

Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research
Mouloud Mammeri University of Tizi-Ouzou
Faculty of Arts and Languages
Department of English



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Subject:

**The Eiron and the Alazon in Edward Albee's *the Zoo Story* (1958),
Le Roi Jones's *Dutchman* (1964) and Adrienne Kennedy's
Funnyhouse of a Negro (1969)**

Presented by:

- OULAGHA Zakia
- TOUIL Elyes

Panel of Examiners:

- Dr.Siber Mouloud ,M.C.A., UMMTO, Chairman.
- Dr. Gariti Mohamed, M.C.A., UMMTO, Supervisor.
- Abdeli Fatima,M.A.A., UMMTO, Examiner.

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Abstract

This research paper has studied the elements underlying the absurdity of communication between the characters in Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story*, Le Roi Jones's *Dutchman* and Adrienne Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro*. This issue has been addressed through three major phases. First, the focus has been placed upon the socio-economic and racial injustices in the American society during the 1950s and 1960s. Second, as a direct consequence of the socio-economic disparity, the alienation experienced by the plays' central characters has been analyzed in the light of existentialism. Third, the very absurdity of the characters' interaction has been interpreted in terms of the characters' ironic pursuit for communication. Such ironic interaction has therefore been tackled from a mythical perspective calling forth Northrop Frye's theory of archetypes, particularly the mythos of satire and irony. Hence, it has been concluded that the characters' failed communication is brought about by their ironic attack of their interlocutors' fake personas.

Dedications

To my beloved parents,
my brothers and sisters,
my beloved family members,
my best friends Sabrina and Souad,
my friends and colleagues,
and to you the reader.

Zakia

To my beloved parents, long they live,
my sisters and brothers and all the family members,
all my friends in the department of English in UMMTO,
my close friends,
everyone in my life,
and to you reading this.

Elyes

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Introduction

The aim of this study is to find out the mythical implications that underlie the ironic communication in three select American plays: *The Zoo Story* by Edward Albee, *Dutchman* by Le Roi Jones and *Funnyhouse of a Negro* by Adrienne Kennedy. The three plays were written at a time when life in America reached its peak in terms of absurdity and meaninglessness. The impact of the Second World War and the intensity of racial clashes made people lose faith in a unified universe and the result was meaninglessness and rootlessness in life. In addition to ironically reflecting the mind-set of American people, the three playwrights were greatly influenced by the Theater of the Absurd that emerged decades earlier in Europe and which freed the stage from the superficiality and conventions of the Nineteenth Century Theater. Accordingly, the language of literature became nothing more than nonsense: a salient decline of the old eloquence and the grand narrative.

Martin Esslin, who coined the term ‘Theater of the Absurd’, argues that “this form of theater was an attempt to unite, in form and content, the sense of ‘metaphysical anguish’ at the absurdity of the human condition.”¹ All plays that can be integrated in this form of theater are concerned with the futility and ruthlessness of the modern life; a life ruined by war, cruelty and where language is no longer a means of meaningful, effective communication, but just hollow talk. In such anti-theater plays, language becomes a means of mockery and senseless bantering between characters in a way that they do not want to communicate with each other meaningfully. Esslin contends that “It is in its attitude to language that the Theater of the Absurd is most revolutionary. It deliberately attempts to renew the language of drama and to expose the barrenness of conventional stage dialogue.”²

During the 1950s and 1960s, the Americans felt much more disillusioned not only because of the aftermaths of the World War but also due to stifling socio-economic issues. The disparity of social classes within the American society as well as the racial

discrimination, and oppression towards the African Americans deepened the feeling of alienation and the absurdity of the human contact. Thus, many White and Black American playwrights tended to experiment with absurd theatrical innovations so as to stress the staggering communication between the marginalized and the marginalizing, or rather between the oppressed and the oppressor. In this context, Edward Albee, Le Roi Jones and Adrienne Kennedy are some of the prominent absurd playwrights who emerged in the United States during the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s and whose very plays *The Zoo Story*, *Dutchman* and *Funnyhouse of a Negro* implicitly target the issue of communication breakdown between people who are united by neighborhood but separated by class and identity.

