faulkner's Novels* (1979) by Donald M. Kartiganer. *Light in August: The Epistemology of Tragic Paradox* by Anne Taylor (1980) makes a deep investigation on the language of the novel and the identity of the characters. Lee Clinton Jenkins firstly makes a detailed analysis in racial aspect, relevant study can be found in *Faulkner's 'Negro': Art and the Southern Context* (1983) by Thadious M. Davis.

In the middle of the 1980s, Cambridge University Press publishes *New Essays on Light In August*. Harvey L. Jr. Gable (1996) makes an insightful analysis on the relation between characters and history. Friday (2001) expounds identity and race in the context of historical imagination. Carl K. Sills (2005) offers a remarkably close analysis of victim-victimizer transformations pattern between Joe Christmas and Joanna, claims this unreconciled paradox leads to the tragedy. Frank Cyba (2008) makes a further exploration on race and racism in *Light in August*.

1.3.2 Study at Home on *Light in August*

The comprehensive research only starts in 1970, since Beijing International Faulkner Symposium is held in 1997, numerous critiques have been devoted to the first Chinese version of *Light in August* come out in 1998. Among domestic scholars, Xiao Minghan (1999) makes remarkable achievement for the research about Faulkner's works in the collection book *The study of William Faulkner*. Li Wenjun and Tao Jie have been the predecessors in introducing William Faulkner to the Chinese readers. In the 21st century, the study on Faulkner and his works reached the climax in China, critical commentary is dominated by discussion of characters, narrative skills, multiple

themes analysis, artistic features. The novel touches upon the themes including racial identity, southern history and religion.

In the past decade, papers published in scholarly journals in China and the M.A theses have analyzed from a variety of angles and aspects, theories being utilized include Marxism, Feminism, post-colonialism, psychoanalysis, aesthetics. Most of the discussions cannot get out of the discourse of dichotomy, the racism and Calvinism. Gao Yuhui (2003) makes a deep analysis on racism in *Joanna Burden A white Racist or a Black Anti-Racist*. Yao Rui (2004) makes an analysis of the novel from three themes: past, racism, community. Li gang's *Faulkner's idea of races as reflected from his representation of mulattoes* (2004) reveals the writer's contradiction in the idea of race is based on incomplete comprehension of humanitarianism, contradictory attitude reflected in writer's depiction of mulattoes, he points out writer's gradualist view towards black people's civil rights. Feng Yi and Wang Yilei's *Critical Redemption—On Faulkner's Ethnic Perspective from Christmas in Light in August* (2008) analyzes the characters from racism and ethnic perspective and points out Joe Christmas is not a victim but a fighter against destiny. Zhong Jingwei and Guo Jide (2011) publish *The Disruption of American Southern Female Myth in Faulkner's novels* they explore the moral pattern largely reflected in Faulkner's fictions, point out chivalry of gentleman of American Southern is discredited and female myth is collapsed due to the decline of Southern plantation. Sheng Anfeng (2004) interprets the novel in light of post-colonialism, the double personality of Joe in *Light in August* in *The Splitting and Ambiguity of Personality in Modern Society*. Techniques used in the novel attract interests of scholars, some articles study the polyphonic structure and the multiple points of view, what's more, anti-structure and Faulkner's concept of time, narrative rhythms are included. Zhang Li (2008) in *The narrative Rhythms in Light in August* studies the artistic and experimental narrative approach, the specific chronological order in the fiction reflect the aesthetic effect, expounds the intricately designed disorder and fragmentation that build a new cycle in the circulation of the time flow so readers sense the ageless eternal struggles in the fluidity of human life. Xiao Lihong (2002) focuses the novel's structure in MA thesis *The Structure of Light in August: Plurality and*

Cohesion in which he shows that the novel can be divided into four strands respectively, which develop around four different consciousness of equal value, creating the novel's plurality. Xiang Hongquan (2002) discusses Faulkner's acknowledgement of human value, integrity of human beings, self-pursuit and eternal beauty. It is noticeable there are the theses analyzing the issue of Christianity and the image of Jesus, theses devoted to the father image, and female characters.

Moreover, in recent years, many theses employ existentialism in the studies as well. Lei Yingming (2006) takes Existentialism as theory foundation, expounds the concept of death. Yuan Li (2007) probes the theme of the novel from the perspective of Existentialism: being in the world, being with others, alienation. Luo Jianbo (2008) makes analysis of character's alienation and anti-alienation based on Marx's theory of labor alienation. Zhang Yanping (2009) interprets the fiction from Sartre's freedom concept. Qin Juan (2011) illustrates the existentialistic features of the novel with philosophical theory of the existence of human beings and the value of existence, explores the loss of self. Li Xue (2011) in the thesis analyzes the absurdity and alienation of main characters, makes a further study on the relationship between freedom and responsibility.

Chapter 2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction to Existentialism

“Existentialism is a current in European philosophy distinguished by its emphasis on lived human existence.” (Baldick, 2000, p.76). The rise and development of existentialism has profound social and historical backgrounds, is widely regarded as the “individual existence” of philosophy, it is the embodiment of the mentality of people in certain situations, the rise of existentialism is closely related to the two world wars, after the First World War, people in many countries experience an unprecedented disaster, people questions their status, loss of sense of belonging, desperate for new theory to prove the contemporary life, and to resolve their sense of alienation. The Great Depression leaves people with shadow, the people began to reconsider the meaning of “existence”, World War II strengthens melancholy and loneliness, and people are no longer tied to absolute faith. Dostoevsky claims that “Without God, everything is permitted”. As William Barrett points out, “existentialism reveals the historical conditions of capitalist society is in a state of upheaval, especially the emotional collapse and depression”. “perhaps no other philosophical movement has had as great an impact on the philosophy, literature, and culture outlook of the twentieth century as has existentialism.”(Bride, 1996, p.11) The Danish Philosopher of Soren Kierkegaard and the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche are considered to be the first philosophers of the existential movement. Kierkegaard introduced the idea of ‘authenticity’ and ‘an authentic self’, he described there was a public pressure to conform to society and this led to ‘inauthenticity’.

Existentialism stems from human suspicion of God. For Nietzsche, “the godless universe allows everyone to have the opportunity to become his own God, to live by self-created values, this should be the goal of mankind, or at least a certain type of man within it , who should set himself apart from ‘the herd’ and follow his own drives and destiny, not slavishly follow those of society.”(Earnshaw, 2009, p.4). The existence of God is denied, claiming the moral collapse of theism, there are none that can be said to be pre-given or universal.

Existentialism is a form of “anti-rationalist” trend: it is a very broad philosophical school contains multiple theories, not a systematic philosophy, but including theist existentialism, atheistic existentialism and existentialism of Marxism. Kierkegaard believes that philosophy should be based on religious considerations that lay the basis for the ideology of Christian existentialism. Atheistic existentialism, the doctrine was developed by Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. Martin Heidegger as an atheist existentialist, his fame and great influence come from the publication of *Being and Time* (1927): he systematically creates existentialism and marks the formation of existentialism. Heidegger studies the problems of human existence. Man cannot exist without taking into account external objects. The suffering of people comes from a deserted world and people can only live in anxiety. Anxiety ensures that people become real objects. According to Heidegger, alienation is inevitable in social development. Albert Camus’ novel *The outsider* (1942) expresses the ridicule of the world. The figure of Meursault finds everything is strange and realized that he was an outsider and not in harmony with the real world. The absurdity mentioned in *The Myth of Sisyphus* is that people cannot understand the meaning of existence. The intention of Sisyphus is meaningless, to exist is to face the burden of existence, Camus emphasizes human being’s conscious rebellion to overcome pointless absurd world with fortitude and maintain the struggle with absurdity each day.

Existentialism spreads to France during the Second World War, it becomes a cultural movement mainly attributed to Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. Sartre’s name becomes synonymous with the moment of existentialism and is a typical representative of existential philosophy, his thinking has a profound influence on the field. Sartre is a French philosopher, writer, playwright and political activist, perhaps the most famous continental philosophy in the middle of the 20th century. It is the ultimate existentialism, mainly related to existentialism but also related to phenomenology and later to Marxism. Sartre’s wisdom is not only showed in his philosophical works, but also expressed in his novels and plays. Richard makes a very precise comment on Sartre:

“No thinker in our country more adequately brokers the marriage of these two disciplines than Sartre. His novels, short stories and plays gave him an audience denied to most philosophers, and his criticism, gathered with occasional pieces in the ten volumes of *Situation*, established him as a major voice in that domain”.(1994, p.74)

According to Jean-Paul Sartre, individual is in an atheistic world. The basic conditions of people are painful and loneliness. Existentialism is the existential philosophy of human existence. Existentialism is closely linked to the existence of human being, Jean-Paul Sartre puts forward three basic principles: existence is prior to essence, the world is absurd, freedom of choice. The concept of freedom is the 'human-oriented' philosophy. In short, Sartre points out nothing is indispensable to us, we make ourselves through our choice. In Sartre's existentialism the world is unreasonable to make an accomplishment of freedom, he points out:

“Free choice is a choice of being. This choice may be made directly, or indirectly via appropriation of the world, or, more likely still, both at once. It is in this sense that my freedom is a choice to be God. All my acts and projects are translations of the project, reflecting it in thousands of ways, for my freedom is itself an infinity of ways of being and ways of having.”(Fredric, 1961, p.201)

By choosing and taking responsibility, we can build a true self, freedom is usually regarded as the highest value of existential thinking. Responsibility is not only a moral obligation but also a guarantee of freedom, people have the right to choose, but they should undertake commitments. Francois Raffoul makes comments on Sartre's concept of responsibilities:

“Responsibilities is universalized by Sartre as including “all humans.” I “carry the weight of the world on my shoulders,” as each of my projects becomes an example for all to follow. It is excessive and overwhelming in this first sense. Responsibility is also infinite because there are no longer any bounds to restrict it. To be responsible hence means to be responsible out of and for the lack that subtends responsibility. Responsibility is also absolutized in Sartre’s

existentialism, following his conception of freedom as absolute, that is, absolutely freed from any deterministic principles.”(2010, p.30).

“‘Existence precedes essence’ is one of the basic proposals and elementary existentialism. People from scratch, no fixed nature, no external reason to explain people’s behavior, nature is not the natural destiny of people, their freedom of choice and action, they have brought themselves. People first exist, meet themselves, rise up in the world and define themselves later.” (Koopman, 1975, p. 291). Sartre believes that the existence of people is not abstract, humans are naturally free to make their own lives meaningful, can realize their values and surpass themselves through free choice, Sartre believes that “there is no absolute position that can be adopted to compare different situations, everyone can only realize in his own circumstances.”

Both Sartre and Camus believe that the world is absurd, making people redundant, people begin to realize that people's living conditions are unstable and illogical. In the novel “Nausea”, Roquentin’s vanity and strangeness are Sartre's literary interpretation of the absurd concept. Sartre claims that this is the “contingency” of existence that will produce absurdity. The fundamental contingency of human existence makes human life meaningless and leads to absurdity. Human beings are thrown into the world as accidental life. Because people do not have a predetermined character, everyone can build their own nature, and men can establish themselves according to their own will. *Being and Nothingness* (1943) is undoubtedly the most important philosophical work laying the foundation of modern existentialism. Sartre makes an in-depth analysis of the relationship between us and “others”. For Sartre, different concepts suggest that the essence of man is “to be with others.” People do everything in order to maintain subjectivity, because they see others as objects, and they are in contradiction with others. Alienation cannot be prevented.

Jean Paul Sartre establishes the theory of existential humanism in “existential humanism”, which emphasizes people’s freedom of choice and respect for individuality. In his “Existentialist Humanism”, Jean Paul Sartre emphasizes the Humanist School in Lamont:

“Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself. It is also what is called subjectivity. Man is at the start a plan which is aware of itself...and make of ourselves...he is responsible for his own individuality, but that he is responsible for all men. There is no universe other than a human universe, the universe of human subjectivity...man is not closed in on himself but is always present in a human universe, is what we call existentialist humanism.” (2001, p.277-279).

2.2 Alienation—key concept of Existentialism

“Alienation,” in the context of existentialism, refers to the separation of a person from the dimension of being human, a process of being “dehumanized” or “stripped of the qualities of self-determination and self-direction which raise people above the animal level” (Novack, 1966, p. 336).

Alienation is expressed in Sartre’s conception “Hell is other people.” “‘Hell is other person’ is usually misunderstood by people. In their opinion, what I indicated was that the relation between us and others was rotten to the core, and it was difficult to coordinate. However, my real intention is to say if the relation with others was distorted and destroyed, hell is other person.”(Sartre, 2007, p.9).

According to Sartre, the relationship between people is not reliable. As Sartre put it in his drama *No Exit* embodies his idea on relationship between people, “the other steals my world and reduces me to a mere object.”(Oaklander, 1995, p.173). According to Existentialists, when conflict happens among people, alienation and self-alienation is bound to occur. One’s existence is a threat to other’s freedom intensifies people’s relationship. Alienation is divided into alienation of interpersonal relationship and self-alienation. Self-alienation is also called self-estrangement, For Sartre, when one is isolated from oneself, he is inauthentic, coexisting with others in the alienated world men become inauthentic.

