

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is divided into several sub-chapters. The research outline includes research background, research questions, research purposes, research significances, and previous studies.

1.1 Background of the Study

Frankl (1963) posited that there exists a universal human drive to seek meaning, a fundamental psychological necessity, which he characterized as the need to perceive one's life and experiences as serving an important purpose. Despite differing interpretations of how meaning is attained, there is agreement that it is a pivotal aspect of human existence and a primary motive. Humans are inherently meaning-makers; indeed, we are regarded as the sole creature that participates in this endeavor (Emmons, 2003). We tend to analyze individual events while simultaneously developing a comprehensive belief or value system shaped by our experiences and impacted by biological, social, and cultural influences. Crucial to infusing life with significance is establishing linkages between concepts and an object to create a feeling of stability in a reality that is, paradoxically, in perpetual flux. The capacity to generate meaning is fundamentally linked to the concept of memory as a mechanism for meaning-making; the act of recalling and contemplating life events enables, and may indeed promote, their integration into a cohesive whole.

Discovering meaning is not a definitive conclusion or endpoint; instead, individuals perpetually reassess their life experiences in light of fresh information, ascribing varied significance to specific occurrences and then re-evaluating their frameworks of meaning. Centuries ago, the quest for meaning was imparted by authoritative figures, such as religious leaders, political leaders, and educators. Today, individuals increasingly assume the task of discovering meaning independently; but, as most have not received training in this endeavor, the pursuit

is fraught with challenges and difficulties. The search process is inherently individual, resulting in interpretations that are subjective and personal. The quest is a personal endeavor; but, the construction of meaning is shaped by external factors: "we construct our world in a personal, unique, and dynamic manner, yet we are also significantly influenced and shaped by a larger world."

The pursuit of purpose in life has been a central element of human inquiry. Philosophers, artists, and novelists have always engaged with this profound question, seeking to clarify the nature of human existence and how individuals can navigate the challenges of living in a seemingly indifferent universe. The search for meaning is often associated with the concepts of freedom, responsibility, and choice—essential components of existentialism. Existentialism, a philosophical movement that emerged in the 20th century through figures such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, and Martin Heidegger, explores the tension between human freedom and the absurdity of life. This philosophy asserts that existence has no intrinsic meaning, forcing individuals to construct their own identities through their actions and decisions.

The inquiry into the purpose of life has captivated individuals for millennia, influencing our cognition, convictions, and creativity. Although it may appear to be a highly personal inquiry, it is a universal experience shared by all individuals: What imparts significance to our existence? What renders our days meaningful, even when time appears to elapse swiftly and erratically? For some individuals, significance is derived from love, community, or faith in a higher power. For some, significance is found in the quest for knowledge, creativity, or individual purpose. The quest for meaning is a universal phenomenon, distinct to each individual, regardless of perspective.

Jean-Paul Sartre, a preeminent intellectual of the 20th century, has a compelling viewpoint on this subject. He posited that the significance of life is not preordained or bestowed upon us, but rather something we must uncover and articulate independently. Sartre's works frequently examine the difficulties of being in a world where meaning is not easily discernible. He dismissed the notion that purpose can be obtained from tradition, religion, or any external authority. He perceived meaning as a phenomenon that arises from our actions, choices, and interactions with the environment. Sartre posits that the significance of life is

intrinsically linked to the notion of human freedom. He contended that we had the autonomy to mould our lives, to make our own choices, and to bear the repercussions. Nonetheless, this liberty presents its own difficulties. In the absence of a defined goal, we are compelled to generate our own significance. Responsibility can be both empowering and onerous. We are urged to face a world that frequently appears tumultuous and apathetic to our challenges. Sartre recognised that the quest for meaning is a multifaceted endeavour. Life is replete with challenges—social constraints, emotional turmoil, and instances of uncertainty—that can hinder the pursuit of purpose. Emotions of isolation, bewilderment, or even hopelessness are integral to the experience. Nevertheless, instead of perceiving these challenges as wholly adverse, Sartre contended that they may serve as avenues for development. During challenging circumstances, we may contemplate what is genuinely important to us and make choices that correspond with our beliefs and purpose. Ultimately, human cognition compels us to appreciate the profundity and possibilities of our humanity. He implores us to address life's essential questions with integrity and bravery, to assume accountability for our actions, and to seek meaning even among uncertainty. While a comprehensive explanation to the meaning of life may remain elusive, Sartre emphasises that the pursuit itself imbues existence with depth and richness. According to him, meaning is not a passive reception but an active creation via our experiences, choices, and connections.

Edward Albee is an American dramatist. Edward Albee's first play, *The Zoo Story*, was created in 1958. The drama discusses how a society's modernity causes people to feel alienated in their lives. It also discusses challenging the core of American optimism. The play also contains some philosophical concepts. Existentialism, for example, is a philosophy that signifies existence as opposed to essence.

