

## The Absurd and the Search for Meaning: Exploring Existentialism in Hanif Kureishi's *The Nothing*

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### ABSTRACT

*This study aims to analyze Hanif Kureishi's novel The Nothing with the perspective of the theory of Existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre. Existentialism has different connotations but it focuses on the individual's existence and the role of that existence. Existentialists accept that the nature of existence is defined by our relationship to others and things in the world. It also explores Sartre's existentialism that is evident in the choice of actions and free will in the selected text. The novel The Nothing by Kureishi depicts the concept of nothingness that refers to the absence and the lack of existence. This study has investigated the ideas of nothingness and absurdity entwined in the novel. Textual analysis of the novel analyses the existentialist struggles within the text through the characters and the narrative structure of the novel. The dialogues spoken by the protagonist Waldo shows his absurd condition. This study has been conducted by using a qualitative method to observe the text of the novel through the lens of existentialist philosophy. The research exhibits the absurd and stressed life of Waldo. His thoughts, language, need for love, revenge in mind, helplessness and mortality explore the element of absurdity. Zee's attraction towards Eddie by abandoning his husband and Waldo's actions to keep an eye on his wife and her lover portrays the existentialist struggles of the characters of Kureishi's novel.*

**Key Terms:** Existentialism, Absurd, Search for meaning

### INTRODUCTION

The novel *The Nothing* starts with a first-person narrative Waldo who narrates the whole plot. Waldo is married to 22-year younger wife, Zenab. Eddie is portrayed as a film journalist, and a reason of Waldo's dilemma. Waldo is a filmmaker who loves his wife Zee. The novel opens with the character of Waldo who reveals that he has become an old man. He is worried of his wife's less attention towards him. He finds out his wife having an affair with his friend, Eddie. He shows revengeful imaginations through language about Eddie. Waldo, who is now an elderly man cannot satisfy his wife's desires. He is sick with diseases. He had not given her sex for seven years. Zee uses Eddie to fill the absence in her because of Waldo. She goes to places with him by ignoring her husband. Eddie accompanies her in dinner and shopping. Waldo, being helpless, sees all that happening and is unable to stop the things. He uses digital devices to capture them.

Waldo delivers absurd dialogues about his sufferings. Kureishi portrays him as the absurd man who goes through the search of meaning in his wife's life who treats him as an old thing. The research will answer the question of the concept of absurd in the novel by Hanif Kureishi. Waldo is totally dependent on his wife, Zee both physically and emotionally. He blames his life that he is not like a man that he was before. The present study will also aim to answer how characters of the novels find the meaning in their lives. Waldo talks about his coming death as he is old. In the end, Waldo finds happiness when he again finds Zee's attention. He still shows absurd thoughts whether Zee will remain alone after him. An emphasis on the existentialist struggles of the characters in *The Nothing* will also be discussed briefly.

### Objectives

1. To investigate how Hanif Kureishi portrays the absurdity of human existence through the novel's characters and narrative structure
2. To explore the various ways in which the characters in *The Nothing* attempt to find or

create meaning in their lives amidst the absurdity

### 1.2 Rationale / Significance

This research aims to analyze the novel *The Nothing* through Existentialism within the narrative structure of the novel. This study is important because no research has been done before on this text *The Nothing* by Hanif Kureishi. This research is the first to explore the text through the lens of existentialist philosophy. This study has explored the novel through existentialist aspects that offers a broader implication of the theory on the plot of the novel by Kureishi. This research will be beneficial for literature students for having a unique perspective of this theory on the selected novel. Further, it will provide deep understanding to the future researchers. This study only explores specific concepts while the researchers of future will be able to examine other aspects of the novel.

By focusing on this novel, the research provides an extensive understanding of existentialist struggles among the characters that shapes the novel. It seeks to examine the absurd elements that depicts the reality of a man. This research will spark the future researchers to explore further concepts in the novel. This study will enhance the academic discourse on the interplay between fiction and reality, illustrating how literary narratives can illuminate complex historical and political phenomena.

### 1.3 Research Questions

1. How does Hanif Kureishi depict the concept of the absurd in *The Nothing* through the novel's characters and narrative structure?
2. In what ways do the characters in *The Nothing* seek to find or create meaning in their lives?
3. How do relationships in the novel reflect the existential struggle with the absurd and the search for meaning?

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Sartre's analysis of "the look" is central to understanding how we experience ourselves through the eyes of others it is called. Objectification. When someone else looks at us, we become aware of ourselves as objects in their perception. This process objectifies us, reducing our being-for-itself (our subjective consciousness) to a being-for-others (an object seen by another). This objectification can lead to feelings of alienation. We realize that we cannot fully control how others perceive us, which can be unsettling and diminish our sense of freedom. Sartre explains that being-for-others involves a complex interplay between our own consciousness and the consciousness of others. Relationships with others are often marked by a struggle for recognition and freedom. Each person seeks to assert their own freedom while potentially limiting the freedom of the other. Others can influence our self-perception and actions. We may adopt roles or behaviors based on how we believe others see us, which can lead to living in bad faith (self-deception) if we deny our true freedom and potential.

