

**TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY**

**John as an Existential Hero in J.M. Coetzee's *Youth***

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**By**

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This thesis titled “John as an Existential Hero in J.M. Coetzee’s *Youth*”, submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Mani Prasad Dahal, has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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## **Abstract**

John is an existential hero in Coetzee's novel *Youth* because he struggles against the hostile circumstances as well as mechanical repetitive jobs with existential consciousness all through the novel. He chooses to be an artist, especially a poet in his life. He takes all the responsibility of his choice and has the courage to leave his parents to meet his dream. When he leaves home, the sufferings, miseries and anxieties of the world thrust up one after another on him. He is sympathetic in the novel, because he creates from the opposing forces and continues his life till his last breath. He takes all the hostile situations as a source of energy and is determined to reach to his dream to be an artist when he leaves the country; his aim to be economically sound is not fulfilled in London. He is failed to be a poet and economically sound man. Neither has he experienced true love which he wants to transform into poetry. Nor he can be economically sound so that he could devote all his time to be a poet. The destiny never favors him. He accepts everything at last and goes to work in Berkshire but his hope to get true love and creativity never dies. In spite of his failures and sufferings in life, he never surrenders before existence. He never leads his life to suicide, death and negativity. He continues his journey of life with positive attitude in mind and revolts against these meaningless, repetitive works of the absurd world. So, John is an existential hero in the novel.

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## I. Introduction

### John's Struggle for Authentic Existence

This research aims for analyzing *Youth* from existential perspective to explore how the writer creates the character like John to show the void of human reality. The human being is thrown into the world in which pain, suffering, frustration, alienation, sickness, contempt and malaises dominate over human existence. This research unravels how Coetzee's central character, John, suffers in this world. He moves through the different situations in the novel. He challenges with hostile circumstances which eventually dominates his whole life and makes him stronger to be an existential hero in this chaotic world.

In the novel, John is a young man who lives in a room in Cape Town and he attends the university. The 19 years old, John studies mathematics, English and philosophy and is engaged in several part time jobs to be able to be financially independent and not having to rely on his parents. John alienates him from family and he says that "each man is an island that you don't need parents" (3). This alienation from his family brings more challenges in his life. On the one hand, he is a student and he has to complete his university. On the other hand, he wants to be an artist-a poet to establish in the society. To fulfill these two aims he has to suffer a lot. Existentialists believe that human beings have their own freedom of choice. The human being is himself responsible for his/her own choice. John also makes his own choice which compels him to enter into miseries which ultimately results as the obstruction in his own ambition to establish as an artist, a poet. His ambition is to become an artist, a poet but he questions himself if he has that gift. He has his dream to be an artist in the future "[t]o emerge one day into the light: the light of love, the light of art" (3). What must he go through to become an artist and how does he find the inspiration? Does great poetry come from a life of despair, suffering, loneliness or love?

He constantly searches the true love to transform that into poetry but destiny never favors him. He handles different women and makes love with them but never gets anything except pain and frustration. After completing his university, John starts tutorial classes in the University of Cape Town. At that time South Africa was heading towards civil war. He cannot fail to “see the country around him is in turmoil” (37). He thinks the situation around him is not in favor of him. He feels insecure in his own country, after this John decides to leave the country. In spite of such situation, his stamina to live in the harsh reality is his heroic quality. War follows him wherever he goes and compels him to leave the country. Yet he collects his strength to continue his existence.

He believes that to fulfill his dream, he must experience hardships and loneliness. He lives in a tiny depressing flat, eats monotonous diet, read many books. His daily life moves this way. This way of life is to him is the life which a true artist must endure. Life for him is a kind of struggle. He says “he is in the fight for his life” (13). This line from the text clearly indicates that John is thrown into this world. To exist in this uncertain world, he is engaged in a struggle for his own life. His life appears to be just like a hurled stone in a space oscillating here and there without clear-cut ground to stand. It is not due to his weakness in character but it is because of hostile society and political turmoil that makes him suffer. However he keeps on passing through the opposing hostile forces which continuously follows him. John, the central character of the novel, is a South African struggling at the time of civil war. He is a representative of common youth at the time of civil strife in South Africa. He is deeply rooted in existential crisis. He is politically dominated and economically exploited youth. Nevertheless, he continues his struggle to resist the encroachment of all the opposing forces by having his strong determination to become an artist, a poet. He continues his further journey though it is surrounded by visible and invisible thorny bushes.

His life in London is not easy for him. He chooses different actions in order to fulfill his dream for which he is himself responsible. Existentialists argue that every human being is free to choose but he is responsible for his own choices. He finds the job as a computer programmer after rejecting several other jobs. He writes the thesis on Ford Madox Ford. He waits for the inspiration and the right girl to come into his life. He loves the women but at the same time they are disturbing him and he cannot write. His first ambition is to get the better job in London is fulfilled. He ought to be happy. In fact as the weeks pass, he finds himself more and more miserable. Though, he gets first aim but he thinks that job can't support him to make him an artist. IBM, he can swear, "is killing him, turning him into a zombie" (47). The job of computer programmer becomes failure for him. His final aim to upgrade him and to make him an artist dwindled down to nothing. When he leaves the job of a computer programmer, he takes the responsibility of his resignation from the job. He reasons why he left the job by saying that "gray heartless agency of IBM, the real world is testing him. He must steel himself to endure" (47).

In the same way, John's struggle continues with the hope that he will be a great artist a poet in the future. He faces every kind of challenges either happiness or sorrows. He wants to learn more things from misery. He believes that "happiness teaches one nothing but misery steels one for the future. Misery schools for the soul" (65). John passed the dead days of IBM, the icy winter of 1962, one humiliating love affair after another: in his life's journey. In spite of such eventual blow of suffering and loneliness, he never surrenders. He continuously struggles with the existence. He gets more knowledge from his miseries and prepares for his future journey to become a creative artist.

Existentialist opines the idea that we are thrown into the chaotic world. Every human being must struggle to exist. John, from the beginning of the novel is engaged in the struggle with different situations in his life. According to the existentialist, every



human being is forlorn in this universe. They are free to choose .They have the freedom to choose any course of action for which they are responsible. In the novel, John chooses to be an artist, a poet. To be a poet, he makes different plans that is the outcome of his free choice .He is responsible for all the choices which he makes in order to exist .So, John's life in the novel seems heroic because he chooses to be an artist and is ready to fight against the challenges which comes before him.

John's life moves through the different situation but without any pleasure and colors. His aim is to be an economically independent man and devote his life in creativity. Though he gets the job, becomes independent but destiny never favors him. His dream of getting true love shatters and he is no longer satisfied with his jobs but he is compelled. Every human being is compelled to make a choice and continue his life till his death. John is compelled to leave his parent because he wants to be a poet. Again, he leaves South Africa because he wants to be economically independent and avoid the South African political turmoil. In this way, Coetzee by creating the character like John shows that how human life is void and meaningless. He further tries to show that the human being is thrown into the world in which the opposing forces of life dominate over human existence. In spite of such critical situation john is shown as the determined in heading towards his final ambition to be an artist-a poet, is the central concern of the researcher. Despite such hurdles and challenges, John's continuation of life shows the heroic quality of John in the novel. So, john can be an existential hero in this disordered, chaotic world.

By applying the tool of existentialism, especially of Sartre, Heidegger and Camus, the researcher proves John as an existential hero in the novel. Existentialists are of the opinion that the world is uncertain, chaotic and nobody knows about his or her own existence. But human being, in the world are free to choose any course of action for which they are themselves responsible .John chooses to be an artist in his life .The choice to be a

poet compels him to leave his house . He takes the responsibility of his choice and involves in different part time jobs to join his hand to mouth. His ambition to be an artist compels him to devise plan to fulfill his ambition. Accordingly, he leaves the country and wants to get the better job with better salary in foreign land, in London.