Existentialism is the theory that allows for a genuine human life in a meaningless and ludicrous universe. The focus is on understanding man's freedom and how he uses it. Existentialism asserts that anything exists or is. Defining something's essence is identifying its core characteristics. Existentialism is a philosophy that examines the individual's existence, including feelings, actions, responsibilities, and ideas. According to Jean-Philippe Deranty's article "Existentialist Aesthetics," existentialism's name comes from its emphasis on

"existence." Human existence distinguishes us from other living entities. Existentialists believe that humans are "more" than their physical form. They recognize their own existence and have the ability to choose how to utilize it to interact with the world. The concept of "existence" is linked to freedom, which involves active participation in the world. According to Stephen Priest's 'Jean-Paul Sartre: Basic Writings', existentialist philosophers are primarily concerned with the meaning of existence. Does existence serve a purpose? Is there a definitive distinction between right and wrong? Are we free? Are we accountable for our actions? What is the correct kind of Jean-Paul Sartre', draws out elements of existentialism. Existence precedes essence, abandonment, individuality, freedom, values, responsibility, worry, despair, self, and poor faith. (Mart, 2012)

In 'Existentialism and Humanism', Sartre argues that his artistic existentialism is more coherent. If God does not exist, there must be another entity whose existence precedes its essence. This being exists before being defined by any notion. So, what is the meaning of "existence precedes essence"? According to Sartre, humans first exist in the world, then encounter and define themselves. Sartre's 'Existentialism and Humanism' highlights the basic principle of existentialism: there is no concept of human nature without God (Sartre, 2007)

Existentialism significantly impacts the topics of Absurdist Theater. Existentialism investigates basic questions about human life, such as death, anxiety, freedom, and the meaning of existence itself. The postwar reception of existentialism in America connected the notion of the absurd to the memories of WWII, as well as the function of language in existentialism and the theater of the absurd. Absurdist plays, such as "The Zoo Story," examine themes of existentialism, solitude, loneliness, communication ambiguities, social inequity, and dehumanization in society. The Theater of the Absurd depicts the current condition of events and establishes the comedic component of a particular scenario, emphasizing the absurdity of life.

Absurdist drama initially appeared in the 20th century, with writers like Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Arthur Adamov, and Edward Albee frequently employing this form. Albert Camus was a recognized pioneer of absurdism. Edward Albee's bizarre play offers a unique perspective on human

mortality. Tragic impressions and pain recur, yet they are given in a unique way that maintains a sense of comedy. Albee's plays also feature music and lighting design. Albee's ridiculous plays contain several symbols that violate the definition of the ludicrous.

The Zoo Story, written by Edward Albee, is an odd play that deviates from conventional theater. The absurd play is a type of drama that stresses existentialist ideas on the absurdity and meaninglessness of human existence.

Jerry and Peter, two characters of contrasting socioeconomic statuses, appear in The Zoo Story's screenplay. Jerry is a character with a constantly shifting worldview, as seen by the way in which he speaks with Peter. Jerry is likewise a lonely individual who doesn't have a family.

Proven in Jerry's dialogues, where Jerry first talks about the zoo, then asks about Peter's life, then talks about his own life, and finally chooses to commit suicide with Peter, implying that the actor playing the character Jerry faces his own challenges, specifically playing Jerry's emotions and mind set. Furthermore, Jerry has a unique way of thinking in general, in which he believes he has no work, no wife, and considers his ideology as a human person. In Sartre's existential theory, Jerry would be classified as an individual recognizing that existence precedes essence, emphasizing that individuals are not merely part of a crowd or objects in a collection but conscious beings responsible for defining their essence through their actions. Jerry, an existentialist, identifies as a perpetual transient. Jerry contrasts with Peter, a representation of the American middle class who has a stable existence, a nice career, a comfortable home, an average number of children, and is considered a respectable member of society. Peter is seen sitting on a seat in Central Park on a Sunday afternoon. He's reading a book. He assumes this is his private and protected space, as if it were his property. Jerry, unlike Peter, does not have a family and lives in a squalid rooming house with other social outcasts, reflecting on his own dark background.

1.2 Statement of Problem

Edward Albee's The Zoo Story is a highly successful critique of human communication, isolation, and the intricacy of real communication in modern society. The play is based on what appears to be a simple but symbolically dense

dialogue between two men, Peter and Jerry, whose differing perceptions of the world and life drive the action towards a confrontation that raises deep questions about human nature. Their encounter is not a chance meeting but an introduction to the way individuals perceive and live life differently. Albee, in his discussion with them, satirizes loneliness of contemporary life, where inadequacy of communication and understanding one another is foregrounded.