It goes without saying that the discursive absurdity and irony in the plays under investigation lie in the characters' failed attempts to establish a successful communication. The initiation and maintenance of contact is reached only through attacking the personal or social problems of the other characters. Eventually, derogative discourse predominantly overshadows the characters' dialogues and speeches. Hence, we can argue here that in each of the three plays the characters resort to irony for the sake of keeping the flow of communication. The irony is clearly manifested in the way the characters struggle to maintain communication. Thus, the absurdity of their interaction can be interpreted mythically in regards to archetypal criticism: mythos of winter. This latter, advocated by Northrop Frye, provides the perfect mythical rationale to account for the ironies of the dissembler characters in relation their ridiculed ones.

- Review of the Literature

It is noteworthy to state that several researches have been carried out on the plays under investigation from an absurd standpoint. However, the three plays did not receive equal critical attention in terms of absurd communication. As to *Funnyhouse of a Negro* and

Dutchman, it is necessary to note that the vast majority of the previous works' central interest has been limited to racial and identity issues and there has not been enough light shed upon the discursive aspects that shape the interaction between characters.

Fentazi and Idir, for example, in their master's dissertation entitled "*Existentialism and Identity in Le Roi Jones's Dutchman(1964) and Adrienne Kennedy's Funnyhouse of a Negro(1969)*" discuss the quest of identity of the Afro-American intellectuals through Clay in *Dutchman* and Sarah in *Funnyhouse of a Negro*.³ In addition, in an article entitled 'Alienation and Intersectionality in Adrienne Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro*', Jabboury et al. examine the motivations of the playwright in presenting Sarah's mental illness in relation to her suffering. Their study traces the intersecting boundaries of race, gender and hybridity leading to Sarah's oppression and alienation. They assert that "these axes contribute to the alienation of self that is experienced by the protagonist of *Funnyhouse Sarah*."⁴ In contrast to Adrienne Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro* and Le Roi Jones's *Dutchman*, the fact that Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story* pertains to the category of absurd drama is uncontroversial.

Martin Esslin in his book '*Theatre of the Absurd*' claims that "Edward Albee (born in 1928) comes into the category of the Theatre of the Absurd precisely because his works attack the very foundations of American optimism."⁵ Nevertheless, very little attention has been paid to the problem of communication breakdown in any of the three plays. In his article entitled: 'The Zoo Story: Regeneration Through Communication', Sayed Salahuddin Ahmed examines "how the playwright delivers message through experimentation on communication and violence in order to create a 'teaching emotion' to push the higher class to endorse the existence and needs of the vulnerable lower class."⁶ The writer attempts to derive positive messages and optimism from Jerry's unreliable and meaningless communication with the socially privileged Peter. Furthermore, Hussein Aliakbari Harehdasht et al. discuss in *the Zoo Story* the techniques deployed by Jerry to convert the incommunicative Peter into someone

who finally appreciates the human interaction. They assert that the stage directions denote that Peter from the beginning resists communication with Jerry who ultimately succeeds at dragging him to condescend.⁷

On the other hand, Bouthelja Riche in his essay entitled: 'The Myth of Sisyphus in the 'Theatre of the Absurd': A Study of its Thematic Implications in Albee's *The Zoo Story* and LeRoi Jones's *Dutchman*', unveils the mythic method deployed by the writers to project the 'phatic function' of language. He, therefore, makes reference to the Greek myth 'Sisyphus'. He argues that

Communication is the "rock" that the modern protagonists in Albee's and Jones' plays roll up to the top of the hill of the language problematic, which in the same manner as in the Greek myth crumbles down for our persevering heroes to renew their effort to roll it up again and get through to one another.⁸

So as to flesh out this absurd interaction among the characters, the author implements the fifth component of Roman Jakobson's Speech Act theory which is the 'phatic function'. This latter happens when the speaker's speech does not deliver any message or meaning. Nevertheless, the writer paid more attention to the functional aspects to Jerry's language with little concern about underlying incentives that made the latter's language much more ironic.

