

Existential Angst in Jesse Andrews's Psychological Realistic Fiction *Me and Earl and the Dying Girl* (2012)

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Abstract:

The purpose of this article is to manifest how a psychological realist text through the techniques of stream of consciousness and internal monologue via an interlocutor narrator can depict what Jean-Paul Sartre calls 'existential angst' that has become popular in the age of modernism. To accomplish this, the current article uses the psychological analysis research method to analyze the American Jesse Andrews's debut novel and shows how the protagonist suffers from his existential angst, the trauma of the other and the inability to form his identity and, therefore, essence. Andrews's recluse protagonist is shown as responsible for his deeds since he creates free choices to form his essence. Existentialism is regarded as the opposite of nihilism. Therefore, considering himself a nihilist or absurd, as well as suffering from low self-esteem, Andrews's protagonist tries to resist his meaningless life and, then, finally exists. Soren Kierkegaard's concept of anxiety, Sartre's modern existentialism, and Erik Erikson's identity development are briefly examined throughout the study, in addition to other concepts like nihilism, absurdism and trauma of the other. It is necessary, too, to explore the literary genre 'realism' and the sub-genre 'psychological realism' as well as the techniques of stream of consciousness and internal monologue, used by the novelist to achieve his goal.

Keywords: psychological realism, existential angst, Sartre, essence, choice

**القلق الوجودي في الرواية الواقعية النفسية "أنا وإيرل والفتاة المحتضرة"
(٢٠١٢) لجيسي أندروز**

المستخلص: يعد الغرض من هذه المقالة هو إظهار قدرة النص الواقعي النفسي من خلال تقنيات تيار الوعي والمونولوج الداخلي و استخدام الراوي المحاور على تصوير ما يسميه بول سارتر "القلق الوجودي" والذي أصبح شائعاً في العصر الحديث. لذا تقوم هذه الدراسة بتطبيق منهجية التحليل النفسي لنقد العمل الأدبي للكاتب الأمريكي جيسي أندروز وتوضيح كيف يعاني بطل الرواية من قلقه الوجودي والخوف من الآخر وعدم قدرته على تكوين هويته وماهيته. حيث يعيش بطل الرواية في عزلة عن الآخرين وبمسئولية تامة عن أفعاله مع تمتعه بمطلق الحرية في اختياراته التي تساعده على تشكيل ماهيته. وتعتبر الوجودية هي الوجه الآخر للعدمية، وهذا يظهر من خلال البطل الذي يعكس صورة الشخص العدمي أو العبثي، ويعاني أيضاً من تدني احترام الذات، ولكنه يحاول مقاومة هذه الحياة التي لا معنى لها، لكي يتمكن في النهاية من تحديد ماهيته. كما تتناول هذه الدراسة بإيجاز مفهوم سورين كيركيغارد للقلق، والنظرية الوجودية الحديثة لسارتر، ومصطلح تطوير الهوية لإريك إريكسون، بالإضافة إلى إيضاح مفاهيم أخرى مثل العدمية والعبثية والخوف من الآخر. كما كان من الضروري أيضاً إلقاء الضوء على أدب الواقعية والواقعية النفسية وإلى تقنيات تيار الوعي والمونولوج الداخلي التي استخدمها الروائي لتحقيق هدفه.

الكلمات الدالة: الواقعية النفسية، القلق الوجودي، سارتر، الماهية، الإختيار

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1- Introduction

Anxiety is the dizziness of freedom

-- Kierkegaard

The broad technological, social, psychological, economic and political evolutions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century have extremely affected the modern age. Thus, the traditional life perspective was transformed, and people found themselves facing new psychological anxieties. This age of modernism highlights 'existential angst' and its influence on teens who face extreme difficulties to form their identity. Hence, Existentialism can be regarded as the most prominent philosophical trend in contemporary Western philosophy.

Literature's main aim is to depict the truth of life. Noticeably, literal copying of truth does not produce the reality effect in fiction. Therefore, to dig into the internal life of the fictional characters, psychological realism is applied to the present fictional text by Jesse Andrews using the stream of consciousness and internal monologue rather than portraying activities and external surroundings alone, as human beings' characters are formed through the activating of their minds together with their psychological past. So, the introduction is elongated to shed light on existence philosophy, identity development, realistic fiction, psychological realism, stream of consciousness and internal monologue.

Psychological analysis is the method of research employed in this study to show how the psychological realism subgenre used by the American novelist Andrews is the best way to portray existential angst in modern society, showing the modern anxieties that the protagonist faces.

1.1 Existence Philosophy: Existential Angst, Nihilism, Absurdity

In the 19th and 20th centuries, modernity widely flourished. Thus, the religious worldview began to collapse revealing a crisis of meaning called Nihilism that the Russian Philosopher Nikolai I. Nadezhdin (1804-1856) was the first to use. Then, the term is famously used by the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). As

defined in the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Nihilism is “the belief that all values are baseless and that nothing can be known or communicated. It is often associated with extreme pessimism and a radical skepticism that condemns existence” (Pratt). Nihilists believe that there is no objective meaning to human beings' lives. This provoked philosophers to ask: what is the meaning of life? Therefore, Existentialism and Absurdism have attempted to manage the crisis Nihilism presents.

Faced with the void of meaninglessness that Nihilism presents, the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre's (1905-1980) Existentialist reaction was to first wonder: what does it mean to be human? The answer, therefore, is that we must create our meaning through our actions. And this is where his popular phrase “existence precedes essence” (Sartre *Existentialism and Human* 13) comes into play. The essence of being human for Sartre is defined by our existence, what we are is what we do and how we act in the world. He states in *Existentialism is a Humanism* that “man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself” (22). As there is no objective meaning, we develop our own by choosing the way we live.

Existential Angst is a condition of dread or anxiety that is related to the philosophy of Existentialism.

The English word “angst” derives from the same Latin root as “anguish” and “anxiety,” and conveys a similar meaning...The concept of existential angst was first explored by Kierkegaard in his 1844 book *Begrebet Angest, or The Concept of Anxiety*. Anxiety (Danish Angest) was no new concept in the intellectual circles at the time Kierkegaard wrote. In his reading of the Romantics, he would have come across the German “Angst.” (Rankin)

The Danish philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) has illustrated existential angst as a state of a man standing on the edge of a high cliff or structure. The fear of accidentally falling is accompanied by the man's illogical impulse to deliberately throw himself over the edge. He feels anxious upon realizing that he is free to choose. He observes the responsibility of making free choices. This philosophy was later embraced by many European intellectuals who were disillusioned by the battles they had witnessed in the world wars. Among these intellectuals were Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) the German existentialist philosopher and social critic, and Sartre. Heidegger's project is descriptive, or “phenomenological,” which means removing Anxiety's

psychology from the context of religion that Kierkegaard adopts and translating it into a general account of the human being's inescapably finite situation. Sartre has mixed methods of German phenomenology with ideas from...Kierkegaard and others set off with the distinctively French seasoning of his own literary sensibility. He applied phenomenology to people's lives in a more exciting, personal way than its inventors had ever thought to do, and thus made himself the founding father of a philosophy that became international: modern existentialism. (Bakewell 14)

