Journal Of the Iraqia University (75-1) December (2025)

ISSN(Print): 1813-4521 OnLine ISSN:2663-7502

Journal Of the Iraqia University

available online at

https://iasj.rdd.edu.iq/journals/journal/view/247

Existential Despair and the Search for Identity in Edward Albee's The Zoo Story A Philosophical Exploration of Absurdism and Alienation

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اليأس الوجودي والبحث عن الهوية في رواية "قصة حديقة الحيوان" لإدوارد ألبي: استكشاف فلسفي للعبثية والاغتراب

الدكتور اسامة عبد حمدي

ملخص

تُعدّ مسرحية "قصة حديقة الحيوان" لإدوارد ألبي (١٩٥٨) عملاً رائداً في المسرح الأمريكي في القرن العشرين، وتتميز بأجواءها البسيطة ومواضيعها الوجودية العميقة. تُقدّم هذه الدراسة تحليلاً فلسفياً للمسرحية، مُركّزة على شخصية جيري كتجسيد للتمرد الوجودي، وبيتر كتجسيد للتوافق السلبي. انطلاقاً من الفكر الوجودي – مُستمدّاً من مفاهيم جان بول سارتر عن الحرية وسوء النية، ومفهوم ألبير كامو عن العبث – يستكشف البحث كيف يكشف أسلوب ألبي المسرحي عن انهيار التواصل، والاغتراب، والبحث عن الوجود الأصيل. من خلال دراسة مُعمّقة للأجواء، والبنية، واللغة، والأفعال الرمزية، يُظهر هذا البحث أن "قصة حديقة الحيوان" تُمثّل نموذجاً مُصغّراً للأزمة الوجودية الحديثة، مُتّحدةً الجمهور لمواجهة التوترات الكامنة بين العزلة والتواصل، والحرية والمسؤولية.

Abstract

The Zoo Story (1958) by Edward Albee is the groundbreaking work in American theater of the twentieth century, which is characterized by a very simple setting and an existential question. This paper provides a philosophical critique of the play, in terms of the character of Jerry as a personification of existential rebellion and Peter as a personification of passive conformity. Based on the ideas of existentialism, namely the notions of freedom, bad faith of Jean-Paul Sartre, and the concept of the absurd of Albert Camus, the study examines the role of Albee in dramaturgy in revealing the failure of communication and alienation and in the quest to find genuine existence. In a detailed analysis of setting, structure, language, and symbolic acts, the paper will unveil The Zoo Story as a microcosm of the contemporary existential crisis that compels the audience to address the existing contradictions between isolation and connection, freedom, and responsibility. **Keywords:Shakespeare; Dramatic Characters; Narrative Structure; Tragic Elements; Character Analysis; Conflict; Theme Development**

I.Introduction

The Zoo Story by Edward Albee becomes one of the critical texts of American drama, with its extreme simplicity and extreme philosophical underpinnings. The play was written in 1958 and debuted in 1959. It summarizes the fears of the middle of the twentieth century, a time characterized through social fragmentation, existential questioning, and the quest of senselessness in an apparently unconcerned world [1].*The Zoo Story* is essentially a drama of a confrontation between two men. On a bench, Jerry and Peter are in the Central Park of New York City. Albee uses their conversation and quarrel to examine the basics existential motives: loneliness, communication failure, freedom, and the search of real life. In the person of Jerry, especially, is the embodiment of the existential rebel that challenges the complacency of society, whereas Peter is the embodiment of the conformist who is stuck on routine and social roles, self-defense against existential anxiety [2], [3].The given research will serve to give a thorough philosophical analysis of *The Zoo Story* in the prism of existentialism and absurdism. It examines how the bareness of the setting and the focus of the narrative make Albee a minimalist, the exploration of isolation and meaning in human beings discussed in play. By examining the dynamics between the characters, the symbolic behaviors of the play, this research attempts to enhance the knowledge on its linguistic strategies, the role that Albee has played in American theatre as well as existential literature. This

research is important in that it is an interdisciplinary study linking literary criticism to philosophy. It contributes to continuing scholarship through pointing out how *The Zoo Story* goes beyond its dramatic shape to explore timeless questions of human life.