Indeed, this latter study addressed the issue of communication breakdown in the two plays by providing its mythical implications in relation Albert Camus' 'Myth of Sisyphus'. The latter, along with Jakobson's the Phatic Function certainly do account for the void language of the characters that leads nowhere with its meaninglessness. However, there is much irony beneath the phatic language and the long speeches of Jerry that, in fact, has been ignored. The influence of the characters' social and racial backgrounds has been entirely neglected. It is agreed that almost all the protagonist characters in the plays under study resort to unveiling their interlocutors' personal or social life as a provocation towards establishing or maintaining contact, but the fact that, in this way, characters are being either satirizing or

the object of irony is marginalized. Nevertheless, the fact that Riche's study is too relevant regarding the communication problematic cannot be denied. His mythic interpretation can serve as grounding ideas for a further investigation as to the absurdity of communication in all of the three plays.

Issue and Working Hypothesis

As aforementioned, Albee's *The Zoo Story* received much attention from researchers compared to Jones's *Dutchman* and Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro*. The former is thematically distinct from the latter plays. While *The Zoo Story* is written by a White playwright and introduces two White characters of contrasting social classes, *Dutchman* and *Funnyhouse of a Negro* are written by African-American playwrights targeting the issues of Black identity and alienation. However, in each of the three plays, we find ourselves before two distinct characters: a straight and conventional character and an absurdly rogue character. The former embodies the common social and socio-economic conventions and values of the dominant culture in general and middle class, in particular, of his or her society, whereas the latter is much more close to reality and thus stands as a scathing critic to the fake attitudes and manners of the former. Hence, considering the characters' communication, the elements inherent to middle class and race contribute heavily in altering the meaning of their language. That is, the characters' embodied beliefs and conventions are being satirized and attacked.

Consequently, it is salient in the three plays that the character representing conventions is usually reluctant and sometimes unwilling to talk while his or her interlocutor struggles hard and deceitfully to establish and maintain conversation. The latter repeatedly tends to meddle into their interlocutors' social or racial problems - such as class, family, Black identity - only for the sake of dragging his or her partner to talk. Hence, in this study, and as far as the communication problematic is concerned, we will endeavour to figure out the mythical implications of the characters' ironic pursuit of communication in the three plays.

Thus, we can suppose that Peter, Clay and Sarah, in *The Zoo Story*, *Dutchman* and *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, respectively, incarnate the common conventions and therefore are the object of irony since they are being ridiculed by their interlocutors. Consequently they form the mythical archetype of *alazon*, within the perspective of Northrop Frye's fourth mythos of satire and irony. On the other hand, Jerry, Lula and Sarah's 'selves', respectively, fall into the archetype of *eirone* since they tend to derogate and deceive their partners. Therefore, so as to further dismantle this claim, we will proceed in analysing the characters' ironic interaction by making reference to Northrop Frye's mythos of winter.

Methodological Outline

We will proceed in the analyses and discussions of this central theme through three subsequent chapters. At first, we will provide an overview of the economic and social conditions of the United States during late 1950s and early 1960s and their impact on the writing of the three plays under study. The second chapter sheds light on the characters' existential alienation and the way such alienation hinders their communication. In the last chapter, we set out on the mythical analysis of the characters' conversations in each of the three plays based on Northrop Frye's archetypal criticism and end up drawing conclusions.

Methods and Materials

1. **Methods: Northrop Frye's *Theory of Archetypes: The Mythos of Winter (Satire and Irony)* and Jean Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*:**

The purpose of this study is to figure out the implications behind the absurd communication in Albee's *The Zoo Story*, Jones's *Dutchman* and Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro*. Since our claim is based on the fact that irony is predominant in the three plays, we will resort to using the theory of mythos precisely the mythos of winter that stands for satire and irony and which is advocated by the Canadian critic Northrop Frye. Frye's theory of myths stresses the idea that all of western literature shares a certain structure.⁹ He posits that literary works fall into four categories: comedy, romance, tragedy and satire/irony. He further asserts that, "human beings project their narrative imagination in two fundamental ways: in representations of an ideal world and in representations of the real world"¹⁰ Satire and irony deal mostly with the real world. The content of the ironic literary works is representative of human experiences or "low-mimetic", in Frye's words, and try to give form to the complexities of unidealized existence.

