

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1 General Background

This research emphasizes human choice and freedom and also analyzes the sources of anxiety, nothingness, angst and alienation in relation to Coetzee's *Youth*. In existential philosophy angst has acquired more specific sense of having anxiety or fear as a result of the paradoxical implication of human freedom. It is a consequence of the meaninglessness of human existence or the emptiness of the universe. Angst, as it is treated as a universal condition of human existences, underlies everything about us. *Youth*, as the title suggests is the story of existential angst of a South African youth. The angst here is in reference point to John's confrontation with impossibility of finding meaning in a meaningless universe and of finding rational justification for irrational issues. His anxiety begins when his desire is defied by his destiny.

John's struggle for the existence is the prime focus of the study. The failure of rationalized categories makes him understand that the universe is not operating in the way he has assumed. This produces existential crisis and forces him to reevaluate every thing he believes. Coetzee captures the picture of a South African youth, who due to the existential crisis, does not find South Africa as the alternative location where he can complete his ambition to become an artist -a poet. John wants to transcend his marginal existence, to become a poet, but feels suppressed by the philistinism of his homeland. London is the only perfect place for him as he views:

[...] London, where South African do not need to carry
papers and where people speak English. London may be story,
labyrinthine, and cold, but behind its forbidding walls

men and women are at work writing books, painting paintings,
composing music. (*Youth* 41)

The protagonist imagines Europe to be the land of opportunities where he can experience his life and transform it into art. London is the place of his choice. Likewise T.S. Eliot is the literary figure of his preference. It is no coincidence that T.S. Eliot is one of his heroes. Eliot, he believes, is an example of a writer who was able to shed the limitations of his nationality, to reinvent himself and thus become part of the literary canon.

Protagonist's disjointed journey of life, runs in close parallel with his literary journey as well. There is a cumulative absurdity of John's bouts of mental torment: practically everything that happens to him triggers a fresh experience of self examination.

John is very much curious to know about himself and his inner talent as an artist. He searches for grace or purpose. But politics, isolated city life and cold human relations do not give him support. Nevertheless, as an existential man, he is not governed by the laws the society has formulated. He is in the process to create his own existence without taking care of institutional rules

We face an uncertain future, and we must fill our lives with our own choices. The dual problems of constant choices and the responsibility for those choices can produce angst in us.

In existential philosophy, angst refers to the condition of existence within anxiety or anxiety within existence. It also refers to human condition that is sense of guilt, regret and fear about the condition of the world around. We face an uncertain future and we must fill our lives with our own choices. The dual problems of constant choices and the responsibility for those choices can produce angst in us. It is because

of this condition that John struggles to exist in the land of opportunities—London rather than South Africa.

Young Coetzee's experiences are far from extra ordinary as they describe the common angst of every bright young man. In his novels Coetzee turns an existential spotlight on individual behaviour. Coetzee exploits the condition of Existential Angst in *Youth*. John, the protagonist does not find his native land, his people, culture and literature appropriate to establish himself as an artist. He finds his existence in native land to be difficult to endure. He disengages from the ugly politics of South Africa. It is the sense of Angst which gives rise to the mode of anxiety and despair.

The ambition, the drive, the effort is there but the more the protagonist clammers through life, the more he gets taken away from his life's mission. There seem to be too many conspiracies and power working against him. Sometimes he submits: sometimes he resists but destiny seems to have scrawled its negative verdict against him. As an existential hero, he plods along searching for his *métier* and his idiom.

Eventhough, the condition is full of despair and angst, John tries to define and redefine his role as an artist in the world, using Ezra Pound's dictum that an artist , “must be prepared to endure all that life has stored up for him, even if that means exile, obscure labour, and obloquy” (*Youth* 20).

This novel intensifies how the African youth attempts to create meaning and purpose in his life which is full of Angst. The only way to have meaning or value is through his own choices and actions – that is, if he is willing to make them and to take responsibility for them. This is what makes him uniquely human, what makes his stand out from the rest of existence around him.

Coetzee further stresses out a youth's struggle to find his way in the world with tenderness and fierce clarity and delivers a remarkable exploration of one man's struggle with meaning.

1.2 Critical Reviews

It is clear by now that the prime concern of this study is to explore the angst of a young man. When the novel was published in the year of 2002, it got a lot of critical acclimation by renowned critics. They lauded the book for Coetzee's artistry in writing. They have delivered so many criticisms and reviews from different perspectives regarding different aspects of the text. These approaches have tried their best to interpret the text and or make the text meaningful. Coetzee is not a writer for his sense of irony, but often adopts an air of quiet mockery.

Coetzee has used unusual kind of narrative in *Youth*. Occasionally there is direct speech. None of the shifts in discourse draws attention to itself: the readers move from one kind of vocabulary to other with little sense that the viewpoint has shifted.

Shhomit Rinnon – Kenan's discussion of free indirect discourse is relevant in this context. She views:

When different segments can ultimately be attributed to identifiable speakers and more so when they can not, [free indirect discourse] enhances the biolocality or polylocality of the text by bringing into play a plurality of speakers and attitudes. (133)

The plurality of speakers seems to include the present day author.

The author realizes that these difficulties were to have an influence on his adult life.

In *Youth* the need for commentary in an adult vocabulary does not oblige a narrator to

insert his views: the protagonist is adult, and presumably commands the discourse in which to reflect and understand events.

The irresponsibility of youth gives a cultural value to immaturity. Youthful emotions are the price of psychological development. In this regard Winnicott states:

The sense of guilt in adolescent is terrific and it takes years of development in an individual of a capacity to discover in the self the balance of good and the bad, the hate and destruction that go with love within the self. (175)

As a South African, the protagonist feels culturally isolated. He is aware that the Great Art that has shaped his sensibility is all imported, and with this realization comes a sense of inferiority.

Racial propaganda was typical of the national party at the time, the suppression and misinformation about South Africa's rich prehistory and subsequent volatile colonial history. Harald Leusmann also finds the issues of race and jurisdiction in Coetzee's writings :

Coetzee destroys the apparently moral foundation of our discourses: the protection of animals or liberalism, for example, or enlightened tolerance with regard to question of race or jurisdiction, guilt and atonement are likely to encounter anything close to justice. (60)

Coetzee is a white African in whose novels the issue of apartheid and postcolonial condition of South Africa are shown in a clear way. *Youth* is a novel about an individual and we can also compare the protagonist, John, with author's life. Margaret Lenta also observes the autobiographical traces in *Youth* (158).

The colonial mentality of the non western writers as well as people do not let them believe their identity and their literary tradition. The text, culture, custom and

history have their own values which must be judged from the particular social context.

Regarding this issue, Manuel Castells borrows the ideas of Communal Heavens as :

We know of no people without names, no language or culture in which some manner of distinctions between self and other, we and they, are not made... self-knowledge—always a construction no matter how much it feels like or discovery—is never altogether separable from claims to be known in specific ways by others. (6)

Heavens views that identity is people's source of meaning and experience which is socially, culturally and historically constructed and it is structured by institution and organization of the particular society.

Similarly, Lynn Meskell and Lindary Weiss consider this matter as: “Coetzee's allegory epitomizes the Foucauldian dynamic of power. Coetzee presents the post – colonial situation and brings a view of an obsessed life which is the cause of the colonial mentality” (92).

The colonial mentality of the protagonist brings despair in his life. The protagonist's problematic relationship with his country and his parents is the problem resulted by the colonial mentality of the protagonist.

According to Hermoine Lee, Coetzee has tried to depict the picture of a youth desperate to fulfill his artistic as well as psycho-sexual dream. Lee observes:

In *Youth*, Coetzee defines the young man's motives for flight from his family and the burden of racism in South Africa, but he primarily is concerned with the youth's behaviour and awareness after he arrives in England. The emotionally blighted youth expects to achieve artistic and psychosexual fulfillment in London, which he sees as an idealized centre of modernism. He [Coetzee] is following the path of such early

twentieth century writers as T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, when he has described as young colonials struggling to match their inherited culture to their daily experience. (6)

Youth is in flight from racism and political unrest of South Africa as well as from the emotional pressure of his family. As the character of Eliot and Pound, Coetzee's character, John in this novel maneuvers within psychological dilemma. There is a vast rift between what John wants and what he gets. The more he tries to get something the farther it runs away from him.

Regarding the connection of *Youth* to his former novel *Boyhood*, William Deresiewicz has read *Boyhood* and knows that *Youth* is a sequel to it, and that both works are autobiographical. However, Deresiewicz, despite the fact that his review is entitled "Third-Person Singular," deals with the third person used for the protagonist only in the last paragraph, and regrets that "these bizarre choices mean that Coetzee has turned his back on the entire autobiographical tradition" and observation that, in its reference to the use of the third person, is far from accurate. Deresiewicz is however referring at the same time to Coetzee's decision to write his autobiographical work in the present tense, and points out:

[T]he tension between the 'then' of the event and the 'now' of recollection has been fruitful for autobiographers as a means of drawing out the complexity of individual experience overtime. It is true that the distance between author and autobiographical subject has enriched autobiographies, but Coetzee has found other means of indicating his distance from experiencing child and young man. (6)

Since, Coetzee has been so concerned in his fiction with narrative mode and its effect on the reader, we must treat it more seriously than Deresiewicz does his decision to cast his autobiographical works in the third person.