Part II – Theoretical Framework

II. Theoretical Framework The philosophy that forms the basis of this study is mainly the existentialist philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, whose ideas can be used to explain the thematic and formal features of *The Zoo Story* by Edward Albee. Existentialism, a philosophical movement of the middle of the twentieth century, focuses on individual freedom, responsibility, and seeking meaning in a universe which is perceived as being meaningless [2], [3]. The absurdist dimension, which has a lot to do with Camus, emphasizes the conflict between the human passion to have clarity and the silence of the world or indifference [3].

A. Existentialism and Bad Faith The idea of bad faith (*mauvaise foi*) by Jean-Paul Sartre is especially applicable to the character of Peter. Bad faith is the deception of oneself: people refuse their freedom and responsibility as they live according to social roles and refuse to make real decisions [2, pp. 73–85]. This is reflected by the fact that Peter is a bourgeois family man who does not take time to reflect. His civilized shyness conceals a greater fear of facing freedom and the existential.

B. The Absurd and Revolt*The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942) is a philosophical essay by Albert Camus that is critical in understanding the personality of Jerry as the personification of the protest against senselessness. Camus characterizes the absurd as the conflict between the human quest of meaning and the mute, unconcerned universe [3, p. 26]. The constant efforts of Jerry to communicate, his rejection of despair, and his refusal to bow to despair show this revolt, though it is unsuccessful. According to Camus, although suicide is one possible reaction to absurdity, the genuine revolt—the acceptance of the absurd with passionate involvement with life—is the authentic response [3, pp. 71–75]. The last act of Jerry, which leads to his death, can be construed as a complicated performance of this uprising, claiming authority over his destiny in an otherwise blind world.

C. Communication and Alienation The isolation of the individual is emphasized by late Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy, underlining the relationship between language and the world, implying that the boundaries of language are the boundaries of knowledge [5]. This is captured in the dialogue of *The Zoo Story* where the harsh language used by Jerry is incompatible with the superficiality of speech used by Peter, emphasizing communication failure and alienation. The idea of Being-toward-death by Martin Heidegger [4] also supports this, defining authentic existence as resulting from consciousness of mortality, which Jerry confronts directly and Peter evades.

D. Existential Theatre and Albee's Dramaturgy*The Zoo Story* tends to fall within the genre of existential theatre, like works by Samuel Beckett and Jean Genet. Minimalistic settings, broken dialogue, and ambiguous characters are used to create existential fears [1]. Albee employs these devices in his dramaturgy to compel humans to face existential reality and to eliminate all superfluous narrative, revealing the raw human experience.

III. Setting and Structure as Existential Space*The Zoo Story* by Edward Albee uses a bare and confined setting and a tightly cut dramatic action to form an existential space—a theatrical space that serves to represent and enhance the philosophical questions of the play in terms of alienation, freedom, and the human condition. The stage is turned into a symbolic arena by the intentional use of one place and a tight time frame, which plays out the complications of existence.

A. Minimalist Setting: The Park Bench as a Microcosm of Existential Reality The whole action of the play occurs on one park bench in Central Park, an apparently ordinary and mundane place in the expanse of New York City. This is a minimalistic setting with a very important philosophical and theatrical meaning.Firstly, the park bench serves as a miniature of contemporary life: the paradox of urban life, where people are in close physical proximity but socially and emotionally distant. Jerry and Peter are in the same physical space, but their emotional worlds are disconnected, highlighting the existential theme of loneliness in the world of proximity [4]. Secondly, the park, traditionally associated with leisure, relaxation, and socializing, is turned into a battleground and the place of existential questioning. Albee subverts the traditional perception of the park as neutral or harmonious by making it the venue of an unsettling and intimate experience, enhancing the absurdity and alienation of contemporary human relationships.The bench itself is a liminal space—between public and personal, life and death, silence and speech. It is a physical and metaphorical intersection where existential tensions are revealed and enacted. The geographical isolation of the bench reflects the psychological isolation of the characters. In this regard, the setting is not merely a location of action but embodies the existential crisis central to the play.