Heidegger is of the opinion that human being must pass through the anxieties and the confrontation with death leads man to a real 'Being'. While in London, John has to pass through the anxieties, loneliness, despairs which he takes as a common phenomenon and confronts with death for his authentic living. The anxieties that he cannot be satisfied with his job of IBM, the loneliness when he leaves the IBM, and the acceptance of death at last is explicit when he says that "the ambulance man fetched Ganapathy and one day they may come and fetch me too" (169). The lines in the text clearly shows that the prime objective of John is the investigation or search for being and more particularly man's being, 'dasein' in Heideggerian term .

The meaninglessness and absurdity is crystal clear when we see the John's efforts to find out the true love. His desperate search for true love and his mechanical change of girl friends one after another is absurd in the novel. His affairs with Jacqueline, Sarah, Caroline returns nothing at all to him except obstruction to his creative work. Albert Camus with reference to Sisyphus shows our mechanical, repetitive jobs which are the sources of meaninglessness and absurdity. John, in the novel continuously struggles to its maximum level. His effort to get the true love does not stop till the end of the novel .The mechanical work in IBM which he accepts it commonly. His efforts to establish economically and his search for creativity continue. In the novel, John moves through failures, anxieties, loneliness and mechanical repetitive work. He accepts everything as a reality and continues his action. Therefore, the evidences found in the text related to existentialism, especially existential hero, helps to prove the research.

This novel is about alienation and suffering. The suffering begins from the very beginning of the novel till the end. The constant suffering and alienation steels John and makes him able to struggle in this world. Webster dictionary defines hero as "a person admired for his courage and nobility or a central male character in a novel or a poem whom the reader or audience sympathies and admire for his outstanding qualities" (668). On the other hand, Oxford dictionary defines hero as a person showing great determination to succeed or to achieve especially something difficult. So, hero is a person having qualities like courage, nobility, honesty, determination, sympathetic, adventurous. In the novel, John does not involve in battlefield of any kind but does struggle to establish himself as an artist especially a poet. Coetzee's novel *Youth* exposes the central character, John moves through the different situations where he challenges with alienation from his family, his frustration with the different jobs he handles which becomes a big obstruction for his creative life. Instead of his constant suffering and alienation he continues his struggle and never becomes tired off which is his noble quality can be seen. So, he is an existential hero not in battlefield but against this human existence.

On the one hand, John is adventurous in the sense that he begins his two adventures one at a time. First his physical adventure from Cape Town to London to get the reputed job to establish himself in the society. On the other hand, he adventures for his inner awakening to be a creative artist. To be an artist he investigates the real life of different artists like T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. What must he go through to become an artist and how does he find the inspiration? Does great poetry come from the life of despair, suffering, loneliness or love? He constantly looks for guidance in works of T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound and Picasso. John desperately searches for his dream that seems so far away. So, his life itself becomes adventurous in the journey of his own inner and outer life of existence. John's determined soul never stops and he quests for experiencing beauty or

creativity through the experience of love. The tremendous experience of love which he wants to transform into creativity results into nothing at all. But his journey does not stop rather continues till the last breath of his life. This determination to fulfill his dream shows his vigor quality of a hero which is against human existence.

J.M. Coetzee's *Youth* has remained one of the most critically acclaimed novels in English literature since its publication in 2003. Many critics have analyzed the text from different perspectives. One of the Coetzee's critics Hermoine Lee observes technical aspect of the novel. He says:

In his portrait of the artist as a young man, Coetzee is even harsher towards his youthful self than Joyce was to Stephen's high aspiration. Joyce depicts young Stephen Deadalus as he prepares for flight from the cultural and religious limitations of provincial Ireland to the detachments of motives for flight from his family and the burdens 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 center of modernism. (6)

Lee says that in *Youth* Coetzee is following the path of such early twentieth century writers as T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, whom he has described as young colonial struggling to match their inherited culture to their daily experience. If the question 'who am I?' impels the writing of an autobiography then Coetzee's answer identifies three interwoven influences: political structures, artistic models and personal emotional needs. In all these sources of the self definition, however the *Youth* is experiencing anxieties of dispossession. Lee has focused on the aspect of modernism. He says the novel talks about autobiography of the writer. The autobiographical aspects of the novel are interwoven with political

structure, artistic models and personal emotional needs of the writer. Lee is of the opinion that the novel is autobiographical which expresses the author's own reality of his life and on the other hand, he talks from modernist point of view.

Coetzee writes with eloquence and honesty about the big decision in life which for some people looms larger and are felt more acutely. The delicate imbalance of Politics and society in South Africa in the 1950's is handled adroitly. Donald Vanouse in his book, *Anxiety in England*, says that the experiences that John experiences are generational experience. This becomes clear when he says that "Coetzee's anxiety is not simply a coldness or gloomy morseness derived from his artistic aspirations or from the emotional inhibitions derived from his family. It is in addition a generational experience" (6). Another critic C. Bollas goes beyond the explanation of generational experience in the novel. He opines that:

The youth's experiences in England do not lead him toward a personal and liberation from anxiety. In fact in England as a foreigner, he discovers a deeper personal loneliness, and in his last job in England, he works with the TSR-2 Atlas project computers in weapons research. Having escaped from the shame and guilt of being a white South African, he finds himself both a beneficiary and a potential victim of the development of unclear weapons in the cold war. He discusses the terror he experiences in England during the Cuban missile crisis and the irony of escaping from the bullies of South Africa to the position of siding with the Americans who behave like bullies in Europe as all over the world. (7)

C. Bollas explores the sense of escapism in the novel. He says that Coetzee's hero is an escapist. Coetzee's hero underlies the philosophy of escape from history and politics. John succeeds to escape from what he calls politics and its violence imposed upon him. But he

is not an escapist. He is an existential hero who accepts and rejoices such eventual blow of suffering and fragmentation.

Different critics have analyzed Coetzee's *Youth* from various perspectives. But the researcher tries to explore John as an existential hero and wants to see *Youth* from existential perspective. To prove John as an existential hero, the researcher applies the concept of the freedom of choice of Sartre, the authentic existence of Heidegger and the concept of revolt against absurdity of Camus to prove John as an existential hero.

In order to prove the hypothesis, the researcher has divided the work into four chapters including the introductory chapter that highlights the research issue that John as an existential hero in the novel. It gives the clear picture that how existentialism especially of Sartre, Heidegger and Camus is applied to prove John as an existential hero in Coetzee's *Youth*. The textual evidences related to existential hero are put in introductory chapter to mirror the whole research.

In the second chapter, existentialism, especially Sartre's concepts of freedom of choice is thoroughly analyzed. Every human being is thrown into the universe and they have to make choices in order to exist is vividly clarified. Heidegger's concept on existentialism that how does human being create essence in life and how he leads to live an authentic life is included in this chapter. Albert Camus talks about the meaninglessness and absurdity in life. He talks about the sources of the meaninglessness and absurdity in human life. He says human life is absurd by the reference of mythical hero Sisyphus. He links the mechanical, repetitive works of Sisyphus with human being then shows us the source of meaninglessness and absurdity in human life. He says the meaninglessness and absurdity can be overcome by the revolt against this absurdity. He further adds the revolt is possible through maximum struggle against absurdity. Hence, John overcomes the meaninglessness and absurdity of his life and lives heroically by his continuous struggle against absurdity.

The third section of this research is textual analysis where the researcher has proved John as an existential hero by the theory of existentialism especially of Sartre, Heidegger and Camus. John, the central character of Coetzee's *Youth* is thrown into a chaotic world. He is free to choose and chooses to be an artist in his life. He takes all the responsibility of his choice and leaves home to be a poet. To meet his ambition, he leaves South Africa gets the job in England but fails to meet his ambition to be a poet. The responsibility of his choice while he leaves his parents in South Africa and his job in England at IBM gives him pressure and he suffers a lot. He passes through the loneliness when he leaves the parents and the job at IBM. The anxieties recur one after another in his life. He wants to get true love but doesn't, tries to get better job with better salary is never fulfilled, the constant anxieties recur on his way to fulfill the ambition. When he passes through anxieties, he comes very close to 'dread'. The recurrent anxieties in life lead him to confront with death. So he enters into authentic existence according to Heidegger.

