

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RELATED STUDIES

Literary theory, as a branch of literary studies, concerned with the development of different interest in viewing and observing a literary work. As Ann Jefferson and David Robey introduce in *Modern Literary Theory*, speaking of literary theory must evidently mean something that overlaps with and draws on two areas of thought: philosophical speculation and reflections of writers' nature of their art, but the term here usually concerns a somewhat different set of interests (7-8).

Furthermore, Jefferson and Robey formulate literary theory as follows:

Literary theory provides not only a means of dealing with differences of critical opinion, but also the basis for constructing a more rational, adequate and self-aware discipline of literary studies. It arises for the most part in response to the problems encountered by readers, critics, and scholars in their practical contact with texts (12-13).

will be focused on the internal elements and, not less important, the interplay among the elements which build the theme.

B.1. The Characters and Dialogues

In *The Zoo Story* the dialogue is not simply words spoken by the characters, but more an exposition which informs the audience about events and ideas. We can also use the dialogue as the source to explore other elements within the play. One that is related to it is characterization. The most important thing to remember about characters in plays is that we can only observe them from the words of the play that is from dialogue itself (Gill 172). Gill also adds that a playwright creates characters through "the way characters speak, what they say about themselves, what one character says about another, and the way the characters are contrasted with each other" (172). Thus, I am not going to separate both elements, especially because *The Zoo Story* only consists of two characters—Jerry and Peter—existing in a one-act-dialogue.

B.2. Plot Structure

Most of existential works, especially those in *The Theatre of the Absurd*, do offer tragic plots. They present a bleak vision of life, concentrate on failure, conflict and disaster (Gill 189). The climax of an existential fiction, says Karl in *The Existential Imagination*, "is often not a traditional climax at all, but simply a ripple of behavior, a sense of nausea overcome or experienced, a broken relationship, a meaningless journey completed to nowhere" (17).

Without any possibility of resolution, I also learn that the absurd atmosphere presents a depressing situation that cannot be solved. Frequently, a critical situation leads to suicide or some kind of death-in-life. Thus, the audience can hardly find some practical solutions to problems, of which they expect to see at the end of the play.

B.3. Symbolism and Repetition

In drama, as in fiction and poetry, symbolism is a thing that suggests more than its literal meaning

(Kennedy 145). We will thus see there is no zoo at all in *The Zoo Story*. We will also discover why Albee repeats it 33 times throughout the play and uses it as the title, accordingly.

In approaching this subject, I will try to seek a connection between the symbolic feature and the interplay among the elements that build the thematic idea of the nature of human interaction. Nevertheless, I also need to discuss some appropriate examinations concerning the term symbolism, as is provided by Robert and Jacobs in *An Introduction to Reading and Writing*. They are: what the symbol is; how they contribute to the play's ideas and impact; determine the symbol that symbolizes something (137).

The use of repetition is also inevitable. It cannot be neglected that there are some repetitions on which Jerry, as the main character, is trying to emphasize. Then we will find out how it increases in intensity to gain some kind of acknowledgment of Jerry's existence, approval and conformity from Peter.

B.4. The Interplay among the Elements

This subject attempts to reveal some specific aspects that bring out a particular atmosphere about the play. Firstly, we will see how each character experiences different way of life, but as a matter of fact, they lead their lives into a state of alienation. Secondly, we will also observe the way each character shows their reaction toward a sequence of disturbing existence created by the other character, or thing. These circumstances are merely caused by the lack of attention and communication one could ever undergo in human relationship, and then, the last element is the result of those circumstances, which effect the depressing atmosphere within the play.

B.4.1. Alienation

It is obviously seen that all existential works are pervaded with alienation. Ted Honderich, the compiler of *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* defines alienation as "the experience involves a sense of a lack of self-worth and an absence of meaning in one's life (22)." Furthermore, the book accommodates the term alienation as follows:

In modern society, individuals are alienated in their common human essence, the actual-cooperative activity which naturally unites them, is power in their lives, which are subject to an inhuman power, created by them, but separating and dominating them instead of being subject to their united will. (22)

According to what Henry Clay Smith says in *Personality Adjustment*, it is said that alienation refers to some characteristics to which it pertains:

Pessimism People take a gloomy view of the future and expect the worst to happen, whereas others hope for and expect the best.

Frustration When we are angry, it is a relief to attack others, but the attack rarely removes the obstacle that is blocking us and often produces retaliations which are even more frustrating.

Anxiety involves inner conflict, which necessarily follows from man's alternatives. Man has the potential to be many different things and these possibilities are his freedom. But at the same time, his confrontation with

freedom is the source of anxiety, it is also aroused by uncertainty about threatening situations.

Withdrawals or *Self-sufficiency* cultivates independence of person and things and meditates on the inner life.

B.4.2. A Sequence of Isolation and Intrusion

Non gregarious people, says Smith, would avoid associating with others and do not like to accept invitations to join others (260). Connecting with alienation above, we will find some evidence that in avoiding any contact with other humans, people, here represented by Jerry and Peter, prefer to withdraw themselves from society instead of letting other people encounter their solitary world. This state of isolation is shown by Peter firstly in early dialogue, then by Jerry as he tells Peter about "The Story of Jerry and the Dog".