B. Spatial Symbolism: The Urban Landscape and Existential Isolation Although the play occurs in a single location, the implied urban setting of New York City serves as a symbol of contemporaryity and sophistication, providing a backdrop for the existential motifs of disconnection, anonymity, and fragmentation. The park bench, amidst a cold metropolis of endless motion, isolates the characters, emphasizing the contradiction of social density and existential loneliness—a major theme in twentieth-century existential literature and theater.**C. Temporal Compression and Dramatic Intensity***The Zoo Story* is a one-act play lasting about 35 minutes. This temporal compression enhances the existential effect. Albee creates immediacy and urgency by keeping the story brief and confined to a single encounter. The condensed time increases dramatic tension and reflects the existential idea that human beings are confronted by fleeting moments that can radically alter life. The unstoppable flow of events compels the audience to engage intensively with the dialogue and actions, stressing the inescapability of existential decisions and the urgency of death and liberty.

D. Structural Progression: From Politeness to Confrontation The structure of the play is a conscious sequence, which can be understood as an existential journey. It starts with the apparently harmless small talk, which is marked by the politeness and reservedness of Peter. This introduction conceals some underlying tension and is an indication of the unreal social dynamics that people tend to engage in so as not to face some inconvenient reality. As the conversation continues, the tone of the conversation changes and it is no longer superficial but philosophical and deep. The social veneer is broken by Jerry more and more intense and fragmented monologues which make Peter (and the audience) confront the problem of alienation, freedom and mortality. The final part of this structural increase is the climax, which is violent death of Jerry, a figurative breaking point of the existential confrontation that becomes bodily and irreversible.

E. The Play as Existential Allegory The highly condensed environment and design make *The Zoo Story* an existential allegory. The park bench, the characters and their interaction go beyond the literalism and turn into symbols of the universal human condition. The limited characters and the restricted space are used by Albee to examine the basic existential questions: the meaning of life, the failure of communication, the fact of death, and the fight against the false life. This allegorical role places the play into the context of the existential theatre, where the physical space and theatrical structure are designed to stimulate philosophical meditations, as opposed to a realistic narrative [7].

F. The Role of Silence and Pause in the Existential Space In addition to the dialogue and action, silence and pause are also used in the play which adds to the existential atmosphere. Silences interlude the conversation between Jerry and Peter with the emphasis on the limitations of the language and the unspoken. These silences underline the gap between the characters and encourage the audience to think about the gaps in human relationships. They also bring the existential idea of the fact that meaning is usually absent or postponed and that people have to face the silence of the world per se.

G. Summary: Setting and Structure as a Mirror of Existential Themes Overall, the sparse environment and narrowed framework of *The Zoo Story* are theatrical devices but symbolic displays of existentialism philosophy. By placing the action of the play in one park bench in a large city, and by presenting the events in real time, Albee manages to construct a microcosm of space and time over which the multifacetedness of human life is condensed. The environment turns into an existential confrontation stage, and the composition reflects the process of social inauthenticity to tragic self-realization. This condensed version compels the characters and viewers to contemplate such primordial issues as alienation, communication, freedom and death.

IV. Jerry: The Embodiment of Existential Revolt Jerry, one of the two main characters in *The Zoo Story* is a multidimensional and multifaceted personification of existential revolt. His personality defies the social conventions, reveals the weakness of inter-human bond, and addresses the meaninglessness of life directly. Albee dramatizes the problem of the isolated and meaningless person through Jerry.