Sartre explores different modes of relating to others, each with its own implications for freedom and objectification. In love, we seek to possess the other's freedom without objectifying them, aiming for a mutual recognition of subjectivity. However, this ideal is often unattainable because it involves contradictory desires to both affirm and possess the other. Desire involves seeking the other as an object of attraction, which can lead to a tension between viewing the other as a subject and as an object of our desires. Sadism involves asserting one's own freedom by objectifying and dominating the other, while masochism involves surrendering one's freedom to become an object for the other's will.

Empathy and Understanding: While we can never fully know the consciousness of another,

we can empathize and relate to others through shared experiences and communication. This partial understanding shapes our interactions and relationships. Our awareness of others as conscious beings like ourselves is fundamental to our existence. This intersubjective reality shapes our sense of self and our actions. Sartre suggests that authentic relationships involve recognizing and respecting the other's freedom and subjectivity without attempting to dominate or objectify them. Living authentically requires a continuous effort to balance our own freedom with the recognition of others' freedom, striving for genuine interactions and mutual respect.

In the last Part 4 of *Being and Nothingness* titled "Having, Doing, and Being," Jean-Paul Sartre embarks on a profound exploration of human existence, delving into the intricate dynamics of consciousness, action, and the fundamental nature of being itself. This part represents a continuation of Sartre's existential phenomenology, offering insights into how individuals engage with the world, possess objects, and take actions within the context of their subjective experience. Sartre begins by scrutinizing the relationship between individuals and the objects they possess. While ownership implies a certain control over material possessions, Sartre delves deeper into the psychological implications of possession. Possessions often become entwined with one's identity, serving as extensions of the self or markers of status and social identity. However, Sartre warns against the dangers of objectification, where individuals define themselves solely in terms of their possessions, thereby relinquishing their agency and freedom.

The concept of action occupies a central position in Sartre's existential analysis. He distinguishes between instrumental actions, which serve specific purposes or goals, and the deeper significance of conscious intentionality. For Sartre, consciousness imbues actions with meaning and purpose, transcending mere mechanical behavior. Despite the constraints of external circumstances, individuals retain a degree of freedom in their actions, as consciousness allows for a dynamic interaction with the world, shaped by personal values, intentions, and aspirations. Sartre's examination of being delves into the fundamental distinction between being-in-itself and being-for-itself. While objects possess a static, inert existence (being-in-itself), human consciousness is characterized by self-awareness, intentionality, and transcendence (being-for-itself). This duality constitutes the essence of the human condition, wherein individuals grapple with the tension between their facticity—the given aspects of their existence—and their capacity for transcendence and freedom.

He emphasizes the radical freedom of human beings to choose their actions and define their own essence. This freedom, however, comes with the burden of responsibility, as individuals must confront the consequences of their choices and the impact of their actions on themselves and others. Authentic existence entails embracing this freedom and taking ownership of one's existence, resisting the temptation of living in bad faith—denying one's freedom and responsibility. Sartre applies existential analysis to various situations, shedding light on the complexities of human relationships, love, and politics. He explores the dynamics of interpersonal relationships, highlighting the struggle for recognition and freedom inherent in social interactions. In love and desire, individuals navigate the tension between subjectivity and objectification, seeking intimacy without sacrificing their freedom. Sartre also examines the political realm, emphasizing the importance of individual agency and collective action in the pursuit of social change and justice.

The arising trend of Existentialism Philosophy is 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries emphasizes the existentialism problems of human life. Existentialism believes allocate humans for the owner of their free will. All humans are responsible for their own acts. There are human decisions that makes

his life. In short, existentialism is a philosophy that focuses attention on absurdity of reality. Jean Poul Sartre was an existentialist of 20<sup>th</sup> century who did works about existentialism. Sartre's "Existentialism and Human Emotions" talks about the freedom and responsibility of man's own life. He argues there is no defined meaning but it's on individual who shapes his life.

Sartre has described two kinds of existentialist views. In Christian existentialists, he includes Jaspers and Gabriel Marcel. He classes French existentialists, Heidegger and himself in the category of atheistic existentialists. The individual reaction is a result of divine intelligence man has a nature that is prominent in all humans (Sartre, 1987). But the "essence" of every man is not same. A human nature is God's concept while essence is individual's plan of his life.

Sartre says Atheistic existentialism more coherent. He throws the argument of "Existence Precedes Essence" to defend his existentialism philosophy. It means if a man exists he defines himself later. Sartre labels this principle as subjectivity. A man is nothing but called whatever he makes of himself. Man has a conscious "will" that defines his essence. When man exists his being also involves others. It clearly tells that a man is not only in-charge of his choices but also for everyone (Sartre, 1987). Sartre says man is free. It is God that has set him free. He brings religious perspective here that man is created. He is thrown into the world. Whatever he does then it is a matter of his freedom. Sartre has further added that Ponge says future of man is a man.

Further Sartre discusses the anguish of human emotions. He says anguish is a part of human personality. Sartre explains his argument with examples of anguish of Abraham. He also gives another example of a lady who says that talks to God on telephone. There is no evidence either it is a voice of God or other. It is a human's conscious whom with he perceives whatever he wants. It is also a choice of man. Dostoevsky and French teachers of 1880 accept the notion of no existence of God. Dostoevsky says there is a possibility of the existence of everything even if God has no existence (Sartre, 1987). It is to be an existentialism. Sartre talks about the condemnation of the freedom of a man. Hence man is not a creator and is unable to make his human nature. It is a God who sets us free. Sartre supports the Descartes words that instead of the world try to conquer yourself. Here he means a man in itself is a whole world. He should focus on his own identity because he is first responsible for himself than for others.