Also, according to Deresiewicz, in many ways Coetzee's subject matter parallels to Joyce's. Different in temperament, their protagonist nevertheless sought to avoid commitment to any party or political opinion in their native lands, and this rendered them in human contacts. Each expressed, at least when he was at home, feelings of rejection of his country which sounds like hatred. Both behaved arrogantly towards their siblings. Both had problematic relationship with their parents, especially their mothers, and regarded fathers as responsible :

Most important, both left their countries in order, they believed, to become artists, and *Youth* and *A Portrait of the Artist* are their interpretations of the separation of their young selves from their families and countries. At the same time, they are the records of the separation of the mature self from the young self and the third person narrative is the means by which Joyce and Coetzee testify to this separation. (23)

Each depicts his protagonist's rejection of his family in a way that enters into the anger and disgust of the youngman, and at the same time registers his apparent heartlessness.

In this research, the focus is on an exploration of John's existential angst going a little beyond then the above mentioned critiques or issues such as Coetzee's autobiography, interpretation of youngselves, third person narrative, indirect discourse, plurality of speakers, terrific sense of guilt, race, jurisdiction, culture, history, colonial mentality and psycho–sexual dream.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

This memoir of Coetzee details the years as a lost and lonely young man, particularly his frustrated careers as a collage student in Cape Town. He denies himself as he disengages himself from the ugly politics of South Africa. He constantly tries to define and redefine his role as an artist in the world.

Some problems arise here. Is South Africa really a handicap for him? Can his flight escape the anxieties? Does London prove itself to be a land he wished for? Is he really in crowded isolation or isolated crowd?

The above questions will be answered in this research trying to seek some ways out.

1.4 Hypothesis

John's journey within self with the craze for better identification of his existence leads him to a severe angst.

CHAPTER TWO

Theoretical Modality

2.1 Existentialism and its Development

Existentialism is a philosophical movement of the 40's and the 60's which emphasizes individual existence, freedom and choice. It maintains that existence precedes essence. By this, existentialism states that man exists in the world in his own subjectivity, and wanders between choice, freedom and existential angst. This term "Existentialism" came into prominence particularly in Germany and France as a philosophical movement after the world wars. The sense of alienation and estrangement gives rise to widespread despair from the established order and values. These feelings of despair and streaming led to the idea that people gave to create their own existence and values because of the shattered condition of the traditional values. Existentialism evokes the human reality that human beings are thrown into the world where they are responsible for their sufferings and pain.

The development of modern existentialism was preceded by the works of the German Phenomenologist Frenz Bernto (1838-1917), and Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). They were immediately followed by the modern existentialists. German existentialism was represented by Martin Heidegger (1889-1979) and Karl Jaspers (1883-1969), French existentialism by Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-80), Spanish existentialism by Jose Ortego Y Gasset (1883-1955), and Italian by Nicola Abbagnano (b. 1910). The most forceful voices of existentialist thought were the works of the French existentialist: Sartre, Simone de Beauviour and Albert Camus. No one has contributed more to the popularization of existentialism of this philosophical trend than Sartre. In literary influence, the Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky in his novels presented the defeat of man in

the face of choices and the result of their consequences and finally in the enigmas of himself. Kafka in his novels like *The Castle* (1926) and *The Trial* (1925) presented isolated men confronting vast, elusive and menacing bureaucracies. In the art, the analogues of Existentialism may be considered to be surrealism, Expressionism and in general those schools that view the role of art not as reflection of objective and external reality to man but as the free projection of the human being (*New Encyclopedia*)

This philosophy draws attention to the void of human reality and admits that human being is thrown into the world where there is only pain, suffering, frustration, angst and so on. It is a 20th Century movement which embraces Heidegger, Sartre, Marcel, but its characteristic features occur earlier, especially in the 19th Century thinker Nietzsche and Kierkegaard. The existentialists do not go with the traditional attempt to get the ultimate nature of the world in abstract system of thought. In stead, they search for what it is like to be an individual human being in the world.

Existentialism as a family of philosophy devotes to and interpret the human existence in the world that stresses its concreteness and its problematic character. It is all related to human being and his existence in the world where there prevails pain and suffering everywhere .The term existentialism, philosophically, is applied to define and interpret the anxiety and the uncertainty of human existence. Sartre, in his book *Existentialism and Human emotion* says “Existentialism we mean to doctrine which makes human life possible and in addition, declares that every truth and every action implies a human setting and human subjectivity” (10). Ellmann and Feidelson define existentialism as “very intense and philosophically specialized form of quest of selfhood” (803). In this

way, the focus of existentialism is on subjectivity. It is based on individual experience rather than on abstract thought and knowledge which is foregrounded in this philosophy. It really concerns to the problem of man and his concrete existence and his freedom.

2.2 Different Views on Existentialism

Existentialism puts stress on the lack of purpose and meaning in life. Existentialists say that existence of human being is the first and basic fact. They say that existence precedes essence. This means human being has no essence, no essential self. Human being as a being is nothing. The concept of nothingness is the central source for freedom. Sartre writes:

We are like actors who suddenly find themselves on stage in the middle of a performance, but without having a script, without knowing what to do or say-yes, without even knowing whether the play has an author at all-whether it is serious or a farce. We must personally make a decision to be something, or other-a villain or a hero, ridiculous or tragic or we can simply exist, immediately.

(Skirbek and Gilje, 444)

We are free in the world and we have to make choices either willingly or forcefully. We decide for ourselves for there is no one to do anything for us. We choose ourselves as the kind of person we are going to be. Existentialists say that human beings are forced to choose for themselves, they have their freedom to choose and they are fully responsible for what they have chosen.

Existentialism is less of an “ism” than an attitude that expresses itself in a variety of ways. Because of the diversity of positions associated with existentialism, no single definition is possible. However, it suggests a major

theme that is the stress on freedom and choice. In this context Ryan gives an explanation of existentialism:

Hence there is no single existential philosophy, and no single definition of the word can give. However, it may be said that they stress man's concrete existence, his contingent nature, his personal freedom and his consequent responsibility for what he does and makes him to be. (639)

As it lays stress on concrete individual existence, freedom and choice, it gives idea that people have to create their own values. In this way, Rayan focuses on freedom of choice and self responsibility. Moreover, he finds man as a finite being and shows the human limitations. Existentialists really concern to the problem of man. They focus on man's concrete existence, his personal freedom and his responsibility for his choice.

The human being is thrown into the world where he struggles to be free. He himself is responsible for what he does; and his deeds are accountable without excuses. He must not move away from his responsibilities. He must take responsibilities and decisions. The world for human being is not pre-determined; he is free to shape his aim and his dreams.

According to Sartre existentialism is doctrine which makes human life possible. He declared himself as an existentialist in his essay "Existentialism and Human Emotions". For him, man is nothing else but he makes of himself. He believes that the existential man is not alone, rather he works or acts for the whole humanity. For the existentialist, especially for the atheists, God is costly hypothesis. He believes "There is no universe other than a human universe, the

universe of human subjectivity” (51). He insists that “even if God did exist, that would change nothing” (51). He further writes:

It states that if God does not exist, there is at least one being in whom existence precedes essence, a being who exists before he can be defined by any concept, and that this being is man, or as Heidegger says, human reality. What is meant here by saying that existence precedes essence? It means that first of all, man exists, turns up, appears on the scene and only afterwards, defines himself. (“Existentialism” 15)

By the phrase “existence precedes essence” Sartre means if there is no cosmic designer, there is no design or essence of human nature. Human existence or being differs from the being of objects in that human being is self-conscious. The self-consciousness gives the human subject the opportunity to define it and create his/her self by making self-directed choices.

The existentialists conclude that human choice is 'subjective' because individuals finally must make their own choices without help from such external standards as laws, ethical rules, or traditions. Individuals make their own choices; they are free to make choices, so they are completely 'responsible' for their choices. MacIntyre says, “Even if I do not choose, I have chosen not to choose” (149). The existentialists emphasize that freedom is accompanied by responsibility. The focus on freedom is not new with the existentialists. Renaissance humanists were also supporters of human freedom. They look very positively. Due to the freedom, man can expose unlimited potentiality. But the existentialists take freedom as a curse. Sartre says “We are condemned to be free”

(56). Because of freedom, there is no one to dictate us what to do and what not to. We have to do things by ourselves.

According to Existential philosophy man is a sole director of his destiny. In fact, existentialism goes back to man's pre-historical attempts to attain self-awareness and understanding of existence. That means the elements of existentialism can be found in the classical philosophy. The connection of being and thinking was Greek insight and it is this very insight that the modern existentialists are trying to re-establish. The ancient Greek thought was revolutionized by Socrates who shifted the attention of the study of philosophy from nature to man. Socrates asked people to understand the need of the self. He made people responsible towards the self. In this context Richard Tarnas in *The Passion of the Western Mind* comments:

In Socrates' view, any attempts to foster true success and excellence in human life had to take account of the inner most reality of human being, his soul and psyche. Perhaps on the basis of his own highly developed sense of individual, and, selfhood and control, Socrates brought to the Greek mind a new awareness of central significance of the soul, establishing it for the first time as the seat of the individual making the moral and intellectual character (33).