A. Existential Alienation and Social Marginalization The life of Jerry is characterized by alienation. He is a marginalized member of society, inhabitant of a boarding house full of strangers and with whom he has brief and frequently antagonistic encounters. This physical and emotional loneliness is similar to existentialist ideas of the for-itself (*pour-soi*)—the person who realizes his/her disconnection with other people and the world [4]. This alienation is expressed by Jerry in his long monologues, in which he frequently tells about his encounters with the dog and the landlady, which act as metaphors to the human relations: any attempts at connection were met with misunderstanding and aggression. Specifically, the dog story is an allegory of the ridiculousness of the human life, where kindness can lead to aggression, and authenticity can never be found.

B. Language as a Mode of Revoltstilted and traditional communication, Jerry employs words as a weapon to shake the social order and arouse existential consciousness. His monologues distort the silence of social courtesy and require genuineness.His language style is existentialist in terms of stressing on the strength and constraints of language. The words spoken by Jerry are unsuccessful in realizing a real communication, but his constant struggle is an example of the idea of revolt that Camus states: The refusal to accept absurdity even when the failure is inevitable [1]. This existential panic is early realized in the play when Jerry tells him that in order to return a short distance right, sometimes it is necessary to go long distances out of the way [5, p. 20]. This is not only a description of the form of his narration, it is also the existential turn his whole life has made—without purpose, hurting, and that always in search of meaning and identity.

C. The Dog Story: A Microcosm of the Absurd The fact that Jerry narrates in detail about his interactions with the dog is the key to his philosophical position. The dog that was originally aggressive is used as a metaphor of the cold or even hostile world.The fact that Jerry repeats his attempts to feed and befriend the dog and then decides to kill it and live with it represents the absurd hero in opposition to the world. His behavior is a resistance to the passivity of alienation but a desire to participate, despite the painfulness and defeat of this participation.

D. The Final Act: Death as Existential Assertion The final event of the existential revolt of Jerry is his death that is stimulated by his self-impalement on the knife that Peter carries. It can be viewed as a suicide and a calculated defiance to Peter and the audience. Based on the philosophy of Camus, the decision by Jerry to die in his own terms is indicative of the claim to freedom in the view of the absurd. His death compels Peter to face the unpleasant truths of life, adulthood, and the instability of human relations [1]. V. Peter: Passive Conformity and the Illusion of IdentityThe apparently normal and impassive figure of Peter in *The Zoo Story* is also the representation of the theme of passive conformity, which, in contrast to Jerry, is an existential uprising. His personality is no longer a mere background character, but the embodiment of the existential conflict of the existential man who has decided to lead an inauthentic life on the basis of the idea of existentialism as a whole, and of the existential philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre. Albee uses Peter to attack the widespread social and psychological processes of forcing people to abandon their freedom and responsibility in favor of the comfort of the social role and routine.

A. The Bourgeois Everyman: Comfort in Routine and Social Facade The life of Peter is stable, comfortable and predictable. Being a publishing executive, a family man, with pets and living in the suburb in an apartment, he represents the ideal of a bourgeois. It is a facade of this otherwise existential emptiness. His reality is that of superficial relationships and social norms that prevent him from formulating more profound questions regarding meaning, freedom, and even death. The external indicators that Peter largely uses to create his identity include his possessions, family, and position in society. They are used as psychological supports to strengthen his identity but they also act as mechanisms to evade existential anxiety. His dialogue is characterized by proper etiquette and evasion, reflecting a lack of closeness to real-life experience and a desire to maintain a socially acceptable facade.

B. Sartre's Concept of Bad Faith and Self-Deception The focus of the interpretation of Peter lies in the concept of bad faith (*mauvaise foi*), which is an act of self-deception Sartre employs when describing how a person rejects his or her personal freedom and responsibility. Peter holds on to preconceived roles and societal expectations instead of facing the pain that freedom brings. The fact that Peter did not want to converse with the existential predicament of Jerry is a detrimental act of bad faith. He rejects the dramatic revelations by Jerry as something alien or threatening, preferring the comfort of ignorance. His unwillingness to listen and react in a genuine way is a demonstration of a psychological defense mechanism, an escape from the burden of choice and fear of true life.This is brought out clearly when Peter, expressing his frustration, exclaims, "You do not have the smallest idea what other people require!" (Albee, 1958, p. 28). The line shows that Peter is angry but also very uncomfortable with being taken out of his emotional comfort zone. Earlier, in the attempt by Jerry to communicate, Peter responds timorously, "I would really have to go home; my wife is waiting, expecting me" (p. 17), making domestic routine a defense mechanism against existential confrontation.