Sartre said: “if God was not existed, everything can be possible. Human is alone, and he can find anything which he can depend on no matter in the outsider or inner world.” (Hinchley, 1992, p.39) In Sartre’s *Age of Reason*, man cannot escape the encircling world of indifference and absurdity since the surrounding is pointless and

superfluous.

Chapter 3 Alienation Reflected in *Light in August*

Alienation is an important concept in Sartre's existentialism, which refers to a condition in social relationship reflected by a low degree of integration or common values, and a high degree of distance or isolation between individuals, between an individual and a group of people in the community where he lives in, or even himself. The concept alienation can be interpreted in two ways. One refers to an individual's intentional isolation between himself and the outside world, the other is the passive state of being alienated, which refers to the people outside who deliberately ignore the existence of an individual because of various reasons. The three main characters, Joe Christmas, Joanna Burden and Gail Hightower in *Light in August*, are all experienced alienation of these two aspects to certain degree. As to Joe Christmas, he was an out comer with secret and uncertainty. After experiencing a journey lasting more than twelve years, he came to Jefferson with silence. His alienation laid in his uncertainty on his identity, which determined his alienation in first sense, and further his uncertainty on his identity led to his few communions or no communications with the people around him, and then the alienation in second sense started. The same situation had also been experienced by Joanna Burden, who had lived in Jefferson more than thirty years. Born in a family which has long residence in Jefferson, she was still a stranger. Besides the frequent visit of black people who sought her assistance, no white fellow folks had ever paid a visit to her house. So she was always in a passive state of being alienated from the white society which caused her further repression on her human nature. Different from Joe Christmas and Joanna Burden, Gail Hightower's alienation was his much obsession to the past memories, which greatly influenced him to perform his social duties. As to the people in Jefferson, they are all strangers or foreigners no matter how long they have been there and how deep their roots are in.

3.1 The Embodiment of Alienation in Christmas's Dilemma

Joe Christmas, a white man with half black part, was being alienated from his birth. Knowing his father who may have black blood, his Grandfather Doc Hines, an extreme racist, who mercilessly killed his father and deliberately kept the doctor from

delivering Joe caused the death of his mother. Later he was sent to a white orphanage by his grandfather where he acted as a watcher who always stared at his life. Until when Joe was five years old, he found the dietitian's promiscuity with a man before marriage which aroused the revenge from the dietitian. The dietitian informed the matron that Joe would be a half black. The matron arranged Joe to be adopted by Simon McEachern, a sternly religious farmer. At the moment Joe was adopted, he took his adoption as punishment. When had more self-awareness, he started to rebel against Mr. McEachern. His rebellion exhibited in his refusal to learn the catechism his adoptive asked him to memorize. As a result, he was beaten by McEachern repeatedly. The cycle of rebellion and punishment continued until finally Joe ended the confrontation with violence. It was a night Joe took her mistress to a country party, and McEachern found his absence and chased him to the dance hall. After he slapped Joe's face and prepared to hit Joe again, Joe stroke him with a chair. Taking all the money hidden by Mrs. McEachern and himself, he would run away with Bobbie. However, Bobbie refused to run away with him. What's worse, she watched her fellows to hit Joe indifferently. After then, Joe started a journey lasted fifteen years until he came to Jefferson and died there. Joe's alienation incarnated in the following two dimensions: identity dilemma and his distorted relationships with the other people.

3.1.1 Identity Dilemma

In *Light in August*, Joe lives in the environment where racialism permeates. Tortured by the oppression of traditions and values of southern society, Joe is struggled for his identity of being a white or black the whole of his life. Under the rigid social values which stress the supreme of the white people, it is impossible for a half-white and half-black to find a position for himself in such a society, so his alienation is inevitable and his life is doomed to be miserable.

The miseries and sufferings of Joe come from the time when he was born. His Grandfather Doc Hines killed his father after being known that his father was a Mexican with black blood, and indirectly caused the death of his mother when she was delivering baby Joe. He thought Joe was a definite black who would be the curse from God, in order to fully perform his duties as a watcher of the God in the world, he had the

responsibility to observe the miseries that the God had put on Joe. Then, he abandoned Joe at the stairs of the orphanage before the Christmas Day. In the orphanage, Joe started to experience the feelings of being alienated. Even if he was already five years old, his existence was obscure. For the people in the orphanage, he was like a shadow.

“In the quiet and empty corridor, during the quiet hour of early afternoon, he was like a shadow, small even for five years, sober and quiet as a shadow. Another in the corridor could not have said just when and where he vanished, into what door, what room.” (p.86)

In the eye of his grandfather, he was the product of bitchery. Since as soon as his grandfather found the pregnancy of his mother, he called her a whore. This could be judged from his staring at Joe when he was in the orphanage:

“he was never on the playground for instant that the man was not watching him from the chair in the furnace room door, and that the man was watching him with a profound and unflagging attention. If the child had been older he would perhaps have thought, He hates me and fears me.”(p.138).

When the other children in the orphanage called him nigger or bastard, because he was too young to realize the implications of nigger or bastard carrying, when Joe sneaked into the dietitian's room to eat her sweet-tasting toothpaste, the dietitian found him hiding there and thought that he has been spying on her promiscuity. Mr. Hines, Joe's grandfather, who thought Joe's finding on the dietitian's love affairs was the arrangement of the God, a curse from the God. “I knowed he would be there to catch you when God's time came. I knowed. I know who set him there, a sign and a damnation for bitchery.” (p.92) Afraid of the little Joe let out her transgression, she bribed Joe with one dollar.

“What the boy wants is recognition, acceptance as a human being, if only through physical punishment. A whipping would establish the passionate, human contact. Instead he is given a silver dollar, and he sees his doom in its adamant, abstract, circular form. He has now

been given an irresistible compulsion to destroy every human relationship that he gets involved in. and this compulsion includes the suicidal desire to destroy himself.” (Chase, 1973, p.68)

Then the dietitian informed the matron that Joe was half-black, and the matron arranged Joe to be adopted, his adoptive father, McEachern hoped Joe could become a pious follower like him. But for Joe, he always considered adoption by the McEachern as punishment. It was extremely difficult for him to follow McEachern's order, so he rebelled. As a result, McEachern kept beating him. Since in a rigid religious family, rebellion was not allowed. In his most critical growth period, Joe lived in a family without love, which restricted his individuality. He developed a weird character, fully surpassing his own sense of self. He hated both Mr. McEachern and Mrs. MaEachern. His hatred for the former came from his indifferent oppression of his human nature by violence. And his hatred for the later one, Mrs. McEachern, came from the weakness of her. When she showed her affections and cares for him, he never accepted. He regarded Mrs. McEachern's affection for him as sympathy. Actually, his refusal of Mrs. McEachern indicated the weakness of himself. In this family, both he and Mrs. McEachern were the subordinate of Mr. McEachern's. The help from Mrs. McEachern's suggested her limited independence. Joe was not willing to accept the food and help provided by Mrs. McEachern because he thought if he accepted the food, he was admitting the weakness and the inferiority of himself. His such conceptions partly from the influence of Mr. McEachern's view's on women, or put it in another way, southern society's on women, and partly from the similarities between he and Mrs. McEachern, that they are the inferior class in the social class, and he was afraid that the acceptance of Mrs. McEachern's help would lead to more serious punishment. With fear and anxiety, he fled McEachern's house and intended to take Bobbie to flee with him together. Whereas Bobbie refused to run with him and told her fellows that Joe was a nigger: “Bastard! Son of a bitch! Getting me into a jam, that always treated you like you were a white man. A white man” (p.217). Her fellows beat Joe heavily and at that time, Joe began to realize the difference between the black and white and to think that his all sufferings must be caused by the black blood he was carrying. So he started his journey

to search final belongings. During his fifteen year's root-seeking journey from the south to the north, eastward and westward:

"It ran between the savage and spurious board fronts of oil towns where, his inevitable serge clothing and light shoes black with bottomless mud, he ate crude food from tin dishes that cost him ten and fifteen dollars a meal...he was in turn laborer, miner, prospector, gambling tout; he enlisted in the army, served four months and deserved and never caught."(p.169).

Desperately to confirm whether he is a black or white and after his illusions of being a white had been destroyed, he started to take his way to find his black part. And during the process, a white prostitute's attitude towards him confused him once more. since his ex-mistress Bobbie left him because he was a negro while this white prostitute seemed not care at more, which in turn shake his resolution. "He rose from the bed and told the woman that he was a negro. "You are?" she said. "I thought maybe you were just another wop or something." She looked at him, without particular interest; then she evidently saw something in his face: she said, "What about it? You look all right. You ought to seen the shine I turned out just before your turn came." She was looking at him. She was quite still now. "Say, what do you think this dump is, anyhow? The Ritz hotel?" "Then she quit talking. She was watching his face and she began to move backward slowly before him, staring at him, her face draining, her mouth open to scream. Then she did scream. It took two policemen to subdue him. At first they thought that the woman was dead. He was sick after that. He did not know until then that there were white women who would take a man with a black skin. He stayed sick for two years." (p.162) Theresa M. Towner briefly introduced Faulkner's identity concern in his book *Faulkner on the Color Line*:

"Standing perhaps as Faulkner's greatest example of the constructedness of racial categories and their relationship to individual identity is Joe Christmas, who murders and is murdered because of the American color line, yet who never knows where he stands in relation to it. In this example we see the heartbreaking consequences not of not knowing what 'color' his

'blood' is, but of knowing all too well how the contending races expect the members of each to think, feel, and behave. Joe has been an apt student of those expectations, and he comes to share them so completely that he can pass equally well in either race. Unsure of what label to assume, he tries to manipulate the color line itself to his own advantage ---telling white prostitutes, for instance, that he is black so he will only get maybe a beating but assuredly a woman at no charge. When this trick no longer works, it makes him 'sick'." (Towner, 2000,p.21).

After being confused about two years, he continued his way to searching his black part. The black part in his body was parked by tricking or teasing the white man with comparatively dark skin, calling them Negroes, or by fighting those who calling him white. He lived with the Negroes and spared no efforts to fully integrate into the black society but failed. He could not integrate himself into the black society, because in the eyes of the black, he was a white. "Sometimes he would remember how he had once tricked or teased white men into calling him a negro in order to fight them, to beat them or be beaten; now he fought the negro who called him white. He was in the north now, in Chicago and then Detroit." (p.162) In the swing between the white and the black, Joe was in an extreme painful position:

"At night he would lie in bed beside her, sleepless, beginning to breathe deep and hard. He would do it deliberately, feeling, even watching, his white chest arch deeper and deeper within his ribcage, trying to breathe into himself the dark odour, the dark and inscrutable thinking and being of Negroes, with each suspiration trying to expel from the himself the white blood and the white thinking and being. And all the while hid nostrils at the odour which he was trying to make his own would whiten and tauten, his whole being writhe and strain with physical outrage and spiritual denial." (p.170).

Though he did his best to adapt himself to the black society, he still could not find any belongings from it, indicting his failure in being a black, which determined that his following life as a human being was neither a black one or white. He was a foreigner to the whole world.

"Then he found himself. Without his being aware the street had began to slope and before

he knew it he was in Freedman Town, surrounded by the summer smell and the summer voices of invisible Negroes. They seemed to enclose him like bodiless voices murmuring, talking, laughing, in a language not his as from the bottom of a thick black pit he saw himself enclosed by cabinshapes, vague, kerosenelit, so that the street lamps themselves seemed to be further spaced, as if the black life, the black breathing had compounded the substance of breath so that not only voices but moving bodies and light itself must become fluid and accrete slowly from particle to particle, of and with the now ponderable night inseparable and one.” (p.87).

After his illusions of being a black had been destroyed by the reality, he became cynical and avoided his human nature. If the refusal of the white and black society was a kind of alienation caused by the outside world, and then his following actions and behaviors in Jefferson was a kind of alienation he deliberately cast to others in order to fully protect himself.

3.1.2 Distorted Interpersonal Relationships

After an adolescent of “captivity” under McEachern who attempts to put an identity on Joe. Joe begins to represent himself first through perversions and irregularities. This becomes a pattern of self-definition, a symbol of differentiating himself from a large part of the world. Joe was completely rejected for his uncertain identity. Born as an orphan, Joe was rootless. So in the relationships with others, he completely acted as a foreigner. When he first came to the mill in Jefferson and the foreman introduced himself to others, after saying that his name was Christmas, all the workers in the mill were wondered whether he was a foreigner or not. Since they never heard a white man named Christmas.

“Is he a foreigner?”

“Did you ever hear of a white man named Christmas?” the foreman said.