Irony or verbal irony is viewed as a statement in which the meaning of the message that the speaker delivers is completely different from the actually intended meaning.¹¹ Thereby comes the *eirōn* archetype in Greek myth and who is conceived to be a dissembler. The myth goes that "the *eirōn* characteristically spoke in understatement and deliberately pretended to be less intelligent than he was, yet triumphed over the *alazōn* – the self-deceiving and stupid braggart."¹² Meanwhile, satire is described as an art of derogating a subject by making it look ridiculous and imposing on it attitudes of amusement and indignation.¹³ In the words of Northrop Frye, satire differs from irony in that "satire is a militant irony: its moral norms are relatively clear and it assumes standards against which the grotesque and absurd are measured."¹⁴ Hence, satire in drama implies that the playwright takes a position and

demonstrates his attitudes to the reader as in *Dutchman* and *Funnyhouse of a Negro* in which Jones and Kennedy explicitly target the psychological and racial problems of African Americans. Frye further contends that:

Satire is irony which is structurally close to the comic: the comic struggle of two societies, one normal and the other absurd, is reflected in its double focus of morality and fantasy. Irony with little satire is the non-heroic residue of tragedy, centering on a theme of puzzled defeat.¹⁵

According to Frye, satire goes through six phases the first three of which “are phases of satire, and correspond to the first three or ironic phases of comedy.”¹⁶ In the first phase, the existent society remains and the absurdity and futility of this latter does not occur until the end of the story. The second phase implies that the society without change is attacked by criticism. Sources of values and conventions are ridiculed usually by a successful rogue who challenges the society’s generalizations, theories and dogmas by showing their ineffectiveness in the face of reality. In the third phase, there is a replacement of the existent society by a happy one. This is accomplished by attacking and criticizing mainly with verbal exuberance or “talk-talk” in order to show societies in a different light. From the fourth phase on, there is a shift into the ironic aspect of tragedy and the recession of satire.¹⁷ The fourth phase is the time for individual’s faults. It applies a moral and realistic perspective to tragedy.¹⁸ The fifth phase or ‘fifth-phase tragedy’ as called by Frye puts emphasis on the natural cycle and the steady turning of the wheel of fate. Its motto is “there may be heaven; there must be hell.”¹⁹ The last phase of irony presents human life in terms of largely unrelieved bondage and social tyranny.²⁰

We have leaned to implement this theory because it not only accounts for the derogative broken human contact between our characters but also it provides mythical explication for the events underlying the three stories. Thus, the archetypal qualities and behaviors of *ieron* and *alazon* in the fourth mythos are best to account for the absurd communication in the three plays.

In addition to Northrop frye's Theory of Archetypes we have called Jean Paul Sartre's existential ideas on Alienation to prop our analysis of the character's existential alienation. Sartre's theory stresses the fact that every human being is free and responsible to choose his nature and to create his personality because before any aspect that defines the nature of the world and the nature of humanity, people exist first. To say that man is alienated is imply that man is estranged from himself, from the world and from his fellow man.

In *Being and Nothingness* Sartre posits that man is a lack who secretes a nothingness which isolates him. In bringing nothingness to the world, man brings alienation. In the second chapter of our dissertation we will analyze the character's alienation in the three plays according to Sartre's concepts which defines the human being.

2. Materials

We are dealing here with three distinct American plays that were written and staged around the late 1950s and along the 1960s. Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story* was his first play and, by all accounts, belongs to the Theater of the Absurd. Another distinctive feature of this play from Jones's *Dutchman* and Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro* is that the dialogue is between two White men of different social classes that undermine their absurd conversation. Whereas, in the two others, it involves White and Black characters suggesting that the issues of identity and alienation are central to the problem of communication.

◆ A Summary of Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story* (1958)

The Zoo Story is a one act play written by Edward Albee in 1958. It is about two men from two different social classes. Jerry, a poor, sloppily dressed man in his late thirties and Peter, a middle class, well-educated man in his mid-forties. They meet in New York Central Park one Sunday afternoon. The play begins with Peter sitting on his bench when Jerry appears and announces that he is coming from the zoo. Noticing that Peter does not want to

hear or answer his call for communication, Jerry repeats, “I have been to the zoo. MISTER, I HAVE BEEN TO THE ZOO!”²¹ We learn from the story that Jerry looks for somebody to talk with, a “real talk” because of his feeling of loneliness and alienation. He tries to converse with Peter while this latter wants to get back to his reading all the time. Jerry provokes Peter to communicate with him and forces him to hear his stories about his experiences with his landlady, the dog and finally the zoo story but Peter’s reluctance to communicate and his willingness to leave makes Jerry behave in a violent way; he challenges Peter to a fight for the bench and for his self-respect. This battle leads to a murder-suicide when Jerry impales himself on the knife he gave to Peter and ultimately dies.