C. The Illusion of Identity and the Role of Social Conventions The actions of Peter are characteristic of a great illusion of identity, a sense of conformity to society instead of being an individual. His self is internalized and relies on social validation, making it weak and insecure. This formed identity is upheld by the observance of social norms, etiquettes, and indexes (husband, professional, pet owner). These elements are a double-edged sword: they are supportive but also limit Peter in his efforts to face existential truths or build real relationships.

This clash between inner wishes and outer image introduces psychological contradiction, which is not fully realized until the denouement of the play.

D. Moral Ambiguity and Responsibility in Jerry's Death The problem with Peter and his character is complicated by his role in the death of Jerry. Although Jerry commits the deadly act, Peter is a passive participant, which makes him morally complicit. This puts Peter in a moral and existential quandary: inaction, particularly during a deep human crisis, is still a choice with its own consequences. According to Sartrean existentialism, a person is doomed to be free, meaning one cannot avoid responsibility even when choosing not to act (Sartre, 1943). Peter's failure to act and his horrified reaction at the end highlight the tragic outcomes of passivity.

E. Psychological Breakdown and Potential for Existential Awakening

The final scenes depict the mental breakdown of Peter. The destruction of his constructed identity and emotional shields is symbolized by his scream and flight. This disintegration may signify an existential awakening—a forced acknowledgment of the freedom and responsibility he has been avoiding his entire life. The ambiguity of the ending leaves open whether Peter will adopt this awareness or revert to bad faith, demonstrating that human authenticity remains an unresolved issue.

F. Peter as a Reflection of Modern Societal Alienation Peter also symbolizes broader societal alienation beyond individual psychology. His personality critiques the means through which modern social institutions enforce conformity, deter genuineness, and alienate individuals in the name of community. Albee uses Peter to comment on postwar American cultural atmospheres, including consumerism, social stratification, and the desire for stability, which often conceal authentic human connection and existential search.

VI. Communication Breakdown and Existential Isolation

The inability of genuine communication between Jerry and Peter is one of the main themes of *The Zoo Story*. Despite their lengthy conversation, by the end of the encounter, both men demonstrate the profound isolation individuals experience even when physically co-located.

A. The Limits of Language The conversation between Jerry and Peter illustrates how poor language is as a means of real knowledge. The speech of Jerry and the reactions of Peter are contrasting as Jerry speaks passionate and fragmented, whereas Peter speaks cautiously and restrained, which shows how hard it is to bridge the subjective experiences. There has been a focus on the boundaries of language being the boundaries of the world where philosophers like Ludwig Wittgenstein have pointed that communication is always limited by the forms of language (Wittgenstein, 1953). This is illustrated by the fact that Jerry never communicates his more emotionally and existentially true things to Peter.

B. Emotional Distance and Social Conventions The fact that Peter follows the polite conversation and other social etiquettes brings in emotional distance, whereas Jerry is less subtle and direct, creating tension. This conflict shows the power of social conventions as some obstacles to genuine connection. The impossibility of the characters to overcome these conventions results in misunderstanding between each other and isolation, which can indicate that human beings tend to be in roles that do not allow them to have a real interaction.

C. Existential Isolation as an Ontological Condition More than an issue of miscommunication the play points to a deeper existential solitude, the innate solitude of each person in the world. The concept of Being-toward-death (Heidegger, 1927/1962) by Martin Heidegger is the realization of the existence of mortality and our subsequent isolation and the need to face our own being on our own. Jerry accepts this isolation and Peter tries to avoid it. The play thus dramatizes the tension between the desire for connection and the inescapable solitude of human existence.