Thus, the meaninglessness and absurdity arises in John's life when he searches true love. To get true love, he changes girl friends and makes love with them one after another. This effort to get true love is his meaningless effort. The experience of true love which he wants to transform into poetry seems a faraway dream but his hope to get true love continues till the last section of the novel. The mechanical and repetitive work at IBM office in London makes his life absurd. But his hope to fulfill ambition never dies. He revolts against absurdity and meaninglessness when he continuously engages to his works. He is determined to his ambition, honest towards duty, sympathetic because he creates from miseries and frustration in life. He is courageous because he leaves his parents to fulfill ambition. By his hard work, he revolts against these meaninglessness and absurdity of life. Because of these deserving qualities John is proved as an existential hero in the

novel. The last chapter concludes the whole thesis by reinforcing the idea of existential hero and John as an existential hero of the novel.



## II. Methodology

### Existentialism and Concept of Heroism in Existentialism

Existentialism is a philosophy that originated especially after the Second World War in Europe. The term is a compound word of 'exist' and 'essence'. It means 'existence' that comes before 'essence'. That is to say, man exists before he acquires essence, a definite individuality. It insists that human being must change their existence into essence by asserting his freedom and making his own character. Richard Tarnas defines existentialism as:

. . . a mode and philosophy reflecting a pervasive spiritual crisis in modern culture. It addresses the most fundamental naked concerns of human existence –suffering and death, loneliness, guilt, spiritual emptiness, and ontological insecurity, the sense of cosmic absurdity, the frailty of human reason and the tragic impasse of the human condition. Man is condemned to be free. (389)

According to Tarnas, man faces the necessity of choice and thus knows the continual burden of errors. He lives in constant ignorance of his future, thrown into a finite existence bounded at each end by nothingness. The infinity of human aspiration is defeated before the finitude of human possibility.

Similarly, Gaarder in *Sophie's World* says that "both the idealism of the Romantics 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. In the view of Rene Welleck, "existentialism is a last and vital trend in this century. It dominated French and German intellectual scene after the Second World War"(82). He further clarifies the term that "if we interpret it as a philosophy of despair, of fear and trembling, of man's exposition to a hostile universe the reasons for its spread are

not far to seek” (82). In terms of its function and nature Encyclopedia Britannica defines existentialism as:

It can insist on the transcendence of being with respect to existence, and by holding this transcendence to be the origin or foundation of existence it can thus assume a theistic form. On the other hand, it can hold that human existence posing itself with absolute freedom creating itself by itself, thus assuming to itself the function of god. As such existentialism presents itself as a radical atheism.

The term existentialism is defined in two different ways: atheistic existentialism and theistic existentialism. Theistic existentialism is taken as an old concept of Christian faith. These existentialists believe in god and his existence. They say that “god exists first then the man exists” (17). Theistic existentialists argue that anxiety of modern man can be entertained when one submits oneself to the will of god. On the other hand, atheistic existentialist avoids the concept of god as an authentic shelter. They regard human being as optimistically forlorn, free and supportless creature. In such division of existentialist condition the atheist existentialist create a system in which the individual is paradoxically free and charged to choose a rugged path in life. When an individual chooses to come face to face with ‘dread’ he comes very close to ‘angst’. When angst passes through human soul, he comes very close to authentic existence.

The theistic existentialists have added some bricks for the spread of the movement. The prominent among them is Kirkegaard and Karl Jaspers. For Kirkegaard, as for the later existentialist, the most extra feeling of human life is anguish ‘angst’, which accompanies us at environment. He says that “wish to avoid ourselves, when we should choose ourselves. We live in time, loosing ourselves there in its contents, but if we face ourselves there in a chance that we shall break through time, into eternity, finding God in the eternal

movements”(183). In true sense, we can say about Kirkegaard that he was really the precursor and forerunner of the existentialist movement. The main theme of his writings is ‘Truth is subjectivity’. He attacked what he felt to be the sterile metaphysics of Hegel and the worldliness of the Danish Church.

Similarly, Jaspers is of the opinion that communication is the way to truth in all its forms. Thus the intellect finds clarity only in discussion and experiences. The self does not exist as a transcendent reality constituting a separate world, different from the world of our experience (432). Instead, there is only one world, which we may more properly appreciate as an appearance of the self. This existential exposition is supreme of all theoretical objective facts, but this supremacy does not lead us to a superior being. Self is will in itself. The will is creative and it creates itself which is consciousness. The existential self is thus related to consciousness and to the world and therefore, to the historical situation in which it finds itself. Illman and Feidelson commenting Jaspers writes:

The individual cannot live fully if there is no another being to communicate with him.

Jaspers is very close with all things around him. We can not have objective possession of a truth that is eternal truth, and because being there is possible only with other being there, and existence can come into its own only with other existence, communication is the form in which truth is revealed in time. (866)

Jaspers wants to create a balance between rational and irrational movement of self. The truth is that it possesses a perpetual question without which we turn back into the more or less dirty stereotype of self satisfaction, which is inadequately thought. The possible truth and reality can sheath in despair, anxiety, suicide, and dark passion. The existential root is not destructive will but a salvation from nihilism because it preserves confidence through its movement.

Jean Paul Sartre, ranking himself to the group of atheistic one along with Heidegger, and French existentialist, includes Jaspers and Gabriel Marcel to the theistic group. Whether they believe in religious mysticism or repudiate the concept of god as an authentic shelter. What they have in common is that they think that 'existence precedes essence'. Sartre's vision of existentialism lays emphasis upon the existence of individual. First of all, "man exists, turns up and appears on the scene and only afterward defines himself" (13). Man is free and in this act of choosing freely from different possibilities, the individual shapes his existence. There is dynamic quality in human existence. The individual has the potency to become more than what she/ he is "man is nothing but what he makes of himself". For the existentialist man is responsible for his own action and its effects. It is feeling of freedom and responsibility that is the source of man's 'anguish (18-19). Anguish is an emotion common to all human being confronting life's problem. Kierkegaard's anguish can be relieved by the transcendent faith in god. According to University Encyclopedia, atheist denies the existence of god and stress upon man's absolute freedom to choose with resolving anguish and despair. Existentialism is defined in Encyclopedia Britannica as the investigation of the meaning of being.

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 strict definition is possible. However, it suggests a major theme that is the stress on concrete individual human existence. Regarding its subjectivity, individual freedom and choice Rayan explains existentialism:

Hence there is no single existentialist philosophy, and no single definition of the word can be given. However, it may be said that with the existentialist the problem the existentialist the problem of man is central and 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)

In this way, Rayan focuses on freedom to choose and responsible that is for himself only. Moreover, he finds as a finite being and shows the human limitations. Existentialist really concern to the problem of man. They focus on man's concrete existence his personal freedom and his responsibility for his choice.

In addition to this, existentialism is also defined as a revolt against traditional European philosophy which takes philosophy as a science. Traditional philosophers procured knowledge that would be implied that the human has no essence, no essential self, and is no more than what he is; he is only the sum of life in so far that he has created and achieved for him, we may use the following extract to clarify sartre's view:

We are like actors who suddenly find themselves on stage in the middle of a performance, but without having a script, without knowing the name of the play or what role they are playing, without knowing what to do or say yes, without even knowing whether the play has an author at all – whether it is serious or force. We must personally make decisions to be, something or other a villain or a hero, ridiculous or tragic. Or, we can simply exit, immediately. But that is also choosing a role and that choice, too is made without our ever knowing what the performance was about. (444)

This is how we are plunged into existence. We exist we find ourselves here free, because here are not prescriptions – and we must decide for ourselves, define ourselves as the kind of person we are going to be. The essence thus follows existence.