◆ **A Summary of Le Roi Jones’s *Dutchman* (1964)**

Dutchman is a one act play written by LeRoi Jones in 1964. It is widely considered as Jones’s masterpiece receiving the Obie Award for the best off-Broadway play bringing the playwright to the attention of the American public. The story takes place on a subway car and it involves two main characters. Clay, a twenty-years-old African American and Lula, a thirty-years-old beautiful White woman. The play begins with Clay sitting on the subway bank reading a magazine when Lula intrudes on him and takes the place next to him. Lula entices Clay to converse with her by her lusty manners and by deriding on his identity as a Negro “middle-class black bastard”.²² She becomes aggressive and insulting when Clay rejects her politely. Lula continues her provocations until Clay reacts violently, too. He wants to kill her but changes his mind, though Lula takes out a knife and stabs him twice then she orders the riders the throw Clay’s body.

◆ **A Summary of Adrienne Kennedy’s *Funnyhouse of a Negro* (1969)**

Funnyhouse of a Negro is a one act play, first staged in 1964 in New York City and won the OBIE award. The play deals with one central character, Sarah, a young Black student who grapples in her mind with her conflicting identities 'herselves'. Sarah worships her White mother and despises her Black African father who "comes through the jungle".²³ Kennedy projects Sarah onto various selves including historical figures such as the Queen Victoria, the Duchess of Hapsburg, Patrice Lumumba, who was Congo's post-independence president, and the hunchbacked Jesus. The play also comprises the landlady and Raymond who are outside Sarah's mind. Sarah is unable to communicate with herself properly because of her hybrid cultural heritage. She becomes paranoid by her father. She fights with 'herselves' about her race and identity and eventually she commits suicide.

Endnotes

¹ Martin Esslin, *Theater of the Absurd*, (London: Penguin Books, 1961), 23-24.

² Ibid., 10.

³ Thanina Fentazi and Anissa Idir, *Existentialism and identity in Amiri Baraka's Dutchman (1964) and Adrienne Kennedy's Funnyhouse of a Negro, (1969)*, (UMMTO: 2015), 4.

⁴ Latifa I. Jabboury, Ruzy S. Hashim and Anita H. Satkunanathan, *Alienation and Intersectionality in Adrienne Kennedy's Funnyhouse of a Negro*, *Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, (Malaysia: Universiti Putra Malaysia Press, 2015), 121, Viewed 29 June 2017,

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⁵ Esslin, *Theater of Absurd*, 166.

⁶ Salahuddin Ahmed Sayed, *The Zoo Story: Regeneration through Communication*, *Journal of Language, Linguistics and Literature*, (USA: American Institute of Science, 2016), 8, Viewed 10 May 2017,

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⁷ Hussein Aliakbari Harehdasht, Leila Hajjari and Zahra Sheikhi Shahidzadeh, *Illusion and Reality in Edward Albee's The Zoo Story*, *Studies in Literature and Language*, (Canada, 2015), 3, Viewed 10 May 2017,

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- ⁸ Boutheldja Riche, *The Myth of Sisyphus in the "Theatre of the Absurd": A Study of its Thematic Implications in Albee's Zoo Story and LeRoi Jones's Dutchman*, (UMMTO) 2, Viewed 20 March 2017, www.ummto.dz/IMG/docx/Albee_and_Pinter.docx
- ⁹ Lois Tyson, *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 221
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 223.
- ¹¹ M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, (USA: Heinle & Heinle, 1999), 135.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, 134-135.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 275.
- ¹⁴ Northrop Frye, *the Anatomy of Criticism*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957), 223.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 224.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 225.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 236.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 237.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 240.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 241.
- ²¹ Edward Albee, *The Zoo Story*, (1958), 1, Viewed 10 May 2017, <https://scholarblogs.emory.edu/thea100fullerton/files/2014/04/The-Zoo-Story-SCRIPT.pdf>
- ²² Le Roi Jones, *Dutchman*, (1964), 8, Viewed 10 May 2017, <http://faculty.atu.edu/cbrucker/Engl2013/texts/Dutchman.pdf>
- ²³ Adrienne Kennedy, *Funnyhouse of a Negro, Adrienne Kennedy in One Act*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press: 1969), 166.