“I never heard of nobody a-tall named it,” the other said. And that was the first time Byron remembered that he had ever thought how a man’s name, which is supposed to be just the sound for who he is, can be somehow an augur of what he will do, if other men can only read the meaning in time. It seemed to him that none of them had looked especially at the stranger until they heard his name. But as soon as they heard it, it was as though there was something in

the sound of it that was trying to tell them what to expect; that he carried with him his own inescapable warning, like a flower its scent or a rattlesnake its rattle. Only none of them had sense enough to recognise it. They just thought that he was a foreigner.” (p. 22-23)

Due to the previous unpleasant experiences, Joe now initiated closing his true self. When he worked at the mill he was in a situation of being fully alienated:

“He looked like a tramp, yet not like a tramp either. His shoes were dusty and his trousers were soiled too. But they were of decent serge, sharply creased, and his shirt was soiled but it was a white shirt, and he wore a tie and a stiff brim straw hat that was quite new, cocked at an angle arrogant and baleful above his still face. He did not look like a professional hobo in his professional rags, but there was something definitely rootless about him, as though no town nor city was his, no street, no walls, no square of earth his home” (p.25).

The first woman appeared in his world was Mrs. McEachern, who once tried to be a kind mother and put all her hopes and affections to little Joe, but he refused. His misperceptions on the adoption caused his refusal of Mrs. McEachern. “It was the woman, that soft kindness which he believed himself doomed to be forever victim of and which he hated worse than he did the hard and ruthless justice of men”(p.147). His rejection of Mrs. McEachern was partially because her uncertainty of herself and partially because his despise of her blind devotion.

The second woman he had contact with was the prostitute Bobbie. Once he had tried his best to treat her well, being known that he was a nigger, she completely discarded him like throwing rubbish. “Is he really a nigger? He doesn't look like one.” asks the thug who knocked him out. “These country bastards are liable to be anything.” Bobbie's pimp replies (p.165). So his illusions on woman completely destroyed. Then his distrust and alienation with the feminine world symbolized his separation with the truth of himself.

Then the third important woman in his life emerged was Joanna Burden. Joanna Burden was a single lady who had lived in Jefferson for decade, her grandfather and half-brother were murdered by a white man because they supported the abolishment of

slavery system. The existential meaning for her was to perform the great mission her family had laid on her, to help the black people for the purpose of relieving the souls of the white. When Joe Christmas entered her life firstly, she was not disturbed. However after six months, they had lost in stormy relationship, until Joanna proposed her intentions to let Joe admit his black part and enter into a black school to study and then work as a lawyer, their relationships came to an end. When Joanna started to examine what they once did was so crazy, showing their disrespect to the God, she asked Joe to knell to pray. And he refused since once Joe was tortured by the issue of being a white or black, and found no identity fit him. Joanna's attempt to force him to accepting himself as a black and knelling to the God for asking forgiveness ferociously sparked his hatred to his past life. They both tried hard to conquer each other. The ultimate rejection of this "enclosurement" threatened by the world of female is the murder of Joanna Burden when she forced him to combine their relation with the belief held by her father.

For both of them, the compromise to each other signified the compromise with the society and the discarding the only existing part of themselves. So they both attempted to kill each other to reserve the only existing part of them from being destroyed. The result was Joe killed Joanna at the price of his death.

Joe's struggle for reserving the only existing himself was costly. On the one hand, he tried to avoid the communication with others by casting the cold violence to others. On the other hand, reversely, others showed no concern about him which he had to accept without any comments.

3.2 The Embodiment of Alienation in Joanna's Predicament

Joanna Burden is a typical woman figure in *Light in August*. Born in a family where family members believed that white people should take the responsibility to take care of the black people for the purpose of saving the souls of white race. She was the victim of both racialism and religious fatalism. In a society where the old traditions and values still permeate, for those who held different ideas would be likely to be alienated. Joanna was such an existence. All the meaning of her life was to commit her family's glorious mission. Since she devoted herself to the career to save the white by helping

the black people, she had no connection with the white world where she should be belonged to. After met Joe Christmas, her life changed totally, once she had fully immersed herself to the sensual feelings Joe had brought to her, but later she realized the wildness and craziness of their relationships and make it come back to the course as the way she thought correctly showing her repression on self.

3.2.1 Marginalization from Mainstream Society

“Many people are confined to a series of outmoded conventions and cannot escape. They possess some attitudes which also make themselves miserable. However, they never try to change that. Anyone who is bothered by those attitudes is living dead.” (Sartre, 2007, p.9).

The above short passage clearly suggests the alienation of Joanna Burden. Any devoid of these conventions would lead to meaninglessness and hopelessness. Joanna Burden, whose ancestors immigrated from the north to south, held different views on the black people. Her grandfather thought the black was cursed by the God and the white was cursed by the black. The only way for the white to save their souls was to help the black no matter how hard it would be. Her father who observed the death of Joanna's grandfather and her half-brother was the necessary sacrifice for them to achieve their goals. Afraid of being found out by the racists, her father “waited until after dark and buried them and did the graves, leveled the mounds and put brush and things over them”. (p.187). When she was four years old, her father took her to their graves and asked her to accept the glorious commission though she had no ideas on what the mission was and what price she was going to pay for realizing this goal. “You must struggle, rise. But in order to rise, you must raise the shadow with you. But you can never lift it to your level.” (p.191). She took such a great mission unconsciously. In her life, family history was the main part which cast great influence on her life which could be divided into two parts: one started when she was four years old and she took the family's mission from his father, or more exactly from her grandfather; the other started when she met Joe.

“She lives in the big house alone, a woman of middle-aged. She has lived in the

house since she was born, yet she is still a stranger, a foreigner whose people moved in from the North during Reconstruction.”(p.37). As a single lady who had lived in Jefferson more than forty years, Joanna was still a stranger to the outside world. Since her deeds seemed unacceptable to the southern society. When residents in Jefferson mention her, “She claims that niggers are the same as white folks. That's why folks never go out there.”(p.42). As her family was immigration from the north, in the people's view of the southern society, they were the intruders who held their own traditions and values which were contradictory to the conventions in the southern society. The unique experience of the south and its relative independence in geography had made southerners have a unique feeling for their own history and tradition, southerners uphold strong racial consciousness, conservative religious tendencies, strong localism, and skeptical attitudes toward foreign personnel. The incompatibility between the north and the south was represented by the incompatibility between Joanna Burden and the white southerners. Her help to the black was dominated by her family's perceptions on the curse of the black people to the white people, the most prominent point showing her difference from other white people, as well as the cause for her marginalization. However, her uplifting to the black people was only the superficial factor attributed to her alienation. The deep cause for her alienation was southern people's perceptions of black people. In other words, their prejudice over black people. When townspeople mention her, they call her “a lover of negroes”. They treated Joanna Burden as a part of the black society, although the truth was, she was a person who held the same point of view like them on black people.

The existentialism stresses the existence precedes the essence, which means the existence of human beings are the premise of human nature, implying the subjectivity of human beings. As an independent individual, Joanna Burden's existence was absolute that no one can overturn. In *Light in August*, Joanna Burden did have specific nature, a white woman who kept assisting the black people and who was also a successor of family career, while both her deeds and thoughts were contrary to the people in Jefferson, so she was alienated by the mainstream culture of white society.

3.2.2 Repression of Human Nature

Joanna's life went on the direction as it was designed until the coming of Joe Christmas. When Joe Christmas arrived at Jefferson, he tried to learn something about Joanna Burden from asking a black boy, the boy told him that Miss Burden was a lady neither old nor young, who lived in the big house by herself and no one in the town would harm her nor she would do harm to the people in the town and only colored folks looked after her. Through the answers of the black boy, it can be judged that Joanna was a single middle-aged woman. She was harmless and invisible and had close relationships with the colored people. Driven partly by hunger and partially by curiosity, Joe Christmas came to Joanna Burden's kitchen to seek food. So she told Joe "if you came here for food, and you could find it." during the following three years, they still didn't talk too much. As to Joe, firstly Joanna was a woman like most of the women he encountered until she told the history of her family. And Joe asked her whether she had thought about to kill the man who had killed her grandfather and half-brother. Actually, Joanna's response to that question signified the difference in their values. They were all alienated by the society and people around them. But their understandings on the way to rebel against the alienation were totally different. For Joe, he rebelled against the alienation with violence, such as his attack on McEachern and the escape of the white and black society. Whereas Joanna thought it totally different, she didn't take her separation with the white world as alienation. Since she put all her efforts to commit her family's glorious mission, she had never thought about the state of being alienated or she had already taken it for granted that it was the normal situation of her life. Since her mission was so sacred that the emergency of other white people would break the rules his forebears asked her to observe. Fully dedicated herself to the great mission, she never thought about herself. Joanna was a woman without any feminine feature. "the maintained muscles and the maintained habit of thinking born of heritage and environment with which he had to fight up to the final instant. There was no feminine vacillation, no coyness of obvious desire and intention to succumb at last." (p.176). After she met Joe who experienced the alienation from both the white and black society, she started to think about his female part as a woman and getting married with Joe.

Totally contrary to her original intention, to Joanna Burden, her thought was truly alienation, alienating from her family's big dream, alienating from her original life. According to Joe, Joanna's violent love is just like "the abject fury of the New England glacier exposed suddenly to the fire of the New biblical hell." (p.194) and "the imperious and fierce urgency that concealed an actual despair at frustrate and irrevocable years" (p.194). But finally she returned to the course that her ancestors arranged to her. After knowing that Joe was also a black, she tried to rescue him by asking him to go to a black college and become a lawyer. But her arrangement totally annoyed Joe, who once was tortured by the issue of being a black or white. The admission of being a black would take him to the past miserable life he never wanted to go back, so he again rebelled it with violence.

Joanna Burden's return to her family mission was a sign of fierce inner pressure and repression of self, the normal life she lived with Joe though lasted only a short time was a sign of self-liberation. Admitting her female part means her fragility and weakness would fail her forebears. So until the last moment of her life, she still lived for others. Though her intention and behavior was the mission of her family but the result was that she became the stranger and the foreigner. The people in the town did not recognize her and she lived alone and became an alienated woman.

3.3 The Embodiment of Alienation in Hightower's Plight

Alienation is a philosophy concept which can be interpreted in two ways. One is the state of being alienated from an individual's physical and spiritual world. The other is the isolation of one's nature from his or her individuality, sociality and sensibility, which was called abandonment in existentialism, a state of being totally lost himself. Existentialism emphasizes the primacy existence of human beings but it seems that abandonment is an absolute denial of the existence of human beings. Living in a society where people held different views and certain social conventions restricted people's values, and thus any obvious rebellion of those conventions would cause the state of being alienated. Just like Joanna Burden, Gail Hightower was another special existence whose life was also being dominated by his family, especially his grandfather. His

alienation from the society was embodied in two aspects: one is his over-obsession to the past memories and the other is his deliberate estrangement from the community.

3.3.1 Obsession in the Past

The civil war totally destroyed the social order of original southern society, as a consequence that most people lost their faith and could not find the meaning of their life. The spiritual crisis had become more and more serious. Many people had been immersed in the past and they were cherishing memories of illusionary glories and declining demeanor. Just like Gail Hightower, who could not find his spirit support from the real world, he turned to the past memories to seek salvation.

Born in a family that his father was fifty older than him, he could not get the love and concern from his parents like an ordinary child. So the big gap between him and his father deterred their communication. For little Hightower, his impression on his father was “a stranger to them both, a foreigner, almost a threat” (p.357). The memory left by his mother is only “first and last as face and tremendous eyes and a spread of dark hair on a pillow with blue, still, almost skeleton hands... His mother's eyes were the house: he dwelled within them, within their dark and all-embracing and patient aftermath of physical betrayal.”(p.475). What's worse, his father was both a minister and doctor, which was an ambivalent coexistence in his mind. Therefore, the existence of his father was meaningless when he grew up. As to his mother, whose existence to him was just like a vacancy filler.

Gail Hightower's father would not let his wife get any food from the slavery, either being grown or cooked by the slaves during the wartime. It is his objection to the slavery that make this unreasonable requirement. Therefore, the situation gets harder for Hightower's mother to have even scarce food to live on. She is even prohibited to accepting the help from the neighbors. According to Hightower's father's behaviors, it can be said that for Hightower's father, the Law — God even take the priority over the body's needs. Sometimes, his wife will interrogate him the way these needs would be satisfied, he would tell her, “God will provide.” She responds him practically, “Provide what? Dandelions and ditch weeds?” He replies with his strong belief, “Then he will

give us the bowels to digest them” (p.467).

When he recalled their images, nothing seemed to be familiar. For Gail Hightower parents were just illusions. When he had awareness of the outside world, he kept talking with his grandfather's black server and tried to know more about the stories happened to his grandfather. His grandfather was a soldier who fought in the civil war to defend the north army. He has learnt that his grandfather was a hero who acted bravely in the battlefield, though the truth was he was killed when he stolen the chicken. From the above analysis, we can conclude that both Gail Hightower's parents and his grandfather were illusions to him, since they never had direct contact with him. Thus, they were the people emerged in his imagination. Inspired by his grandfather's great deeds, he could not wait to come to Jefferson where he was told once his grandfather served here as a soldier and died. To Gail Hightower, the existence of his life was to follow the shadow of his father. So when he was going to graduate from the seminary, he conspired with his finance to find the way to ask the church to send him to Jefferson. Finally he came to Jefferson with excitement and his newly-wedded wife. Since his original intention to come Jefferson to find the memory of his grandfather, he was alienated from the reality.