The existentialists are of the opinion that human choice is 'subjective', because the individuals must make their own choices finally without help from such external standards as laws, ethical rules, or traditions. Because individuals make their own choices, they are

free because they choose freely; they are completely responsible for their choices. In this regard Macintyre agrees that “even if I do not choose, I have chosen not to choose” (149). The existentialists emphasize that freedom is necessarily accompanied by responsibility. Furthermore, since individuals are forced to further more, since individuals, are forced to choose for themselves, they have their freedom and therefore their responsibility thrust upon them. Sartre says that they are condemned to be free.

Similarly, existentialism focuses on the lack of meaning and purpose in life, and solitude of human existence. This human being must be accountable without excuse. The human being must not miss a way from responsibilities. He needs to take decisions and assume responsibilities. There is no significance in this world and universe. The human being cannot find any purpose in life; his existence is only a contingent fact. If human being rejects the false pretensions like the illusions of his existence having a meaning he encounters the absurdity and the futility of life. Therefore man’s role in the world is not predetermined or fixed: every person is compelled to make a choice, choice is the thing that human being must make. The trouble is that most often the human being refers to choose. Hence he cannot realize his freedom and the futility of his existence Rayan thus summarizes this concept:

Man is free and responsible but he is responsible only to himself. As with Nietzsche, man creates moral values. Besides being free, man is a finite and contingent being, existing in a world that is devoid of purpose. The pessimism resulting from this position is likewise expressed by Camus doctrine of ‘the absurd’. Absurdity or contradiction arises from the clash between human hopes and desires and the meaningless universe into which man has been thrown. (639)

Furthermore, Camus has of the opinion that human existence is absurd. The modern world is full of injustice and millions work in repetitive exploitation jobs. He thought that we should rebel against these 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. In the “Myth of Sisyphus”, Camus says:

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

In order to get the liberty from the anxiety of absurd world, one may to go 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 the absurd man depends upon the maximum struggle against this absurdity. The world is full of absurdity and Sisyphus teaches revolt through action that offers freedom and justification for the continuation of life.

As Olafson genuinely remarks, Camus believes in fraternity and humanism rather than in nihilism (79). Camus sees the condition of modern man similar to that of the Korinthian King Sisyphus. Sisyphus is the martyr and teacher to all modern man who, because of his disobedience to god and his passion for life, suffer eternal fortune heroically. This universe, states Camus “henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile” (852). Camus reached to the conclusion to declare the condition of man

absurd when he realized that the speculative systems of past provided no reliable guidance of life or guaranteed any foundation of human values. According to Camus, when the absurd man becomes aware 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 acknowledges the consciousness of absurdity as a reliable guidance to revolt against this absurdity. The cocksureness of science for absolute reality has made the world more complex and inexplicable, terminating itself to a more hypothesis. The only predictable truth is that the world is absurd and unintelligible. But suicide cannot be the solution to the discomfort of absurd man if he is conscious of human pride which always negates the nihilistic attitude of life. Sisyphus continuously tools the boulder up the hill makes him happy because he is fully aware of his absurd task.

Camus makes this explicit when he writes:

Suicide is repudiation. The absurd man can only drain everything to the bitter end and deplete himself. The absurd is his extreme tension, which he maintains constantly by solitary effort, for he knows that in that consciousness and in that day to day revolt he gives proofs of his only truth, which is defiance. (846)

Camus was also considering about human right while thinking on the common condition of men. The revolt against the injustice done upon man was relevant as the revolt against that absurd condition. Sisyphus maintained at one and at the same time these revolts. The injustice done upon him by God has made him conscious of his absurd task. Camus was careful about the unjust practices being carried out by the traditional political system such as Fascism and Nazism. He held the view that no one has the right to take life of another being political revolt is violent revolt, as much as the metaphysical revolt, according to Camus, anticipates either a suicide or domestic desire to destroy the world. Camus hated



the destruction of the world and mankind as carried out in World War I and II. 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.

Thus, Camus philosophy is not pessimistic and anti humanistic but optimistic and humanistic. As Ellmann and Feidelson note, he sees man “arriving, through admission of absurdity, at an affirmation of his own worth” (80). Encyclopedia Britannica, evaluating human behaviour in Heideggerian world, writes:

Man is continually a project (Ent-wurt), submerged in things to such a degree that he is temporally absorbed (Aufgehen in). He is then nobody in particular and a structure that Heidegger calls (das man) ‘The They’ is revealed, which ... stresses man’s other directedness, his tendency to measure himself in terms of his peers.

Heidegger is of the opinion that the principal object of investigation is the search for being and more particularly, man’s being (Dasein). He says that there is no pre-given human essence. So, man himself is the author and reader of his own life. James R. Jacob commenting Heidegger further says that “like Sartre, Heidegger insists that human self interpreting beings just are what they make themselves in the course of their active life” (557). Separating being from beings Heidegger says “Man stands out (ex-sists not merely ex-ists) from things” (801). Man is not captivated and defined by things but he is apart from them because he is “no-thing”. Man dwells in the world and continues to be there until his death. Being thrown into things, he falls away and is on the point of being drowned into things.

In the same way, Heidegger has coined the word 'Dasein' to refer human existence. 'Dasein' his term for existence or 'being there', is not a constant phenomenon but is rather the 'happening' of a life course stretched out between birth and death. According to the Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy, "The being of the entities in the world is constituted by the framework of intelligibility or disclosedness opened by Dasein's practices. Our own being as agents of specific types is defined by the world into which we are thrown" (452). The painful human conditions in which accomplishment is a mere illusion and happiness an evasion, permits the chance to face the human existence and thereby feeling of dread or angst. Anxiety shows the light of dynamic existence. According to Heidegger, the angst manifests the freedom of man to choose him and take hold of him. In anxiety all entities sink away into a nothing and nowhere, man hovers in himself as exists being nowhere, at home. He faces nothingness and all average, obvious everydayness disappears and this is good, since he now faces the potentiality of an authentic being (801). Thus, it is clear from the above statement that the feeling of anxiety and the confrontation with death leads man to real 'Being'. People struggle to transcend the feeling of 'dread' or angst in existential crisis for authentic living.

Similarly, Sartre introduces the concept of the project to account for the originating context of an individual's actions. The project is an individual's most basic choice of who he is in relation to the world. It is both proclamation and propulsion: It proposes a self-made plan for which he will become in the future, and it also commits him to activity. Linda E. Patrik commenting Sartre says that "a project is not simply a goal, but a projection of oneself into the future. It motivates an individual to undertake actions, and it also unites his actions so that they will not be haphazard but will build on one another and coalesce into a single, effective course of action" (159).

## **Freedom of Choice in Existentialism**

As existentialism deals with multiple issues and it can not be confined within one definition. Though, different writers associated with existentialism have their own perspectives of looking at life with the glass of existentialism. In this research the researcher is going to explore how J.M. Coetzee has presented the central character John as the heroic figure in this forlorn universe. The fundamental problem of existentialism is concerned with existence and the study of being. The human being has liberty to view of his situation in decision which he makes himself and sets himself to solve his problems and live in the world. This is what we call as freedom of choice.

In the novel, John, the central character, chooses to live his life outside from his home. He says that “man is an Island, you don’t need parents” (3). This is his free choice and he bears the responsibility to solve his problem which comes before him as he leaves the house. The human being is condemned to be free. The human being must take this freedom of being and responsibility and guilt of his action. While taking the responsibility of his choice to leave his home, he has to suffer from alienation, sickness; he bears all responsibilities by accepting it. There is no significance in the world, this universe. Human being cannot find any purpose in life his existence is only a contingent fact. His being does not emerge from necessity. If a human being rejects the false pretensions, the illusion of his existence having meaning, he encounters the absurdity, the futility of life. The human being’s role in the world is not pre determined or fixed, every person is compelled to make a choice. As we see in the novel, John has to choose to leave his house. In order to live authentic life, the human being can add essence to his life. To avoid the inauthentic form of existence or being of the things, the human being is in constant state of flux and is able to comprehend his situation. To make his life different from things, John tried his best to

materialize his dream of being a poet. By this attempt of being a poet, John lives his authentic life as a human being.