Results and Discussion

Results and Discussion:

This study targets the absurdity of communication between the characters in Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story*, Le Roi Jones's *Dutchman* and Adrienne Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro*. The bright and at the same time, seemingly, gloomy life of the late 1950s and during the 1960s is reflected in the unsuccessful interaction between the plays' characters. It was bright because of the outstanding economic bloom that led many Americans to live luxuriously, especially with people's adherence to mass consumerism as a result of mass production. However, the period was also characterized as gloomy for many other Americans. On the one hand, such a capitalist evolution created a marginalized lower class whose gap between the upper class was deepened and on the other, the black Americans were still undergoing harsh racial oppression. Such conditions left the less privileged lower class people and the oppressed Blacks with significant alienation in the American society. Therefore, this discussion attempts to examine the way this imposed alienation affected people's interaction that is depicted in the plays.

Thereby, Albee, Jones and Kennedy provide us with characters who go through such conditions undermining their ironic relationships. Although they might live in the same area, they are estranged to one another based on the way they communicate with each other. This climate of inhibited human contact reflects the barrenness of human relationships within the American society during the period. While Albee's *The Zoo Story* sets forth characters who are separated by the bounds of the capitalist society, Jones's *Dutchman* and Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro* show African American characters who cannot reconcile with themselves and with others because of their double identity within this very society.

Therefore, this analysis will revolve around three major axes: first, the focus shall be placed upon the socio-economic background of the couple of decades stretching from early 1950s to the 1960s that historically have much to do with the writing of *The Zoo Story*,

Dutchman and *Funnyhouse of a Negro*. Second, as an aftermath of socio-economic conditions, the alienation experienced by the plays' characters will be analyzed and interpreted from an existential standpoint. Last, but not least, a profound mythical analysis of the characters' interaction will be carried out under the light of Northrop Frye's mythos of satire and irony. Much focus shall be placed on the characters' ironic and failed pursuit of contact.

Chapter One

CHAPTER 1: The Socio-economic Context of the Late 1950s and the 1960s and its Influence on the Writing of the Three Plays.

Understanding the socio-economic conditions of the time lapse during which *The Zoo Story*, *Dutchman* and *Funnyhouse of a Negro* were written is paramount to understanding the broken down communication between the plays' characters. Our aim is to cover up the major events and socio-economic issues of the period which contributed to the alteration and absurdity of the human relationships as portrayed by the playwrights. As long as failed communication is common in the plays, studying the historical background will help figure out the origins of such an absurd interaction. The unfair practices of the capitalist system and the racial discriminations played a major role in distancing people from each other. In other words, certain socio-economic and racial conditions contributed in a way on another to the manifestation of ironic attitudes in some central characters of the plays, leading to the creation of the dissembling *eirons* and the incommunicative *alazons*. Therefore, much focus is placed upon the ups and downs underlying the American dream before and during the early 1960s as well as the Blacks' consciousness represented in their ongoing protest against segregation practices of the White majority.

The 1950s and the 1960s were decades of prosperity and simultaneously of protest for the Americans. While the 1950s represent an era of conformity and well-being due to the economic boom, the late 1950s and early 1960s were marked by disillusionment and incessant, intense racial turmoil. Several events throughout the period put the idealistic tenets of the American dream into question, especially with people's increased clinging to material possessions and conformity instead of each other and human values. When the World War II was over, the American economy kept evolving leading many to enjoy the American dream to the fullest while leaving the less privileged and the Black minority struggling in the lower class and marginalization. America at that time seemed to be the only beneficial nation from