According to Griffin, existentialists are interested in man's concrete individuality. It is a theatre of absurd that represents the actual reality of a man. (Qamar, 2020). Existence is considered absurd. Jim Unah sees nothingness as the point of everything that has been. Nothingness is the phenomenon that covers our being. He follows when we create nothing to others, we dissolve ourselves. If we plan to ignore the others, basically we bury our own selves. (Unah, 2002).

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This research imposes a qualitative method to investigate the theory of Existentialism on the text. This theory serves to provide the understanding of existentialist struggles of the characters within the novel. This research is proposed to highlight the efforts of characters to seek meaning in their lives. The data is collected to find out the absurdity in the novel woven by Kureishi. The data is collected after the close reading of the text. This study is based on the textual analysis of the novel.

### **Primary Source:**

*The Nothing* by Hanif Kureishi is taken as a primary source for the study. The novel is analyzed to observe the absurdity in the novel and the implications of the theory of Existentialism of Sartre. The close reading of the novel is done to find out the results and findings of the research. The main

focus is emphasized on the text of the novel for this conducted study. Academic articles and journals have been chosen to provide a deep understanding of the theory of existentialism and its implications on the narrative of the novel. Further, the books on existentialism have also been studied to better understand the concept of this theory.

### Data Analysis

#### Textual Analysis:

This study is subjected to the close reading of the whole text. The selected novel is examined as a view of existentialism theory. Close reading of the text helps to analyze the smallest and crucial information in the text.

### DATA ANALYSIS

#### Data Analysis

The Latin word “absurd” has broad meaning of lack of sense, lack of reason and meaninglessness. The term absurd points the human quest for the meaning of life and his inability to find that meaning. If there is something absence in human’s life it refers to absurdity. The philosopher Albert Camus has argued absurd existence of human. The world is in itself is not absurd but it a result of human needs. Human questions about his own existence in the world and try to seek its meaning (Camus,1991). If human tries to find a meaning it arises conflicts with the world in his personality. The world is not an absurd in itself but absurdity refers to something that is impossible by human (Arinze, 2020). The philosophy of absurdity is closely related to the concepts of existentialism and nihilism. Absurdity was born by Albert Camus. In his chief work, *The Myth of Sisyphus* he explores the absurdity in human’s life.

In *The Stranger*, Camus discusses purposelessness of life and death. All humans have to face death so life is meaningless. The novel starts with a character Meursault who attends his mother’s funeral. After this, he kills someone in the story. He has been sentenced to death for killing a man. In this difficult situation he says;

Nothing, nothing mattered, and I knew why. So, did he. Throughout the whole absurd life I’d lived, a dark wind had been rising toward me from somewhere deep I my future, across years that were still to come, and as it passed, this wind leveled whatever was offered to me at the time, in years no more real than the ones I was living. What did other people’s deaths or a mother’s lovematter to me; what did his God or the lives people choose or the fate they think they elect matter to me when we’re all elected by the same fate, me and billions of privileged people like him who also called themselves my brothers? Couldn’t he see, couldn’t he see that? Everybody was privileged. There were only privileged people. The others would all be condemned one day. And he would be condemned, too (Camus, 1942, p. 121). Camus shows absurd man in the novel. He does smoke and loves Maria. At the end, sentences to death for murdering a man.

Hanif kureishi is a British playwright, filmmaker, screenwriter and novelist of both Pakistan and English ancestry. He was born on 5 December 1954 in England. Kureishi has both Pakistani and British nationality. His father was from Pakistan, and he married a British lady Audrey Buss. He has been among the greatest British writer. Kureishi has wrote famous works like *The Buddha of Suburbia*, *My Son the Fanatic*, *The Mother*, and *The Nothing*.

In the novel *The Nothing* Hanif explores the absurdity throughout the plot of the novel. It was originally published in 2017. Waldo, the narrator of the novel finds his life meaningless in the declining years of his life. The idea of absurdism depicts through Waldo’s delivery of lines in the plot. Waldo who is married to Zenab, now waits for his death. He suspects his wife affair with his friend Eddie. If we see the title of the novel *The Nothing* in itself is absurd. Hanif Kureishi has chosen this title that explains the story of a man who now have nothing except waiting for a death and seeing his wife with other man. It opens the story which is based on the fact that nothing is happening meaningful in the life of the main character of this novel. Nothing refers to the absence

that Waldo feels in life. In this way one can explore this novel through the lens of absurdism philosophy.

*The Nothing* revolves around three major characters of Waldo, Zenab and Eddie. Kureishi portrays Waldo as an absurd man. In the novel he thinks that his life has become mean. He reconsiders himself purposeless as he aged. He is married to his wife who is younger than him. Waldo is suspicious that his wife is having fun with his friend in his ending years. The novel opens with Waldo who is complaining about his current situation. He is paralyzed and dependent on his wife. Kureishi shows Waldo as a loving husband who deeply loves his wife. He calls her by nicknames of “Zee” and “Zena”. He feels jealousy when he sees Eddie and Zee together. His jealousy shows his feelings of his misery. He cannot give Zee what she wants.