As for Kierkegaard anxiety means "freedom's actuality as the possibility of possibility...Anxiety is a sympathetic antipathy and an antipathetic sympathy... neither does it exist in the beast, and the less spirit, the less anxiety" (*The Concept* 57). He states that man does not only exist but is also "infinitely interested in existence" (*Concluding* 268). In other words, one is free to choose his own decisions and thus shape his existence with complete responsibility. This movement highlighted the essence of things over their existence. The essence of a thing is what makes its existence available. As Sartre highlights First of all, man exists, turns up, appears on the scene, and only afterwards defines himself. If man as the existentialist sees him, is indefinable, it is because at first, he is nothing. Only afterwards will he be something and he himself will have made what he will be." (*Existentialism* 18)

Existentialist philosophers consider themselves responsible for improving man's fate in a world characterized by a lot of anxieties (Olajide 128). They believe that life has no predominant meaning or order, except for what human beings establish; what the human being does, senses, his main tendencies, attachments, etc., are what constitute his existence. Contrary to Behaviorism, which claims that human beings are submitted to the control of the environment and laws or fate, *Webster's New World Dictionary* defines Existentialism as "the doctrine that existence takes precedence over essence and holding that man is totally free and responsible for his acts. The responsibility is the source of dread and anguish that encompass mankind" (622).

Existentialist philosophers claim that only human beings exist whereas other beings are; they merely are but do not exist. To exist entails "to be personally committed to a freely chosen way of life; it means being conscious of the problems of human life with all the choices open to man and opting for a certain way of life while assuming responsibility for it" (Agidigbi 4). Admitting that only human beings can

exist, Heidegger confirms that “the being that exists is man. Man alone exists. Trees are but they do not exist. Angels are but they do not exist” (215). We do not exist till we shape our character through our free choices. Hence, to exist you have to confront choices and be responsible. Whereas Sartre confirms the freedom of choice, Heidegger hardly refers to it. Sartre considers existential angst as an inherent result of free choices.

Sartre argues that humans live in ceaseless anguish, not only because life is miserable, but also because they are “condemned to be free; because once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does” (*Existentialism and Human* 32). He claims that our being in the world is beyond our control, however, once we become self-aware, we have to make free choices that constitute our ‘essence’; so, only by existing and behaving in a specific way do we grant meaning to our lives. The Absurd is the result of this confrontation between our strong desires for meaning with the meaningless world. It is the anxiety between this instinct for meaning and the failure to satisfy it.

The term, Absurdism, first appeared in the 19th c. by Kierkegaard. Then broke from Existentialism and Nihilism through the French philosopher Albert Camus (1913-1960). *The American Heritage Dictionary* defines it as “A philosophy, often translated into art forms, holding that humans exist in a meaningless, irrational universe and that any search for order by them will bring them into direct conflict with this universe” (8). Camus claims that we should hold the tension, hold the space of Absurd meaningfulness. He believes that “the only way to deal with an unfree world is to become so absolutely free that your very existence is an act of rebellion.” Therefore, Absurdism means to struggle with integrity. The Absurd is the assembly between two psychological matters: the cold indifferent and meaningless objective reality (Nihilism) on the one hand, and humanity’s instinctive desire for meaning (Existentialism) on the other.

There is no fixed design for a human being to follow. Therefore, we are responsible for defining ourselves. This lack of pre-defined design accompanied by an absurd existence, which provides us with limitless choices, is what Sartre calls the ‘anguish of freedom’. Paul Auster states, “In the end, each life is no more than the sum of contingent facts, a chronicle of chance intersections, of flukes, of random events that divulge nothing but their own lack of purpose” (256).

For existentialists, man and the world are inseparable. Man, being a conscious being, does not exist in a vacuum; he is a part of the world and

cannot exist without the world. The existence of an individual is closely connected to the world in which he lives. He is part and parcel of the world. So, he cares continuously about how others judge him. Heidegger describes man as a “being-in-the-world” (*Being and Time* 52). In addition, Sartre states that there is no world without selfhood and without the world, there is no selfhood (*Being and Nothingness* 104). Arguably, not only selfhood but also otherhood.

Existentialism, also, states that the existence of the one-self necessitates the existence of others, as it is impossible to exist without others. Heidegger uses the term ‘Dasein,’ technically, to stand for (man’s being). This German word *Dasein* literally means ‘being there;’ in the sense that we are continuously connected to the world in a specific way. Dasein is a being that does not simply occur among other beings. Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that in its being this being is concerned about its very being. Thus, it is constitutive of the being of Dasein to have, in its very being, a relation of being to this being. (Heidegger *Being* 32)

Thus, man is not only a being-in-the-world but also a being-with-others. This means that the social nature of man depends on his being-with-others. Even though each individual keeps his individuality, uniqueness and singularity, he is a being who is regularly connected to others. Human beings cannot live in isolation and if it happens, they are going to be depressed and psychologically suffer. The individual should be careful not to be lost in the world. Hence, existentialists differentiate between reliable and unreliable existence; which is the difference between existence and essence.

The Canadian psychologist James E. Marcia (1937-) argues that ego-identity is “a particular kind of existential position” (2). Existential angst creates destructive impacts on the human being causing a reconstruction of the person’s identity and consciousness of the world. These psychological anxieties, not only cause fragmentation and destruction of the self; causing low self-esteem, but also create trauma of the other and difficulties in identity development.

1.2 Identity Development: Self-Esteem and Trauma of the Other

It was Erik Homburger Erikson (1902–1994), a German-American psychologist known for his theory on the psychological development of human beings, who first claimed the stages of psychosocial development of identity and coined the phrase ‘identity crisis.’ He claims that “A well-developed identity is comprised of goals, values, and beliefs to

which a person is committed. It is the awareness of the consistency in self over time, the recognition of this consistency by others" (*Identity and the Life*). Identity formation depends on self-concept, personality development, and ethics. It is a scheme in which human beings form a distinct and specific view of themselves and their identity to form their essence.

Self-esteem is another sphere of identity formation. "Self-esteem has traditionally been defined as a stable sense of personal worth and worthiness" (Rosenberg 326). It is known as one's beliefs and feelings about one's self-concept and identity. Hence, identity formation and self-esteem help us constitute our essence. "I am what I can imagine I will be" (Erikson *Identity Youth* 116). The protagonist in the current novel is searching for his identity and self-concept, anxious about his being among others and thus suffering from what Sartre calls trauma of the other.

Therefore, let's shed light, briefly, on the trauma of the other. First, according to the *Oxford Dictionary of Word Origins*, trauma is "an English use of a Greek word meaning literally 'wound'. It was transferred to the notion of a 'mental wound' in the late 19th century" (1248). It is, also, defined in *Webster's New World Essential Vocabulary* as "a mental shock or painful emotional experience" (243). But what about the *Other*? In the late 18th century, the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) introduced the concept of the Other as a constituent part of self-consciousness. The English philosopher, John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) introduced the idea of the other in 1865 in *An Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy*. In *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* (1943), Sartre applied the dialectic of intersubjectivity to describe how the world is altered by the appearance of the Other, of how the world then seems to be set to the Other person, and not to the Self. In addition, the French philosopher, Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), claims that the absolute alterity of the Other is compromised because the Other person is other than the Self and the group.