Philosophers earlier were concerned with the issue of cosmos. They tried to understand the functioning of the universe. But Socrates laid stress on human existence. Like modern existentialists, Socrates laid stress on individuality. For him self is prior to everything. The joy springs from the heart, not from external circumstance, that is reputation, power and wealth.

Existential elements can be seen even in the medieval age, especially in the philosophy of St. Augustine. Richard Tarnas, in *The Passion of the Western Mind*, supports it in the following passage:

Augustine possessed an existentialist's self-awareness with his highly developed capacity for introspection and self-confrontation, his concern with memory consciousness and time, his psychological perspicacity, his doubt and remorse, his sense of solitary alienation of human self without God, his intensity of inner conflict, his intellectual skepticism and sophistication. Augustine who could doubt in everything, but not the fact of soul's own experience of doubting and knowing, willing and existing thereby affirms certain existence of human ego in the soul. (144)

Medieval age was characterized by the belief in God. Everything was seen through the eyes of god. So man was expected to surrender before god for salvation. Augustine asked man not to go outside himself in the quest of truth. He affirmed the existence of human ego in the soul. He gave importance to the individual self.

The existential trace can be found in the works in Montaigne as well. He writes about himself rather than handling other issues. He assigns importance to the self. In the same vein, Charles Van Doren, in *The History of Knowledge* views:

Montaigne's main aim is to reveal with utter honesty and frankness the author's mind and heart. Montaigne makes no attempt to conceal his faults but he does not beat his breast, either and demand forgiveness. He is content to report what he is, what he thinks, what

he feels. He doesn't hide anything. He makes the exploration of his self. (89)

Montaigne in his essay reveals what he thinks and what he feels. He does not hide anything. He makes the exploration of his self.

Existentialism as a distinct philosophy began with Danish Christian thinker Kierkegaard in the first half of the 19th century. He was critical to Hegel's philosophical system which analyzed being or existence in an abstract and impersonal way. He served the study of philosophy to the subjective, emotional and living aspect of human existence against Hegel's objective and abstract academization of reality. Kierkegaard advocated Hegelianism. He discussed man's essence with existential predicaments and limitations: hope, despair, anxiety and so on.

Gaarder through his speaker Alberto Knox, in *Sophie's World* acknowledges "He thought that both the idealism of the Romantic and Hegel's 'historicism' had obscured the individual's responsibility for his own life" (377). Therefore, it is obvious that existentialism is opposite of idealism, abstract thinking and objectivity.

Although the classic forms of Existentialism are characteristics of post World War II philosophy, literature and art, we have already seen with Dostoyevsky, reflect that existentialist-like ideas were anticipated long before. The most important was certainly Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). There are at least three ways in which Nietzsche qualifies as a classic existentialist, all of which we can see in what may have been magnum opus, *The Spake Zarathustra* (1855). Nietzsche focused precisely on the non existence of God as implying that non existence of all value is one of the most famous saying in the history of

philosophy, “God is dead.” Nietzsche’s replacement of God is the *Übermensch*. This was originally translated “Superman”. It is the Latin interpretation of the word where “super” means “over” as does German ‘Uber’. When Nietzsche says man (*Mensch*), he means someone egotistical, brawling, aggressive, arrogant, and intensive. The superman is not vulnerable to taming domestically. The second most important thing is that the superman is free because all his own values flow from his own will. Value is a matter of decision and a matter of will. As the superman, whom we find triumphant, his “will to power” is free. He takes what he wants and does what he likes. He is authentic. The third point, which is advanced as the greatest teaching of Zarathustra, does the same job as Sartre’s redefinition of responsibility. This is the “Eternal Recurrence”. Since every point where a time like the present has happened, or will happen, itself also is an eternity of time before it, than what is happening now has already happened an infinite number of times and will happen an infinite number of times again. Though actions to Nietzsche are no longer good or evil they still do not mean that they are right or wrong after all. It simply means that before you do something, you must determine that you really want to do it.

Phenomenology and ontology have had remarkable influences on existentialism. Sartre and Heidegger were disciple of the founder of phenomenology. Edmund Husserl and Sartre, somewhat younger, were then influenced by Heidegger. Regarding their existential interest Skirbekk and Nils Gilje define the term phenomenology as:

Phenomenology aims to describe the everyday items that we use, as they appear to us: the pencil with which I am now writing is described as it is in this context. Phenomenology attacks the views

that the pencil is only a collection of atoms. In this sense, we can say that this school aims to reconstruct the universe in all of its diversity and fullness, with all of its qualities, as apposed to a one dimensional standardization based on scientific philosophy. (440)

With the phenomenological concept, all understanding and perception are subjective. An individual plays a central role in perception. The doctrine of intentionality holds that everything depends upon the consciousness of an individual who perceives things other than himself as objects. Phenomenology gives emphasis on the individuality. So the existential notion of individual can be considered as the systematic growth of phenomenological concept of intentionality.

This notion of individuality and intentionality influenced the existentialists. Stressing on the human existence, Martin Heidegger, Sartre, Camus and many others developed existentialism. It has become an established theory at present and is implemented in interesting literary texts.

Existentialism as a school of thought devotes to the interpretation of human Existence. The term “existence” comes from the Latin root ex “out” and Sistere from stare “to stand” (*A dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary theory*). Thus existence means to stand out in the universe. It takes human being as an isolated existent into an alien universe. The feeling of despair and separation gave idea that people have to create their own values. Therefore, one has to make choices and create self. One exists up to the extent one makes choices.

Existentialism is the movement of literary and artistic as well as philosophical sectors in the 40's and 60's. Sartre is also a convenient

representative of Existentialism and offers a definition for the word. So Sartre takes a convenient place to begin with.

According to Sartre the existentialist thinkers can be divided into two groups: theistic and atheistic. The theistic group includes Kierkegaard, Karl Jaspers, Martin Buber and Gabriel Marcel who are supposed to believe in the Christian faith. Theistic existentialism is Christian in its outlook. The main thing that sets them apart from atheistic is that they posit the existence of God, and that He is the source of our being. It is generally held that God has designed the world in such a way that we must define our own lives. Each individual is held accountable for his or her own self-definition. In the second atheistic group, Sartre puts himself with Heidegger, Nietzsche and other French existentialists who do not believe in god. The atheistic existentialists reject the concept of God as an authentic shelter. They regard human being as optimistically forlorn, free and supportless creature. The absence of God implies the loss of value.

Kierkegaard is an existentialist because he accepts the absurdity of the world as fully as Sartre or Camus. But he does not begin with the postulate of non-existence of God, but with the principle that nothing in the world and nothing available to sense or reason, provide any knowledge or reason to believe in God. His moral and religious seriousness offered a more promising basis for the development of existential themes than the basically nihilistic, egocentric, and hopeless approach of Nietzsche, Sartre, Camus and the others. Philosophers who make their own leap of faith to Marxism of Sartre or Nazism of Heidegger have really discredited their own source of inspiration. Thus, while Sartre achieved for a time a higher profile in the fashionable literary world, theistic existentialists continued. Kierkegaard's work also went on with updated approaches to traditional

religions. Atheistic existentialism exhausted itself. The effort of will is required for Sisyphus to maintain his enthusiasm. It is really beyond most human capacity and better the solace of traditional religion than the vicious pseudo-religions of communism or fascism.

Simone de Beauvoir stands very close to the philosophical outlook of Sartre. To say that she was close to Sartre and her thoughts are a mere duplication of interpretation of Sartre would be a mistake. She gives an independent interpretation of existentialism though not radically different from Sartre's. She chooses to concentrate on the personal and moral aspect of life. She also attempted to apply existentialism to feminism. She treats existentialism from very feminist point of view. In her book, *The Second Sex*, she takes the position that the history of attitudes of women has determined her own views. Audi says:

Her master piece, *The Second Sex*, relies heavily on the distinction, part existentialist and Hegelian in inspiration, between a life of immanence, or passive acceptance of the role into which one has been socialized, and one of transcendence, actively and freely testing one's possibilities with a view to redefining one's future. Historically, women have been consigned to the sphere of immanence, says de Beauvoir, but in fact a woman in the traditional sense is not something that one is made, without appeal, but rather something that one becomes. (256)

Beauvoir denied the existence of a basic 'female nature' or 'male nature'. It has been generally claimed that man has a 'transcending' nature so he will seek meaning and direction outside the home. Woman is 'immanent' which means she wishes to be where she is. She will therefore nurture her family, care for the

environment and move homely things. For that, Beauvoir did not agree with the way we perceive the sexes.

Albert Camus (1913-60), another prominent French existentialist laid no claims to be an existentialist. He was concerned with the freedom, and responsibility of the individual, the alienation of the individual from society and difficulty of facing life without the comfort of believing in God or in absolute moral standards. Camus opines that existence is absurd. His works are associated with Existentialism because of the apparent absurdity and futility of life, the indifference of the universe, and the necessity of engagement in a just cause.