“I tell you, they were not men after spoil and glory; they were boys riding the sheer tremendous tidal wave of desperate living. Boys. Because this. This is beautiful. Listen. Try to see it. Here is that fine shape of eternal youth and virginal desire which makes heroes. That makes the doings of heroes border so close upon the unbelievable that it is no wonder that their doings must emerge now and then like gun-flashes in the smoke, and that their very physical passing becomes rumor with a thousand faces before breath is out of them, lest paradoxical truth outrage itself.”(p.483)

Although he was totally departed from the reality, his behavior was exactly observed by the people in Jefferson, and thus the traditions and values in Jefferson still restricted his life. He came to Jefferson to serve as a minister, while because of his over-obsession of the past memories greatly dominated his life, affecting him to fully perform his duties.

“While at the seminary, after he first came here, he often thought how he would tell them, the elders, the high and sanctified men who were the destiny of the church to which he had willingly surrendered. How he would go to them and say, ‘Listen. God must call me to Jefferson because my life died there, was shot from the saddle of a galloping horse in a Jefferson street one night twenty years before it was ever born.’” (p.452)

His incompetence in taking his responsibility as a minister broke the conventions of southern society, which greatly disappointed the local people. What’s worse, his indifference to his wife made her fall into the strict situation in life. Since Mrs. Hightower could not get any concern and love from her husband, she came to the outside world for comfort. It was unacceptable for a woman who betrayed her husband in southern society at that time. So the rumors and gossip greatly hurt her that she died, leaving the reason of her death uncovered. It is possible she committed suicide and the root cause for her death was her husband’s coldness. The death of Gail Hightower’s wife deteriorated his situation. Before his wife’s death, the local people were just annoyed by his perfunctory manner when he performed his duties. But her death completely irritated the local people because in their mind, minister was the one to establish the communication between the God and people. He did not care the death of his wife since his indifference and coldness was the symbol of disloyalty and his incompetence to cleanse their souls and relieve their pains. So they reported his failure in performing his duties and his inappropriateness in being a minister in Jefferson, he was expelled by the church. And then the church donated him a sum of money and asked him to leave Jefferson, he refused for the reason that his left meant the loss of the illusions of his Grandfather. His persistence in staying in Jefferson was the existence of his belief, the last spiritual support. So he put all his spirit into a dead man, and then his deliberate alienation from the mainstream society began.

Analyzing their tragedies, readers can find that their grandfathers play so crucial role in their life, which is also the major culprit of their absence of parent role. Joe Christmas’ grandfather killed his father directly and mother indirectly. Joanna Burdon took her grandfather’s mission to help black people, but the commission made her a machine. Gail Hightower could not shake off his grandfather’s heroic deeds so

he lived his whole life in the shadow of his grandfather.

3.3.2 Self-Estrangement from Community

Human beings are social creatures, whose social feature determines that man cannot live alone. Gail Hightower started to deliberately separate with the community. He took his life in the chapel as the image of Keats's Grecian urn:

"intact and on all sides complete and inviolable, like a classic and serene vase, where the spirit could be born anew sheltered from the harsh gale of living and die so, peacefully . . . with scarce even a handful of rotting dust to be disposed of. That was what the word seminary meant: quiet and safe walls within which the hampered and garment worried spirit could learn anew serenity to contemplate without horror or alarm its own nakedness."(p.478)

Byron found in the sleeping figure of Hightower "a quality of profound and completely surrender," "had given over and relinquished completely that grip upon that blending of pride and hope and vanity and fear, that strength to cling to either defeat or victory, which is the I-Am, and the relinquishment of which is usually death"(p.345). The congregation of Hightower did not succeed for the reason that he abdicated his responsibility as a minister, refused to commit himself:

"Hightower's career in his Jefferson church was as a Figure antic as a showman, a little wild: a charlatan preaching worse than heresy, in utter disregard of that whose very stage he preempted, offering instead of the crucified shape of pity and love, a swaggering and unchastened bravo killed with a shotgun in a peaceful henhouse, in a temporary hiatus of his own avocation of killing." (p.462) .

The main characteristic of Gail Hightower was the decay of his life, just like a death-in-life figure. Hightower was afraid of real life and was fond of darkness. After resigning from the church, he still stayed in Jefferson where his soul dwelled in. Though the local people tried various ways to drive him to leave, he still stickled to stay in Jefferson. "Having resigned from the church, he buys a house in a back street and settles down, refusing to leave even after he is beaten unconscious by the K.K.K. Under all

kinds of persecution, inside his house again and the door locked, he lifts the mask with voluptuous and triumphant glee” (p.368). Finally, he stayed but was forced to start a life being alone and isolated. After the close reading of the text, we know that Hightower always lived in an entirely imaginary world, fully obsessed in the past, thus he could not accept and bear what the real life brought to him. That is to say, because he did not have the courage to face the reality, he closed him into the past, the world he conceived of in order to get rid of the torture the reality and community put on him. As an individual who could not become the master of his destiny because of the past burden which deprived of his freedom in making choice, Gail Hightower was a person who neither had the real life nor the true self. On the one hand, Faulkner criticized his avoidance in performing his duties as a minister. Meanwhile, he also criticized the indifference of the southern society which compelled him into an almost insignificant person.

Chapter 4 Factors Leading to Alienation of Characters in *Light in August*

Joe Christmas, Joanna Burdon and Gail Hightower are the three main characters in *Light in August*, all of whom were being alienated by the southern society. They cannot find a right position in Jefferson because the discrepancy in their personal understandings on themselves and others' understandings on themselves. From the above analysis, we can conclude that all their alienations come from their uncertainties on their identities. For Joe, a white man with supposed black blood, in his whole life he was greatly bothered by his race and identity. He was tortured by the classifications of being white or black, but until he died he finally found neither of the identities fit him. As to Joanna, a white woman who devoted herself to help the blacks but her generosity came not from her universal love but from her deepest discrimination. In her point view, the blacks were sinful and should get salvation. This understanding on the black people came from her grandfather who thought the black were evil and dirty and they were cursed by the God and the white were cursed by the black. Therefore, in order to seek self-salvation, the white people should raise the blacks. While tragically the whites in Jefferson did not hold the same idea, and then her actions on helping the blacks were conceived as weird and unreasonable. As a white woman in southern society, her behaviors made her neither a white one nor a black one. Finally it comes to Gail, who was a minister but did not so strictly observe his professional ethics. When he delivered a sermon in the church, he always hastily concluded and kept talking the civil war and his grandfather, a cavalryman who was killed in the war. His absent-mindedness in reality and over-obsessed to the past memories irritated the local people. So they started to dispel him. In summary, with a close analysis, we may find out more factors contributed to their alienations. In the following part of this chapter, the reasons caused their alienations will be analyzed carefully.

4.1 External Factors Contributed to the Alienation of the Characters

The social background of *Light in August* is the town named Jefferson, a typical southern society. After the civil war, the original social order was destroyed and great trauma was left in people's heart. Influenced by the war, the original tradition was ruined, people lost their faith and they were tortured by the racial problems, so all the people are confronted with various worries in every aspect of life. Through a close reading of the text, we can find that in their deep thought, they just tried to live the life as it they think it should be and never tried to make any effective changes. Their identity stagnant determined that alienation was a fate they could not escape. In this part, the factors caused their alienations will be analyzed through three dimensions: racial discrimination, religious fanaticism and patriarchal society.

Nietzsche holds a belief that when Christianity has died, human beings can create new values and become their own masters again. Nietzsche attacked on traditional ideas and social norms with relentlessly. He believes that it is an obstacle to the realization of a complete and abundant existence of human beings. From his point of view there are no absolute standards of good and evil in the world and modern society is weak in corruption. Religion sacrifices human freedom and intuition for the reason that it puts too much emphasis on rationality. The real power of mankind lies in the mysterious instinct world. Belief in religion inevitably leads to the creation of slave morality. Religious advocacy of the extraordinary world has greatly weakened the will of mankind to control the world. The obsession with religion must be put on the shackles of sin, and thus lose the freedom to realize will and the nature of expressing intuition. Religion prevents natural manifestations of human instinct. Religion is the power of depravity and it is also full of elements of corruption.

4.1.1 Alienation Resulted from Racial Discrimination

“First, that race is a crucial constituent of human identity and, second that racial distinctions are matters of cultural construction: a discourse, a code of behavior, a set of expectations. As Derrida claims of racism, ‘it institutes, declares, writes, inscribes, prescribes. A system of marks, it outlines space in order to assign forced residence or to close off borders. It does not discern, it

discriminates. "" (Weinstein, 1992, p.82)

Racialism is a plague in the town of Jefferson where no one can be the exception. Racial discrimination involves treating someone unfavorably because he/she is of a certain race or because of personal characteristics associated with race (such as hair texture, skin color, or certain facial features). In *light in August* the two characters who are persecuted by racialism are Joe Christian and Joanna Burdon.

Here, Stevens, on the behalf of the law which fulfills its role of discriminating between "black" and "white" blood. Stevens gave the reason that Joe Christmas attempts to break "free" in the end:

"But there was too much running with him, stride for stride with him...It was...all those successions of thirty years before that which had put that stain either on his white blood or his black blood, whichever you will, and which killed him... Because the black blood drove him first to the Negro cabin, and then the white blood drove him out of there...It Was the black blood which swept him by his own desire beyond the aid of any man, swept him up into that ecstasy out of a black jungle where life has already ceased before the heart stops and death is desire and fulfillment. (p.393)

Gavin Steven held the view that it was a serious of contradictions between Joe Christmas's white blood and black blood that caused the murder. Steven thought that the black blood was the originality of evil while the white blood represented the humanity. This conflict arrived its climax when the black blood guide him to strike the minister to whom he had asked for help.

For Joe Christian as a white man with supposed black blood, he was completely treated as a black people by his grandfather Doc Hines, an extreme racist. Though Joe has no obvious characters of a black people, dark color, his blackness is based on an assumption without being proved. After the death of his parents, he was cruelly abandoned to an orphanage though in fact he wasn't an orphan at all. This is the first time he was alienated and this alienation was due to his grandfather's unfavorable attitudes to black people. As an extreme racist, Joe's grandfather showed no mercy on

Joe's family and the chief culprit of Joe's tragic fate. The second stage of Joe's alienation started from his findings of the dietitian's intercourse with the parochial doctor before marriage, the dietitian threatened him: "you little rat! Spying me! You little nigger bastard!" (p.133). So he was on the edge of his chair to wait the coming of the punishment. Later, after he was adopted by his adoptive parents, his miseries didn't stop. His adoptive father treated him extremely badly, since in his deep thought, he also regarded Joe as a black one because of his supposed mixed blood. He never thought Joe as their son though he provided Joe with the basic necessity in daily life. Mistreated by his adoptive father Joe finally fled his adoptive father's house. Then he drifted to Jefferson and met Joanna by chance. At the first time, Joanna's generosity to the black people eased Joe's sensitive but fragile nerves. However after being told Joe may have the decent of a black one, Joanna asked Joe to live like a black people which sparked Joe's uneasy nerve. The dilemma Joe confronted was not because whether he was a white one or black one but because who he was. He was abandoned by the white society when he was born and later when he was adopted and thus his black part in himself started to awaken. Before drifting to Jefferson he tried to live like a black person, but after trying few times he failed. So when Joanna asked him to accept his black identity he rebelled at the price of both Joanna's and his lives. At the time when he died he was still suffering the prosecution of racial discrimination. From above analysis comes to a conclusion that Joe Christian is the direct victim of racialism. And Leonard Harris states in his book *Racism*:

"For the individual, therefore, racism means that damnation or salvation in this world is determined at conception; an individual's good life cannot tip the balance in his favor and he cannot live a bad life if his physical type is the right sort. By virtue of birth alone each member of the 'race' is high caste and rightly claims his place in the sun at the expense of men of other 'races'. He need not base his pride upon personal achievement nor upon virtue; he was born high caste." (Harris, 1999, p.25)

At the first time when readers know about Percy Grimm, it is impossible for them to combine Grimm with self-alienation. However, William Faulkner demonstrated great

sufferings Grimm experienced to indicate that he is alienated from the community and is drastically conscious of being broke off from the community. In fact, Faulkner spared no effort to construct the background information of Percy Grimm's starvation of spirits and alienation as he has with that of Gail Hightower. It can be concluded that the feeling of being a member of the community is urgently needed by Percy Grimm. This feeling attracts so much that he attempts to obtain the values of community by a way of bleeding. Percy Grimm is a violent racist in *Light in August* who persisted to the belief that "the white race is superior to any and all other races and that the American is superior to all other white races and that the American uniform is superior to all men, and that all that would ever be required of him in payment for this belief, this privilege, would be his own life." (p.339). Grimm indulged in the illusory aura of the knightly spirit and played the role of the white woman protector. Only in this way could satisfy the vanity of the knights. The southerners called their ancestors who arrived on the New World a knight. The plantation owners who were later in the agricultural competition also followed their own origins. The chivalry in the south of the United States was nothing more than a tool used by white plantation owners to show off the status and industry. They said that they were the descendants of noble knights. The southern knights treated the white women as their own protection object, thinking that without their protection, white women would become victims of blacks. This inexplicable fear and pride fostered the chivalry spirit.