B.4.3. The Lack of Attention and Communication

One could not stand being alone; he would seek people and wants them to seek him. Still in the same book, Smith states that "man's biological needs demand a

satisfactory relationship between himself and his physical environment, his interpersonal needs demand a satisfactory relationship between himself and his human environment (260).” This quotation answers the question as to why a person tends to have interests in common with other people, to have some control over others, and to have affectionate relationship with other people (260). In *The Zoo Story*, however, we will see how Jerry neither gets Peter’s attention nor makes good communication for his attempt in reaching other humans.

B.4.4. The Depressing Atmosphere

The plays of the absurd try to present an unusual atmosphere--usually the depressing one, an unsolved problem, and a state of mind. After observing the previous elements above, we can conclude that those circumstances effect the atmosphere of the play, the depressing situation, and it is undergone by both characters.

B. Related Studies

Encyclopedia Britannica asserts that Albee's grimly humorous plays, which usually categorize "The Theatre of the absurd," focuses on man's tendency to torment others and destroy himself. The book regards *The Zoo Story* as a one-act play about a poetic psychopath and a conventional professional man. Whereas *Current Biography Yearbook* suggests that *The Zoo Story* deals with the tragedy of alienation, man's struggle to communicate with his fellowman. Through a conversation that takes place on a Central Park bench between two male strangers of strongly contrasted personality. Albee himself commented that *The Zoo Story* concerns a meeting between two men: Peter, who has accommodated too much to life, to his society, to his environment, who has made too many final choices too soon; and a younger man called Jerry who in the course of the play tries to transfer a sense of all the anguish and joy of being alive to Peter. In order to accomplish this transference he must precipitate an act of extraordinary violence (Bigsby 257).

Another view is given by Coles in his *The Plays of Albee* that *The Zoo Story* is not merely about the violent

nature of life in a big impersonal city, but about mankind in general, about how men build emotional and material barriers between themselves and other men, choosing to live in destructive spiritual isolation from each other (7). Further Coles stated that *The Zoo Story* has been convincingly interpreted by Rose A. Zimbardo in terms of Christian symbolism and the final scene is particularly suited to such interpretation. Jerry is portrayed as Jesus offering himself voluntarily on the cross (or a park bench) to save mankind. Peter remains Peter, the disciple who denied Christ, yet who also, because of Christ's influence on him, founded the Church. Jerry's wiping the knife becomes an act of absolution, Peter's book representative of the revitalized gospel (6).

Koesoemawati, a student of Gajah Mada University, has previously analyzed a structural analysis of *The Zoo Story* in 1992. In many ways her analysis has inspired me; but of course I will not allow myself to be a follower. Thus I have deliberately avoided any similarity either in analyzing the intrinsic elements of the play or in the interplay among them which builds the theme.

C.1. Existentialism in *The Zoo Story*

It is well proven that existentialism nevertheless lies within the plays of the absurd, including *The Zoo Story*. Martin Esslin the writer of *The Theatre of the Absurd* declares that "Ultimately, a phenomenon like The Theatre of the absurd does not reflect despair or a return to dark irrational forces but expresses modern man's endeavor to come to terms with the world he lives (Goldstone 773)." Albee himself has agreed that The Theatre of The Absurd is an absorption-in-art of certain existentialist and post existentialist philosophical concepts having to do, in the main, with man's attempts to make sense for himself out of his senseless position in a world which he makes no sense—which makes no sense because the moral, religious, political, and social structures man has erected to 'illusion' himself have collapsed (Goldstone 772).

Thus, it is a necessity to discuss that philosophical thought, even though not as an external influence upon the work, but as a view on human existence to support the analysis, thematically, on the interplay among the

elements. But it should be remembered that our concern here is with existentialism as it lies within literature, and it will not be necessary to trace in detail the origin and development of every form of this philosophy.

In the following section we shall consider firstly the original principles of existentialism, particularly those which are closely concerned with revealing the significance of being human through the nature of human interaction.

- (1) Existentialism declares that "existence is prior to essence" (Horton and Edwards 466). To this Sartre explains that "man is nothing else but he makes for himself. To believe in human nature at all is to believe there is something outside man that establishes for man a nature. Thus, no God no human nature. We are what we will. Man is not only free to choose; he cannot choose not to choose, for his refusal of choice is an act of choice in itself (501)."
- (2) The freedom to choose one's way of life. Freedom of choice entails commitment and responsibility which means that individuals are free to choose their own

path, but they must take the risk and responsibility of following their commitment wherever it leads. (471). Kierkegaard concludes this view that "the ethical stage is reached when the individual becomes aware of the temporality of human existence and tries to deepen the meaning of his life in reference to some absolute moral standard" (473).

Accordingly, the essence of *The Zoo Story* is not as simple as man's freedom to choose for his life, but further as he takes the right choice to reach out to other human beings, to fill his life with meaningful relationship with all mankind, so that he can finally discover the significance of his being a human with all its humanity.

CHAPTER III

JERRY'S ACCEPTANCE OF THE NATURE OF HUMAN INTERACTION