One of the major themes of the play is seeking the meaning of life as perceived by Peter and Jerry. Peter, the middle-class male with the stable job and family, is life of routine, social norm, and structure. Jerry, the alienated and confused male, is life of purposeless drifting, one that refuses the norms and opposes the specter of purpose. Their encounter is a catalyst for delving deeper into more existential questions of life, symbolizing the struggle between conforming to society and desiring a greater, though unsettling, and knowledge of their existence.

This study aims to find out what Peter and Jerry's perception of life means, that is, how their ideologies shape their dialogue and behavior in the play. By examining their dialogue, the study aims to ascertain how their different perception of life leads to tension and ultimately a tragic fate. The study will try to answer the following questions:

1. How do Peter and Jerry show their differences in perspectives of life?
2. How does the interaction between Peter and Jerry reflect the search for meaning and identity within the context of existentialism?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The researcher aims to perform a thorough investigation of existentialism as represented in the renowned play "The Zoo Story." This study seeks to examine the complexities of existentialism in the play, concentrating on uncovering the fundamental views of the characters and narrative. The researcher has established two primary objectives for the study, which are as follows:

1. To find out how Peter and Jerry show the differences of their perspective of life in *The Zoo Story*.
2. To find out how the context of existentialism reflected through the

interaction of Peter and Jerry in *The Zoo Story*.

1.4 Research Significances

The purpose of this study is for readers to more easily understand and analyze existentialism in characters and how it affects reality through the characters in an absurd play script. As a result, this discussion needs to be studied so that there are no misunderstandings when interpreting the play script, whether for critical analysis or practical studies in theatrical art performance. This research was created to serve as a reference for others in need.

Theoretically, this project seeks to enhance literary studies by enriching the comprehension of existentialism, particularly within the realm of contemporary American plays. This research aims to enhance understanding of how existentialism influences character and narrative development through a thorough investigation of the concept via dialogue and character evolution. Furthermore, this research is anticipated to serve as a reference for students and scholars interested in literary criticism of dramatic works, particularly those authored by Edward Albee, and to establish a basis for future investigations into the use of this notion in contemporary literary theatre.

Additionally, this research aims to furnish the viewers of *The Zoo Story* with facts and ideas about how existentialism elucidates the intricacies of societal and moral principles amid individual difficulties in confronting life's obstacles. By comprehending existentialism in this drama, readers may gain a more profound insight into the characters, their relationships, and the themes the author intends to communicate.

1.5 Previous Studies

In addition to supporting this research, the researcher examines several previous studies conducted by other researchers. The same topic has been addressed in four previous studies. The first study is an undergraduate thesis titled *Absurd Condition of Existence Embraced through Characters in Samuel Beckett's End Game* by Samuel Beckett, an important work in the Theater of the

Absurd. Permana conducted this study in 2023. He focused on how the play's protagonists, trapped in a small environment, exemplify absurdist concepts such as monotony and the futility of existence. Their repetitive actions and conversations reflect the monotony of life, he which emphasizes death as the only certainty in life. This is in line with Albert Camus' idea of absurdity, as stated in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. According to Camus, humans experience an existential battle between the desire for meaning and the meaninglessness of the cosmos. In *Endgame*, the characters reflect this ludicrous tension, persevering despite knowing the futility of their activities. (Permana, 2023)

An Undergraduate Thesis titled *The Existentialism on Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe's Freedom of Life*. Umar Wirahadi completed this study in 2008. He analyzed the characters in *Robinson Crusoe* to always maintain their existence. This research focuses on how to maintain the existence of characters and find out the relationship between existence and freedom of choice. Existentialists reject the notion that signs in the world are intended to instruct humans. They think that each individual must interpret the indications in his or her own way. They believe that without external support or assistance, every human being is destined to spend his or her life wholly alone. If someone obtains assistance, he is bound to meet a new companion in his life. The concept of subjectivity is central to Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist philosophy. Sartre sees humans as creatures with worth and consciousness. He believes that people exist before any other living entity. Man is an entity who propels himself into the future while fully conscious of his activities. (Wirahadi, 2008)

The following study is a journal titled *Edward Albee's The Zoo Story as The Play of Absurd and the Themes of Existentialism*. Dr. Manoj Kumar Yadav and Dr. Meenakshi Sharma Yadav completed this study in 2018. They analyzed the ideas of existentialism in *The Zoo Story*. *The Zoo Story* is frequently seen as a depiction of the Theater of the Absurd. In this play, Edward Albee examines the themes of existentialism and absurdity, emphasizing that because human life is intrinsically ludicrous and scary, communication through language is similarly absurd. Albee explores fundamental topics such as existentialism, Dadaism, surrealism, and absurdity

through his protagonist Jerry, a "permanent wanderer." In this drama, existentialism shows the person as a conscious creature living in a state of anguish, resistance, absurdity, and alienation surrounded by nothingness. Jerry's anguish is exacerbated by the understanding of the absurdity of existence, which makes him aware of the futility of death and birth. Jerry represents the ludicrous human who suffers from his own consciousness, as well as how contemporary man deals with a meaningless environment. (Yadav, 2018)