According to Camus the modern world is full of injustice and any work is repetitive exploitative job. He thought that men should rebel against the absurdities by refusing to participate in them. In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus asserts that by refusing to surrender, Sisyphus, the representative of modern man, can create meaning through a free act of affirmation in which he gives meaning to a situation which until then had none. Camus, in “*The Myth of Sisyphus*”, says:

I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain! One always finds one's burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the gods and raises rocks. He too concludes that all is well. This universe hence forth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of the night filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy.(70)

Camus advocates freedom, individuality, choices and consequently the human existence. In order to get liberation from the anxiety of the absurd world, one may go to the rules of God or he may submit himself to the hand of death.

But either of these choices is ridiculous and bad for the absurd man. The living of absurd man depends upon the maximum struggle against this absurdity. The world is full of absurdity, but Sisyphus teaches revolt against action that offers freedom and justification of continuing life.

The absurdity of life is the first concept for Albert Camus. As Olafson remarks, “Camus believes in fraternity and humanism rather than in nihilism” (12). For Camus the condition of modern man is like that of Sisyphus. He says that condition of man is absurd. When the absurd man becomes aware of his failure of his futile living, he is naturally filled with anxiety and hopelessness but he does not surrender himself in the mouth of death. Instead he revolts against it. He views that the human being must not set out to destroy the absurdity, for there is no scope to 'leap' to Gods or optimism but face the absurd with courage. He writes in, *The Myth of Sisyphus*:

At the very end of his long effort measured by skyless space and time without depth the purpose is achieved. Then Sisyphus watches the stone rush down in a few moments towards that lower world hence he will have to push it up again towards the summit. He goes back down to the plain. (68)

We and our condition are not different from Sisyphus. It is like that of him. Camus says that absurdity does not lead to death but brings light by consciousness and also leads to freedom. In *Absurd Freedom*, Camus writes:

The absurd man feels released from everything outside that passionate attention crystallizing in him. He enjoys a freedom with regard to common rules. It can be seen at this point that the initial theme of existential philosophy keeps their entire value. The return

to consciousness, the escape from everyday sleeps represent the first steps of absurd freedom. (848)

It is because of the estranged, alienated and absurd condition of himself and the world, man strives of his self-identity, self-existence and his self-hood. He presents the nihilistic and rebellious hero, who seeks freedom and tries to get rid of absurdity through rebellion. For his rebellion is the major action for the way to freedom.

Kierkegaard supports the idea that self realization of the individual comes when he takes full responsibility for his life. He advocates that individual existence is prior to everything. In contrasting philosophy from Plato to Hegel with authentic Christianity, he emphasized the concepts of individuals, of choice, of dread and of paradox. He argues that human mind is free and he can make choice and decisions of his own. "It is only when we act especially we make significant choices that we relate to our own existence" (Gaarder 380). When a man comes to realize that he is solely responsible for his decisions and destiny he feels unnerved. So, Kierkegaard believes that truth is subjective. There cannot be any truth that is objective and universal. What is right and what is wrong, what is true and what is false, that depends on the individual's decisions and thought. He believes in the existence of God and not in Christian doctrine. He stresses that "Christianity is therefore not doctrine, but the fact that God had existed" (Ellmann 857). Though he believes in God, he takes it as a matter of faith.

Thus, he argues, "There are two options for the individuals to choose either he has to choose God and get redemption from the angst and ethic religious choice or has to reject God and go to perdition, and atheistic choice" (830).

According to him, the choice is, paradoxically, criteria less and it is individual himself who has to fix criteria by making choice.

Nietzsche, a German philosopher, was a radical critic of the western philosophical tradition and Christianity. He strongly emphasized that life should be the center of everything. Gaarder remarks in *Sophie's World*: "Nietzsche, both Christianity and traditional philosophy had turned away from the real world and pointed toward 'heaven' or the world of ideas" (455). His stress is on this world but not on heaven or on the world of idea. He proclaimed the death of God' and went onto reject the entire Judeo-Christian moral tradition in favour of a heroic pagan ideal. He called Christianity a 'slave morality' and half that religion provides no truth because God is dead and Christianity has become the shelter of weak and disabled people that he hated (Russell 732). In *The Death of God and the Antichrist*, he writes:

The Christian conception of God-God as God of the sick, God as a spider God as spirit is one of the most corrupt conceptions of the divine ever attained on earth. It may ever represent the low-water mark in the descending development of divine types. God degenerated into the contradiction of life, instead of being its transfiguration and eternal yes! God as the declaration of war against life, against nature, against the will to live! (912)

Since the God is dead, there lie many possibilities and choices. Nietzsche says that life is all irrational and cruel features hover round it. His stress is upon the individuals who confronts existence heroically.

Another leading existential thinker, Heidegger, was interested in the 'question of being'. According to him being is not realized in normal situation. It

does not occur all the time. It is realized in the state of boredom or anxiety. In

What is Metaphysics?, he states:

“It irrupts when one is bored, profound boredom drifting here and there in the abysses of our existence like a muffling fog, removes all things and men and oneself along with it into a remarkable indifference. This boredom reveals being as a whole” (4).

Heidegger made a distinction between beings and Being. The oblivion of Being (individual) into the beings (group) has made us lost in unreal existence (Ellman 879). He suggests that we return back into the ground of metaphysics and find the roots of our existence. According to him, to consider individual as the representation of mass is the recurrent mistake of metaphysics. He was with the belief that man should face explicitly the problem of Being; he has to determine his own existence, create his own possibilities and make choices and commitment. Human beings can never hope to understand why they are here in the world. Instead, each individual must choose a goal and follow it with passionate conviction.

Establishing existentialism as the humanistic philosophy, Sartre argues “By existentialism we mean a doctrine which makes human life possible and, in addition, declares that every truth and every action implies a human setting and a human subjectivity” (10). Existentialism, then, gives dignity to man. It encourages human action. He thought that there was no fixed human nature or essence and so the individuals has to choose his/her being.

Sartre believed that Marxism was the only contemporary philosophy that could recognize the human being's existentialist freedom. He made a contrast to a divine viewpoint on the world and on human nature with a human viewpoint

where there is no divine element. Human existence of being differs from the being of objects in that human being is self-conscious. This self-consciousness also gives the human subject the opportunity to define it. The individual creates his/her self by making self-directed choices.

According to Sartre, the individual has the potentiality to become more than what he or she is since “man is nothing else but what he makes of himself” (15). Every individual simply follows custom or social expectations in order to escape the angst; we have escaped the responsibility of making our own choices, or creating our own essence. We are free to create our own interpretation of ourselves in relation to the world, to create or project of possibilities, of authentic actions as the expression of freedom. Each individual has to make his own universe with a meaning of his own. Sartre claims, “There is no reality, except in action” (32). Sartre divides the living as authentic and inauthentic. He chooses authentic living, stressing that one must choose and make a commitment to make better. He mentions the nature of existence in his *Being and Nothingness*:

The structure of *Being and Nothingness* is clearly Cartesian, despite the strong influence of Heidegger at the time. On the one hand, there is consciousness ('being-for-itself or pour soi) and on the other, the existence of more things ('being-it-itself or ensoi). (379)

Sartre makes a distinction between being-in-itself (en-soi) and being-for-itself (pour-soi). En-soi applies to things; this means a thing is basically what it is. In case of human being existence precedes essence. Therefore, man is pour-soi: “The best way to conceive of the fundamental project of human reality is to say that man is the being whose project is to be God” (63). According to him we first exist to appear on the scene, make choices and create our identity. It is through

our choices that we create meaning in our life. Since our involvement in the world creates essence, there is no predetermined essence to govern our existence.

As a conscious person a man exists being-in-itself. No God is needed to account for his being. So, Sartre connects existentialism with humanism, not in the sense of regarding man as the ultimate end, but in the sense of regarding man as the creator of all values.

Camus declared the condition of man absurd when he realized that the speculative system of past provides no reliable guidance for life. When the absurd man is aware of his futile living, he is naturally filled with anxiety and helplessness. Then one realizes that forlornness, anguish and despair are the characteristics of life. To get liberation from the anxiety of the absurd world, if one chooses to submit oneself to the hand of god or death, for him, either of these choices is ridiculous. He believes that one needs to accept the challenge but not to commit suicide and bow before God.

Camus supports choices like Sartre. He emphasizes upon choices. Sisyphus is given the choices. He does not surrender to God and makes a choice. He believes that choice leads us to absurdity but joy comes out of that absurdity.

Thus, existence is the basic theme of existentialism. Being alive does not only mean to be in existence. And all the things and beings do not exist. One exists only when one is conscious of one's existence. Man is conscious, so he exists. Existentialists are obsessed with the meaning of life and focus exclusively on the individual. Though life is very difficult and does not have any objective or universally known value, existentialism attempts to find happiness and meaning in a modern world characterized by alienation, isolation, loneliness, frustration, inauthenticity and absurdity. Existentialism focuses that man is full of anxiety with

no meaning in life; just simply exist, until he makes a decisive choice because he creates his self by making self directed choices.