this worldly clash due to the huge profits made from the military industry. The economy became much more dynamic which provided people with leisure and income. This paved the way for the mass production, marketing and mass consumerism that brought about material conformity under way throughout the 1950s. During the decade, consumer values dominated the American economy and culture.¹ It was a time for the “good life” for many Americans who were eager to spend their money on goods that were scarce before and on those newly invented machines. As jobs in the service sector grew vastly with satisfactory revenues, almost 60 percent of the population enjoyed the middle class status. Most of them owned flashy cars, TV sets, washing machines and many luxuries. The habits of shopping in big malls and enjoying fast food restaurants became commonplace. In addition, many Americans lived this “good life” in the suburbs building their homes with new techniques and low prices. A great number of Americans at this time enjoyed the “dream” to the fullest since they had ever aspired to fulfill such shared beliefs as “individual freedom of choice in lifestyle, equal access to economic abundance and the pursuit of shared objectives mutually advantageous to the individual and society.”²

However, this mass consumerism brought about material conformity. Because what people cared about most were possessions and the things they could buy so that to sound like others or rather as a typical middle class. Conformity became the norm. In this context, Zangrando and Zangrando agree that “Individuals who benefited, or thought they benefited, from the dream have often discovered it exerted a burden of conformity to a set of national values that exceeded the individualized rewards they sought.”³ Everyone tried hard to get on the train of conformity in order to avoid being looked down. In fact, this is well represented by Albee in *The Zoo Story* through Peter, and by Jones in *Dutchman* through Clay. They both saliently try to assimilate to the “dream” through embodying the common values of the dominating culture and lifestyle leading to their self-deprecation. Peter and clay believe they

achieved success in life and earned things like a beautiful house, good income and a family that everybody would consider to make people happy and better than the others.

Such yearn to homogeneity in the American society was clearly boosted by deliberate advertising from business owners belonging to the White majority. Through television shows, people were presented with positive futuristic portrayals of the idealized modern family (mother, father, son and daughter) enjoying the comforts of their new home, the convenience of their automobile and leisure time together. Advertising also aimed to portray a society that is moving upward towards prosperity and technological superiority. For example, the necessity of becoming a two-car family was heavily promoted throughout the 1950s, a decade that began with 59% of American families owning a car.⁴ Within this reinforced conformity, it was hard to identify farmers or working people as an economic class. The American worker acquired buying habits of the middle class and their social values. Hence, many thought that such a “good life” included all the “melting pot” constituents of the American society, while in reality it was just an illusion.

A number of Americans were still marginalized wading in poverty with low wages. Some of these alienated groups expressed their angst and rejection of the prevalent luxuries. They were part of the Beat Movement that appeared in New York during the 1940s, and whose members searched for ways to get beyond their sense of alienation such as expressing their openness to sexuality, drugs...etc⁵. In fact Jerry in *the Zoo Story* and Lula in *Dutchman* embody typical qualities of the Beat generation. However, this unbalanced division of the society resulted in economic inflation. Several goods and materials became no longer affordable by the low waged workers because of their soaring prices. This inflation reinforced the gap between the “haves” and the “have-nots”, assisting the rich to get wealthier and the lower class people to get poorer. In this context, Iris Young argues that:

Karl Marx, the father of Socialism, said that capitalism creates “haves” (those who have wealth) and “have-nots” (those who do not have wealth). Typically in a

capitalist society, the “haves” end up exploiting the “have-nots” for their hard work. Therefore, exploitation creates a system that perpetuates class differences, keeping the rich richer and poor poorer.⁶

Hence, those white Americans who succeeded in the full participation in the dream mostly constitute the middle class. i.e. those who enjoyed well-remunerated jobs and thus could easily afford to have cars, houses, televisions etc. Whereas, the Black people, Hispanics and the new immigrants belonged to the lower class, living in poor conditions with low waged jobs, low level of education and precarious houses. Jerry, in *The Zoo Story* is one of these “have-nots”. He is perceived as a vulgar tramp or a rogue by his conformist partner Peter, merely because he lives in a rooming house with no family and because of his ‘weird’ sexual affinity and openness. If they do not share equal socio-economic statuses, it is almost impossible for them to reconcile with each other communicatively in the park; they are strangers to each other at all rates.