An Undergraduate Thesis titled *Existential Resistance to Life and Inauthentic Responses in The Plays of Harold Pinter and Edward Albee*. AYSEL MERVE ÇAVUŞ completed this study in 2009. This thesis conducts a comparative analysis of Harold Pinter's "The Birthday Party", 'The Caretaker', and 'A Slight Ache' by Harold Pinter and "The Zoo Story" and "A Delicate Balance", to achieve dramatic structure, characterization, and the use of language in these dramas show the playwrights' tendency to use the themes of existentialist philosophy. It is crucial to highlight here that the existentialist view of freedom does not imply full control over conditions and occurrences. According to the existentialist definition of freedom, there are external impediments and acts of others that strive to limit one's freedom. *Geworfenheit* (nothingness) is Heidegger's idea that explains these limits to freedom. Solomon remarkson Heidegger's idea of tossing as follows: "Dasein finds itself thrown into a particular world, time, and place and a particular place." Man is put into the world and has no control over it. Each person has his unique facticity, which is the fact of being under certain conditions such as time and location. Man is put into the world and has no control over it. Each person has his unique facticity, which is the fact of being under certain conditions such as time and location. However, he has the ability to choose how he perceives situations, how he deals with them, and how he enables them to impact his viewpoint. Humans have the freedom to make their own decisions, but they are also restricted by the circumstances. Another way to put it is that man is free to make choices in his current position and is accountable for those decisions. (ÇAVUŞ, 2009)

1.6 Conceptual Framework

The researcher defines the fundamental concept of this study, existentialism in characterisation, as noted in the title and elaborated on in the preceding section. The researcher used Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist notion to the study's dialogues and activities. Next, characterisation is explained, followed by Gerard Genette's structuralist narrative theory.

The Zoo Story will be examined using the theories discussed in this research. Existentialism and characterisation theories help analyze characters in playscript. The Zoo Story uses existentialist philosophy and characterisation to evaluate its characters. The Zoo Story is basically about two characters: Peter and Jerry.

Abrams' Glossary of Literary Terms suggests that while analyzing a character, we should focus on their general dependability. The Zoo Story's character interpretation might benefit from this approach. Edgar V. Robert and Henry E. Jacobs' characterisation idea will help identify the characters in the play. This theory helps analyze character development in a play by considering what characters say, act, what others say about them, and what the writer says about them.

The concept of existentialism, as developed by Sartre, serves as the foundation for this theory. The examination will focus on Sartre's concept of existentialism. The researcher will analyze the concept of existentialism in The Zoo Story from various perspectives, including contextual and philosophic systems, to determine how the characters' characterization aligns with Sartre's philosophy.

1.7 Definition of Key Terms

1.7.1 Existentialism

Existentialism is a philosophical doctrine that examines the essence of human existence, highlighting individual autonomy, decision-making, and accountability. It explores issues including the quest for existential significance, the encounter with absurdity, and the difficulties of genuine existence in a world sometimes regarded as chaotic or uncaring. Existentialism frequently emphasises the conflict between humans' quest for meaning and the intrinsic ambiguities of existence.

1.7.2 Play

A play is a literary work composed for theatrical performance, generally featuring speech and interactions among characters. Plays can encompass several genres and styles, including humour, tragedy, drama, or a synthesis of these elements.

1.7.3 Characters

Characters are the entities that inhabit a tale, drama, or narrative. They may be human, animal, or symbolic creatures that propel the narrative through their actions, conversation, and relationships.

1.7.4 Plot

The plot constitutes the chronological arrangement of events that comprise a narrative. It generally comprises the exposition (introduction of characters and location), rising action (events culminating in the climax), climax (the pivotal moment or peak of suspense), falling action (events after the climax), and resolution (the ending or outcome).

1.7.5 Character Development and Plot Development

This pertains to the development and transformation of both the characters and the plot during a story. Character development entails alterations or evolution in the characters' personalities, motives, or relationships, whereas plot development encompasses the progression of events and conflicts that propel the story along. Character building is crucial since it communicates the author's message, mandate, meaning, and purpose for acceptance and comprehension by the readers. Within existentialism, character and plot development frequently illustrate conflicts with identity, autonomy, and the quest for significance, offering a profound examination of the human experience.