Similarly, the constant failures and sufferings one after another in his life, John continues his struggle. John bears the full responsibility of his choice. His dream of establishing himself as an artist-a poet seems so far away, He faces several challenges in the life. He moves through the existential problems throughout the novel. "Instead of running away from such challenges, John constantly struggles in his life. The challenges make him stronger and he continues his efforts to meet his final aim. The spirit of continuing life towards his final goal is his heroic quality will be analyzed by the researcher in relation to existentialism in this research.

To sum up, existentialism primarily focuses on the investigation of the meaning of being. The world is meaningless and absurd. We all human being is thrown into this uncertain universe with the gift of making free choices in life. Every human being must make the choices in their life. From these free choices, human being creates essence and lives authentically in the world. The world is itself meaningless and absurd but this absurdity can be overcome if human being become conscious about the futility of their actions and devoted themselves in maximum struggle against absurdity to live heroically.

### III. Textual Analysis

#### John's Freedom of Choice

Coetzee's novel, *Youth*, is about a young man John who searches his freedom to transform himself into an artist, a poet. The 19 years young gentleman lives in Cape Town, South Africa. Throughout the novel John seeks freedom and wants to transform his free time in creative work but unfortunately he entangles with different problems. John's quest for making himself free can be seen throughout the novel. John's freedom of choice is captured in the beginning of the novel. Each man is an island that nobody needs parent which shows John's effort to make himself free. John tries to be economically independent and he no more wants to burden to his parents. To get liberation from his family he engages in several part time jobs. John has his list of several part time jobs to stand in his own feet and no more rely no his parents. The list of his several part time jobs is explicit in the novel:

Working in the library is not his only employment. On Wednesday afternoons he assists with first year tutorials in the mathematics department (three pounds a week); on Fridays he conducts the diploma students in drama through selected comedies of Shakespeare (two pounds ten); and in the late afternoon he is employed by an exam School in Rondebosch to coach dummies for their matriculation exams (three shillings an hour).

During vacations he works for the Municipality (division of public Housing) extracting statistical data from household surveys. (2)

His involvement in several part-time jobs shows that he wants to be economically independent. He wants to add the money and wants to save a little in his account. This becomes clear when he says that "he adds up the monies, he is comfortably off – comfortably enough to pay his rent and university fees and keep the body and soul and

even save a little. He may only be nineteen but he is in his own feet, dependent in no one” (2). The lines reveal the fact that John, the central character in the novel is free to choose. He chooses to live an independent life. This is the effect of his choice of leaving his parents. Existentialist believes that every human being is free to choose but they must be responsible for their choices. They must take the responsibility of their choices.

In the same way, John, in the novel, engages in several part time jobs which are the effect of his decision to leave his parents. The idea to choose to leave the family is not only his personal desire. The different circumstances and his final aim of establishing himself a poet leads him to make that decision. As Macintyre argues that “even if you don’t choose, you have chosen not to choose”(49). The entire universe which is against human beings, we all human beings must struggle to exist here. The decision which every human being makes must bear the responsibility of his/ her choice. We are free but contradictorily we are compelled to make choice for authentic living. Sartre Argues by saying that “[e]very human being is condemned to be free” (17). John has his dream to be established as an artist a poet. This aim does not allow him to stay with his parents. His final dream to be an artist a poet constantly gives the pressure to leave his home. His dream becomes explicit when he says:

Meanwhile, being dull and odd looking is 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. If for the time being he must be obscure and ridiculous, that is because it is the lot of the artist to suffer obscurity and ridicule until the day when he is revealed in his true powers and the scoffers and the mockers fall silent. (3)

John struggles continuously to establish himself as an artist a poet. John in the novel devotes his life to meet his final dream which seems so far away. In the course to meet his

dream to transform his life he continuously makes his choices in different ways. He decides to leave his parents first and that is followed by his other multiple choices of changing the girl friends and quest for getting true love. His quest for getting better job to be economically sound gives him constant energy. This energy, he mobilizes to meet his dream and the struggle becomes continuous till the last breadth of his life.

Similarly, John in the novel has designed his life's course of action to meet his final dream to be an artist. Firstly he wants to get the true love and that experience of love he wants to transform into poetry. Secondly, he wants to get the better and reputed job in foreign land with better salary so that he could devote his more time to meet his final dream. John's quest to meet his true love becomes clear in the very beginning of the novel when he says, "what will cure him, if it were to arrive, will be love. He may not believe in God but he does believe in love and the powers of love. The beloved, the destined one, will see at once through the odd and even dull exterior he presents to the fire that burns within him" (3). The series of girl friends which John meets throughout the novel with whom he makes love result into nothing. Neither has he got the true love from them nor has he become creative. John's continuous struggle and regular changes of girl friends itself becomes an absurd game. John's first meeting with Jacqueline, a nurse in Guy hospital, is his first attempt to get the true love. This meeting becomes possible through his friend Paul. The meeting with Jacqueline becomes fruitless. He tries to justify his failure of love by the reference of Picasso and he says:

Picasso, who is a great artist, perhaps the greatest of all, is a living example. Picasso falls in love with women, one after another. One after another they move in with him, share his life made for him, out of the passion that flares up a new with each new mistress, the Doras and Pilars whom chance brings to his doorstep are reborn into everlasting art. (10)

Though, John in the novel tries to justify his act of making several girl friends with more other references of Eliot, Ezra Pound, Arthur Rimbaud. But the love affair with Jacqueline, Sarah, Caroline etc do not provide anything in return to him. His failure to get the true love does not stop him from struggle in life. Now he is “in a fight for his life” (13). The series of failures in love makes him unhappy. But he believes that unhappy people are interesting because they can do something worthwhile. He says that “better to accept the burden of unhappiness and try to transform it into something worth while poetry, or music or painting” (14).

In addition to this, John again makes his free choice and starts his second course of action to meet his final dream of being an artist. Another plan of John becomes explicit when he says:

His plan, when he entered the university, was to qualify as a mathematician, then go abroad and devote himself to art. That is as far as the plan went, as for as it needs to go and he has not thus far deviated from it. While perfecting his poetic skills abroad he will earn a living doing something obscure and respectable. (22)

According to his plan, John makes his decision to leave his country. The decision which he makes to leave the country is not only his internal desire. The political turbulence in South Africa and insecurity compels him to leave the country. The political circumstances are the forces which compel him to leave the country.

Furthermore, existentialists are of the opinion that every human being is free to choose a path in life and have to add essence in his life in order to exist. The concept matches with Coetzee’s hero John who continuously struggles till the last breadth of his life. John is now in new world. In London he searches the jobs first as a teacher and as a Junior Experimental Officer in agricultural station away from London. Both these works



could not satisfy him. John is in constant state of flux and he is trying to comprehend in this new situation. Finally, he gets the better job in IBM office of computer programming. The moment he gets the job and starts to work then he realizes that it is a blocked to meet his final aim. The IBM office where John works takes all his time.

Though, he got the better and reputed job with better salary, he is dissatisfied with the job. John couldn't manage the time to devote in creative work. The better and reputed job in foreign land also couldn't satisfy him. He again failed in his second course of action. He says that "[h]e has a job a proper job, better than mere teaching, for which he is being paid a salary. He has escaped South Africa, has attained his first goal he ought to be happy. In fact, as the weeks pass he finds himself more and more miserable. IBM, he can swear is killing him and turning him into a zombie. These lines in the text refers that John, is again failed in his second course of action to meet his final dream. Firstly, he was failed to get true love and transform that wonderful experience of love into art. Secondly, he is failed in his aim to get better job with better salary in foreign land and save a little so that he could devote his life towards creative work. The series of failures generally makes a person depressed, harassed and can't work further. But John doesn't be so and continues his life struggle to exist in the world to establish in society and to be an artist. This feeling of continuing life becomes clear in these lines yet he "cannot give up, Burnet hill Secondary Modern Rothamsted, IBM: he does not want to fail for a third time: Failing would be too much like his father through the grey, heartless agency of IBM the real world is testing him. He must steel himself to endure" (47).