Hanif’s novel *Intimacy* of 1998 discusses the story of a middle-aged man who has decided to leave his wife and children. In *The Nothing* Kureishi shows a life of an elderly man Waldo whose wife is going to abandon him. Waldo likes when his wife Zee takes care of him. Waldo himself says that he is waiting for his death. It explores the Camus’ idea of meaningless of human’s life that death is for everyone. Waldo cannot walk like before. He is unable to satisfy his wife. He knows that he can do nothing expect watching Eddie and his wife together. He bears the situation and waits when death comes. Death is giving him hope to live that is totally absurd. He is hopeless as he cannot reverse this process of natural phenomenon. As Waldo says; “I have been expecting to die any day. The thought of death helps me to live and makes me curious” (Kureishi, 2017, p. 7)

Waldo discusses London where he lives with Zee in a lateral place. He gives a description of Victoria which is under renovation. He says that he would not be alive to see its new look. Even though this new world is vapid and exhausted for him. Kureishi explores the absurdity of human existence through these narratives. Waldo is old and sick who cannot enjoy his life like before. The absence of things and opportunities forces humans to question the world and his existence. Waldo is doing the same in his miserable condition by saying this new world banal. According to Zee, he is a kind of person who sees roughness of the things. Waldo says; “It is true that I imagine things for a living, and the imagination is the most dangerous place on earth” (Kureishi, 2017, p. 8).

In the plot, Waldo remembers his time when he was young. He talks about having wide shoulders and black hair. He further says if a person is gorgeous, he keeps that charm in mind when he is old. It shows disgust of Waldo with this old age and sickness. “It has been three years since I walked and I still expect to be the man I once was” (Kureishi, 2017, p. 13).

Through the narrative structure Kureishi shows the character Waldo who is obsessed with his wife. He wants Zee to be happy but deeply he thinks about not fulfilling his desires and satisfaction. Zee has been deprived from sex in the last seven years. Imagining Zee with Eddie and thinking of not satisfying his wife has grappled Waldo with absence of the purpose of life. Hanif Kureishi shows to what extent a man become absurd if he sees nothing in his life. Along with being sick and old, Waldo starts imagining his wife and friend Eddie in an intimate relationship. He doesn’t like his friend’s frankness with his wife in front of him. He is also aware that Zee makes love with Eddie in his absence. He personally hates Eddie. He knows what type of a man he is. He often visits his house to meet Zee. Waldo seems to put efforts to find out the secret affair of Eddie and Zenab. Waldo’s current situation and his wife’s affair has forced him to suffer. As he says; “As their pleasure multiples, they will be less discreet. Aren’t we all looking forward to it? Suffering loses its horror if the victim can find a way to enjoy it” (Kureishi, 2017, p. 18).

He has found that way to enjoy his situation. His situation traverses the absurd ideas. As the title *The Nothing* suggests the nothing in Waldo’s life. He knows he has become weak.

He admits of his illnesses of diabetes, prostate cancer, ulcer, constipation, hypochondria and diarrhea. It is an imagination of Waldo's mind that pushes him to highlight exclusions in his current life. He imagines the situations in his head. When Zee goes out with Eddie for having a lunch. He wonders; "I soot to the window, watching them walk up the street through my binoculars. Does she take his arm as they turn the corner?" (Kureishi, 2017, p. 25).

He does not aware of what is actually going on. He makes scenarios of his wife and Eddie's affair in head. He has no authentic proof that can support this suspicion. This is all absurd what he is imagining and thinking to be. At same time, he convinces him saying nothing happened. He has accepted the reality that his friend is enjoying with his wife. It is not easy for him to search the reality being on the wheelchair. Zee and Eddie friendship hurts him but deep down he keeps on suffer because of his helplessness. He is unable to deal with the situation so he admits the reality. It emphasizes the philosophy of absurdism that in the end a human has no other option to accept his reality of life and meaninglessness. Absurdity in view of existentialist philosophers is that the existence of human in this world is totally bizarre and queer. There is no abstract meaning for a man in this world but it is a man who finds or searches for a meaning. Waldo goes Spain in Cannes with wife and Eddie to take his achievement award in filmmaking. There he again sees Zee and his friend having enjoyment. They do gossips and dance. He becomes more curious to find out the things. He calls it "Jihad". He expresses absurd thoughts about the world.

"My wife and now my hospitality. The world has titled a little. Everything in it going wrong" (Kureishi, 2017, p. 41).

Waldo is aware what is going on in his house. He sees Eddie and Zee smiling while texting each other on couches. He talks about Zee hands cash to him. Despite knowing all these facts, Waldo remains silent. He does nothing because things were not in his hands. He says;

"Zee looks delighted as Eddie slips the wad in his pocket, grinning – but not too much – at my absurd generosity" (Kureishi, 2017, p. 46).

In his old age, he was aware death is coming. He keeps fantasizing things in his mind. He delivers absurd talks. He had no other option rather than imagine what is happening around him. He feels alienated because of his wife less attention towards him. His isolation scares him and compels to exaggerate all the happening in his brain. He expects love from Zee but reality memorizes him his place. In chapter six, he assumes in exaggeration; "I wake up expecting to be loved and then I remember that I am not" (Kureishi, 2017, p. 47).