Mentioning the trauma of the Other necessitates quoting Sartre's claim that "the Other is an explosive instrument" (320). Sartre explains, "It is shame or pride which reveals to me the other's look and myself at the end of that look" (*Being and Nothingness* 284-5). The other's look creates a feeling of shame because the objectification that flows from the Other's look suppresses consciousness's pre-reflective feeling of absolute subjectivity. Once the Other looks at consciousness, it comes

to see itself as something objective. For this reason, Sartre writes that “through the Other, I am enriched in a new dimension of being: through the Other, I come to exist in the dimension of being, through the Other I become an object” (*Notebooks* 499). Therefore, if social relations occur through the look, they are strife and rigid; either consciousness observes the other and objectifies it or it is observed by a subjective Other and is objectified.

Actually, for a novelist to portray these psychological anxieties and traumas for the reader, he should use the ‘psychological realistic’ subgenre of fiction through the techniques of stream of consciousness and internal monologue.

1.3 Realistic Fiction

The realist movement in literature is first developed in France in the mid-nineteenth century by Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850) who is recognized as the originator of French Realism in literature. Soon spreading throughout different nations to have the Russian Ivan Turgenev, the English Charles Dickens and the American William Dean Howells. Realism is defined in *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* as:

A mode of writing that gives the impression of recording or ‘reflecting’ faithfully an actual way of life...realism is not a direct or simple reproduction of reality (a ‘slice of life’) but a system of conventions producing a lifelike illusion of some ‘real’ world outside the text, by processes of selection, exclusion, description, and manners of addressing the reader...a dominant literary trend...in which the problems of ordinary people in unremarkable circumstances are rendered with close attention to the details of physical setting and to the complexities of social life. (Baldick 391-2)

Literary realism reflects a faithful portrayal of life. It tries to narrate a story as accurately as possible rather than romanticizing or dramatizing it. Literary fiction offers an imaginative re-creation of real life. It is supported by the creativity of the literary men that forms its outlines and gives it a pattern.

The novel is considered the most capable genre of manifesting and reframing the complex and massive experiences of man in the modern age. The American novelist, Willa Cather (1873-1947), clarifies that novel “is merely a work of imagination in which a writer tries to present the experiences and emotions of a group of people by the light of his own. This is really what he does, whether the method is ‘objective’ or

‘subjective’” (48). Realistic novels may represent not only *real* depictions of incidents and characters, but also *real* traumas, restrictions, prejudices and anxieties. These sensitizing influences and empathic feelings depend on the reader's response; what each reader individually can deduct and infer from the fictional text. The literary author yields to write fiction because he has something to convey and to narrate. Throughout his book, *Man as an End*, the Italian novelist Alberto Moravia (1907-1990) claims that realism represents courage. He considers this literary figure as a witness. To “witness means to name things, that is, to determine them and to establish their objective significance for us” (12).

There are different kinds of literary realism, each with its definite features. Magical realism, social realism, kitchen sink realism, socialist realism, naturalism, and psychological realism; which this study is going to handle.

1.4 Psychological Realistic Novel

The phase of psychological realism started in England with the sentimental novel *Pamela* (1740) by the English writer Samuel Richardson (1689-1761). This subgenre is a kind of realism that is character-driven. It flourished in the late 19th century with the literary writings of the American novelist Henry James (1843-1916). By manifesting the profound real-life experiences in fiction and by stepping aside old theories like Romantic idealism, psychological realism has broadly become widespread in modernist literature. Hence, the literary movement of the early 20th century resorts to degrading previous movements of literature and caring much more for human psychology. It has become commonplace in 21st-century lit.

This subgenre can explore the traumas and consistent anxieties of life experiences. It focuses on what stimulates certain characters to make specific choices and why. It uses characters to exhibit commentary on different issues just as social ones. It presents an honest portrayal of human beliefs and feelings. It “denotes fidelity to the truth in depicting the inner workings of the mind, the analysis of thought and feeling, the presentation of the nature of personality and character” (Cuddon 610).

This type concentrates on why characters do what they do. When literary men want to detect the internal lives of their fictional characters, they apply it to their text. The major characters in these fictions are often troubled men and women who struggle with their *choices* or are *anxious* about their *existence* and *essence*. This may be stressed by the effect they

have on the people around them and how those secondary characters view their actions. The same happens to the protagonist in Andrews's literary text who struggles with his choices as well as is plagued by his relationship with others. To drive a story from inside a character's mind, the author has to show the characters acting and show why they are acting. On the contrary, a story that focuses on external experiences rather than the inward psychological thoughts of the characters cannot be considered psychologically realistic or psychologically enlightening.

The American literary critic Bernard J. Paris (1931-) writes in *Imagined Human Beings: A Psychological Approach to Character and Conflict in Literature*:

Because of its concrete, dramatic quality, literature enables us not only to observe people other than ourselves but also to enter into their mental universe, to discover what it feels like to be these people and to confront their life situations. We can gain in this way a phenomenological grasp of experience that cannot be derived from theory alone, and not from case histories either, unless they are also works of art...Literature offers us an opportunity to amplify our experience in a way that can enhance our empathic powers...it is a valuable aid to clinical training and personal growth. (8)

In his book *Consciousness and the Novel*, the English literary author David Lodge (1935-) has shown how Freud's disclosure of the 'model of the mind' allows authors to 'plumb these depths' of psychological reality in the characters they depict:

The Freudian model of the mind was structured like geological strata: unconscious, ego, superego - in ascending order. It, therefore, encouraged the idea that consciousness had a dimension of depth, which it was the task of literature, as of psychoanalysis, to explore. For modernist writers, the effort to plumb these depths, to get closer to psychological reality, paradoxically entailed an abandonment of the traditional properties and strategies of literary realism. (61)

Indeed, literature "can help to reveal Consciousness in ways that Science cannot" (Lodge). Psychological realistic texts provide us with "immediate knowledge of how the world is experienced by the individual consciousness and an understanding of the inner life in its own terms" (Paris 24). "The ultimate in psychological realism is the use of the stream of consciousness method" (Cuddon 610).

1.5 Stream of Consciousness and Internal Monologue

The literary author tries as much as possible to portray the inner processes of fictional characters using different techniques. Accordingly, certain literary techniques have come to be related to psychological realism. These techniques are what make psychological realism possible; despite no specific technique is indispensable. The sentiments and motivations of the fictional characters in these novels are claimed to be “part and parcel of their natures and conditions, their talk is individual, belongs strictly to them, and not to the author” (Carroll 70). Therefore, most psychological novelists use the stream of consciousness and interior monologue to allow the reader to get directly to the inner thoughts of the fictional characters.