In this way, the lines above clearly hint that John is not an ordinary character of flesh and blood. John is an existential hero in the sense that he is fighting against the real world. The lines cited above the real world is testing him and he must steel himself to endure clarifies his struggle is not against other side but with the human existence. John

bears all the effects of his choice and he himself take the responsibility of his choice. He is existential hero because he accepts the continuous failures in his life but never get depressed. He affirms his life by accepting the challenges, hardships, pain, and suffering.

### **John's Acceptance of Challenges and Responsibilities**

Rayan is of the opinion that existentialist really concern to the problem of man. They focus on man's concrete existence, his personal freedom and his responsibility for his choice. Rayan focuses on the freedom to choose and responsible that is for himself only. Rayan explains existentialism:

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

By keeping this view in mind, regarding existentialism, if we analyse Coetzee's *Youth* where John takes all the responsibilities of his action. From beginning to the end of the novel, he constantly makes the choices for which he takes all the responsibility of his choice. In the beginning of the novel, he decides to leave the house and his parents. This decision urges him to get new shelter. It requires him the job as the base to exist in the new situation. He involves in several part-time jobs to stand economically or to join his hand to mouth. John has his one final aim in the novel that is to be an artist or a poet. To meet his dream, he leaves his house. First, he searches true love and never gets. Second, he leaves his house and go abroad to get the reputed job. In England he gets the job but the job at IBM office kills all his time. He does not get chance to involve towards the course of his final aim.

Finally, John, in the novel; fails two times. But his energy to continue life to meet his final aim never stops. John takes the responsibility of both of his failures in the novel. By taking the responsibility of both of these failures he wants to change the direction of his life. His final dream to be a poet changes and he wants to be a prose writer. The writer in the novel says “[d]oes his first venture into prose herald a change of direction in his life? Is he about to renounce poetry? He is not sure. But if he is going to write a prose then he may have to go the whole hog and become a Jamecian” (64).

After his gradual failures two times, he takes the responsibility of his failures and wants to renounce the poetry. To console himself he takes the reference of Henry James. Henry James was successful to create setting of his novel in foreign nation but John can not rise above mere nationality. He accepts another failure that he couldn't be Henry James. He thinks that “Henry James' sensibility is finer than his; there can be no doubt about that” (65).

Similarly, the series of failures continue. He meets his girl friend Caroline. He makes love with her. That love also couldn't give him the warmth and he couldn't be creative. It became one whole year that he is working under IBM. Now, he makes another decision to leave the IBM. When he realizes that he “can not go on like this. He can't sacrifice any more of his life to the principle that human beings should have to labor in misery for their bread, a principle he seems to adhere to though he has no idea where he picked it up” (105). These lines reflect his freedom to choose. To make the decision of his life, he chooses to leave the IBM. After lengthy reflection he writes at last that “I have reached to the conclusion that my future does not lie with IBM” (107). The IBM officer asks the reason for his leave of IBM. By taking the responsibility of his choice John says that “I don't find working for IBM very satisfying at a human level. I don't find it fulfilling. I was hoping for something more, I was hoping for friendships” (107).

When he leaves the job, the IBM officer asks him the reasons for his leave. John took all the responsibility of his decision to leave IBM when he says “I’m not blaming anyone. The fault is probably my own” (107). When he decides to leave the IBM, the different challenges comes before him. The job in IBM giving him the economic support but now he has become jobless. The different challenges come before him. He was doing his thesis on Ford Madox Ford. In spite of different challenges in his life he never becomes hopeless. He waits for the chance which will transform his life. Coetzee writes that “Chance does not bestow any of her blessings on him. But chance is unpredictable, one must give chance time. For the day when chance will at last smile on him he can only wait in readiness” (111).

What happens next happens swiftly. When he leaves his job of IBM, there are two main choices in his horizon. Either he has to do school mastering or he can go back to computer programming in London. As existentialists say there are multiple choices before any human being and human being must choose one of them for their authentic existence. John after some days of his leave got another job in International Computers. When he got his job with international computers he has to bear another responsibility. The work for which they want him is out in the country in Berkshire. It takes one hour train journey to get there from London. He takes the responsibility and challenge of his life and ready to go Berkshire. Slowly and gradually he accepts all the reality and takes the responsibility of all his actions and decides to continue his life: “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” (144).

At last, he meets another Indian friend Ganapathy. They share their problem with each other, Play chess and cricket in free time. At last, john accepts his fate. The destiny

never favors him. At last he accepts the reality and takes all the responsibility of all of his action in his life. To justify his actions of all his life he says:

Experience the artist must taste all experiences from the noblest to the most degraded. Just as it is the artist's destiny to experience the most supreme creative joy, so he must be prepared to take upon himself all in life that is miserable, squalid, and ignominious. It was in the name of experience that he underwent London the dead days of IBM, the icy winter of 1962, one humiliating affair after another, stages in the poet's life, all of them in the testing of his soul. (164)

The lines above justify his choices of actions throughout his life. The one who takes responsibility tries to justify the action. In the novel John is justifying his actions. At last destiny never favors him. He thinks that "for nearly two years he waited and suffered in London and destiny stayed away" (165). He accepts everything in his life and continues his life till the day of his last breath. He says "The ambulance men will call at Ganapathy's flat and bring him out on a stretcher with a sheet over his face. They have fetched Ganapathy, they might come and fetch him too" (169).

### **John's Angst in the Novel**

According to existentialists, 'anguish' is an emotion common to all human being confronting life's problems. Theist existentialists have their opinion that human being in this world is optimistically forlorn, free and supportless creature. In such division of existentialist condition the atheist existentialist creates a system in which the individual is paradoxically free and charged to choose a rugged path in life. When an individual chooses to come face to face with 'dread', he comes very close to 'angst'. When angst passes through human soul, he comes very close to authentic existence. It is the feeling of freedom and responsibility that is the source of man's anguish. John moves through the

different situations in his life from beginning to the end of the novel. He confronts with the different life's problems. While confronting with his life's problem he faces 'angst'. John has his dream to be a poet in his life. To meet his dream, he is compelled to make different choices for which he is responsible. It is the John's feelings and responsibility that is the source of his anguish. The angst of John begins from the very beginning of the novel. In the first page of the novel Coetzee writes that He "is at pains not to be late with the rent because he is in the flat under false pretences" (1). This painful situation comes before him because of his choice for which he is responsible. In the course to materialize his dream he has to make decisions in his life. The wonderful experience of love which he wants to transform in art results in nothing at last. The reputed job with better salary in England also couldn't satisfy him. It only killed his time. He couldn't get the time to devote himself into poetry:

What then is he doing in England? Was it a huge mistake to have come here? Is it too late to move? Would Paris, the city of artists, be more congenial. If somehow he could master French? And what at Stockholm? Spiritually he would feel at home in Stockholm, he suspects. But what about Swedish? And what would he do for a living? (50)

These series of questions which John makes for himself indicates the anguish of John in the novel. If both of his plans to materialize the dream fail, then he has no reason to stay in England. He thinks about other multiple choices but he is compelled to work there. He has no other economic option to leave the job at once. The angst which John bears continues. He works in IBM office. He encounters with different friends there but can not communicate with them. One of his friends Bill Briggs with whom he gets the chance to talk in the break time. But John does not have more ideas in different topics.