If Joe was the direct victim of racialism, Joanna Burden and Gail Hightower were the indirect victims of racialism. Because of the glorious mission of her family, to rescue the soul of the white people, Joanna Burden had to work like a machine to help the blacks under the guidance of their ancestors' will which she also took it as the God's will. In her deep thought she believed that if she repeatedly showed her generosity to those black people her final goal would be achieved. She helped black people without receiving any refusal because the situation of the black people at that time made them no choice but to accept her generosity though they all knew that kinds of charity was at the price of their obedience. The civil war had abolished the slavery system but Joanna's behaviors essentially indicated the duration of slavery system. Meanwhile the

white people in the town had already realized the end of the slavery system. It was the abolishment of slavery system greatly damaged their benefits and thus they hated the black people. Therefore, it was certainly difficult for them to accept what Joanna has done to those blacks. As an independent individual Joana was eager to be recognized by the society, but she had to live her life under the heavy burden without any meaning. The encounter of Joe and Joanna were accidental, but the contradicted thoughts of these two were fatal although they faced the same condition of malediction. Therefore, it is no doubt that two complementary designs are generated about their love affair. At the end of their fierce relationship, it was Joe who has finally become the “shadow” and the “cross” of Joanna. It was the right time for both Joe and Joanna for their final confrontation. Accordingly, there come the predictable results of mutual destruction. When Joanna, reminding of his father’s thoughts and identifying with her father’s will, insists on taming Joe for his “Negro” identity, there is no other way for Joe to choose but to kill Joanna.

The conflicts between Joanna and black people and the other white people were all brought from racialism. The former conflict emerged as Joanna she did not treat the blacks as an equal individual, she helped them on the premise that she occupied a dominant role but the black people who accepted her charity were like beggars. While the conflict between Joanna and the white folks in Jefferson came from white people’s prejudices on black people. They thought Joanna’s action was an indication of her recognition of the black people so her tragedy was the result of racism’s chilling injury to blacks.

In southern society no one could avoid the impact of racialism. Although it was not obviously showed that Gail is a racist, the whole society and the place where he grew up was also branded with racialism. His grandfather was soldier in the south army to defense the northern army in the civil war, he once had slaves and supported racialism. Greatly influenced by his grandfather could be seen from his avocations of his grandfather glorious past.

4.1.2 Alienation Resulted from Religious Fanaticism

Besides the influence of racialism, the three characters also suffered spirit torture of

religious fanaticism, which was also the reason attributed to their alienations. Puritans believe that man was born with sin, which they called the original sin in Bible and in order to release the curse, the man's most important job in the world was to make atonement. And the only way for their atonement was to do the God's will, only by doing God's will, man could get redemption and be rewarded with happiness in the future. In addition, American Puritans also rigidly adhered to constraining desires and condemning enjoyment and recreation. The extreme doctrines of Puritanism not only dominated the thoughts of people but also restricted their behaviors to a large extent. What's more, they also provided the theoretical evidence for racialism.

In *Light in August*, Joe Christmas, Joanna Burden and Gail Hightower were the victims of religion. These characters shared the surprisingly similarities. There are two ways about identity for Joe to choose. One possibility is to have an identity which means to be a white man. And the other possibility is to have two identities with the meaning of neither being a white man nor a black man. Like many predetermined characters of William Faulkner, both Joanna and Joe suffered the experience of helplessness to their grandfather's inexorable power. Joanna has no chance to escape from the "black shadow", nor will Joe ever stop to perceiving himself through a white whose eyes are full of hate.

It was religion that determines Joe Christmas's life. As an adult, Joe cannot help telling about his black blood even when he bedded with white women. From his point of view, a white woman's sleeping with a black man is as unbearable as to any white racists. It costs two policemen to prevent from killing a white prostitute for her indifference to his blackness. The beginning of his miserable life started because of his religious fanatic grandfather, Doc Hines. Though apparently Hines was an extreme racist whose obsessive thought came directly from his beliefs on what the Puritanism had advocated that human being should be morally and spiritually pure. Since Joe Christmas was born with supposed black blood which violated the tenet of Puritanism, he had to be punished. And being deserted was a kind of punishment. Joe also suffered from Puritanism at his adoptive father McEachern. When they met first time McEachern told Joe that "I will have you learn soon that the two abominations are sloth and idle

thinking, the two virtues are work and the fear of God.”(p.144). “McEachern is bundled too against the cold, squat, big, shapeless, somehow rocklike, indomitable, not so much ungentle as ruthless. He is like a cold rock. What can be seen from him is only ruthlessness.”(p.121). When Joe could not recite Presbyterian catechism. “McEachern began to strike methodically, with slow and deliberate force, still without heat and anger.” (p.114). When McEachern mistreated Joe Christmas severely, “He stood, slight and erect. When strap fell he did not flinch, no quiver passed over his face. He was looking straight ahead, with a rapt, calm expression like a monk in a picture.”(p.149). When being beaten with a whip, his body “might have been wood or stone; a post or a tower upon which the sentient part of him mused, like a hermit, contemplative and remote with ecstasy and self-crucifixion” (p.121).

Joe Christmas’s resistance to the religious dogma of his adoptive father McEachern expressed in the protestant music: “deliberate and without passion so much as immolation, pleading, asking, for not love, not life, forbidding it to others, demanding in sonorous tones death as though death were the boon.” (p.367) Ironically, after his harsh punishment to Joe, he asked Joe to kneel to God to ask for forgiveness. He showed his hypocritical nature of a puritan and he hoped Joe can be a pious puritan. Although Joe rebelled McEachern’s will and escaped, the influence of puritanism on him cannot be neglected which was largely reflected in his relations with Joanna later. Another Puritans’ core ideal was that women should subordinate to man and a wife must be ruled over by her husband. So when Joanna asked him to become a real black people and pray like the black ones, he refused to accept her proposal and murdered her. His actions to Joanna revealed the influence of McEachern’s Puritanism on his thoughts that man is the master of a woman though once he denied accepting what McEachern told him.

Most of Joanna’s behaviors were directed by religious doctrines. She helped the black people because her grandfather told her that helping those black people was a kind of salvation to their souls. Because Nathaniel Burden’s “A race doomed and cursed to be forever and ever a part of the white race's doom and curse for its sins. Remember that.” Nathaniel Burden said (p.278).

It was the core idea of the Calvinist ideology that human beings could not rescue

themselves on their own for lack of God. This ideology stems from the biblical concept of original sin. Predestination in Calvinist theology implies the salvation of each individual, or being abandoned was predetermined by God's omnipotent will. In her inner heart she believed Negro was evil and ignoble and being a slave was an identity the slave owner had empowered with. Joanna was told the curse of the black was God's curse but the curse of the white was the black man. Both the curse of the black and the white was somehow coincided with the original sin Puritanism asserted. Puritan also asserted that the only way to release the curse was to do the God's will and Joanna regards her assistance to the black as a way of serving the God. Strictly obeying religious doctrines she was alienated by white people in Jefferson. Her emotional repression in later period reflected the persecution of human nature by the Puritan morality. She chose to use unnatural behaviors to rebel against the damage and destruction imposed on her by the outside world, which showed the human side. She wanted to be a normal woman whom the society could accept. Struggling Joana regarded Joe as her redemption and the saver. When she tried to scrub God's unforgivable lustful crimes through marriage but was rejected, she raised her gun. Her selfishness and violence revealed the distortion of human thought and soul under the puritanical system. Believing she had superiority over the blacks, Joanna became the victim of rigid religion and racialism. She had a strong urge to rule and her strong desire came from her grandfather's religious mania. She was so eager to change Joe's way of life that she asked Joe to pray. However, she did not realize that it was tantamount to ask him to admit that he was black. Joanna could not coexist with those who betray her faith, her tragedy was the result of racism's chilling injury to blacks. Puritanism firmly controlled and blinded Joanna Burton's feminine nature. Puritanism advocated the idea of abstinence and regarded desire as the source of all sins. She believed that life should prohibit all desires and tolerate all misery and pain. The puritanism code of conduct more requires women to abstain from desire. Joanna was a victim of the puritan moralism that advocated extreme abstinence. The puritan ethics not only supported the social, political, and cultural aspects of the South, but also permeates family ethics in the South, controlled people's thoughts and lives and stipulated relationships and codes

of conduct among people. Joanna grew up in an isolated environment, human nature was suppressed and the right to own a woman's normal life was also denied.

4.1.3 Alienation Resulted from Patriarchal Society

"Patriarchal is a social system in which males hold primary power, predominate in roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege and control of property" (Tickner, p.1197). Patriarchal refers to a social system where males hold primary power and plays the predominant role in the family and society. Jefferson was a typical patriarchal society within which women were treated as an object or animals. The hopeless and lifeless social reality diminished their humanity and made them lose themselves. As a result, they were alienated by their family, by the society even by themselves. Though some of them tried to get rid of such alienations and attempted to assert the existence of them and rebelled against the reality, they failed and ruined by a destructive way.

Within the society of Jefferson, women were actively mistreated or subtly restricted by the mores of the community. A number of them attempted to assert themselves or to rebel, even in destructive ways. The frustrating and depressing social reality suppressed the people's humanity and made them lose themselves so that they eventually changed to be alienated from themselves and even the whole society. In southern traditional values, women's sin was condemned in the Bible for the reason that they were the tools that gave rise to the Fall of Man. Therefore, they took it for granted that women's chastity was the most important one in the southern moral system which means women's subordinate status and values consisted with their chastity. The cruel patriarchy impacted on the formation of southern womanhood, in the family-centered society, it was certain that the father as a manor owner was the head of family, consequently they dominated their wives and daughters by the rights empowered by the old domestic institution and tradition, under the suppression of patriarchy women's natural rights and desire must be smothered thoroughly which resulted in their distortion of human nature and tragedies of destiny.

Mrs. Armstid, characterized by the "savage" gray twist of hair at the back of her head and the brusqueness of her dealings with men and women alike, had undergone the

grueling experience of bearing five children in six years and of preparing three meals a day for thirty years, rarely leaving her isolated farmhouse.

Mrs. McEachern and Mrs Hightower were the two typical features who were alienated in *Light in August*. Living in a society where patriarchal thought permeates, they were considered as the appendages of man's. For Mrs. McEachern, who had been long neglected by his husband, she cannot get any concern or warmth from Mr. McEachern, so the arrival of Joe Christmas greatly inspired her and empowered her with another identity, that was mother which meant hope to her, she had another chance to take her responsibility to care for Joe. Since she could not get any care from his husband, she would devote all her energy to take care of Joe.

“She had always tried to be kind to him, from that first December evening twelve years ago...She didn't answer. She knelt before him (Joe) while he watched the crown of her head and her hands fumbling a little clumsy about his feet...looking back he could see now the long series of trivial, clumsy, vain efforts born of frustration and fumbling distinct: the dishes she would prepare for him in secret and then insist on his accepting and eating them in secret...the times when, like tonight, she would try to get herself between him and the punishment which, deserved or not, just or unjust, was impersonal, both the man and the boy accepting this as a natural and inescapable fact until she, getting in the way, must give it an odor, an attention, and aftertaste.”(p.157)

Mrs. McEachern of the “beaten face” seems prematurely aged by her difficult marriage, her husband and Joe ignored her during their confrontations, and she had been “hammered” by such experiences “into an attenuation of dumb hopes and frustrated desires.”