VII. The Final Act: Symbolism of Jerry's Death The ending of Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story* is marked by the death of Jerry, which carries a highly symbolic and existential meaning. This last act summarizes the philosophical contradictions spread throughout the play and represents the ultimate expression of Jerry's existential revolt, highlighting the profound human conflict with freedom, responsibility, and alienation.

VII. The Final Act

A. Death as the Ultimate Act of Freedom and Authenticity Death is given a special place in existential philosophy as the ultimate end of human existence and the ultimate statement of freedom. In his work *Being and Time* (1927/1962), Martin Heidegger defines *Being-toward-death* as a critical way of authentic existence, where the subject recognizes that death will occur, and it is in this recognition that he/she will gain a greater insight into being. Jerry decides to use his own ability to end his life by piercing himself on the knife that Peter is holding, Jim is a radicalized version of this existential freedom. This is unlike suicide as escape whereby the death of Jerry is a conscious action of self-definition. It makes death not a passive subject but a subject of

agencyan indication that Jerry does not want to be a victim of alienation and absurdity in society. This is also very close to the idea of revolt by Camus where the absurd hero accepts life and its absurdity without ultimately giving in to despair [1]. Ironically, the death of Jerry is his ultimate validation of his life and a defiant protest to the nonchalant world.

B. The Knife: Symbol of Power, Choice, and Responsibility Death is given a special place in existential philosophy as the ultimate end of human existence and the ultimate statement of freedom. In his work *Being and Time* (1927/1962), Martin Heidegger defines *Being-toward-death* as a critical way of authentic existence, where the subject recognizes that death will occur, and it is in this recognition that he/she will gain a greater insight into being. Jerry decides to use his own ability to end his life by piercing himself on the knife that Peter is holding, Jim is a radicalized version of this existential freedom. This is unlike suicide as escape whereby the death of Jerry is a conscious action of self-definition. It makes death not a passive subject but a subject of agency, an indication that Jerry does not want to be a victim of alienation and absurdity in society. This is also very close to the idea of revolt by Camus where the absurd hero accepts life and its absurdity without ultimately giving in to despair [2]. Ironically, the death of Jerry is his ultimate validation of his life and a defiant protest to the nonchalant world.

C. The Death as a Catalyst for Peter's Existential Crisis The death of Jerry is a trigger to the psychological and existential turmoil that Peter experiences. During the entire play, Peter continues to possess an illusion of restrained coolness, which is based on societal norms and repudiation of inner fears. The sheer violence and sexuality of the manner in which Jerry was killed breaks this illusion and makes Peter vulnerable and someone who has to face the reality that he was trying to flout. The last scream and the escape of the moment by Peter represent the breaking of the self-formed identity and also the disintegration of complacency. This response may be viewed as the experience of existential realization in which Peter is brought to the realization of his freedom and responsibility. Nonetheless, the uncertainty of the conclusion remains whether Peter will either accept this newfound awareness or go back into denial.

D. Death as Communication and Connection Ironically, the death of Jerry is the final way of communication. As the play progresses, Jerry finds it difficult to relate with Peter by shattering social conventions to reveal awkward reality but they fail to comprehend each other. The killing on the knife which Peter will die of is a dramatic and physical way of communicating—making Peter physically and emotionally involved in the existential case of Jerry. The last act swings out of the stalemate of unsuccessful conversation and represents the extreme steps that are needed to get beyond alienation. It reveals the sad truth that in some cases, only in the face of death and pain, one can really be a true human being.