Waldo spends much of his time spying about his wife and Eddie. Anita as a friend of Waldo is a minor character in the novel. Anita assists him in collecting proof against his wife and Eddie. He installs secret cameras and keeps eyes on their every move. His actions and observations highlight the irrationality. Waldo's imagination resonates the absurdist philosophy that there is not a certain meaning of life (Ditum, 2017). He has jealousy and envy for Eddie. Eddie is a film journalist. Once he admired him and from that day his house and wife has become accommodation for him. He explains him as a charming man. He hates his candidness with Zee. Waldo is not young healthy now but his narratives show his revengeful expressions for Eddie. He cannot deal with Eddie in reality. Although he fantasizes that revenge through words.

"First, I will smite him with madness, blindness and impotence, among other things. Then I will urinate in his mouth and wipe my ass with his head" (Kureishi, 2017, p. 28).

The character of Zee also exhibits the notion of absurdity. She doesn't deal her husband with the same potential as she was before. She uses Waldo's money but enjoys with Eddie. She knows her husband has become old and sick. He can't fulfil her desires. She takes Eddie to fill the lack in her life. She goes on trips and dinner with him. Zenab had given Waldo's place to Eddie. Having Waldo, her husband Zee chooses Eddie for the lack she had after Waldo's sickness. She wants to have life and fears of being alone. She was mad in love with his husband when he was

manly. Now she is obsessed with Eddie because he is not old aged man like her husband. She expresses her feelings to Waldo;

‘What do you mean? You don’t want someone to talk to me? To listen to me? To take me places? You’re becoming more of a rude man than you were before.’ She says. ‘You want me to be alone. You’re old, very old. Waldo, and I want to have a life. Can’t you admit you were harsh with him?’ The things that do not make sense refer to the absurd. *The Nothing* is 2017 novella. *Waiting for a Godot* is a true example of the theatre of absurd. Samuel Beckett exposes the absurdity in modern age as it published in 1952. The whole play is based on bizarre acts, dialogues and narrative. The characters in this play wait for Godot what they don’t know will come. The play explores the sense of “nothing to do”. “I’m glad to see you back. I thought you were gone forever” (Beckett, 1952, p. 2). In the same, the novel by Hanif Kureishi depicts the life of a modern absurd man who is struggling to have attention of his wife. He does strange things of using digital devices to capture his wife and her lover. In the last, Waldo has gained Zee’s attention again. “You forgot about me for a time. But now you remember me. That’s all I want” (Kureishi, 2017, p. 147).

The absurdity relates with nothingness in human life. In Hanif Kureishi’s novel *The Nothing*, nothingness is woven into the narrative structure through imagination, search for identity, lack in Waldo’s life and suspicion. The story revolves around the Waldo who is on wheel chair. He is tortured by his younger wife and his affair with that man whom he dislikes, Eddie. The title, *The Nothing* echoes nothingness. Waldo questions his existence in Zee’s life. And she ignores Waldo to fulfil her desires. Kureishi uses Waldo’s character to show the fear of a man of his identity in someone’s life or in the world. Waldo’s knowing of his wife infidelity and his need to capture all that things and installing cameras shows his desperate situation and control of things that are going far from his hands. The analysis of the whole narrative allows to arise a question whether Waldo is suffering as a victim or he is a masochist? (Scholes, 2017). This all show the absurd reality. Zee chooses Eddie in the place of Waldo to fill the gap that happened with the aging of Waldo. Overall, *The Nothing* investigates the existentialist thoughts of aging, lack of desires, helplessness and loss of identity.

In *The Nothing*, characters try to find or make importance in their lives through different means, whether it is through, intellectual engagement, profound associations, or self-serving desires. Waldo's protagonist struggle with physical decline, Zee's quest for vitality, and Eddie's opportunism all represent the assorted ways to people defy and cope with the existential void. These pursuits highlight the intricacy of human cravings and the ceaseless mission for importance in the midst of life's innate difficulties. Each character's activities and connections depict their singular endeavors to search importance and fulfilment in the face of their personal struggle and circumstances. Waldo's personality is a powerful exploration of maturing, jealousy, and the search for importance. Through his communications and inward talks, *The Nothing* dives into the intricacies of the human mind and the existential dilemmas that go with the progression of time. His process is a demonstration of the persevering through struggle to find the reason and importance even with the unyielding walk of time. Waldo, an aging and debilitated movie producer, grapples with the disintegration of his previous existence of essentialness and imagination. Laid up and dependent on his better half, Zee, Waldo's reality has contracted essentially, compelling him to go up against the void left by his reducing powers and purpose. Waldo's jealousy of Eddie is tangible and drives a lot of his way of behaving. This jealousy isn't just about Zee's expressions of warmth yet in addition about Eddie's childhood and essentialness, which distinctly diverge from Waldo's own physical and mental decline. As in text Waldo says:

“My brain might be consumed by agonizing flames, but I assume the loving couples have forgotten about me. I am becoming less important. They are under the lights, while I am fading. in a walk-on in my own movie” (Kureishi, 2017, p. 17) .