In 1890, the American psychologist and philosopher William James (1842-1910) was the first to use the term ‘stream of consciousness’ in his work *The Principles of Psychology* (1890). He used this term to be able to reflect the free stream of thoughts. In 1918, the British novelist May Sinclair (1863-1946) first applied this term in a literary context while discussing Dorothy Richardson’s novels. Literary authors use it to dig into a character’s mind to be able to perceive their thoughts as well as to understand their motives and behaviors. This resembles taking a boat down the stream of a character’s feelings and beliefs. This technique is defined in the *Encyclopedia of the Novel* as “the unceasing flux of thoughts and associations, conscious and otherwise” (Schellinger). It is considered a proper technical device to disclose the thoughts of the characters.

Stream-of-consciousness texts are “characterized by associative (and at times dissociative) leaps in syntax and punctuation that can make the prose difficult to follow, tracing” as they do “a character’s fragmentary thoughts and sensory feelings” (*Encyclopedia*). Joseph Warren Beach (1880-1957), the American literary scholar, claims that this technique shows “the direct presentation of a character’s thoughts in the first person...It is a technique in which the writer lets the reader see the thought processes of a character” (517). Noticeably, when humans think, they do not think in sentences, with perfect logic: “Minds jump from place to place with the flimsiest of connections, creating all sorts of images and calling on memories and sensations” (Beach 517). This technique tries to seize and express this flow of thought: “By breaking up the formal railway line of the sentence, by the use of ellipses and parentheses, by blurring the boundaries between what is thought and what is spoken, and by switching point of view and narrative voice with

bewildering frequency” (Lodge 23). Consequently, the novelist can imitate in fiction his real-life using the phenomenon of consciousness.

The term interior monologue is often used interchangeably with stream of consciousness. Interior monologue is first used extensively by the French writer Édouard Dujardin (1861-1949) in *We'll to the Woods No More* (1887) and later has become a characteristic device of 20th c. psychological novels. Similar to the stream of consciousness, it leads the reader to “see the character’s thoughts. But in this case, the character’s thoughts are not presented chaotically, as in ‘stream of consciousness’, but are arranged logically, as if the character were making a speech (to himself) in his one mind” (Warren 518). In other words, internal monologue presents the feelings and thoughts of the characters using a logical stream from one idea to the other, whereas stream of consciousness conveys the real experiences of thinking in all their distress and chaos. Inward monologues’ basic aim is to unveil deep emotions. Skillful literary men often use ‘interior monologue’ accompanied by certain actions and motions that aim to elevate its effect and indicative goal. Thus, it becomes evident that psychological realists, like Andrews, can best show the existential angst of their fictional characters via stream of consciousness and interior monologue.

2- Existential Angst Reading of Jesse Andrews’s Psychological Realistic Novel *Me and Earl and the Dying Girl* (2012)

Literary texts are generally read because they cope with the depth of life and not its vacuum. The reader fills the gaps in his existence by comparing his experiences to the imagined ones imitated in the fiction that he is reading. Therefore, those imitated experiences work as a guide for most existential anxieties (O’Gorman 113). Moreover, in *what is Literature?* Sartre examines the reader/writer relation and he states that the writer writes to fulfill his desire to be “recognized as essential to the totality of being” (45).

Existential angst, together with the trauma of the other, creates destructive impacts on the human being causing a reconstruction of the person’s identity and consciousness of his existence in the world. Andrews’s novel portrays the angst of human beings in some fields of modern life like disease, technology, etc. His protagonist is a traumatic character who is highly affected by psychological and social affairs and events of the age of modernism. The traumatic conditions of this character, not only cause fragmentation and destruction of the self; causing low self-esteem, but also extreme existential angst.

Jesse Andrews (1982-) is an American novelist and screenwriter. He wrote both the novel and the feature-film adaptation of *Me and Earl and the Dying Girl* that won the Cybils Award for Young Adult Fiction. In 2015, Andrews's hit novel is set and filmed in Pittsburgh, Andrews' hometown. In an interview with Andrews by Michael M. Jones on April 6, 2016, he admits, "The movie was actually shot at the house I grew up in, and at my old high school, which I hadn't anticipated. Greg's bedroom was my bedroom."

Since realism aims to depict life as it is, one of the most important factors of realist characterization is to portray characters as specific individuals. Affected by his own life, Andrews portrays his seventeen-year-old protagonist, Greg Gaines, to resemble him. Like his low self-esteemed antihero, it is not until college that Andrews even makes out with a girl for more than five minutes. In addition to Greg, who admits in the text to be "a Jew" (Andrews 85), most of the major characters are Jewish just like Andrews whose family is Jewish. Additionally, Naming is one of the most important elements of the individualization of the character because it endows the character with social identity and helps the reader to visualize contemporary life. Andrews achieves this criterion of realistic character-portrayal as the names are neither historical nor type names, but furnish the characters with a social identity that fits contemporary life: Greg, Earl and Rachel. Andrews mentions in his fiction most categories, classes and groups in our life: "ill-tempered foreign kids led by Nizar the Surly Syrian" (26). "Dad grows a beard, and it makes him look like a member of the *Taliban*" (50). The author seems to be overwhelmed by Easterners from different nationalities and religions: Syrian, Taliban, Saudi Arabian and Jewish.

What Andrews follows throughout *Me & Earl and the Dying Girl* is the subgenre 'psychological realism.' Greg confesses from the very beginning that what he is going to narrate is "the literal truth" (11). It seems as if Andrews shows his first trial of writing through Greg's trial in the text: "I stared at the computer for an hour and it was all I could do not to have a colossal freak-out...I tried messing with the punctuation and italicization...I have no idea what I'm doing with this book. And the reason for that is, I'm not a writer" (11). He writes his text in the form of a diary from the beginning to the end.

Greg informs the reader that this book is his college essay in an elongated form. He needs to declare why his grades decreased in the last year. It narrates that up until his senior year, Greg, a perplexed troubled groundhog-looking teenager, has chosen to live in complete social

invisibility. A social recluse who navigates high school life by obtaining everyone's acquaintance while staying away from any specific clique. From the very beginning, Andrews draws the reader's attention to the theme of existential angst. "High school is where we are first introduced to the basic *existential* question of life: How is it possible to *exist* in a place that sucks so bad?" (14) He is anxious about his existential identity. The answer to this basic existential inquiry is that one "cannot become too deeply enmeshed in any one group... One must instead be at the periphery at all times" (16-7). He describes himself as being in no group, but simultaneously in every group; "you can't really describe me as group-less" (17). Greg has classified students or teenagers in his territory into multiple separate groups: rich kids, the church kid, the jocks (divided into black and white kids), the masses, the smart kids, the theater kids, the stoners, the gangbangers, the band kids and the gothy dorks. All struggle for control, and subsequently, all of them wish to diminish each other. Therefore, the problem is that if you are part of a group, everybody outside of that group may kill you. Hence, Greg thinks that to solve this problem he has to "get access to every group" while not "join any group outright." However, he admits, "At the top of the Benson social hierarchy, there is a vacuum. The result: chaos" (15). Greg compares his school to a school he has witnessed on television and thinks that like schools on TV, his school has a hierarchy of cliques that are noticeably not controlled by one dominant clique. He claims that conflict and chaos are the dominant features of any society that has many classifications and lacks a leader. Andrews likens the fear among these groups of kids to "the Nazi fear of Jews" (16). As high school is a cruel and difficult place sometimes, Greg and Earl Jackson, the person who is supposed to be Greg's coworker, keep an insanely low profile. They make mediocre films together. They do not make their films for other people. They are confident that if they share their films with their peers they will be tyrannized. Greg abandons his plans to study film as Earl advises him.