Mrs. Hines was a downtrodden wife, hardly ever seen for decades by the townspeople, she had astonishingly, refrained from questioning Hines about their dead daughter's missing child. By appearance, she had been alienated to be a woman with remarkable endurance and without any femaleness:

“It was as though instead of having been subtly slain and corrupted by the ruthless and bigoted man into something beyond his intending and her knowing, she had been hammered

stubbornly thinner and thinner like some passive and dully malleable metal, into an attenuation of dumb hopes and frustrated desires now faint and pale as dead ashes.”(p.125)

Mrs Hightower’s plight and rebellious response to it were the most dramatic. Coming to the town as a hopeful young minister’s wife, she soon learned that she had little claim on her husband’s attention because of his immersion in a strange admixture of religion and ancestor worship, she became alienated from him and from the townspeople until anger finally caused her violent and blasphemous outburst during a church service, Mrs. Hightower was dispatched to a sanatorium, her “cue” involved capitulation to the standards of conduct expected of her by the community of Jefferson, after some months of institutionalization, during which neither her husband nor his congregation showed more than the most desultory interest in her progress, she returned temporarily subdued, her final actions involve openly adulterous in a Memphis hotel and suicide of a sort of calculated to cause her husband the greatest possible public embarrassment, she made sure that her identity was known by leaving her name on a piece of paper in the hotel room, though in one way clearly and pointlessly self-destructive, constituted a resounding refusal to conform to restrictive community mores or to tolerate his husband’s self-absorbed failure to comprehend her complex needs and psychological makeup. Her early decision to use marriage as a means to escape the confining circumstances in which she found herself as a result of her birth and upbringing ironically only served to trap her in an extremely frustrated relationship, driving her to a rebellion that ended in tragedy. The dietitian Miss Atkins knew her filthy activity will be condemned by the middle-class mores of which she was essentially a prisoner.

Both of them have been shorn of human rights and human nature, are the victims of Southern cultural tradition.

4.2 Internal Factors Contributed to the Alienation of Characters

Besides the persecution of racialism, religious doctrines and patriarchal society, the characters in *Light in August* also bothered by their inner world which were the internal factors attributed their alienations.

The existentialism stressed that a man was born with specific surroundings in which he could establish social interaction with. Any lack of the surroundings will lead to alienations. The embodiment of the alienated behaviors such as worries, anxieties, uncertainties, ambiguities, stubbornness which are all reflected from the main Characters in *Light in August*. Similar to the external causes for the alienations of the characters, there are also three internal factors contributed to their alienations. They are uncertainty of self-identity, avoidance of social responsibilities and self-imposed isolation.

4.2.1 Alienation Resulted from Uncertainty of Self-Identity

“Existentialism is a person-centered philosophy. Though not anti-science, its focus is on the human individual’s pursuit of identity and meaning amidst the social and economic pressure of mass society for superficiality and conformism.”(Flynn, 2013, p.8).

All the three main characters in *Light in August* Joe Christmas, Joanna Burden and Gail Hightower were troubled by the problems of identity. Joe Christmas was a man who had no family ties, no communications with the surroundings and no identity in any community. He was totally an “other” to the people around. Though he thought his miseries came from his supposed black blood, in fact his miseries came from his uncertainty of his self-identity. He was aware himself as an object of contempt and hatred through the other’s abusive words. He failed to distinguish the distinctions between the black and the white. As a child he was conscious he was deserted by his grandfather Doc Hines, because he might have black blood. At that time actually he did not have any ideas on what black blood mean. Later when he was adopted by McEachern who imposed a great number of religious doctrines on him. He still could not understand what kind of identity he needs to carry. Since McEachern asked him to become a pious follower, he refused and rebelled because he could not find himself from the rigid religious doctrines.

“Joe’s flesh is white, and in response to his attempts to get rid of “the white blood,” his body just gets whiter. In this paradoxical condition Faulkner reveals that Joe is really the victim

of “the white thinking and being” of his raising and background; he is McEachern’s and Doc Hines’ progeny, most evidently in his violent repudiations of their influence, no matter the color of his skin. Yet in one crucial respect Joe Christmas is literally and symbolically black” (Towner, 2000, p.21)

And when his mistress Joanna Burden asks him to act like a black person and kneel to pray, he killed her. “No. If I give in now, I will deny all the thirty years that I have lived to make me what I chose to be.” (p.265). Finally he found that he didn’t belong to any world whether in the rigid religious world or the complete black world. He started to rethink the meaning of the word “bastard” to him. He found the meaning it carried was far from what he could bear.

Joe could not make any reconciliation of his irreconcilable conflicts. If he could follow his adoptive father’s order to be a pious follower he could find an identity in McEachern’s family. Judging from his appearance, no one could know he was a hybrid. Yet in deep heart Joe was too obsessed in the idea of being white or black so he fled away. When he arrived at Jefferson he got another chance to live like a normal person but he refused. He was persistent in seeking himself but failed to recognize the truth that he always existed. So the conflict between the seeking of self and the existence of self led to his tragedy. Over-reaction to others’ understandings on him and neglecting himself attributed his uncertainty of his identity. It was his imagination of himself as a “nigger” that threatened Joe most leading to alienation: “When he found it (the kitchen door) was not locked it was like an insult” and “He went directly to the table where she set out his food. He did not need to see. His hands saw; the dishes were still a little warm, thinking set out for the nigger. For the nigger” (p.179).

Joanna’s dilemma on self-identity lies in that she could not distinguish what the state of the reality demanded a white lady to do from what his grandfather told her to do. There is a big gap between his grandfather and her mainly due to different social background they lived in. So if she insists on following her grandfather’s advice, her alienation is inevitable. Her grandfather was a typical southern white man who grew up under the influence of southern traditions, such as the popularity of slavery system. He had deep feeling on the past prosperous memory, so he educated his granddaughter

to preserve the old tradition. In southern society before the civil war most blacks served as slavers. In the eye of white they are the private property of the slaver owners and they are dominated by their masters and in exchange, the masters provide them with the basic necessity in daily life. However after the civil war both the blacks and the whites were suffering from the identity crisis. For most people can adapt themselves to the changes, but for Joanna there was no possibility. On the one hand, she helped the blacks as a master provided the basic necessities for their black slaves. On the other hand, she hoped to escape the shuttles the old traditions imposed on him, which can be seen from his relationships with Joe Christmas. She hoped to have normal marriage because she believed through this way she could relieve her soul and escape her fate ,but the refusal of Joe to marry her destroyed her illusions completely. It is the contradiction between the state of reality and her illusions of the past glorious southern traditions caused Joanna's failure in finding the right position in the southern society after the civil war. And it was her incapability of adapting herself to society caused her uncertainty of self-identity.

The identity problem also tortured Gale Hightower. He was a white man with rightful career as a priest but he could not truly adapt himself to the real world. When he came to Jefferson to serve the local people as a priest he could not fully perform his duties. What he really cared about was his memories concerning his grandfather and he never tried to accept he identity as a priest to cleanse other's soul or relieve their pains. The conflicts between his obsession to the past times and the changes of the times caused his uncertainty on his self-identity. Among the three main characters in *Light in August*, Gail Hightower's lack of self-identity is the most complicated. He does have numerous identities, whether the society empowered him or his family offers him. For instance, a priest, a son, a husband, but he chose the identity as a grandson of his dead grandfather. Since his grandfather has passed away, his influence on Gail Hightower was indirect. And most of his influence came from Gail's imagination on him. Imagination generated from an individual's subjective tendencies towards something happened and would be happen. All that it was from one's subjective choices, it cannot be treated as the reality. However as to Gail, his illusions and imagination was the real

state of his life. And the living people including his wife and the other people in Jefferson never came into his sight. They were invisible. His neglecting to others is essentially his neglecting of himself, which will definitely determine his final fate, to be neglected by the others.

4.2.2 Alienation Resulted from Avoidance of Responsibility

Heidegger emphasizes that the real human life must first face the existential problem, otherwise it is out of existence. Only by facing life can we find the true meaning of human beings. According to Sartre's explanation, subjectivity will be the starting point of life.

Another cause to the main characters' alienation in *Light in August* was their avoidance of social responsibility. In existentialism, responsibility is the basic tie for an individual to sustain his social relationships. For Joe Christmas, when he was adopted by McEachern's family, Mr. McEachern tried to cultivate him as a qualified follower but he could not fully perform his duties as a pious follower, such as reciting the tenets, giving his prayers. As a result, finally he rebelled and fled away. His escape from McEachern's house reflected his avoidance to perform his duties as a pious follower and his resistance to the McEachern's family with the result of being alienated. His alienation was caused by his incompetence in performing his duty. In terms of Joanna, she did not perform her duty either. According to the custom of tradition, as a woman, being a wife and mother were the basic demands a society for a woman. Joanna failed to perform neither of them, though she dedicated herself to her family's great mission. She performed a duty her family left her to achieve but which was not recognized by the society. So she could not be accepted by the outside world.

Gail Hightower, a typical character who fails to shoulder his social responsibilities. When in seminary, Hightower married a girl who was the daughter of seminary teachers. However, it was not the true love that matched this couple instead of his selfishness for getting a position in the town of Jefferson. But when he achieved his goal, indifference to his wife and his work were fully displayed. In other words, he did not care his wife's feeling at all for the reason that his brain was filled with illusion of the glory of his grandfather.

Hightower was eager to have a shelter. “He believed with a calm joy that if ever there was a shelter, it would be the church” (p.359). Priest and husband are the two major roles he was empowered with. The former was empowered by the society and the latter is given by his family. As a priest what he should do was to cleanse people’s soul and relieve people from sufferings but what he did most in religious ceremony was repeatedly talking about his grandfather’s glorious deeds in the past. As a husband, he was cold to her wife. Mrs. Hightower could not get any care and love from him, her love affair was the result of Gail’s indifference. And she committed suicide to awake his soul but failed. In summary, Gail’s tragic fate was caused by his avoidance of his social responsibilities as a priest and a husband.

4.2.3 Alienation Resulted from Self-Imposed Isolation

Besides the uncertainty of their self-identity and avoidance of social responsibility, self-imposition isolation is another factor caused the alienations of the main characters. The three main characters in *Light in August*, Joe Christmas, Joanna Burdon and Gail Hightower were suffering from various degrees of self-isolation, especially for Joe and Joanna. In all his life, Joe Christmas has been struggling to know whether he was a black or a white one. The natives of the white community regarded Joe as a Negro, treated him as a Negro, and will mutilate him as a Negro. It was the ambiguity of his situation that beyond the scope he can endure and accept. It can be said that Joe shared many similarities with Ahab of *Moby Dick* who determined to “strike through the mask” to obtain the absolute truth, ultimate certainty and clarity even at the expense of life. For Joe, seeking the truth was the only mission in the rest of his life. What he embraced in his single and singular predestine are his ambiguities and contradictions which acts out its conflicts, exemplifies in allegorical fashion the principle of division holding it together or tearing it apart.

Joe was a hybrid who had the lowest position in that society. Even if he was much concerned with his identity and self, he never tried to dig out who he was instead he accepted that fate he was treated unfairly. He found a kind of peace in accepting the fact that he must be punished for what he never did because he was a man with black blood. All his indifferent response to the reality showed his self-imposed isolation.

“He was just eight then. It was years later that memory knew what he was remembering; years after that night when, an hour later, he rose from the bed and went and knelt in the corner as he had not knelt on the rug, and above the outraged food knelling, with his hands ate, like a savage, like a dog.”(p.118)

At the age of his seventeen, he said to himself, “he [McEachern] has nursed a nigger beneath his own roof, with his own food at his own table” (p.127). It was obvious that life without warmth and love had twisted Joe.

“While she watched him, he rose from the bed and took the tray and carried it to the corner and turned it upside down, dumping the dishes and food and all onto the floor” (p.155). “She is trying to make me cry, he thought, lying cold and rigid in his bed” (p.169).

He never tried to defend anything for himself. Even at the last moment, when Joanna threatened him with death in exchange of marrying her, he did not speak anything but killed her. The murder he committed was the direct results of his refusal to choose to be a black or a white one. He will choose his means of reconciliation as long as he has the right to choose. Surely, the blackness occupied his mind, his body is thrown to the darkness, the extinction, the death.

Normally, he could speak his miseries and worries not to marry Joanna, more importantly he could not accept her proposal as a real black man. They could have parted amicably. But he did not end their relationships in a peaceful way instead he ended their relationships at the price of their lives.

Self-imposed isolation was represented by Joanna Burden to a large extent. Although Joanna’s grandfather was claimed to be from New England, he was still regarded as the black man who was accused of God. Deeply influenced by the spirits of his grandfather, Joanna, an unmarried white woman, spent all her life time to rescue the soul of the white through helping the black people. It can be said that Joanna has been fighting with his womanhood just as Joe with his blackness. There is only alternative between subjection and objection for the reason that neither can there be acceptance of

otherness within self.

Joanna resists her own femininity. She thought her spirit was noble, just as the mission she committed. Even the great mission was left by her family, as an independent individual she had the right to not commit the mission. At this respect she was so harsh to herself. On the other hand though she committed her mission for the sake of relieving the white people's soul, after she met Joe Christmas by chance, she once tried to open to Joe and thought Joe was the most suitable person to be her would-be husband. She started to rebel against the damage and destruction imposed on her by the outside world, showing the human side of her. However, when she tried to ask Joe to be a real black person and pray for their misbehaviors, the repression of her was shown once again. When Joe refused her arrangement and beat her, she said, "Maybe it would be better if we both were dead." (p.209). Joanna is extremely complicated. On the one hand, she sought free relation and marriage, hoping to become a sound wife and mother. On the other hand, she was asking for forgiveness for what she did. Self-repression was the outside force which erodes her inner appeal.