In addition to this, all the jobs in England are taken equally. He works as a computer programmer for which he shouldn't show his qualification. This also becomes an angst which John feels and he says "what is good to be a computer programmer if computer programming is to be his life, to have an MA in English literature?" (56). another angst which John feels is expressed this way:

Of the throng on the sidewalks, most are young people. Strictly speaking he is their contemporary, but he does not feel like that. He feels middle aged. Prematurely middle aged: one of those bloodless, high domed exhausted scholars whose skin flakes of the merest touch. Deeper than that he is still a child ignorant of his place in the world, frightened, indecisive. What he is doing in this huge, cold city where merely to stay alive means holding light all the time, trying not to fall? (57)

The angst expressed in these lines is because of his decision to enter England and to join the job with IBM. He is worried about his final aim. He made his own decision to come to England and dreamt to get the better job with better salary. He got the job but that didn't give him to move further. Because of his obstacles to meet the final dream made John to feel angst. Despite the different angst which John feels in the course of his struggles, he does not accept that "yet he can not accept that the life he is leading here in London is without plan or meaning" (59). John's anxiety continues from beginning to the end of the novel.

This is how; the continuous feeling of anguish itself becomes energy to continue his life. His angst which Coetzee clearly spills in the novel by saying:

Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion but an escape from emotion; says Eliot in works he has copied into his diary: Poetry is not an expression of personality but a escape from personality. Eliot adds, but only those who

have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things. (61)

The horror which John feels whether he has personality and emotions or not. This also becomes angst for him. He has a horror of spilling mere emotion on to the page. Once it has begun to spill out he would not know how to stop it. His aim to be a creative artist a poet is in constant question. But John continues his life even after suffering.

Furthermore, he prefers misery than happiness in his life he says that 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 life of art” (65). Misery which he prefers does not become a purifying bath for him. On the contrary, it is like a pool of dirty water. From the each misery which John faces in the novel does not make him brighter and stronger but duller and flabbier. First, John tries his best to get true love to inspire him. When he fails to do so he takes misery as a source of inspiration. When misery also does not become effective then he feels angst how to be creative in life when his plan could not meet the final dream, he tries to change his course of action. He has multiple choices before him either to quit the job and leave the country or to quit the IBM and get another job. He finds this second choice best and quit his job at IBM. The decision which he made compelled him to take the responsibility of his choice. The sudden decision which John makes increases his angst. He feels difficult to answer why he is leaving IBM. After this John involves in another job in International Computer. When he joins international computer, he has to leave the city and take the responsibility of his job place in Berkshire. He accepts everything what ever comes before him. The spirit of continuing life never stops within him in spite of his several angst expressed in the novel from beginning to end. The ever alive spirit to continue his life makes John heroic in the novel.



### **John's Search for Authentic Existence (Being to Beings)**

Heidegger is of the opinion that the principal object of investigation is the search for being and more particularly the man's being (dasein). Man himself is the author and reader of his own life. James R. Jacob's view on Heidegger, "[h]uman being is self-interpreting beings just are what they make themselves in the course of their active life" (757). The life is not a constant phenomena but happening of a life course stretched out between birth and death. The feeling of anxiety and the confrontation with death leads the man to real 'being'. People struggle to transcend the feeling of 'dread' or 'angst' in existential crisis for authentic living. If we analyze Coetzee's *Youth* by considering these things in mind, John from the very beginning of the novel to the end continues his struggle for authentic living. The journey from being to 'being' starts from his decision to leave his parents and his continuous struggle to establish in the society. Heidegger says there is no pre-given human essence. So, man himself is the author and reader of his own life.

First of all, John makes his course of actions to reach his final dream. His final aim is to establish himself as an artist a poet. The essence John creates in his own life. The different happenings of life stretched out between John's birth to death can be divided into three parts. First he decides to leave the parents. Second, he makes two course of action to meet his final aims to get true love to transform that experience of true love into poetry. He wants to get better and reputed job in foreign land so that by saving some money and managing free time he could devote himself to poetry. When he fails in both of his plans, then he accepts whatever comes before him in the course of his action and continues life struggle till the death. While accepting death in the novel, he says that one of these days the "ambulance men will call at Ganapathy's that and bring him out on a stretcher with a sheet over his face. When they have fetched Ganapathy they might as well come and fetch him too" (169).

To sum up, the painful condition of John's life in which accomplishment is a mere illusion. John's struggle to transcend the feeling of anxiety and angst is explicit throughout the novel. In the beginning, he engages in several part time jobs. He struggles to find out true love. He struggles to get the reputed job with better salary in new world. All these struggles of John in the novel show his effort to transcend the feeling of angst in existential crisis for authentic living.

### **John's Revolt against Absurdity and his Maximum Struggle to Exist**

If there are no clear philosophical answers to the question of existence, then each individual has to design their own life as a project. So does John in Coetzee's novel *Youth*. If we read the novel thoroughly the novel reflects the John's life as a project. John's final aim is to be a creative artist in his life. For that, he devises a plan which seems like a project. To get his final dream his first plan in his own words:

He may not believe in god but he does believe in love and the powers of love. The be loved, the destined one, will see at once through the odd and even dull exterior he presents to the fire that burns within him. Mean while 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 artist, that has long been settled. If for the time being he must be obscure and ridiculous, that is because it is the lot of the artist to suffer obscurity and ridicule until the day when he is revealed in his true powers and the scoffers and mockers fall silent.(3)

The lines above obviously establish John's aim which is to establish himself as an artist that has long been settled. To meet this aim he searches for the true love. The experience of true love he wants to transform into an art. His second plan is to establish in foreign land. In foreign land, he wants to get better and reputed job with better salary so that he

could devote his life in creative work. From the job he wants to save a little and with that money he will manage for time being and manage time to devote himself in creative work. He says that His plan, when “he entered the university, was to qualify as a mathematician then go abroad and devote himself to art” (22). Unfortunately, both of these plans fail neither he gets true love nor the job could make him free to devote into poetry. John’s life continues even after these two failures. He accepts reality at last. He is not Rimbaud and Baudelaire. He says:

If he were a warmer person he would no doubt find it all easier: life love, poetry. But warmth is not in his nature. Poetry is not written out of warmth any way. Rimbaud was not warm Baudelaire was not warm. Hot, indeed, yes, when it was needed in life, hot in love but not warm. He too is capable of being hot he has not ceased to believe that. But for present, the present indefinite, he is cold: cold frozen. (168)

This is how John’s life becomes a project first searching true love then job in foreign land and third he accepts the reality that he can’t be a poet and waits for the last day of his life by saying “Ambulance man call at Ganapathy’s flat one day they might come and fetch him too”. John gets freedom and he takes the responsibility. Which falls entirely upon him?

Camus has of the opinion that human existence is absurd. The modern world is full of injustice and millions work in repetitive exploitation job. If we see John’s life with this view in mind John’s activities looks absurd. His continuous change of girl friends, to get true love is a absurd game. John gets the job in IBM office as a Junior Experimental officer. His job becomes just like Sisyphus’ rolling the rock up and falls down. He says that though the hours at the Newman Street Bureau are nine to five, “he soon discovers that it is frown upon for male employees to leave the premises promptly at five” (47).

Though John is not satisfied with his work but he cannot leave this work yet “he cannot give up. Barnet Hill Secondary Modern Rothamsted, IBM”(47). He accepts this repetitive work as a challenge and says through the gray, heartless agency of IBM the real world is testing him, “he must steel himself to endure” (47).

Accordingly, John in order to get the liberty from the absurd world, neither he goes to the rules of god nor he submits nor he submits himself to the hand of death. Rather John engages himself in maximum struggle against the absurdity and Sisyphus teaches revolt through action that offers freedom and justification for the continuation of life”. John’s life in IBM is routined. To get liberation from this repetitive work John refuses to participate in them. He decides to leave the job at IBM. After lengthy reflection, he writes at last that “I have reached to the conclusion that my future does not lie with IBM. I have decided to resign the job” (106).

From the beginning of the novel, John engages himself in several works. When he leaves his parents, he has to struggle to be established economically. He engages for the search of true love seems absurd. To revolt against this absurdity he continues his work of searching true love. He makes love with Jacqueline first then Sarah, Caroline which continues till the last of the novel. Either he refuses to participate in those works or he engages himself with the work even after dissatisfaction.