However, writing down what he has been through and reliving it all over again makes Greg perceive that he undoubtedly wants to join film school and that he has been trying to reform his identity. Close to the end of his narration, we observe a change caused by the climax of Rachel Kushner's death. When Rachel dies, both Earl and Greg collapse and, consequently, they destroy all the films they have ever made, even the film about Rachel herself, all perish with her. This shows how much Rachel means to both of them, despite their insistence not to get close to anyone. Thus, Greg chooses to change his way of existence throughout

developing his identity and self-esteem. He concludes his book wondering if he should put Rachel in his following film.

Greg narrates in his book that despite his isolation, ironically, his mom, Marla, forces him to revive his friendship with Rachel who has leukemia, a fast-moving disease, to give her psychological support, telling him that he has to help others because he owes a lot to them. "You're gonna have to learn to give because you've been given everythi" (55). This irony is intended by Andrews to clarify how much is Greg psychologically pressured. Mum asks him to endow others with what he is deprived of. Actually, it is not his mom who is uttering this, it is Greg's narrative monologue so it is quite clear that he is narrating his suffering. Whereas Greg had only befriended Rachel to get closer to her more attractive friend, Leah Katzenberg, he perceives that he cannot disobey his mother. Reviving their friendship, Rachel texts Greg telling him that she is going to start chemotherapy. He and Earl rush to Rachel's house and Earl meets Rachel for the first time. Earl shows her one of their films despite Greg's unwillingness. He prefers to keep filmmaking a secret. Meanwhile, Rachel decides to stop treatment, thus Greg and Earl come up to make her a movie entitled 'Rachel The Film'. They intend to show it to Rachel alone, however, it is presented to the whole school in a particular assembly. Greg is humiliated and stops going to school.

Despite failing all of his classes, his parents want him to apply for college. Greg is unable to choose and be responsible for his existence in society. Before passing away, Rachel tries to convince him to pursue film school just a few days after her film is screened. Finally, Greg abandons invisibility and makes a stand. He confesses that "this technology had come into our lives for a reason: We had to *recreate* every single shot in Aguirre, the *Wrath* of God" (98). Throughout this internal monologue, Greg admits that he has to change every shot, honestly, in his life, not in the video. He has to change his life to get rid of God's anger that may result from the negative effects of technology that may lead to some psychological issues. Greg wants to recreate his essence.

This prose fiction is concerned with inward characterization and analysis rather than plot development that portrays real-life human emotions. Convinced by the ethical ability of literature, Andrews uses this fiction effectively to criticize existential angst in the traumatized age of modernism. He reflects the anxiety of existence through the life of Greg. He discusses the absurdity, nihilism, existential angst and trauma

of the other through identity anxiety. Andrews criticizes low self-esteem throughout Greg who neither believes in himself nor realizes what or who he is. He tries to investigate and display the protagonist's deep processes of life and the complexity of inward thoughts. In this fictional text, the protagonist becomes increasingly obsessed with his consciousness, so far as his alienation from society influences his identity and he yields to change himself or his way of existence. The author is successful to portray and show the negative sides of Greg's identity development. In the end, he shows that he chooses to apply to film school, which is what he really wants to choose. Hence, through this book, we can observe the identity development Greg has confronted.

The major conflicts in this fictional text are Rachel against Leukemia (man vs. nature), Greg against identity (man vs. himself), and Greg against others (man vs. society). Andrews has used stream of consciousness to spotlight the conflicts that face humans through Greg. Psychological self-examinations are common in this text as the author allows the protagonist to detail psychological internal monologues for the reader both in first-person and third-person narrative POV that best describe man's existential anxiety in this psychological realistic fiction. For example,

First-person POV internal monologue:

I am not very good-looking. In fact, I sort of look like a pudding. I am extremely pale and somewhat overweight. I have kind of a rat face, and my mediocre vision makes me squint a lot. (28)

Third and Second person POV internal monologue:

The rich kids aren't the alpha group of the school. The next most likely demographic would be the church kids: They're plentiful, and *they* are definitely interested in school domination...they spend so much time trying to convince *you* to hang out with them, and the way they try to do that is by inviting *you* over to their church. (15)

Narration is the best way to describe something to people. Asking his father about life, Mr. Gaines replies, "echoing mysteriously" (64). The mysterious features of the modern age like; the psychological problems that attack teenagers due to modern technology exemplified in video games, robots, uncontrolled social media, the internet as well as the mysterious and dreadful diseases that attack not only old people and adults but also teenagers, lead to existential angst. Trying to depict the effects of modernism and some real incidents that occur in our

contemporary life, cancer is one of these results that Andrews was successful to portray:

leukemia is cancer of the blood cells. It's the most common kind of cancer that teenagers get, although the specific kind Rachel had— acute myelogenous leukemia—is not the normal kind for teens. “Acute” means that the leukemia basically came out of nowhere and is growing really quickly, and “myelogenous” has to do with bone marrow...Rachel's blood and bone marrow were being invaded by aggressive, fast-moving cancer cells. (42)

Andrews has used the idiom ‘Cancerland’ to describe cancer to indicate how it is widespread everywhere. It overwhelms all humans and attacks anyone whatever his/her age causing anxiety. It is portrayed in the text as an enemy that you have to fight. “A member of the Benson family. Is in the *fight* of her life. *Against cancer*” (226). To be reliable, he helps the reader to visualize leukemia:

Some cancers are localized in your body, like lung cancer, or butt cancer. You probably think butt cancer doesn't exist, but it does...with those cancers you can sometimes go in and cut them out surgically. But leukemia is cancer of the blood and bone marrow, so it's spread throughout your entire body, so you can't just go in and cut it out with knives. I mean, the knife thing obviously is scary and disgusting, but then the other way to treat cancer is to blast it with radiation and/or chemicals, which is worse. And with leukemia, you have to do that to someone's entire body. So that definitely sucks. Mom said it's like a city that has “bad guys” in it. (167)

Rachel's battle with the antagonist Leukemia acts as both an external and internal conflict. Thus, the author, out of his existential angst too, advises the reader to avoid this kind of conflict:

I'm leukemia. I like to pick on kids and teenagers because I'm extremely pathetic. Here's a list of things I hate:

—delicious foods such as pizza

—adorable panda cubs

—if you were to fill an Olympic-size swimming pool with pleasant-smelling rubber balls such as would be fun to frolic around in, I would hate that as well. (200)

Continuing in portraying the features of anxiety in the modern age, the author tries to declare the side effects of chemotherapy that are

widespread among teenagers and affect their existence. “Chemotherapy. You get injected with a shitload of chemicals and all your hair fall out... You basically get sick as hell” (127). The author helps the reader to visualize real hospital life: “With the constant television, and the food brought to you, and the mountains of books” (146). He also tries to portray the state of life and humanity and how people are anxious about contemporary modern diseases, “Gilbert... We find that he’s a helpful reminder of WHAT HAPPENS TO ALL LIVING THINGS” (153).