Waldo often uses his sharp intellect to belittle others, a defense mechanism to mask his insecurities. He frequently engages in verbal sparring with Zee and Eddie, using his wit to maintain a semblance of control and superiority. As Waldo ages, he becomes increasingly preoccupied with his legacy and the fear that he will be forgotten. This fear is exacerbated by his perception that Zee is drifting away from him, both emotionally and intellectually. This is poignantly captured when he reflects on his life's work. Waldo's relationship with Zee is marked by a mix of deep affection and bitter resentment. He loves her, but he also resents her vitality and the attention she gives to Eddie. Waldo's existential musings are a central theme in the novel, reflecting his struggle to find meaning in a world he increasingly views as meaningless. His nihilistic outlook is captured in a conversation with Zee. "Making sense is always delusional, and I enjoy my magician's imagination, thinking through the scenario as I sit here shovelling mango kulfi into my cakehole" (Kureishi, 2017, p. 22).

Zee is the much younger wife of the protagonist, Waldo. Her character is deeply complex, torn between her loyalty to her ailing husband and her desires for vitality and passion, which she seeks through an affair with Eddie. Zee is portrayed as a woman caught in a web of conflicting emotions. She embodies a mixture of compassion, guilt, restlessness, and a yearning for something more than her current life offers. Zee cares for Waldo, tending to his needs as his health declines. This is evident in her moments of tenderness, yet her compassion is constantly tested by her internal conflicts and the affair with Eddie. Zee's affair with Eddie highlights her longing for passion and a sense of aliveness that she feels is missing in her life with Waldo. Her relationship with Eddie is fraught with guilt.

Zee is aware of the betrayal but is unable to resist the allure of what Eddie represents – youth, excitement, and a break from the monotony of caring for Waldo. Zee's interactions often reflect her inner turmoil. She oscillates between moments of intense emotion and detachment, showcasing her struggle to reconcile her actions with her conscience. Zee serves as a pivotal character that influences both Waldo and Eddie. Her actions and decisions drive much of the plot's emotional and moral complexity. Through Zee, the novel explores themes of loyalty, betrayal, the search for meaning, and the inevitable conflicts that arise from human desires and obligations. Zee's relationship with Waldo is marked by a deep, albeit strained, bond. She is his caretaker, but her emotional distance grows as she becomes more involved with Eddie. Eddie represents an escape for Zee; a chance to reclaim a part of herself that she feels is lost. Their relationship is passionate but fraught with the shadow of betrayal. During conversation she portrays Eddie's character as:

"I think Eddie should help us,' she says.

'Eddie Warburton?'

'He's kinder than you realize.

"In what way?" (Kureishi, 2017, p. 36).

He squeezed that spot on the back of your neck which I couldn't bear to touch, and gave up two days to take you to the doctor's and to hospital. He's better than any assistant and never complains. Eddie's quest for meaning is multifaceted, involving career ambitions, relationships, power dynamics, and existential musings. His actions and choices reflect a deep-seated desire to assert his identity, find fulfillment, and navigate the complexities of human existence his career aspirations play a significant role in his quest for meaning. His association with Waldo, a once-renowned filmmaker, can be seen as a way to gain inspiration, mentorship, and possibly a boost in his own career. Eddie's ambition drives him to seek validation and success in the competitive world of filmmaking. Eddie's affair with Zee is a means of creating meaning through intimate human connections. His relationship with her is not just about physical attraction but also about

fulfilling emotional needs and desires. Through this affair, Eddie seeks a sense of importance and influence, as he becomes a central figure in the lives of Zee and Waldo.

By ingratiating himself with Waldo and seducing Zee, Eddie exerts power and control over the couple's lives. This control can be seen as a way for Eddie to assert his significance and agency. Manipulating the dynamics within the household allows him to shape his environment and assert his identity. Eddie's youth and vitality are in stark contrast to Waldo's frailty and old age. By embracing his youthful energy and physical prowess, Eddie creates meaning through the celebration of life and the pursuit of pleasure. His actions reflect a desire to fully experience and enjoy the present moment, making the most of his youthful years. Despite his manipulative tendencies, Eddie's actions can also be interpreted as a search for authentic experiences and genuine human connections.

His affair with Zee and his relationship with Waldo might be driven by a deeper need for meaningful interactions and understanding. Eddie's quest for authenticity reflects the complexity of human desires and the longing for true significance in life. Eddie's character can be seen as engaging in an existential exploration of his own identity and purpose. His relationships and actions are ways to test boundaries, challenge norms, and explore the essence of what it means to live a fulfilling life. Eddie's journey is marked by a continuous search for meaning in a world that often seems arbitrary and unpredictable.

Existentialism is a philosophical movement that arose in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, mainly on European continent. Existentialism is by nature a focus on the individual human being, and what this means for concepts of free will or self-determination. The absurdist philosopher Albert Camus stated that individuals should embrace the absurd condition of humankind while also defiantly continuing to explore and search for personal meaning. Existential Angst and Existential Dread One of the major themes in existentialist thought is that individuals have the freedom to make their own choices, but with this choice comes great responsibility which causes us dread. By themselves, the existentialists insist that humans will always have to deal with this dismay and they ought not conceal away from it.