In *Youth*, the protagonist John suffers from the existential problem such as alienation, angst, meaninglessness, failure, frustration, absurdity, anxiety and so on. The succeeding chapter will analyze the text in relation to his existential state.

2.3 Angst

Angst, the German word for 'anxiety' or 'dread', was used by the philosophers of existentialism-notably the Danish theologian Soren Kierkegaard in *Begrebet Angst* (The concept of Dread, 1844). It is used to denote a state of anguish that we feel as we are confronted by the burden of our freedom and responsibility. It imposes values and meanings on an absurd universe. It describes an intense feeling of emotional strife.

The word Angst has existed since 8th century. The term Angst distinguishes itself from the word *Furcht* (German word for "fear") in that *Furcht* usually refers to a material threat (arranged fear), while Angst is usually a non-directional emotion. It is usually confusion and anxiety within the self.

The focus of the Existential Angst is on the feelings of anxiety and dread that we feel in the face of our own radical freedom and our awareness of death. Kierkegaard saw rationality as a mechanism human use to counter their existential anxiety, their fear of being in the world. He believed that if everyone is rational then there is nothing to fear. There is no reason to feel anxious about being free.

Regarding the concept of Existential Angst, Kierkegaard believes that it is a word to describe a profound and deep spiritual condition of insecurity and despair in the free human being. He believes that the freedom given to mankind

leaves human in a constant fear of its responsibility to God. His concept of angst is considered to be an important stepping stone for 20th century existentialism. Kierkegaard's feeling of angst is fear of actual responsibility to God. But in modern use, angst is broadened to include general frustration associated with the conflict between actual responsibilities to self, one's principles, and others (possibly including God). Angst is the main characteristic of existence itself. Different philosophers view angst in a different way. For Heidegger, it is that through which fear becomes possible. For Sartre, it is the immediate consequences of facing the possibility of nothingness. For Kierkegaard, it is a desire for what one fears. In his book *The Concept of Dread* he views:

Learning to know anxiety is an adventure which every man has to affront if he would not go to perdition either by not having known anxiety or by sinking under it. He therefore who has learned rights to be in anxiety has learned the most important thing. (204)

Anxiety is being 'afraid' when there is nothing to fear. We struggle with something in the dark, but we do not know what it is. But in existential angst, we come across with the fundamental anxiety of our existence. Therefore, to learn anxiety is to be able to exist within the anxiety.

CHAPTER THREE

Textual Analysis

3.1 John's Suffocation in South Africa

John, the protagonist of *Youth*, a 19-year-old South African Mathematics graduate, embarks on a journey to find himself. He lives in a room in Cape Town and attends the university. He studies Mathematics, English and Philosophy. He has several jobs to be financially independent.

This memoir of Coetzee details the years as a lost, lonely young man, particularly his isolated and frustrated career as a college student in Cape Town. He denies himself as he disengages from the ugly politics of South Africa. As an aspiring artist, he considers his home country poor material: “South Africa was a bad start; a handicap. An undistinguished, rural family, bad schooling, the Afrikaans language” (*Youth* 62).

Moreover, he wants to go away from his (mother) land, family, bad schooling, the Afrikaans language and the political turmoil going around the country. To escape his angst he wants to escape his native land. It is not only John, but it is every single youth who wants to escape the land of South Africa for their existence:

Not having proper jobs, they stay up all night and sleep until noon.

They hate the Nationalists but are not political. If they had the money, they say, they would leave benighted South Africa and move for good to Montmartre or the Balearic Island. (*Youth* 5)

John feels estranged and isolated from the rest of the existence. The very isolation disengages himself from his nation and pulls toward the land of his dream-

London. Though John works and studies in South Africa, his feelings of despair and anxiety makes his existence difficult.

Written in third person present tense, *Youth* might seem objective at first, but it turns out to be extremely personal. Throughout the book, readers will feel as if they are sitting inside John's head, sharing his psychology.

Intellectually, he is attracted to Pure Thought (mathematics) but he also wants to become a poet. Sentimentally he has to fight against his own depths of coldness, callousness and caddishness. He gives a very realistic picture of a youth's struggle for existence:

Happy people are not interesting. Better to accept the burden of unhappiness and try to turn it into some thing worthwhile, poetry or music or painting: that is what he believes..... Happiness , he tells himself, teaches one nothing. Misery, on the other hand, steels one for the future. Misery is a school for the soul. From the waters of misery one emerges on the far bank purified, strong, ready to take up again the challenges of a life of art. (*Youth* 14-65)

Happiness is not the thing that John wants to achieve and is struggling for. His struggle is to enable himself to exist in the situation full of anxiety and turn his chaotic life into an organized life of art or poetry.

John has a lofty ambition to become a great poet, like his literary heroes T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. It is his dream that strengthens him to struggle against the angst that he faces in South Africa:

There is a lesson for him in that, driven home on every page of their poetry- of Eliot's, with which he had his first overwhelming encounter

while he was still at school, and now of Pound's. Like Pound and Eliot, he must be prepared to endure all that life has stored up for him, even if that means exile, obscure labour, and obloquy. (*Youth* 20)

Pain and suffering of his heroes provide him with the inner strength to struggle for his existence as an artist. But at the same time he also senses that his future as an artist or a writer in his native South Africa is hopeless. He feels that his dream to be an artist, like his heroes, is possible only in London. John does not find South Africa as a country of his dream. His angst makes him believe that his dream to become an artist- a poet- in South Africa is not possible. He says that to some extent all human beings share a feeling of isolation from the view of the existential man.

John's feelings of angst set him apart from his family specially his mother. His flight from South Africa parallels to his flight from his family. Both escapes are responses to anxiety and dispossession. It is a flight from the oppressiveness of his family and the love of his mother. To be more explicit it is flight to freedom:

It was to escape the oppressiveness of family that he left home [...].

Now that he has his own income, he uses his independence to exclude his parents from his life. His mother is distressed by his coldness, he knows, the coldness with which he has responded to her love all his life. All his life she has wanted to coddle him; all his life he has been resisting. (*Youth* 18)

John's bitter relationship to his mother may contribute to his inability to understand or accept any women's expression of interest or affection for him. When any specific and actual woman shows interest in him, he can not comprehend why she is seeking his company.

John feels that it is part of the artist's job to have many affairs. But love affairs described in the narrative have a recurring bleak emptiness and lack of passion. In a love affair after moving from his parents home, for example, his relationship with volatile Jacqueline collapses after she reads his diary. She finds a variety of critical comments upon herself and upon their living together:

If he is to censor himself from expressing ignoble emotions - resentment at having his flat invaded, or shame at his own failures as a lover- how will those emotions ever be transfigured and turned into poetry? And if poetry is not to be the agency of his transfiguration from ignoble to noble, why bother with poetry at all? Besides, who is to say that the feelings he writes in his diary are his true feelings?

(Youth 9-10)

Such questions concerning the uncensored revelations in his journal are pertinent to the memoir itself. His relationship with women are almost entirely reported as selfish, unfulfilling, and even dishonorable. He is concerned in creating only great art out of his affairs:

He knows that to condemn a woman for being ugly is morally despicable. But fortunately, artists do not have to be morally admirable people. All that matters is that they create great art. If his own art is to come out of the more contemptible side of himself, so be it. *(Youth30)*

He loves women but at the same time he finds them disturbing him in his writing. He dreams of falling in love with film divas, but his own love (better: sex) life is not that of a 'fine' author. He is waiting for the inspiration and the right girl to come into his life.

The right woman will see through the opaque surface he presents to the world, to the depths inside; the right woman girl will unlock the hidden intensities of passion in him. Until that woman arrives, until that day of destiny, he is merely passing the time. (*Youth* 134)

He nevertheless believes that in encountering the woman of his destiny he will be able to achieve passionate maturity as a man and as an artist.

The angst of his existence in South Africa sickens when the political turmoil begins in the nation. South Africa has been cursed with a century of interesting time, and the early sixties were no exception. Both internationally and from within the country's own borders, apartheid encountered its most forceful challenge since it had come into power. Though he is surrounded by his private worries, he is not untouched with the political situation:

Wrapped up though he is in his private worries, he cannot fail to see that the country around him is in turmoil. The pass laws to which Africans and Africans alone are subjected are being tightened even further, and protests are breaking out everywhere. In the Transvaal the police fire shots into a crowd, then, in their mad way, go on firing into the backs of fleeing men, women and children. (*Youth* 37)

As one of the citizens of the nation, he could not be left aloof from the events going politically around the country. This situation furthermore increases the feelings of dread inside him. Situation is such that, nothing could be done or gained:

After the carnage of Sharpeville nothing is as it was before. Even in the pacific Cape there are strikes and marches. Wherever, a march takes

place there are policemen with guns hovering around the edges,
waiting for an excuse to shoot. (*Youth* 37)

John has no hope of continuing with his jobs and his study. He feels the shock of dismay. He is all set to leave the land for his existence: “Will the ships still be sailing tomorrow?- that is his one thought. I must get out before it is too late (39)!”