E. Broader Symbolic Interpretations

The death of Jerry can also be interpreted in a number of larger symbols and socio-cultural ways:

- **Sacrificial Figure:** Jerry can be considered a Christ-like character who sacrifices himself to open the eyes of Peter (as well as, metaphorically, society) to the truths of existential experience, to shake them out of complacency and noncommittal socialism.
- **Protest Against Isolation:** The death is a bloody protest against being singled out by contemporary society—a desperate challenge telling it that human beings cannot stand alone existentially without punishment.
- **The Final Act of the Absurd Hero:** Following Camus in *Myth of Sisyphus*, Jerry accepts the absurd and concludes his meaning with his subversive act of finality as a symbol of human strength even in the face of inherent meaninglessness [3].

Conclusion of the Section In short, the death of Jerry in *The Zoo Story* is a multidimensional symbol that summarizes the main existential concepts of freedom, responsibility, alienation, and communication. It is not just another dramatic climax but a great philosophical declaration on the human condition. In this percussion, Albee is inviting viewers to deal with their own relationship with mortality, their authenticity, and their potentials and constraints of human connection.

VIII. Conclusion*The Zoo Story* by Edward Albee is a milestone of the twentieth-century American drama, a small but powerful work on existential topics that are still being played in the modern discourse. As evidenced in this paper, however seemingly straightforward in its form, a short conversation between two men on a park bench, is a philosophical question of a highly profound kind. The play is close to the dialectic between Jerry and Peter, who represent the two opposite existential attitudes. Jerry is a kind of an existential rebel, the type of character who is not afraid of the absurdity of life and does not want to go back to his or her comfort zone. His pursuit to overcome social indifference and to stir real human interaction echoes the meaning of revolt to the

absurd state by Albert Camus, in which life is affirmed in the event of a meaningless one is established (Camus, 1942). The existential statement of individual freedom and responsibility is best embodied by Jerry who is ready to die on his conditions. To the contrary, Peter is a representation of inactive obedience, a man lost in Jean-Paul Sartre's concept of bad faith—self-delusion whereby it deprives oneself by becoming enveloped in social roles and practices (Sartre, 1943). The character of Peter demonstrates the psychological processes that a person uses to escape the pain of being able to choose and the pressure of real life. His civilized yet cold-hearted personality depicts the existential threats of repression and denial.The two characters interrelate to present the basic human conflict between authenticity and inauthenticity, freedom and security, connection and isolation. The inability of the authentic communication in the play demonstrates the deficiency of language and social convention as the means of overcome existential gap between people (Wittgenstein, 1953). This loneliness is further exaggerated by the realistic setting, which is a solitary park bench in an urban context, which serves as a visual microcosm to the contemporary existential loneliness. The pivotal moment in which the philosophical tensions of the play are tragically resolved is the death of Jerry, which had a certain symbolic meaning. The essence of existential freedom is explored in the act: the decision to take death as the ultimate claim of being in an absurd world. The reaction and flight of Peter are rather indicative of a possible break in his constructed identity, and it is possible that he may experience existential awakening, or just keep denying it.

Significance of the Study The study is an addition to the current interdisciplinary debate between literary criticism and existential philosophy since it sheds light on how *The Zoo Story* exemplifies and dramatizes the fundamental existentialist concepts. It is important to contextualize the play in the philosophical context of Sartre, Camus, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein in order to highlight the effectiveness of the play in a perspective that is not limited to the time and circumstances of the play.Furthermore, the paper will highlight how theater serves as a tool of philosophical inquiry and how the form of drama and the interaction of characters can help to bring abstract ideas of existence, freedom, and alienation into direct human experience. The minimalism used in the play and the intense focus on the narrative play a role of refining these themes, making the audience collusive in the existential challenge.

Future Directions

1.Although this paper has dwelled on the existential issues and characterization in *The Zoo Story*, more studies can be undertaken to cover:

2.Comparison to other existential or absurdist playwrights like Samuel Beckett or Harold Pinter.

3.Psychological explanations of the motivation and actions of the characters, the combination of existential philosophy and psychoanalysis.

4.Sociopolitical interpretations that put the play in the context of the American society of the postwar.

5.Performance analysis of the ways that various stagings approach and focus on the existential aspects of the play.

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