The individual against society is a common theme among existentialist thinkers. Critique of Social practices, Criticism may be directed at customs, rules, or social institutions which seem to limit our freedom in ways we ourselves find unjust. Existentialist thinkers often explore the tension between the individual and society. They criticize societal norms, values, and institution that may restrict or limit individual freedom and authenticity. Existentialist advocate authenticity, encouraging people to act in accordance with their true selves rather than conforming to external expectations or pressures. Existentialism also boils down to the experience of alienation and loneliness. Existentialists argue that individuals are essentially alone in the world, facing the challenges of existence without inherent meaning or guidance. This sense of isolation can lead to feelings of despair but also opens up the possibility of authentic self-discovery and self-expression. Key figures of the existentialist movement include Friedrich Nietzsche, Soren Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Simone de Beauvoir. Each of these thinkers contributed unique

approaches to existential philosophy, but they all share a common concern with the individual's struggle to find meaning and purpose in a seemingly indifferent universe.

In Hanif Qureshi novel *The Nothing* relationships serve as a powerful vehicle for exploring the existential struggle with the absurd and the search for meaning. Throughout the novel, the characters navigate the complexities of human connection against a backdrop of existential uncertainty and uncivil despair. By examining specific relationship and their dynamics, we can gain deeper insight into how Kureishi tackles these existential themes. One of the primary ways in which the novel examine existential struggles is through the protagonist's relationship with his surroundings. As the narrative unfolds, reader is introduced to the protagonist who is disappointed with the uniformity and emptiness of his life. His worldly routines and lack of purpose mirror the existential angst that spread through the novel. Qureshi employs vivid imagery and introspective narration to convey the protagonist's sense of alienation and detachment from the world around him. "I can't say life is less interesting now I am almost paralyzed and dead. The neighbours in the lighted cages of their apartments are compelling. Dinner parties are more riveting than wars, and are always an occasion for a close-up" (Kureishi, 2017, p. 24).

The main character's conflict with other characters further highlights the theme of existential struggle. Through different relationships, Qureshi explores different aspects of the human condition and the search for meaning. For example, the protagonist's interactions with his romantic partner reveal the complexities of intimacy and connection in a world devoid of inherent meaning. Their discourse often veers into existential territory, as they grapple with questions of identity, purpose, and the nature of reality: The protagonist asks his partner one evening. "Sometimes I wonder if anything we do really matters in the end" (Kureishi, 2017, p. 52). Such exchanges underscore the characters shared sense of existential unease and their ongoing search for significance amidst the chaos of existence. Qureshi highlights the inherent absurdity of human relationships and the inherent tension between the desire for individual autonomy and belonging., Qureshi invites readers to confront the arbitrary nature of societal norms and the existential implications of conforming to them.

Waldo's dissatisfaction with his marriage stems from his wider disappointment with life itself. He grapples with questions of identity and purpose, feeling adrift in a world devoid of meaning. His artistic pursuits, once a source of inspiration and spirit, have become hollow and meaningless. This existential crisis spread through his relationship with Zee, as they struggle to find common ground amidst their shared sense of emptiness. The central relationship in the novel is between Waldo, the protagonist, and his wife, Zee. Their marriage is characterized by a sense of disillusionment and depression, reflecting Waldo's existential crisis. Early in the novel, Waldo reflects on the nature of his relationship with Zee, describing it as "You want me to alone . You're old, very old, Waldo and I went to have a life" (Kureishi, 2017, p. 50). This sentiment sets the tone for their relationship, which is devoid of passion or genuine connection. Throughout the novel, Waldo reflects on the nature of his marriage, observing the futility of their efforts to find fulfillment and purpose. "When I am dead I hope you find a wealthy man with an attractive penis to look after you" (Kureishi, 2017, p. 29).

This quote highlights the existential dilemma faced by Waldo and Zenab as they navigate their relationship. Despite their longing for something more, they confront the bleak reality of an indifferent universe, where their pursuits ultimately lead to a sense of emptiness. Their relationship becomes a creation of the broader existential struggle depicted in the novel. Moreover, the interactions between Waldo and Zenab serve to further illustrate how ambiguous human bonds can be in a time where life has lost all meaning. While both try fruitlessly to give meaning through one another, they are ultimately forced up against the boundaries of their interrelationship and asked what might it mean for them if a world without inherent meaning.

As Waldo reflects on his relationship with Zenab, he observes, "We were like two

astronauts, lost in space, clinging to each other for dear life. But even in each other's arms, we felt the vast emptiness of the universe pressing in on us" (Kureishi, 2017, p. 62). One example is when the protagonist reflects on the temporary nature of human connection. The absurdity of seeking meaning in relationships while acknowledging the inherent emptiness of existence. Additionally, another character's existential crisis is evident. The character grapples with the futility of human relationships in the face of existential uncertainty, highlighting the novel's exploration of the search for meaning amidst the absurd.

Zee, too, is grappling with her own existential dilemma. She feels trapped in a marriage that no longer brings her fulfillment, longing for something more meaningful. However, she lacks the agency to break free from the confines of her life, resigned to her fate. Both partners feel powerless to change their circumstances. The arrival of Anita, a young and vibrant woman, interrupts the motionless equality of Waldo and Zee's marriage. Waldo is immediately drawn to Anita's youthful energy and zest for life, seeing in her an opportunity to escape the boredom of his existence (Adams, 2017). Their affair provides a temporary spare from Waldo's existential angst, offering him a fleeting sense of purpose and vitality. However, their relationship ultimately proves to be hollow and transient, failing to provide the meaning and fulfillment Waldo seeks.