The young man is certain that if he follows his ambition of experiencing life to its full intensity, then it will help him escape the tragedy that is South Africa, with all its inequality and social injustice. He is in the quest, to be an authentic being. He tries to create his true self by the will and efforts of his own.

Almost all the characters in Coetzee's writing prefer freedom and choice. He presents his heroes as freedom fighters. His concept of choice and freedom is concerned more with inner reality of the hero. His hero is more subjective, thoughtful and alienated. Whatever his inner heart suggests, his character just does it. Life is not frustration, life is not disaster, major or minor; and life is not knowledge. It means open feelings; it means love for oneself and for human beings, and it also means confidence and faith. It is Coetzee's message which his hero converse in his novel.

John chooses to live a life that his literary heroes like Eliot and Wallace Stevens lived. The young man treasures his ideals with expectation of escaping South Africa and embarking on an adventurous life in a new country. It is his own choice. Here, his own words can be more relevant to clarify his choice:

T.S. Eliot worked for a bank. Wallace Stevens and Franz Kafka worked for insurance companies. In their unique way Eliot and Stevens and Kafka suffered no less than Poe or Rimbaud. There is no dishonor in electing to follow Eliot and Stevens and Kafka. His choice is to wear

a black suit as they did, wear it like a burning shirt, exploiting no one, cheating no one, paying his way. (*Youth* 60)

First, we exist, and then create essence ourselves. We are what we make ourselves to be. In that sense we are in the state of “becoming” not in the state of “being”. We don’t know what we become after all because we are constantly choosing and creating ourselves.

3.2 John's Sense of Voidness in England

It is not possible for us to exist or be without choice. Even when we are not choosing, we are still choosing. Since we make choices, we create meaning ourselves. Coetzee also supports the choice and freedom. He says that the enjoyment and happiness depend upon our choices and interest. To make our life as heaven or hell, it depends on our choice and responsibility. All our comforts depend upon the occurrence of eternal phenomena. It is our duty to confront with external phenomena and make our life meaningful:

Meanwhile, being dull and odd-looking are part of a purgatory he must pass through in order to emerge, one day, into the light: the light of love, the light of art. For he will be an artist, that has long been settled. (*Youth* 3)

John is hungry for excitement, adventure and mystery. Though he has a job as a computer programmer, his heart's great desire is to burn with the inner flame of the artist. Coetzee's hero seeks to cut themselves off from the part and to find an area in which self choice may become effective.

Coetzee's third person present tense narrative takes the reader right into the young man's angst in all its idiotic self-absorption. Feeling his isolation from home

and country keenly, he arrives in London not only as a foreigner from South Africa but as an artist-to-be. John runs off to London to seek his fortune. Later on he comes to know that even London is not the brilliant experience he had hoped for:

He is in England, in London; he has a job, a proper job, better than mere teaching, for which he is being paid a salary. He has escaped South Africa. Everything is going well, he has attained his first goal, he ought to be happy. In fact, as the week pass, he finds himself more and more miserable. He has attacks of panic, which he beats off with difficulty. (*Youth* 47)

Nevertheless, he achieves his first goal and should be happy, but he is not. The work at IBM is deadening. He finds that IBM is turning him into a zombie: “The building, a featureless block of concrete and glass, seems to give off a gas, odorless, colorless, that finds its way into his blood and numbs him. IBM, he can swear, is killing him, turning him into a zombie (47).”

A soul-destroying job as a computer programmer at IBM sucks away his peace of mind. Other attempts to do something meaningful work and to establish personal relationships ensure but the grand moment of definition never comes.

Yet he cannot accept that the life he is leading here in London is without plan or meaning. A century ago poets deranged themselves with opium or alcohol so that from the brink of madness they could issue reports on their visionary experiences. By such means they turned themselves into seers, prophets of the future. (*Youth* 59)

As a computer programmer he finds his days dull and boring. He could not create any better piece of art which he had come to London for.

John wavers between pretentious defense of his artistic purity and self-loathing assessments of his lack of talent and his unease as an outsider:

The poems he writes are wry little piece, minor every sense. Whatever their nominal subject, it is he himself-trapped, lonely, miserable-who is at their centre; yet-he can not fail to see it-these new poems lack the energy or even the desire to explore his impasse of spirit seriously.

(Youth 59)

Coetzee succeeds in defining the dilemma of the artist-as-a-young-man in sympathetic if angst-ridden terms that reflect the doubts of those who decide to devote their live to literature without any idea of how they can make a meaningful contribution.

John is in England. He is free to live his life according to his choice. He tries to fill his life with his own choices. Unknowingly the responsibility for those choices produce angst within him. Coetzee seems very satirical as he presents his hero being unaware about the term angst:

He would like to have a taste of Angst, if only to know what it is like.

But, try though he may, he cannot find anything in his heart that he can recognize as Angst. Angst seems to be a European, a properly

European, thing; it has yet to find its way to England's colonies. *(Youth 49)*

He fails to recognize the anxiety and fear that prevails within him. Not finding the angst in himself, he decides it to be a European phenomenon

John is exhausted all the time. At his grey topped desk in the big IBM office he is overcome with gales of yawning that he struggles to conceal. He had come in

London in search of true love and an inspirational ground to transform all his dormant vision and imaginations into fecund lines of poetry. Lonely and adrift, his search for true love culminates into random, hurried, even downright embarrassing affairs:

Will the woman who unlocks the store of passion within him, if he exist, also release the blocked flow of poetry; or on the contrary is it up to him to turn himself into a poet and thus prove himself worthy of her love? It would be nice if the first were true, but he suspects it is not. (*Youth* 134)

In London, girls pay no attention to him, perhaps because he is not well dressed or his clothes are not right. The city is full of beautiful girls but John feels it hard to get a chance to find out for himself. His logic of the destined one to see the artistic flame burning inside him is dashed. He feels as if he is in the process of losing the poetic impulse.

Coetzee's *Youth*, to some degree share a distaste for the prevailing intellectual ethos. It shows a profound sense of metaphysical disjuncture, and a corresponding existential struggle with the idea of commitment, even to the artistic act itself:

He has come to London to do what is impossible in South Africa: to explore the depths. Without descending into the depths one cannot be an artist. But what exactly are the depths? He had thought that trudging down icy streets, his heart numb with loneliness, was the depths. But perhaps the real depths are different, and come in unexpected form. (*Youth* 131)

John labors on until he finally has had enough and leaves his IBM job. Somewhere inside his heart, he feels whether he made a mistake coming in London.

As an existential hero he thinks Paris, the city of artists, could be more congenial, if some how he could master French. But free for only or few weeks, he finds that in order to escape deportation he must find another job. So he again takes work as a programmer.

John's life in London is dreary and attenuated: living frugally in a small room, subsisting on bread and cheese and apples; taking house-sitting jobs when he can. In Coetzee's word it is a heartless city where the cold seeps up from the very stones of the street, where the hours of daylight are spent in drudgery and the evenings huddled over a gas fire in a hired room with peeling walls and sagging furniture:

All in all, London is proving to be a great chastener. Already his ambitions are more modest than they used to be, much more modest. Londoners disappointed him, at first, with the poverty of their ambitions. Now he is on his way to joining them. Each day the city chastens him, chastises him; like a beaten dog he is learning. (*Youth* 113)

Despite his loneliness and misery, John feels that to return home to South Africa would be to admit defeat and he would never get chance to escape again. He feels that the piles of misery he is going through is like a test:

Through these balmy summer days, which seem made for ease and pleasure, the testing continues: what part is being tested he is no longer sure. Sometimes it seems he is being tested simply for testing's sake, to see whether he will endure the test. (*Youth* 113)

He could dodge the test that London was taking on him if he preferred. He could leave behind all his hopes and desires to be an artist and run away to Cape Town and never come back. But this is not what he wants to do.

His anxieties entrap him in a cold insensitivity toward the women and men he meets and inhabit his attempts to define himself as a writer. The provincial who travels from South Africa in search of maturity expects London to enrich him with emotional and artistic development. However, he imagines that Londoners see him as a forlon White South Africa in search of parents. He is not prepared to give up even though his approach to be an artist is unsuccessful:

Giving up undertakings is his father's way. He is not going to be like his father. So he commences the task of reducing his hundreds of pages of notes in tiny handwriting to be a web of connected prose. (*Youth* 136)

John wants to give himself a chance though it does not bestow any of her blessings on him. He believes that chance is unpredictable, and one must give chance. For the day when chance will at last smile at him he can only wait in readiness.

The plan at the back of his mind when he came to England, was to find a job and save money. When he had enough money he would give up the job and devote himself to writing. When his savings ran out, he would find a new job, and so forth. As he cannot succumb the job at IBM, he quits it. He leaves IBM simply to get out of IBM. Along with IBM he had joined the secret defense force too with TSR-2 project. But he has the feeling of guilt with this job as he feels that this job is like participating in evil:

From the frying-pan into the fire! What an irony! Having escaped the Afrikaners who want to press-gang him into their army and the blacks who want to drive him into the sea, to find himself to cinders! What kind of world is this in which he lives? Where can one turn to be free of the fury of politics? Only Sweden seems to be above the fray: Should he throw up everything and catch the next boat to Stockholm.