This realistic text has not forgotten to shed light on the “power of video games” (74) and the existential angst caused by them. Video games have controlled a lot of kids and teenagers to the extent that they may destroy their lives. Video games are portrayed as a bad side effect of modern technology. Any kid or teenager who uses websites or modern technology as useful tools for learning feels ashamed to tell others as they are going to bully him. This generation is too overwhelmed by video games. When they try to keep themselves away from these games and desperately search to play with water guns or play board games, they fail and return to these video games. Even Earl’s mom “gave up on everything and started hanging out in chat rooms” (76) when her husband was sent to jail. Hence, modernism causes autism, low self-esteem and isolation and plays a basic role in humans’ anxiety about their essence. To clarify it more, Andrews uses some idioms and vocabulary throughout the whole text to reflect how this generation is affected by modernism due to the extreme use of modern technology and social media:

eleven-year-old say words like “fuck”
lick my ass-cheek
stick his face all up in my butthole. (100-2)

Affected by modernism, the narrator frequently uses a script-like narrative technique to portray turning-point actions for the plot. Greg considers himself a filmmaker; hence, he prefers to depict events as movie scenes. He yields to depict these events as a third-person narrative in a book to hide his real feelings. He also uses TV shows, like names to manifest his behavior that he believes is beyond normal. This fictional text is set in 10.75-point Adobe Garamond, in a trial to show how these teenagers are different even in their style of conversation and typewriting: “going in for *chemo tomw*. do *u* want 2 say goodbye 2 my hair? :)” (126).

Imitating modern films, Greg decides to make Rachel the Film as ‘LEGO’ or ‘ANIMATION.’ He uses “LEGO Darth Vader” (201). Darth

Vader is a fictional character in the *Star Wars* franchise. It is the major antagonist of the trilogy.

DARTH VADER

singing to himself La la la. I am a jackass. Doot di doo. Big, big jerk.
looking at camera Oh! Hello! I didn't see you there. My name is Darth Vader, and I'm the president of Evil Villains In favor of Leukemia, a.k.a. EVIL.

..We just think leukemia is the greatest. But don't take my word for it! Here's some testimony from some annoying pirates! (201-2)

DARTH VADER

We sure do love leukemia! Don't believe me yet? Why don't you ask this spinning tarantula paperweight? (203)

Andrews uses also the LEGO PIRATE SHIP:

PIRATE KING

Arrrr! 'Twas a day the likes o' no other, athwart the starboard bow upon the rottin' maggoty beard o' *Davy Jones* himself!!! Upon the horizon did Two-Eyepatch Bill not espy the hideous sucker'd limbs o' the mighty Kraken— fast amidships all cannons astern and swab the decks, ye filthy motherless bilge rat SWINE!!!! (202)

Davy Jones is a fictional character in the *Pirates of the Caribbean* movie series. He is first referred to in *The Curse of the Black Pearl*, emerges in *Dead Man's Chest* and *At World's End*, and appears as a minor character in *Dead Men Tell No Tales*.

Greg has a scene in 'Rachel the Film' that he entitles LEGO DEATH STAR. The setting of time for this scene is night, while the setting of place is space. The tone is elevator music. Greg uses LEGO stormtroopers to wander around in the background. Stormtrooper is a fictional soldier in the *Star Wars* American epic space opera multimedia franchise fabricated by George Lucas. These elite troops are fanatically loyal to the Empire and can hardly skip imperialism. They are dressed in impressive white armor that shows a wide scope of survival equipment and temperature controls to help the troops to survive in approximately any environment. They skillfully wield blaster rifles and pistols, and attack in hordes to completely defeat their enemies. Greg aims to help Rachel "watch a bunch of evil people talking about how much they love leukemia, and get pissed off at them, and be inspired to *fight back*"

(201). Then, Greg has another scene in day using a plastic figure of Serpentor with a snake accent: “I am Serpentor, Cobra Emperor, of the evil Cobra Command! Leukemia is my favorite thing in the world!” (Andrews 203) Noticeably, Serpentor is a fictional character and a constant antagonist from the G. I. Joe: A real American hero toy line, comic books and animated series. He is a member of the Cobra Council, the ruling body that elects the Cobra Commander. As evident, Greg often portrays events as a screenplay. He likes to think of himself as a filmmaker but suffers from very low self-esteem and is regularly caring about others’ opinions about him. Therefore, he frequently fragments his anxieties and thoughts as a scene of a script.

Referring to what Sartre claims, “we do not know what we want and yet we are responsible for what we are... everything has been figured out, except how to live” (*Existentialism*), existential angst is represented here through the identity crisis. The author portrays the protagonist’s rebellion against his character and his essence. By rebelling against his status quo, he wishes to achieve a new essence. Remarkably, Andrews, too, believes that we alone are responsible for everything that we really are, and by not examining the innumerable choices life offers us, we alone are responsible for restricting our freedom. “We are left alone without an excuse” (Sartre *Existentialism is a Humanism* 32). All humans are responsible for their choices, Mr. Gaines claims that “suffering in life is a relative notion—that for every life there is a different baseline, an equilibrium, below which one can be said to suffer?... The primary insight being that one man’s suffering is another man’s joy” (Andrews 64-5). He confesses that man’s essence is not the same for every human being. Each person has his/her own choices and responsibilities with complete freedom. However, one cannot miss the fact that there is also fate. Man is both forced to facticity as well as free to choose. Therefore, this is really what may reduce this kind of Anxiety.

Existentialism represents “a philosophy of subjectivity or selfhood” (Agidigbi 4). Greg’s main aim is not to have any communication with anyone. Since kindergarten, he sees people as “evil, or boring, or both” (74). He has no trust in himself to the extent that he sees anyone else “not as weird as” himself (112). He describes his relationship with others as ‘terrible’ to the extent that he blames his father for sending him “off to Homewood with some other kid he had never met before” (74). He prefers loneliness and suspects others. “Having friends is how your life gets fucked up” (104). When his relationship with Rachel starts gradually to be noticed by everyone, he is annoyed and anxious and claims that this may represent “the death blow to the invisibility I had

been cultivating throughout high school” (187). He does not like to be condemned as a friend or a boyfriend, thus he insists through his narrative internal monologue in his book that his relationship with Earl is not a friendship; Earl acts as a coworker. Ironically, Greg describes Earl as “a very solitary person” (117) as if he himself is a sociable one. He does not describe himself as a solitary one, however, he considers himself as not “interested in what other kids were interested in” (118). He neglects himself and evaluates others like Earl whom he believes is “a better person than me” (216). However, this text is written from the narrator’s point of view; thus, Greg justifies his intense will to isolate himself from others by telling the reader that he has a good sense of humor which he does not like to destroy by communicating with others, “the world tries to just beat you down” (47).