At last, John in the novel seems like a man of struggle "now he is in a fight for his life"(13). When he can't be successful in his both of the plans he accepts the reality. He is ready to go away from London to Berkshire. He realizes that he can't be Baudelaire and Rimbaud because he lacks the warmth within him. He submits himself in the hand of death. He says that one day the ambulance man will come and fetch him too like Gangapathy.

### **John as an Existential Hero**

John is an existential hero because he is honest in taking the responsibility of all of his actions. The freedom of choice which every human being uses is responsible for their actions. John, in the novel, makes choices frequently and takes the responsibility of all of his actions. First he chooses to leave his house and parents and takes all the responsibilities thrust upon him. He involves in different part time jobs to survive. In the beginning of the novel, Coetzee writes "working in the library is not his only employment"(3). This indicates that he involves in several other jobs to exist. Not only has this John throughout the novel honestly taken all the responsibility of his choice of his actions. He takes the responsibility of the failures of his both plans; to get the true love and to get the better and reputed job so that he could get free time to devote in art. He honestly takes all the responsibility of his actions. So, John deserves to be an existential hero.

John is an existential hero in the novel because he is determined to continue his life struggle even if he feels angst several times throughout the novel. The angst begins in the very beginning of the novel because he has to pay the rent himself. Coetzee writes that "he is at pains not to be late with the rent because he is in the flat under false pretences" (1). The angst continues throughout the novel. He feels angst because he couldn't get true love; he couldn't establish in foreign land. The angst of his series of failures which he overcomes through his strong determination to continue life. Yet he cannot accept that "the life he is leading here in London is without plan or meaning" (59). The lines indicate his strong determination to continue life and move towards his final aim. John in the novel creates his essence himself. He has his aim to be a poet. To reach to the final goal he has to face several angst. He has the courage to confront with the different problems. To remove his economic burden he involves in several work. He has the courage to accept the life's problem from his birth to death. The series of failures in his life never discourages him.

Rather he sees misery as a source of energy to continue life. "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" (65). By confronting with the different hostile situations in his life, John's soul passes through angst and he leads to have an authentic existence.

In the same way, John in the novel is honest towards his duty even after his failures, suffering, loneliness, despair and angst. From the beginning of the novel, he entangles with the different problems. He leaves his home and has to face the several challenges of his day to day life. The problem of food, clothing and shelter he takes as the matter of simple common sense. Coetzee writes that the needs of the body "he treats as a matter of simple common sense" (2). The challenges continue after his separation from parents. His desperate search for true love and his efforts to establish himself in the new land brings challenges in his life. He is failed in his work. John's loneliness go to its extreme when he gets no one to talk in the new land. He says that "Saturday and Sunday evenings are the worst. Then the loneliness that he usually manages to keep at bay sweeps over him, loneliness indistinguishable from the low, grey, wet weather of London or from the iron hard clod of the pavements" (52).

The loneliness develops in its extreme when he leaves the job at IBM. He is too much worried because for whole week he has no one to speak and does not speak even one word. About quitting IBM he has no regrets. But now "he has no one at all to speak to, not even Bill Briggs. Day after day goes by when not a word passes his lips. He begins to mark them off with an S in his diary: days of silence" (114).

The pain, suffering, loneliness dominate all of his life. In spite of all these he is dutiful towards his final goal. So, this dutiful John is an existential hero in the novel. John has the power to do maximum struggle against absurdity. John's desperate search for girl

friend and true love seems absurd in the novel. The repetitive work at IBM and his failure to establish in foreign land, he overcomes through his continuous action. He affirms his life rather leading it towards negativity or nihilism. He revolts against absurd world. So John is proved as an existential hero by the researcher.

To sum up, John is an existential hero because of his determination to continue life even after the miseries frustrations alienation, anxieties and hopeless situation in his life. He is sympathetic because he creates out of miseries and frustrations. He overcomes all the hostile circumstances and hopefully continues life to his goal. He revolts against the absurdities and meaninglessness with awareness about the mechanical span of life. He struggles upto maximum limit to revolt against absurdities. The ever alive energy John keeps out to overcome the anxieties of life and to confront with death and lives authentic life. So, John is an existential hero in the novel.

#### IV. Conclusion

Despite the conception that Coetzee's *Youth* is an autobiographical one; this carefully crafted novel represents the central character John's existential awareness. The novel galvanizes the idea that how human life can be survived heroically even after the rampant failures sufferings miseries, anguish and despair, throughout the life. J.M. Coetzee has done this by creating the imaginary character John who is embroiled in constant hostile circumstances, but yet has continued his life with strong determination and hope to reach to his final goal. The novel opines the idea that miseries, despair, loneliness, sufferings are very common in this forlorn universe. That's why we have to continue life with strong determination and hope and lead towards our final goal of life.

Coetzee not only reflects hostile circumstances that try to ruin human life. But also shows the strength and stamina, individual determination and hope to continue life. By showing the heroic survival of an individual over all the opposing forces Coetzee has successfully demonstrated the passion and hope of life with strong determination for heroic survival. For example, acceptances of failures, miseries, suffering of the world and strong determination and hope to continue life after failures are characteristic features of the novel that highlight the heroic survival of existential hero in the novel *Youth*.

To be a hero, an individual should bear such qualities like courageous, determined, hopeful, sympathetic, honesty towards duty, power to struggle to exist, and responsible, positive attitude towards life. J.M. Coetzee attributes such qualities to his protagonist John which is suggestive of all the human being that people should have these qualities to exist heroically in their life. John is courageous because he decides to leave his parents. This courage to continue life even after failures is suggestive of heroic existence in J.M. Coetzee's *Youth*.



Similarly, John is responsible for his choice of his action. He takes the responsibility of his choice and leaves his parents. He involves in several part time jobs to be economically independent. He is responsible for his resignation from job at IBM. He does not blame other staffs as a cause to leave IBM. He takes all the responsibilities of his choice. The effects of his resignation from job at IBM which he accepts easily and goes to work in Berkshire are suggestive that every human being must take the responsibility of their choice.

In the same way, Coetzee's character John is determined. His strong determination to leave his parents and his country forlorn him into an uncertain direction. When he leaves the parents, the angst of John begins for his economic existence. Again, he fails two times in his plans. But his strong determination never dies rather it gets energy to move further. He has to go through several anxieties, sufferings, loneliness, and despairs but his determination to reach to his ambition continues. Furthermore, he creates out of his mistakes, frustrations and humiliations. Because of these attributes John seems sympathetic in the novel. The angst which regularly passes from his heart he overcomes easily. The miseries, frustrations, loneliness gives him energy to continue life. He accepts everything what ever comes in the course of his life and waits for the ambulance to fetch him when he dies.

This is how; John's life is full of struggle. He tries to create from miseries with strong hope he changes the hostile situations in favor of him. He is determined towards his decision and his goal of life. Hence, John is an existential hero which is suggestive of all the human beings that we must be determined towards our goal. John is very honest towards his duty. His first duty, he never forgets to get the true love. His second duty, according to plan, is to get the better and reputed job in foreign land. For that he leaves the country, gets the job there at IBM office. The job at IBM could not make him satisfied.

Even if he was not satisfied with the job, he continues it honestly. His ambition to be an artist is not dead still. He is honest towards his final duty. John, in the novel, always keeps positive attitude towards life. In the course of his life, John has to struggle against hostile circumstances, miseries and loneliness. Even in such situation, he affirms life. He never looks life negatively. He does not lead his life towards nihilism. He involves in maximum struggle towards the goal of his life. He revolts against the absurdity of life in terms of his action and he affirms his life. In this way, Coetzee creates John as an existential hero who has never dying spirit for continuation of life

Thus, J.M. Coetzee, by attributing such characteristics to his character John, wants to imply that life can be lived in this absurd world heroically. But, every human being should have the qualities like courage, sympathetic, determined, hopeful, honesty towards his duty and power to struggle against absurdity with positive attitude in mind. Hence, J.M. Coetzee, through this novel wants to imply that life can be lived in its heroic way and we shouldn't lead it towards nihilism even if the world is against us, the whole universe is against us, the existence is against us.

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