(Youth 85)

John does not get liberation from anxiety. Instead he finds himself both a beneficiary and a potential victim of the development of nuclear weapons in the Cold War. Coetzee's anxiety is not simply a coldness or gloomy moroseness derived from his artistic aspiration or from the emotional inhibitions derived from his family. It is, in addition, a generational experience. The political turmoil haunts him even in England. The feeling of angst inside him compels him to think about wandering to various places as he thinks to run away to Sweden.

Disillusionment, and the threat of military service provoke him to flee South Africa. He ends up in London, the city of The Waste Land, of gas stoves and cold-water sinks: that locus of postcolonial exile, black and white, classically rendered in the Trinidadian writer Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*. To support his living he accepts the offer from International Computers without hesitation. He again falls back into the work of a programmer:

Working for International Computer is quite unlike working for IBM. To begin with, he can pack his black suit away. He has an office of his own, a cubicle in a Quonset hut in the back garden of the house that

Incarnation computers has outfitted as its computing laboratory. (*Youth* 142)

He has been hired to test the programmes at the International Computers. It has assembled a team of bright young programmers, of whom he has now become one, in this rural retreat. As a programmer he will also have to travel to Cambridge University, which he thinks is the chance he got by luck:

He is in Cambridge, on the premises of an ancient university, hobnobbing with the great. He has even been given a key to the Mathematical Laboratory, a key to the side door, to let himself in and out. What more could he hope for? But he must be way of getting carried away, of getting inflated ideas. He is here by luck and nothing else. (*Youth* 157)

John considers himself lucky because he could never have studied at Cambridge, was never good enough for a scholarship. Before his task comes to an end and he will have to give back his key, he wants to let him enjoy while he can.

He does not like bad news. Particularly he does not like bad news about himself. He feels that he is hard enough on himself and does not need the help of others. It is a sophistry that he falls back on time and again to block his ears to criticism: he learned its usefulness when Jacqueline, from the perspective of a woman of thirty, gave him her opinion as a lover. Now as soon as an affair begins to run out of steam, he withdraws:

There is another thing he notices. He has stopped yearning. The quest for the mysterious, beautiful stranger who will set free the passion within him no longer preoccupies him. In part, no doubt, that is

because Bracknell offers nothing to match the parade of girls in London. (*Youth* 144)

His indifference to the world he realizes is the consequences of excessive intercourse with machines that give the appearance of thinking. He fears how he would fare if he were to quit the computer industry and rejoin civilized society one day. After spending his best energies for so long on games with machines, he fears if he was able to hold his own in conversation. Is there anything he would have gained from years with computer?

[A] tight little world defined by made-up rules, one that sucks on boys of a certain susceptible temperament and turns them half-crazy, as he is half-crazy, so that all the time they deludedly think they are playing game, the game is in fact playing them. (*Youth* 149)

Rather than becoming an artist and creating any pieces of art, he believes, these machines would make him think logically and make logic his second nature. The more he has to do with computing, the more it seems to him like chess. But it is a world he can escape. It is not too late for that.

Alternatively, he can make his truce with it, as he sees the young men around him do, one by one: settle for marriage and a house and car, settle for what life realistically has to offer, sink their energies in their work:

He is chagrined to see how well the reality principle operates, how under the prod of loneliness, the boy with spots settles for the girl with the dull hair and the heavy legs, how everyone, no matter how unlikely, finds, in the end, a partner. (*Youth* 150)

The pain of being and the struggle for survival does not end with marriage or settlement. Marriage: who would have imagined he would be feeling the tug, however faint of marriage! He was not going to give up his struggle just getting married, not yet.

One of his co-workers is an Indian named Ganapathy. Both are the foreigners in the group struggling for survival in the foreign land. Ganapathy, it emerges, is a particularly valuable acquisition for International Computers. He has studied in America, holds an American degree in Computer Science. Like John, he too, is struggling to exist in London as a programmer. He is not satisfied and disparages about International Computers and the whole Atlas project either. He feels he has made a mistake, coming England and wishes to escape it:

Coming back to England was a mistake on his part, he says. The English do not know how to think big. He should have stayed in America. What is life like in South Africa? Would there be prospects for him in South Africa? (*Youth* 145)

But John dissuades Ganapathy from trying for South Africa. South Africa is very backward, he tells him, there are no computers there. He does not want Ganapathy to go to South Africa because he himself does not see any prospects there (145).

3.3 England as a Never-Never Land to John

John wonders more than ever what Ganapathy is doing in England, in the Home countries, working on a project he has no respect for. Would he not be better off in Asia? Should he have a chat to him? But again he wonders if Ganapathy's destiny lies in Asia, where his lies. The fear of existential angst entraps him. He thinks

how it would be if he goes to China. He suspects that the Chinese have no use of computers. So, he writes to the Chinese Embassy in London about his intension and preparation to come and teach English in China, he says, as a contribution to the world struggle. What he is paid is of no importance to him. Days pass on but he gets no word from the Chinese. He fears if his letter is destroyed:

If so what is the point in letting the Chinese have an embassy in London? Or, having intercepted his letter, have the secret services forwarded it to the Home Office with a note to say that the South African working for International Computers in Bracknell has betrayed communist leanings? Is he going to lose his job and be expelled from England on account of politics? If it happens, he will not contest it. Fate will have spoken, he is prepared to accept the word of fate. (*Youth* 153)

He believes he only belongs to two worlds, tightly sealed from each other. In the world of South Africa, he is no more than a ghost, a wisp of smoke fast dwindling away, some to have vanished for good. As for London he is as good as unknown here.

Puzzled and baffled, the harder he tries, the more he feels sucked into the English middle class. He realizes that the combined effect of the wallop of neutral lives buzzing outside him and the constant conscience present inside him is shrinking his life into yet another inconsequential existence. He wonders if there is a way to recuperate, or it is too late. His friend Ganapathy advises him to try America:

‘You should go to America,’ says Ganapathy. ‘You are wasting your time here. We are all wasting out time’. He shakes his head. ‘That’s not realistic,’ he replies. He has thought more than once of trying for a

job in America, and decided against it. A prudent decision, but a correct one. (*Youth* 151)

The youth is poised at the edge of a decision to further his graduate study for a Ph.D. in linguistics in the United States. But he has the dread feeling that business in America may not want someone like him.

America is not England. America is hard and merciless: if by some miracle he bluffed his way into a job there, he would soon be found out. Besides, he has read Allen Ginsberg, read William Burroughs. He knows what America does to artists: sends them mad, locks them up, drives them out. (*Youth* 151)

He does not seem to be expecting to escape from his personal or cultural history as he did when he fled South Africa. Beside this, he fears the political tricks that powerful nations play with. America and Russia are competing for the hearts and minds of Indians, Iraqis, Nigerians; scholarships to universities are among the inducements they offer. He believes the hearts and minds of whites are of no interest to them, certainly not the hearts and minds of a few-of-place white in Africa.

Now and again, for an instant, it is given to him to see himself from the outside: a whispering, worried boy-man, so dull and ordinary that anyone would not spare him a second glance. These flashes of illumination disturb him; rather than holding on to them, he tries to bury them in darkness, forget them. He wonders if the self he sees at such moments is merely what he appears to be, or it is what he really is:

What if Oscar Wilde is right, and there is no deeper truth than appearance? Is it possible to be dull and ordinary not only on the surface but to one's deepest depth, and yet be an artist? Might T.S.

Eliot, for instance, be secretly dull to his depths, and might Eliot's claim that the artist's personality is irrelevant to his work be nothing but a stratagem to conceal his own dullness? (*Youth* 116)

Perhaps; but he does not believe it. If it comes down to a choice between believing Wilde and believing Eliot, he will always believe Eliot. If Eliot chooses to seem dull, chooses to wear a suit and work in a bank and call himself J. Alfred Prufrock, it must be as a disguise, as a part of the necessary cunning of the artist in the modern age.

He is killing time, he is trying to kill Sunday so that Monday will come sooner, and with Monday the relief of work. He finds that the only way to kill his loneliness and frustration is work. Obviously work is a way of killing one's loneliness. With the killing of time and isolation he waits for his destiny to arrive: "Destiny would not come to him in South Africa, he told himself; she would come (come like a bride!) only in London or Paris or perhaps Vienna, because only in the great cities of Europe does destiny reside (165)."

For nearly two years he waited and suffered in London, and destiny stayed away. Not having been strong enough to bear London and with the heart full of anxiety, he tries to get retreat into the countryside, a strategic retreat. He hopes, if destiny pays visits to him in the countryside, even if it is the English countryside.

But in his heart he knows destiny will not visit him unless he makes her do so. For destiny to visit him, he has to sit down and write, that is the only way. But he cannot start writing until the moment is right. A year has passed since he last wrote a line of poetry. He does not know what has happened to him. He wonders if art comes only out of misery. He questions to himself if it means that he must become miserable

again in order to write. To struggle for his survival and to escape misery, he hopes to write. He would like to leave behind him a little sheaf of poems before he dies:

As for his own writing, he would hope to leave behind, were he to die tomorrow, a handful of poems that, edited by some selfless scholar and privately printed in a neat little duodecimo pamphlet, would make people shake their heads and murmur beneath their breath, 'Such promise! Such a waste!' That is his hope. (*Youth* 58)

As a self-conscious man, John wants to enter the struggle. Unable to bear the terrible responsibility of his nominal freedom, he gives himself up to the struggle, seeking redemption perhaps through writing, seeking escape from the fear of angst.