Greg is anxious about his ‘being-in-the-world’ as well as ‘being-with-others’. He’s so anxious to be visible. He is so satisfied to have his “hard-earned social invisibility” (106) which he fears losing. Greg hates social communication to the extent that he compares people crowding at the Benson cafeteria during lunch hours to “one of the more chill battles of World War II...Basically, it’s like a low-security state prison” (107), as it is extremely crowded and full of people who are trying to hit others with food and quarrel. Throughout another stream of consciousness, Greg shows how he regularly mistrusts and suspects himself and his abilities, which causes low self-esteem. He fears the others, suspects them, and cares about how they judge him, “I’m pretty bad in pressure situations... my throat was dry from fear” (171). He forcefully resists any intimate relationship with the other; the “eye contact was giving me a headache” (173). This justifies his hesitated character and insistence on invisibility. “Earl and I had never been in a fight. That was mostly because *I am cowardly*... and also I am *terrified of conflict*” (208).

When anyone appraises him, Greg keeps low self-esteeming, “maybe she’s just lying” (151). He is used to judging himself so hard, “I was the Human Nose, as well as Fall-Down Boy...my nose was like a blimp attached to my face! A blimp filled with mucus!” (124-6) However, Greg likens himself to a national hero just because he imagines that Madison, the hot and universally popular girl in school, is jealous of the supposed intimate relationship between him and Rachel. “I am like the Joseph Stalin” (108). Noticeably, Stalin’s name means ‘man of steel’ and he lived up to it. He was responsible for the war machine that helped Russians to defeat Nazism and, for a quarter of a century, was the sovereign ruler of the Soviet Union. So, when others highly evaluate

Greg, he stops his low self-esteem and starts to imagine himself as a valuable character in society. Not only Stalin but also Thomas Edison, the famous scientist, “I am the Thomas Edison” (150). Even Rachel, the girl whom the others think he is in love with, is likened to “the Duchess of Snortsylvania” (110). Duchess is the wife of a duke. As mentioned, man is not only a being-in-the-world but also a being-with-others. Thus, the social nature of man depends on his being-with-others. Greg is regularly connected to others. He estimates himself according to how others see him. Earl condemns Greg to be “so fucking much about what other people think, you gotta be secretive as shit, gotta go round sucking errybody’s dick pretendin like you they friend cuz you care so much bout what they think” (210). As existentialists believe, the existence of the One-self necessitates the existence of Others, as it is impossible to exist without Others. Thus, fearing to be judged by others, Greg “didn’t make an effort to talk to anyone. No friends, no enemies” (56). His “only goal with college is not to get into a fraternity” (161).

Greg is regularly anxious and unable to be responsible to choose his way of existence in life. He does not believe in the afterlife. He views life as uninteresting and looks forward to ending it without returning to that afterlife. “There’s no afterlife, and nothing happens after you die, and it’s just the end of your consciousness forever” (67). On the contrary, he thinks that he should lie to Rachel and convince her that there is an afterlife after death and this is not the end of her life in order not to be frustrated due to her illness and supposed death. “Was I going to have to make up some afterlife for reassurance purposes?” (67) Later in the text, he wishes to die instead of Rachel. He feels sorry for not being “the one whose life was literally about to end” (174). This reflects his extreme existential angst.

However, this antihero is so hesitating to the reader. Later on, in his narrative internal monologue, he seems to believe in the afterlife that he previously neglected. He is completely an absurd, nihilist and perplexed character. He is anxious and unable to choose.

Maybe after you die you get sent to a giant room with archives of newspapers that have been written by these angel journalists specifically about your life and then you read them and they look like this. That would be insanely depressing. Hopefully, at least some of the headlines would be about the other people in your life and not just you. (158)

Additionally, Andrews portrays through one of the minor characters, a school peer, his ideas about life and death, reflecting how life is meaningless:

Even if you do die...it's really only on the arbitrary human scale that human life seems short, or long, or whatever, and, like, from the perspective of eternal time, the human life is vanishingly small, like it's really equivalent whether you live to be 17 or 94 or even 20,000 years old, which is obviously impossible...on the other hand, from the perspective of an ultra-nanoinstant, which is the smallest measurable unit of time, human life is almost infinite even if you die when you're, like, a toddler. So either way it doesn't even matter how long you live. (188)

Contrary to Greg is the average teenager, Rachel. She is an independent character who encourages Greg to "be himself". Rachel's illness foreshadows her death. Despite her upcoming death, Rachel does not act as if she is sick or needs sympathy. Whereas she is unable to choose her fate, she does not ask others to define her, who she is or how can she choose to live her life. The way Rachel chooses her existence in life contrasts with Greg's choices. Greg fears rejection and bullying. He does not consider anyone as his friend but is acquainted with everyone. On the other hand, Rachel lives life to the fullest, enjoys her true friends and leaves those who do not matter. She accepts her fate. Considerably, existentialists believe that all of us are subjected to facticity, which describes man's awareness of his finitude. Therefore, Rachel is subjected to this facticity that exposes man's inadequacy to know beyond what he can know; it is about the factors that restrict and control human existence.

Rachel is not the founder of her existence in life. She has to be responsible for her essence as a being-in-the-world who faces matters, but not like sickness death or decay. Facticity seems to act as a restriction to Rachel's existence. Human beings are unable to choose to live or die. Death and disease are examples of the limits and boundaries that we can neither go beyond nor choose to take or leave. On the other hand, we worry and suffer from existential angst when we are free to choose and feel responsible about our choices. Greg says to Rachel, "I don't know how to put it. I guess, your patience. If it was me, I would be angry, and miserable, and hurtful, and just terrible to be around. And you've been so strong throughout, and so patient, even when things aren't going right" (215-6). Rachel is not anxious and confidently accepts her fate, while Greg is so anxious despite his freedom to choose.

The world is Depicted by Greg as "a hostile world" (187), his mum also admits after knowing about Rachel's leukemia, that fate is "really not fair" (38). She does not accept fate. This reflects human beings'

existential angst and the lack of freedom to choose their fate or way of existence when this matter is restricted by facticity. She insists, “You don’t have a choice” (40) to stay away from your facticity. However, Greg tries to convince Rachel that she can fight against disease and choose to live. “We want you to get better.. The thing is: I know you can get better. I know you’re strong enough...I believe in you” (217). Despite doing your best to overcome these shortcomings, you cannot transcend these limits of facticity. Ironically, as if she can choose her fate, after stopping to shoot her up with chemicals, Greg claims that Rachel “decided to die...when someone stops cancer treatment and you point out that this is a decision to die, everyone freaks out at you” (205). On the contrary, it is Greg’s choice not to indulge himself in the community. This contrastive analysis clarifies the meaning.

Human life is likened to the ecosystem. “Fact: A change in one part of an ecosystem, affects an entire thing” (171). Thus, it changes according to external and surrounding circumstances and features. Human choices are affected by these external features too. Hence, in order to live you have to struggle. However, Rachel “was never much of a fighter. She’s always been a quiet girl..never wanting to fight” (191). Rachel does not struggle and finally dies. Rachel’s mum claims that Rachel did not choose to live. Her mum says, “It’s like, God forbid, she doesn’t want to live anymore” (192). Obviously, because of mom’s anxiety about her being-with-others, she tries to defend herself. She fears being condemned as a bad mother. “I’m a good mother. I’ve been a good mother to her” (192).