Different from Joe Christmas and Joanna Burden who constrained themselves, Gail Hightower over-stressed himself. As a priest he had permanent audiences. He could speak out how he thought about the world, human being. But his miseries lie in his loss of himself. So he had to appeal for his only spiritual support, the old memories of his grandfather. He repeated to talk about the glorious deeds of his grandfather, showing his main concern in the society, which was incompatible to other people's views. His isolation could be divided into two kinds. One was his obsession into the past which isolated him from the present, the other was his absence in fully performing his duties as a priest.

Chapter 5 Approaches to Eliminating Alienation

In *Existentialism and Humanism* “If God does not exist, there is at least one being in who existence exceeds essence—a being whose existence comes before its essence, a being who exists before he can be defined by any concept of it. That being is man, or, as Heidegger put it, the human reality. What do we mean here by “existence precedes essence”? We mean that man first exists: he materializes in the world, encounters himself, and only afterward he defines himself. If man as existentialists conceives of him cannot be defined, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later and when he will be what he makes of himself.” (2007,p.22-23). From the point of view of existentialism, we can conclude that the existence of human being is the primary premise for one to create his nature. The existence of human beings endowers an individual special power to recognize the identity of themselves. It is the human being himself who is the creator and determiner of his life and his essence.

The main characters in *Light in August* illustrate the above points suggesting through existentialism. For Joe Christmas, Joanna Burden, and Gail Hightower, all of whom exist in the material world, but their existence is no more like an object for the reason that there is no interaction—real communication with the outside world. They just live their lives as it would be as if their life was a formula which was designed by a great mathematician. Lack of intercommunication with the outsider world, they are alienated. However, existence precedes essence, providing the possibility to eliminating the alienations. In this part, the approaches of eliminating alienation will be discussed from three aspects: acceptance of responsibility, pursuit of meaningful existence and realizing self-awakening.

“Man is nothing else but the sum of his actions, nothing else but what his life is, man is no other than a series of undertakings , he is the sum, the organization, the set of relations that constitute these undertakings.”(Sartre,1973,p.41.)

5.1 Acceptance of Responsibility

In existentialist philosophy, man is nothing at his birth in this abandoned world, and it is man’s consciousness and constant actions that help him to create his nature step

by step. For Sartre “the being of human reality is originally not a substance but a lived relation’ ‘Lived relation’ alert us to another feature of Existentialism: the responsibility of the individual to take hold of his or her self in a way which ensures really existing, rather than sleepwalking through life”(Earnshaw,2006, p.2) Hightower succeeds in surpassing himself by struggling to realize his moral responsibility. During his whole life of a minister, his failed to concern other’s feelings, to care other people, as if they were all invisible to him, even his wife. But finally he discovered it was he who should be responsible for his wife’s deaths and other people’s deaths.

“And I know that for fifty years I have not even been clay: I have been a single instant of darkness in which a horse galloped and a gun crashed. And if I am my dead grandfather on the instant of his death, then my wife, his grandson's wife.....the debaucher and murderer of my grandson's wife, since I could neither let my grandson live or die.....”(p.491).

From this confession, we can sense Hightower’s acknowledgement of his faults for his wife. As the wheel of his memory turn on and on, he becomes to realize it was his own cold selfishness and his indulgence in the Confederate grandfather that brought the disgrace and death of his wife

As a minister, his duty is to cleanse other’s soul and relieve their sufferings. However he was too obsessed himself to his grandfather’s glorious memories that he ignored to perform his duties, and thus, people could neither cleanse their souls, such as Joe Christmas nor relieve their sufferings causing the inevitable fates of death. He realized that human beings are all responsible because we are all a part of mankind. At the moment of accepting this consciousness, it is possible to accept the tragic situation of human, with its all absurdity and irrationality, and with the acceptance of peace and tranquility. As a normal human being, no matter how isolated and incompatible the material world, he still exists in this material world, whether physically or spiritually. It is the existence of this material world that guarantees the importance of his existence. Perhaps sometimes his existence is superfluous in some people’s eyes while such a perception is not always true. One is forced to make choice according to the moral theory which always guides him. It is anxiety about freedom that leads the human

beings to take actions.

Based on human's free will in his existentialism, Sartre tries to define human nature through their existence. He stresses a person's nature is what he or she has done all the time. Others' understandings on an individual are based on his success or failure in action. In deep sense, the sense of taking or accepting one's responsibility is a key step for one to get rid of the state of being alienated.

Living alone for more than twenty five years, Bryon Bunch was the only visitor of his house every week. The real communication between Gail Hightower and Bryon Bunch started at the time when Lena came to Jefferson. Just like Gail Hightower, Bryon Bunch's life was fixed and lifeless. However, the coming of Lena brought vitality and life to his life. At first Gail Hightower did not pay much attention to the stories of Lena until he found that Bryon had fallen in love with Lena and tried to take the responsibility of taking care of Lena and her unborn child. Meanwhile, Joe Christmas, who had lived in town for more than three years but Hightower had no ideas of Joe except for Bryon had told him what had happened on Christmas. Until later, the visit of Joe's Grandparents from whom he learned the stories of Joe, he still was numb to Joe. The very next day coincidentally he had the chance to deliver Lena's baby. The coming of the new life made him rethink the meaning of life and he decided to take his social responsibility.

Different from violent death of Joe Christmas and Joanna Burden's, positive change in *Light in August* is reflected by the rebirth of Hightower who acts as doctor to deliver the baby which is the beginning for Hightower to accept his social responsibility. Then he starts to rethink his relationship with his wife, and he admits it is his indifference that caused his wife's shame and despair and it is he that leads to her death. He thinks his failure lies not only in incompetence in performing his social and family responsibility. What's more important is that he also fails to be responsible for himself. It is his failure in fully considering the meaning for his existence that caused his failure in performing his other responsibility. Bryon tries to involve his recognition on his obligations and acceptance of performing them.

It is the birth of Lena's child and the death of Joe Christmas and Joanna Burden

that fully awake the Hightower. In his talking with Bryon who fully witnesses the new-born baby and the cruelest death, Hightower fully experiences the joy of new birth and the horror of death through which he has different understandings of the meaning of life-from which he gets rebirth and acknowledges human responsibility.

He thinks, “there must be some things for which God cannot be accused by man and held responsible.”(p.488) He starts to realize that when he tries to escape from fears, much pain and terrors have been created to others. If any reader who read Tennyson’s poetry would find a flavor of female character, his choice to reading Henry IV is a clear indicator that his is turning into a real man. He starts to get out of the “shadow” he has established for himself for more than thirty years.

“He enters the house. He shaves and remotes the nightshirt and put on the shirt which he had worn yesterday, and a collar and the lawn tie and the panama hat. The walk out to the cabin (to Lena’s) does not take him as long as the walk home did, even though he goes now through the woods where the walking is harder. ‘I must do this more often’, he thinks, felling the intermittent sun, the heat, smelling the savage and fecund odor of the earth, the woods, the loud silence. ‘I should never have lost this habit, too. But perhaps they will both come back to me, if they are not the same as prayer.’” (p.305)

From the above description, it can be concluded that Hightower is ready to take his responsibility for the reason that his state of mind has been totally changed. Life to him is different, so he becomes to be able to interact with the society, with other people. In the end Hightower gets out from his obsession of the past memories and starts to integrate into the real society. Eventually, after about thirty-years of inner isolation, he gets from the chains he tied to himself. After reexamining the meaning of life and his past life, he gets rebirth. Finally he overcomes himself and gets from the immersions of the past and looks forward the future.

5.2 Pursuit of Meaningful Existence

The beginning and development of existentialism benefited from the rebellion against reason and the pursuit of intuitive experience. Existentialism believes that before human existence, there are not any absolute, eternal truths, and there are no fixed moral

standards and behavioral norms. The so-called human nature is only the free will embodied in human behavior. In his novels, the author shows people's resistance to social conventions and pursuit of their own definition, and their significance of existence. People must decide their own existence, create their own possibilities, and make choices and promises.

Lena's consciousness which represents healthy traditionalism rescues her from the pain of others. Lena is healthy both in spiritual and in physical. Thus she is bothered neither by logic nor abstract concepts or old traditions. She gets power and energy from her "calm unreason". Emptiness of spirit and the rigid religious doctrines are completely strange to her, although she is an unmarried mother who is bound to be dismissed and abused on her way to Jefferson. Her premarital pregnancy was regarded as the destruction of the virtue virginity. When her sister-in-law told her brother that Lena was pregnant, her brother accused her of a whore. Lena lives in a world which is full of hope. Everyone she encounters on the journey is radiant with the glory of humanity and she boldly launches a war against traditional values. She is a typical resister to Southern society. Her personality and hope illuminate the darkness of others' misfortune.

The novel begins with her arrival and ends with her departure. From Alabama to Jefferson, Mississippi, a simple soul with a simple faith, Lena is sure that she will find Lucas who will marry her and support their child. Her certainty about going to Lucas directly stems not from her knowledge of Lucas's character or his whereabouts but from an unquestioned belief that the Lord will take care of her. With her swollen belly and faded blue dress, she comes directly to the town to which Lucas has rested on. All the people whom she meets on the journey are nice to her, even a Martha Armstid, who extremely despises an unmarried mother, treating her with kindness and generosity. The earth goddess is attuned to "the very immutable laws which earth must obey." (p.338) As Gail Hightower observes, she is of the "good stock peopling in tranquil obedience to it the good earth." (p.406) As a response to Lena, Byron Bunch leaves the social world governed by old traditions. Before Lena arrives at the mill on the fatal Saturday in August, Byron is a man who lives under the guidance of a belief that that idle hands make one a sinner. He works overtime on Saturdays until he has enough time to return

to his boarding house, ride on his mule thirty miles into the country to give religious instruction. When he returns to Jefferson, the mill could make him busy again. Byron escapes life in a harmless manner, but he avoids the fate of his contemporaries in Jefferson and the South through completely responding to Lena's affirmative power of life, which frees him from his preconceptions. He could accept her premarital pregnancy, non-virgin state and fall in love with her. As Lena reaches the mill, on the horizon raises the yellow smoke from Joanna Burden's intended funeral pyre. A week later, in a cabin close to the burned ruins of the Burden's house, Lena gives birth to her child. Byron Bunch, a friend of Gail Hightower, is the tie between the natural world which is bright, mindless, life-oriented, embodying in Lena Grove and the social world which is taboo-ridden, dark, violent, death-oriented, embodying in Gail Hightower, Joe Christmas, and Joanna Burden. Bunch falls in love with the obviously pregnant girl at the first sight. At the end of the novel, he is still accompanying her. Lena has been called "the principle upon which any human community is founded"; "the world of nature with its total indifference to both moral and social categories"; a "force of nature." The story of Lena is an important part of this novel which is totally different from Joe, Christmas, Joanna Burden and Gail Hightower, Lena is the symbol of free human nature. She is very optimistic to life and love. Lena is the only positive and energetic character Faulkner created in *Light in August*, who is also the exemplification of a meaningful existence.

Strongly contrast to Joe Christmas, Joanna Burden, Lena is a special existence in *Light in August*. As an instinctive and unmediated natural creature, Lena is more like a model of peace and self-confidence. With unshakeable faith she does not hesitate to find the father of an unborn child and she has no space or time pressure. Lena's respect to natural order strongly contrasts with the beliefs of fanaticism. Only Lena lived in the present.

Lena's story was used by Faulkner to express his attitude toward women, that is, women is with determination and persistence. Different from the other women in this novel, She always keeps good relationships with the people she encounters. In a broad sense, Lena is the ideal image in *Light in August*, and it is her nature that brings

happiness to others and let others to believe the existence of happiness. Though she is in an extremely unpleasant situation, pregnant, unmarried, having no idea to her future, she believes if she keeps trying, she will find the unborn child's father and the truth is that she has no idea about his whereabouts. Even when she arrives at Jefferson, judging from Byron's words, she knows that Lucas possibly has cheated her, she is still hopeful. Her optimism to life attracts the attention of Byron and let Byron rethink the meaning of life. Lena is the symbol of "light" in August.

The public doesn't have any idea on Byron Bunch until he meets Lena. Life to him without much meaning, the only meaning in life lies in the one day a week when he gives lectures in a church. But after he comes across Lena his life is totally different, he starts to know the meaning for his existence, the relationship between Byron and Lena broadens the humanity of Byron, which promotes him to become a fully authentic human-being deserving a meaningful life.

The previous Byron cares for nothing and is indifferent to the outside world. After falling love with Lena, he achieves fully self-transcendence. He starts to care about the other's life and outside world, which can be judged from his talk with Hightower. He discusses the conflagration of the Burden's house, the death of Joe Christmas, the story of Lena and Lucas Bunch. The change of attitudes towards others suggests the changes of his ideas of life. "Byron fell in love. He fell in love contrary to all the tradition of his austere and jealous country raising which demands in the object physical inviolability" (p.38).