Anita herself embodies the existential struggle with the absurd, grappling with questions of identity and authenticity. Despite her outward confidence and charisma, she harbors her own insecurities and doubts. As she reflects on her relationship with Waldo, Anita's existential uncertainty mirrors Waldo's own, underscoring the universal nature of the human condition. The dynamic between Waldo and his friends, further illuminates the existential themes of the novel. Horace, a successful businessman, represents society's conventional values and aspirations. He views life as a series of achievements and acquisitions, measuring success in terms of material wealth and social status. In contrast, Waldo rejects society's prescribed path, questioning the value of conventional success in the face of existential nihilism. Their differing perspectives lead to tension and conflict, as Horace struggles to understand Waldo's existential crisis.

Marianne, an artist and former lover of Waldo, provides him with a sense of companionship and understanding amidst his existential turmoil. Their relationship is characterized by mutual respect and empathy, as they navigate the complexities of love and desire. However, their connection is also fraught with tension and unresolved emotions, reflecting the inherent ambiguity of human relationships. Throughout the novel, Kureishi employs rich imagery and evocative language to convey the existential struggle with the absurd. The setting itself becomes a metaphor for the characters' internal turmoil, as they navigate the labyrinthine streets of London in search of meaning and purpose.

In conclusion, *The Nothing* offers a compelling exploration of the existential struggle with the absurd and the search for meaning. Through the lens of relationships, Kureishi delves into the complexities of human connection amidst the backdrop of existential uncertainty. Whether through marital discord, extramarital affairs, or friendships, the characters in the novel grapple with questions of identity, purpose, and authenticity. By examining these relationships and their dynamics, we gain deeper insights into the universal nature of the human condition and the quest for meaning in an absurd world.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis of the novel *The Nothing* by Hanif Kureishi explores the existential struggles of the characters in the novel. The novel further explores the conceptualization of the absurd and search for a meaning in life. Kureishi's novel depicts the key ideas of Existentialism theory through the narrative structure of the novel. Kureishi's novel depicts the concept of absurd through the character of Waldo and the narrative used by him. There is an absurdity in this novel in several aspects. Waldo narrates the story, who is a filmmaker and facing his declining condition. His observation and commentary on the situation show dark humor and his absurd behavior.

His wife abandoned him for another man Eddie. He blames Eddie for snatching his wife, Zee. The relationship of Waldo, his wife Zee and her lover Eddie are tied up with absurdity. The plot of the novel exaggerates the flaws of characters and highlights the ridiculous behavior of the characters that show illogical sense of human emotions and desires. The narrative of the novel reflects Waldo's decay and desperation as the result of this natural phenomenon of death. His thoughts and words explore the theme of absurd as he is captured with his helplessness and mortality.

We can explore the themes of desire and desperation throughout the text. The plot is much based on Waldo's desires and desperation. His need for love, revenge in mind and mortality drives him towards absurdity. Waldo's struggles for dominancy shows his control that he has lost over Zee. Waldo's health and physical decline mirrors that how aging effects the relationships and self-concept for a person. *The Nothing* by Hanif Kureishi is a poignant exploration of aging, jealousy, and the search for meaning. Through the lives of Waldo, an incapacitated filmmaker; Zee, his younger wife; and Eddie, a young opportunist, the novel delves into complex human emotions and existential dilemmas. Each character's struggle to find or create significance amidst personal challenges highlights the perpetual quest for fulfilment. The novel examines themes of loyalty, betrayal, vitality, and the human desire for connection and legacy, ultimately reflecting on the existential void and the ways individuals cope with life's inherent challenges.

The novel incorporates absurdist elements through its depiction of human relationships and actions that defy conventional moral norms. Eddie's opportunism and his affair with Zee disrupt the traditional boundaries of loyalty and fidelity, highlighting the arbitrary nature of human behaviour and the pursuit of personal desires regardless of consequences. Through the characters' struggle Kureishi portrays the inherent meaninglessness of life and the constant struggle to find purpose and significance. The characters' pursuits—whether it's Waldo's desperate attempts to reclaim his fading glory or Zee's search for vitality through her affair—underscore the absurdity of human existence in a world where meaning often eludes grasp. *The Nothing* leads to existentialism and absurdism by challenging traditional narratives of purpose and morality, portraying characters who navigate the complexities of existence in a universe that appears indifferent to their struggles and desires.

Kureishi highlights the inherent meaningless of human relationship and inherent tension between the desire for individual freedom and belonging. Waldo's dissatisfaction with his marriage stems also from his widespread disillusionment with life itself. He grapples with questions of identity and purpose feeling helpless in a world devoid of meaning. This existential crisis spills over through his relationship with Zee as they struggle to find common ground between their shared sense of self. The central relationship in the novel is between Waldo the main character and his wife Zee. This marriage is characterized by a sense of despair and depression reflecting Waldo existential crisis. Furthermore, the interactions between Waldo and Zeinab further illustrate how ambiguous human bonds can be in a time where life has lost all meaning.

The arrival of Anita, a young and dynamic woman, disrupts the motionless equality of Waldo and Zee's marriage. Waldo is immediately drawn to Nisha's youthful energy and zest for life, a chance to escape the boredom of his existence. Their affair provides a temporary relief from Waldo's existential angst, giving him a momentary sense of purpose and vitality. However, their relationship ultimately proves hollow and ephemeral, failing to provide the meaning and fulfillment Waldo seeks.

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