The narrator is one of the most influential devices of narrative composition because the narrator plays the role of the mediator between the writer and the reader as well as between the text and the reader. Accordingly, a perfect perception of the narrator is required for the reader’s understanding of the narrative. Not only the narrator but also the major characters. Hence, to be real, there is some information about their physical appearance. There is also a great deal of information about their activities, from which we can understand their personal traits. Thus, Ch. 7 is entitled ‘The Gaines Family: A Summary’. Greg’s qualities are considered weird, and that has caused his isolation. They, also, clarify his ignorance of the social roles, he is supposed to play. His mom lived in Israel for some time. They doubt that she may have had a boyfriend in the Saudi royal family. She is Jewish. Therefore, being a girlfriend to a Saudi-Arabian Muslim may indicate that she is a cunning and freaky woman whom Greg could not have a close parent-child relationship with. “Israel. Where Virginity Goes to Die” (51). Victor Gaines, Greg’s

dad, plays a much less crucial role in the narrative than Greg's mom and is contrasted with Marla through his passive attitude. He believes that Greg should be left alone. Greg inherits his love of movies from his dad who is portrayed as a father figure for both Greg and Earl. Neither Earl's biological father nor his stepdad plays an active role in his life. Andrews was brilliant in analyzing and portraying each character even the cat, Cat Stevens Gaines. By describing mental and physical characteristics, the novelist provides his characters with a more persuasive life-likeness to appear real.

Greg and Earl are different from other teenagers. They have different interests. They are the only teens in Pittsburgh who like 'Aguirre, the Wrath of God'. Greg's father calls them "The young nihilists." He informs them "Nihilists believe that nothing has any meaning. They believe in nothing." "Yeah," says Earl. "I'm a nihilist." "Me, too," Greg utters (79). As Existentialism and absurdity have attempted to manage the crisis nihilism presents, Andrews tries to manage the crisis of nihilism that Greg suffers from through his search for existence and identity in society. So, faced with the void of meaninglessness that Nihilism presents and the Existentialist belief that we must create our meaning through our actions, Greg has to create his own essence. He searches for his identity, being and existence in society. That is the Existentialist resolution to the dilemma of Nihilism.

Q: What's the movie about?

A: It's a documentary about human stupidity. (98)

Here, Andrews sheds light on life's stupidity, nihilism and absurdity resulting in man's existential angst. Since the Absurd arises from the meeting of our hunger for meaning with a meaningless universe, Greg can be described as absurd when he does not care about how he exists in society until Rachel's death. Contrary to Nihilism, the Absurdist does not throw a tantrum and kill oneself. The Absurdist does not grab onto the nearest life raft and commit philosophical suicide. The Absurdist faces troubles and enjoys life for what it is. Hence, Greg does not commit suicide and later yields to develop his identity.

Earl and Greg call the film which they have decided to make 'Earl, the Wrath of God II'. The film is about a crazy boy named Earl who searches "for the city of Earl Dorado in a *normal family house* in Pittsburgh" (103). Both of them lack a normal family. They lack harmonious family relationships that necessitate psychological defects in any character and a strong belief in nihilism, absurdity and existential

angst. In this film, they call a specific scene: ‘Apocalypse, The End of the World,’ and wonder when the apocalypse is happening. Teenagers like them who are portrayed as nihilists, absurdists and suffering from existential angst, are undoubtedly supposed to think about the apocalypse and hope for the end of the world. This justifies why Greg confesses repeatedly in his narrative monologue that he does not believe in the afterlife.

Greg likens himself to two contrasted characters who live in isolation most of the time. “I don’t really have a moral compass...I might accidentally become like a *hermit* or a *terrorist* or something” (140). According to the *American Heritage Dictionary*, a hermit is a “person who has withdrawn from society and lives a solitary existence; a recluse” (823). While a terrorist is a “person who engages in terrorism, especially against civilians” (1798). Greg cannot even choose which kind of personality does he belong to? Is he kind and religious or evil and weird? He is perplexed and absurd and does not have a moral compass. Even when Earl asks him about his sexual identity, he is perplexed and just expresses that “some scientists think that everyone’s actually a little bit of both. Homo and hetero” (175).

Pointedly, existential angst is portrayed not only through nihilism, absurdity, identity development and otherness but also through blackness (racism). Greg claims that Rachel mistrusts Earl. “She was eyeing Earl warily. I had the queasy feeling that she was mistrustful of him because he was black...that would be accusing a girl of racism” (129). Earl is portrayed as a black guy. In addition, he is portrayed as coming from a poor area, from a broken home. This clarifies why Greg assures all the time that he is not a friend to Earl. During the conversation between Earl and Rachel, Greg describes their silence for a while as “possibly racist silence” (130). Racism represents one of the existential anxieties. Not only Greg but also Principal Stewart has been described as a black man. Greg portrays him as a giant, *terrifying black man*...He is extremely authoritative, and his default facial expression, like Earl’s, is Pissed...His speaking style is hard to describe. There’s sort of an angry undercurrent to everything he says, even when the words aren’t angry at all, and there are a lot of pauses. He definitely sounded pissed at the pep rally...Principal Stewart clapped his *giant hands* on our shoulders, glared at us as though he was about to eat our flesh. (225-6)

Therefore, it is so clear how Greg humiliates the black men Earl and Stewart and feels anxious about their existence in his life.

Conclusion:

Andrews's novel is one of these psychological realistic novels that show how writers depict inward human experiences in this age of modernism. Self-esteem represents one's thoughts and feelings about one's self-concept and identity. Therefore, as a low self-esteem character, the antihero appears as a recluse who lives a solitary life and tends to avoid other people. This extremely low self-esteem hinders and complicates his identity formation. He is terrified of bullying that is common in high schools. Thus, he does not get too close enough to anyone. Greg is unable to exist and form his essence in society. He, even, refuses to call Earl 'friend', and calls him 'co-worker' instead. Greg thinks that most humans are annoying. They try to fuck up man's plans. Instead of facing his fears of others, he chooses to be invisible and isolates himself from them. The films Greg and Earl make, reflect their need to be understood by others. After getting publicly humiliated at their school when *Rachel the Film* is shown to the whole school, Greg and Earl destroy all their films.

Therefore, choice, freedom and responsibility represent a fundamental role in Greg's existence. Freedom represents part of the structure of the being of Greg. He is condemned to be free to choose. So, Greg can choose how to exist in society. He, ultimately, behaves as responsible and chooses to be a filmmaker. He changes into visible by staying away from his nihilism and absurdity and trying to find his essence to exist in this modern world. Andrews advises the reader: "If you don't have one, build one! Build it to give your life meaning" (Jesse).

To sum up, Andrews was able to portray many aspects of existential angst in the modern age using the psychological realism literary subgenre throughout the literary technique of stream of consciousness via internal monologues to help the reader understand the characters' inner thoughts and anxieties.

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