Sartre claims that man always chooses what are beneficial to the society. As is voiced in *Existentialism Is a Humanism*:

"That in choosing himself, he is choosing for all man. In fact, in creating the man each of us wills ourselves to be, there is not a single one of our actions that does not at the same time create an image of man as we think he ought to be. Choosing to be this or that is to affirm at the same time the value of what we choose, because we can never choose evil. We always choose the good, and nothing can be good for any of us unless it is good for all". (2007, p.24)

Choosing for himself, he is choosing for all man. Byron starts to be optimistic to

life and get back to society where he starts to have communication with a great number of people. The typical affair is his selfless devotion to Lena. Byron's choice to live a new life with Lena symbolizes the possibility to transcend oneself and the way to achieve such transcendence. He is the symbol of successful self-transcendence.

Sartre defines subjectivity as: "man is ...something that projects itself into a future, and is conscious of doing so. Man is indeed a project that has as a subjective existence, rather unlike that of a patch of moss, a spreading fungus..." (2007, p.23). Put in other words, man's subjectivity lies in his willingness to make free choice and take relevant actions, through which he can achieve himself.

5.3 Realization of Self-Awakening

"Existential awakening occasioned by the feeling of angst, the awareness of 'nothingness' upon which the 'possibility of possibility' is dependent. 'awakening' in Husserl's conception of phenomenological is "The process guides the individual into a different attitude to the world, a new way of being in the world that pays attention to the phenomena of consciousness rather than the habitual manner of the 'natural attitude' (1969,p.43)

"Facticity denotes the givens of our situation such as race and nationality, our talents and limitations. Transcendence or the reach that our consciousness extends beyond these givens, denotes the takens of our situation, Transcendence functions some like the intentionality of consciousness." (Flynn,2013,p.66).

In Sartre's opinion in *Existentialism and Humanism*, there is another meaning to the word "humanism" that is "man is always outside of himself, and in his projecting and losing himself beyond himself that man is realized. On the other hand, it is in pursuing transcendent goals that he is able to exist." (2007, p.52). Since it is the man himself who need to realize this transcendence, he is the core and main focus of this transcendence. As a human being, at the time of his birth, he was put into certain circumstances. Although himself is the key factor to realize his transcendence, his interaction with the community or surroundings cannot be neglected. Thus, the active interaction with the environment, and the willingness to transcendent will lead to the

realization of the existence of himself. The protagonist suddenly becomes 'aware' of existence as a form of awakening is similar to Kierkegaard's idea of the intensification of spirit breaking through from its dream-state. In *Light in August*, Joe Christmas, the typical character who refuses to communicate with anyone, is the victim of both racialism and rigid religious doctrines. It was his feeling that he was imprisoned in and excluded from his white father's value system at the same time that caused the uncertainty of Joe's identity. No matter how his decision to refuse, no matter how heroic his will to persist, the whole himself was troubled in the social machinery.

Like the figure of Meursault in Camus' novel *The Outsider* has epitomized the alienated Existentialist: "he remains true to his own beliefs and emotions, and refused to accept the dictates and hypocrisy of public morality, even when it means his own execution". When Joe has the ability to think, he starts to realize the difference between him and other child, he starts to realize the connections between his identity and his experiences. Joe's paradoxical mind also illustrates this point that he is both a white and a black man, or neither. He should have had the right to choose to accept or not the ready-made identity pattern imposed by the south society. If he had the ability to merge or transcend the identities of southern society, he could have achieved a self beyond race. However, this grand and complex task cannot be accomplished for the reason that predestination was decided even before he was born. Therefore, the only thing he can do is to persist in his refusal, to persevere in his silence, and to affirm what is left of his human nature through repudiation and revolt.

Then after he goes to McEachern's family, he refuses to accept the concern and care of Mrs. McEacherns'. He thinks that he is doomed to accept the punishments. Then on his escaping from McEachern's family to the drifting of many places, he always tries to protect his true self and projects himself as a "other". This is also the key stage for him to get another identity as a "black", though finally he fails.

"he lives with negroes, shunning white people. He ate with them, slept with them, belligerent, unpredictable, uncommunicative. He now lives as a man and wife with a woman resembled an ebony carving. At night he would lie in bed besides her, sleepless, beginning to breathe deep and hard. He would do it deliberately, feeling, even watching, his white

chest arch deeper and deeper within his ribcage, trying to breathe into himself the dark odor, the dark and inscrutable thinking and being of negro, with each suspiration trying to expel from himself the white blood, the white thinking and being.” (p.163)

The existentialism emphasizes the realizations of oneself are through a way of losing of himself, the above excerpt fully indicates Joe's loss of himself. Heidegger introduces the Existential concept of finitude-each individual's awareness of his or her death, there is also the awareness of 'others' which demands that we are necessarily in some relation with others. Joe is a white person with supposed black, he could not been accepted by the world society, he tries to fully engage into the black society. His intention to be involved into the black society, to live like a black people is a sign of his denial of his white part. Later, after his arrival at the Jefferson, his avoidance to communicate with his colleagues in the mill all reflects his denial of himself. Even in the relationship with Joanna Burden who has the same identity problems, Joanna tries to obtain redemption from Joe but fails. Even in the end of his life, he couldn't break off the chain of his predetermined fate. Actually they both want to get realization of existence from each other, but their experiences and their faith in life prevent them from realizing the state of reality. As a result neither of them can get salvation. The faith in Joanna's prayer is a curse to Joe, he kills Joanna in the cruelest way. And Joanna's prayer for Joe is actually the prayer for herself. When Joe asks Joanna whether thinking about killing the man who killed his grandfather and brother, Joanna feels surprised because she thinks what he has done and what she experiences are what the Gods asks her to sustain, even her prayer to Joe and herself. She does attempt to do something to relieve herself, show her self-awakening and self-consciousness. But at that time, Joe still denies himself and treats Joanna's doings for him as sympathy. So kills Joanna and runs away. In his lifetime, Joe has been going on the way of searching of his identity. It was an old man's suspicion that caused the Joe Christmas spilt himself from the community. Racism was brought by nothing but preconception and misconception of the residents of Jefferson. But after he murders Joanna, Joe suddenly realizes that: “all the past was a flat pattern. And going on: night, all the tomorrows, to be a part of the flat pattern, going on going on, myriad, familiar, since all that had ever been was the same as all that was to be, since tomorrow to-be and had-been would be the same. Then it was time.”(p.211).

Joe starts to realize the sense of peace. Refusing to live in a contradictory world, he makes a reconciliation with himself. "I am tired of running, of having to carry my life like it was a basket of eggs" (p.294). "I have never broken out of the ring of what I have already done and cannot ever undo," (p.296).

His admission on his murdering of Joanna Burden and actions in taking the responsibility for his crime-the result is being sentenced to death best illustrates his determination to self-awakening. In Hightower's house, Joe finally made his decision to submit to the Law connotes, so facing death, Joe "just lay there, with his eyes open and empty of everything save consciousness, and with something, a shadow, about his mouth. For a long moment he looked up at them with peaceful and unfathomable and unbearable eyes" (p.349). "He crouched behind that overturned table and let them shoot him to death, with that loaded and unfired pistol in his hand" (p.449).

According to Existentialism, the realization of existence of oneself is through the active interaction between oneself and the community. At the end of Joe's story, he is not tortured by the issues of whether he is a black or white at all. His reconciliation with himself is the symbol of self-awakening and the face of death is his first step he resorts to reconciliation with the society. He achieves his freedom and his dignity through his death.

Existentialism asserts it is not true that man strives for his freedom without knowing they are going to. Just as once Joe projects himself as an "other" or "foreigner", fully repressing his communications with the outsider world. His reconciliation with himself and the outsider is his choice of freedom and he is aware of his actions and his thoughts. He realizes the existence of himself at the last moment.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

In the conclusion part, a summary of the whole analysis on the alienation in Faulkner's *Light in August* will be made based on explanation in previous sections. As one of famous stories of William Faulkner, *Light in August* raises much concern not only in the field of critics but also among the ordinary readers. Since its publication in October, 1932, *Light in August* played a crucial role in the growth of reputation of William Faulkner. In terms of narrative structure, unlike Faulkner's previous stories, its structure and narrative methods are not so complex as to confuse or distant readers when they first read this novel. At the same time, the theme of individual alienation of this novel is displayed gradually with the developments of plots. Central themes of this novel simultaneously indicate William Faulkner's concern about existence and development of human beings. By describing the unfortunate life experiences of the three main characters, the author of this novel not only vividly displays some problems left by the history but also pay his much attention to the living conditions of modern people. Furthermore, meaning and value of existence of human beings are also positively explored by the author. On the one hand, it is the concern of real "human beings" that makes this novel surpass a level of reflection of racial discrimination, religious depression and some other social problems. On the other hand, this novel achieves communication and vibration with philosophy of Existentialism which was one of the most influential theories in 20th century.

Based on the theory of Existentialism, this paper applied thematic analysis to explore the factors caused the alienation of the main characters as well as some solutions to eliminate self-alienated situation of them. In the eyes of Existentialists, the outer world is a place which is fully occupied by the force of alienation. Anyone who lived in this world always has the feeling of helplessness and loneliness especially when he has to face the sufferings from other people and horrify from death. At the every moment of living in the alienated world, a mixture sense of sadness, loneliness, tiredness, horrify, even the desperation leading to the results of self-estrangements, alienation and self-closure. The world in *Light in August* is a place full of extreme

racialism which changes ordinary people into alienated creatures. Moreover, when outsiders came into the Jefferson town, the natives ruled the strangers by wearing invisible mental shackles which was the production of the strict doctrines of puritanism and racism. Constrained by alienation, people who lived in the town of Jefferson were all inevitably became the sacrifice of force of alienation. All these sufferings from alienation are fully depicted on the three main characters.

Joe Christmas's life experiences can best illustrate the real meaning of Existentialism. With an uncertain birth, Joe spent all his life to seek the truth of his identity. Because of this uncertainty, no matter how much effort he paid, the value and dignity of an individual cannot be realized. It is no doubt that no admission and recognition from others for a modern man is a tragedy which inevitably leads to the loss of direction of life. Lacking of affection among family members, Joe actually alienated himself from the outside world. Mistreated on both physically and mentally by his grandfather, Joe was more and more curious about his identity. After coming to the town of Jefferson and living with Joanna, other people's unacceptance and Joanna indifference after her knowing of Joe's possible identity of black people gradually lead this poor man to the rode of death.

There is no exception for Joanna, the sacrifice of her grand mission of saving the black people, she also shared the similarity with Joe. In other words, this seemingly independent woman was heavily engulfed by her heritage of his family which pushes her into the vortex of alienation. Joanna Burdon was deeply shaped by her unknown grandfather who was an extreme racist as well as a crazy abolitionist at the same time. In all her life, the doctrines of puritanism about original sin and redemption decided all directions of her actions in saving the black group from the curse from God. However, all her help given to the black was conflicted with her own willing which finally brought her tragedy. At the last moments of her life, there were no sadness and sympathy instead of indifference and excitement about the murder causing her ending of her life. Although Joanna spent all her life in the town of Jefferson, there is no acceptance by the native residents of Jefferson. She was the twisted production of tormented by puritanism, racism and calvinism which tormented this woman to death.

As for Hightower, once an educated man worked in seminary before he came into the town of Jefferson, a person who has been fleeing from reality of life, from his responsibility for his work and his wife. The over indulgence of the past glory made him blind to all the present things before his eyes. It can be said that it was the memories of past ran out all his enthusiasm for life leading to his ignorance of his wife and his responsibility for community he lived in. In the last time of his life, he was driven out by the natives of Jeffery which was the most ideal place he has been longing for.

After experiencing the sufferings both from the outside world and the inner world of themselves, these three productions of alienation finally explore their way to liberation. At the last moment of his life, Joe Christmas forgave the man who ended his life. Not only did Joe give the other chance to the murder, but also he released himself from alienation. In terms of Joanna, it was the big fire that took off her life from the town of Jefferson and more importantly eliminated the crucifix carried on her back. As for Hightower, a dead-alive person, it was a new born life that broke down the illusion of the past to make him get rid of the danger of alienation.

Having been exploring, these sacrificial lambs of social alienation finally find their way of being themselves. All experiences of these characters also indicate William Faulkner's purpose of pointing out a spirit outlet for the modern men. According to the stories of main roles, William Faulkner reminded readers of people live in an absurd world to make right choices to realize true meaning of human beings. At the same time, the rebellious consciousness and the awakening of the protagonists also enlighten us a lot. Sometimes human beings are not free for choosing the environment they live in, it is just the attitude towards life they can change. When we are in trouble, it is the beings' subjective initiative that can make us constantly transcend ourselves. Only do we take full of advantage of the subjective initiative, the constraints of environment around us can be broken off to find a position in society where we can manifest the true value and meaning of a person. Besides, we should always bear in mind that we are the members of society where people are closely related and interdependent. No one can live a better life when they are separated from communities of society. However, the way how to treat the vulnerable groups and to prevent culture from lost also left us contemplation.

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