Regarding the youth's increasing anxiety in England, Coetzee says that tests no longer come with fair warning or even to announce themselves as tests. The present tense exhibits both the youth's continuing perceptions of danger and the narrator's lack of certainty about the resolution of that anxiety. He is well aware that his failure as a writer and his failure as a lover are closely parallel. They might as well be the same thing:

If he were a warmer person he would not doubt find it all easier: life, love, poetry. But warmth is not in his nature. Poetry is not written out of warmth anyway. Rimbaud was not warm. Baudelaire was not warm. Hot, indeed, yes, when it was needed-hot in life, hot in love-but not warm. (*Youth* 168)

He has not ceased to believe that he too is capable of being hot. But for the present, the present indefinite, he is cold: cold, frozen because of angst.

John recognizes that he and his friend from India, Ganapathy, are two sides of the same coin. Ganapathy is starving himself in a kind of grief not because he is cut

off from his mother but of loneliness. Loneliness and isolation are the common factor he finds between both of them. He has this dread feeling that like Ganapathy he too might be fetched by ambulance from his flat. As long as he lives on his own, he will never break out of his isolation. To break off his isolation, the only way he finds is to write. As he is not prepared to fail and to give up, he tries to create perfect piece of art though it seems difficult to be created:

He wants an A or an alpha or one hundred percent for his every attempt, and a big *Excellent!* in the margin. Ludicrous! Childish! He does not have to be fold so: he can see it for himself. Nevertheless. Nevertheless he can not do it. Not today. Perhaps tomorrow. Perhaps tomorrow he will be in the mood, have the courage. (*Youth* 168)

The memoir is explicitly about the struggle of the young, late 20th Century provincial who struggles hard for his survival in the world full of anxiety, fear, loss and isolation. Nonetheless, he hopes to have courage to create a piece of art that he had dreamed of.

There were varieties of responses to the crisis of hope among people during and after world wars I and II. These world wars gave rise to widespread feelings of despair and separation from the established order. This led to the idea that people have to create their own values in the world in which traditional values no longer reign. The old values concerning human existence ceased to operate. Critics support that the idea of absurdity and purposelessness of man emerged in literature with the publication of *The Myth of Sisyphus* in 1942. Camus tried to diagnose the human situation in a world of shattered belief. In this incoherent, disordered and chaotic universe the individual destinies were obstructed and torn apart by the Second World War. People, especially the philosophers and literatures, could not believe in old

concepts like unity, rationality, morality, value and even in Christianity. They saw the world total absurd, incoherent, disintegrated and disordered. This feeling of an existence without justification became the main proposition of the twentieth century. Ellmann and Feidelson note that Camus sees the affirmation of individual's worth only through the acceptance of absurdity, repudiating the illusion of hope and ultimate meaning which enables the individual to recognize the peculiar meaning of his very condition: "In a hopeless and meaningless state, the individual is liberated to make commitment but his liberation only affirms the continual revolt against absurdity like Sisyphus" (806).

Modern man, especially after the break out of the world war, has been cast down a deserted land. He has been abandoned and rejected not only by mankind in general, but also by his nearest and dearest ones. Almost all the writers who wrote in the existentialist trend focused more on this aspect. Albert Camus, in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, writes:

The traditional values had been weakened by war, lack of faith in authority, attacks on religion, and the worldwide economic depression that cast everything into doubt. Camus was searching through his own thoughts about suicide to see if he could come to a conclusion about life that would be positive. (67)

Although, John, the protagonist of the novel belongs to the era of absurdism, he struggles hard to come out of the negative aspects of human existence like depression, frustration, pain, anxiety, alienation caused by modern society.

The feeling of void within him makes him seek for different places and cities, where he could in a real sense emerge as an artist. He thinks of cities like Paris and

Vienna as a place to get his poetic solace. But at the end of the memoir London is the only place, where he thinks, he could reside struggling with his anxiety:

He journeyed to the great dark city to be tested and transformed, and here, on this patch of green under the mild spring sun, word of his progress has, surprisingly, come. If he has not utterly been transfigured, then at least he has been blessed with a hint that he belongs on this earth. (*Youth* 117)

With his edgy style and tightly spun text, Coetzee delivers a remarkable exploration of man's struggle with meaning. The human need for attachment, protection and meaning may also contribute to the foundation of faith which we could notice in John.

The book ends with the young man not having written a single line to be proud of, but he hopes to. As an existential man, John attempts to find happiness and meaning in a modern world characterized by alienation, isolation, loneliness and frustration, in authenticity and absurdity. With his existential angst, he struggles to exist within anxiety and cope with anxiety within existence.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

The key contribution attempted by this research is to exhibit the struggle of a man for his existence. This vast world is engulfed by alienation, fragmentation, loneliness, absurdity, anxiety and disillusionment. Meaninglessness is the meaning of life. Suffering is only reward that people get in life. In this futile world the possible way of authentic living is to be prepared to struggle for survival.

John is the protagonist of the novel *Youth* and his choice is subjective because individuals finally make their own choices without help from external standards like laws, ethical rules or traditions. What is right and what is wrong depends on his decision and thought. The traditional values do not work. He takes his own decision and is not governed by any social norms and values. So John struggles against the prevailing system to affirm his existence. He is a lonely figure. He suffers from a feeling of angst. With his freedom of choice he struggles to overcome his feeling of angst: "Existence involves freedom and thought and action: Both our ability to be self-conscious and our ability to launch ourselves into action are aspect of human freedom" (Patrik 40)

The hardship of human effort in incoherent world can be perceived from the very beginning of the novel. John, the existential hero, from the beginning is shown to be struggling to find his identity whether it is for his survival as a human or as an artist. The monotony of completely futile events in South Africa creates a condition which in fact becomes a means to understand life better. He explores the possibility of existence even in the world devoid of meaning. Like Sisyphus, John struggles in the alarmingly insecure and incoherent world. Existence precedes essence is truly

applicable in John's case. He first believes in existence, and makes the essence thereafter. He exists, therefore, he choose to struggle.

For Sartre, as well as for Coetzee, existentialism leads man to a possibility of hope. John has the view that man is nothing else but what he makes of himself. He is sure in his individuality and subjectivity. As the existentialists show a fundamental existence of man unlike other beings, John has nothing to consider about, but he all the time worries about himself and the whole humanity.

John is in the quest to exist as an authentic existence i.e., human being. He tries to create his true self by the will and efforts of his own.

Youth is about confrontation with existential questions during the period of despair and anxiety. John seeks the answer to his question, by submitting himself to a painful trail of loneliness and voidness. He deals with disillusionment and despair. Though he is full of anxiety with no meaning in life, he creates his self by making self directed choices. Coetzee supports the idea that self realization of the individual comes when he takes full responsibilities for his life like other existential philosophers. Most of the existentialists have insisted that personal experience and acting on one's own conviction are essential to the truth.

John is aware of his own existence. With his exercise of choice and freedom he escapes to London. He wonders about different other places to escape so that he could fulfill his dream of becoming an artist. But towards the end of the novel he finds himself being able to reside in London. He says that the hopeless condition can destroy him physically, but he will take account of it as long as he is alive and able to write. He does not have fear of anxiety. As long as he will write, he will struggle and exist in any kind of situations. Though he does many tedious jobs, he spends his free time trying to write and thinking about his vocation.

Actions are the major themes with the existential hero. The hero has concept of free choice. He has no concern with moral and immoral things. With his dream to create a perfect piece of art, John engages himself in many loveless affairs and sexual relations. When someone does not find his value or existence in the society, the existential hero tries to establish it by action.

John, as an existential figure, is observed to find the meaning of life. Though life, he feels, is very difficult and does not have any objective or universally known value, he attempts to find happiness and meaning in a modern world characterized by alienation, isolation, voidness, loneliness, frustration, inauthenticity and absurdity. He focuses on struggle against anxiety for humanism and optimism. John tries to overcome his angst, confusion and anxiety with his struggle to exist in the world full of absurdity.

In *Youth*, Coetzee, like Kierkegaard, has tried to focus that individual existence is prior to everything. Despite of authentic Christianity, he emphasized the concepts of individual, of choices of dread and of paradox. Presenting John as an existential hero, he shows that human mind is free and he can make choices and decision of his own. An individual can make significant choices when he acts and then he can relate it to his existence. John's existence is meaningful only in the sense that he opposes the traditional propositions like that of Christianity.

Through the protagonist John, Coetzee evokes the anxiety of human beings that provides a lucid experience of freedom which characterizes human existence. The concept of existential 'angst' gives a meaning that there is anxiety in every individual's existence and every individual must struggle to exist within that anxiety. With this meaning, John tries to pursue his life though it is full of angst.

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