Added to the deprived folks like Jerry, were the African Americans. They were the largest of these groups being marginalized and affected by the Whites’ capitalist practices and racial inequality. They were not allowed to take profit from the conformities that had ever been sanctioned by national values and aspirations. The Blacks’ exclusion from the dream contributed to their socio-economic alienation as well. They had ever been cast from enjoying equal status with the white majority. However, so as to eschew such alienation, many African Americans tried to immerse themselves into the mainstream conventions. The trending lifestyles of the Whites and their overlaying culture tremendously affected the aspirations of the black community. Many felt that they had no choice but to conform and borrow the Whites’ conformist habits even at the expense of their identity. *Dutchman*’s Black character Clay is one of those typical African Americans yearning for respectable social status by demonstrating manners and values of the Whites. Nevertheless, those who adhered to the socio-economic conformity were aware of their fading culture and the unachieved recognition

of their race. Therefore, although they were still treated as “aliens” and patronized, their consciousness of their actual identity revived. As they had always fought for freedom and equality, their struggle towards confirming their emancipation turned intense in the 1950s and particularly in the early 1960s.

The Blacks’ protest against racial injustices and segregation of the dominant Whites matured remarkably at this era and altered the idealism of the American dream. Therefore, with the outstanding influence of some great Black Civil Rights activists and philosophers like Martin Luther King and W.E.B. Dubois, the battle for racial equality evolved greatly with the emergence of the Civil Rights Movement.

Long before the Civil Rights Movement, the Afro-Americans faced conditions of extreme repression. Although emancipated after the civil war, the Jim Crow legislation imposed on them oppressing life styles of segregation and second class citizenship. Until 1954, Black Americans were still not allowed to attend the same schools along with the Whites, nor the same buses or restaurants. If one takes a glimpse at the speeches of *Dutchman*’s character, Lula, it is noticeable that the latter resorts to fire up her Negro partner for reaction by reminding him of his ancestors’ ruthless life under the harsh oppression of the slave owners and also by mocking him out for denying his identity. Back into our post 1950s period, these discriminatory acts were still largely common in the southern states compared to the abolitionist northerners.

According to Zangrando and Zangrando, the White Americans cannot blur their identity within the dream’s traditional limits if the Black people continue their liberation unchallenged.⁷ Eventually, the gap between theory and practice expands drastically and the chances for the Blacks’ adherence to the American dream are low. Therefore, the Afro-Americans had but to renounce to the dream and instead emphasize their sense of community through the instruments of Black awareness and Black identity. This process of self-

determination began with the projection of Blacks' cultural heritage and potential through arts, poetry and music. Consequently, the increasingly artistic productions and activities of Black Arts Movement dominated the 1960s for the sake of affirming the Black power. In this Larry Neal states that "The Black Arts Movement is radically opposed to any concept of the artist that alienates him from his community. This movement is the aesthetic and the spiritual sister of the Black Power concept. ⁸ Thus, the Black Arts Movement occurred to relieve the Afro-Americans from the alienation felt out of the White's non inclusive aspect of the dream. Through poetry, writing and music, the artists within the Black Arts Movement sought to create politically engaged work that explored the African American cultural and historical experience and transformed the way African Americans were portrayed in literature and the arts. Although the movement flourished during and after the civil rights struggle, its origination in Harlem dates back to 1920 when W.E.B. Dubois called for "a renaissance of American Negro literature... (for) the strange, heart-rending race tangle is rich beyond dream and only we can tell the tale and sing the song from the heart."⁹. Hence, the Harlem Renaissance constituted the ideological foreground for the Black Arts Movement.

LeRoi Jones was one of the most important figures in the Black Arts movement, who began his career among the Beat generation, associating with poets such as Allen Ginsberg, Charles Olson, and Gary Snyder. Following the assassination of Malcolm X in 1965, Baraka made a symbolic move to Harlem, where he founded the Black Arts Repertory Theater. Together with a number of Black artists, they produced numerous plays of excellent artistic quality especially Jones's *Dutchman*, a shocking one-act play. The symbolism and radical black consciousness underlying the play made the playwright most famous. The Black Arts Movement became the home for black aesthetics and motivated many other black artists to exhibit their talents. Poets, writers, musicians and theater groups began to emerge in a cogent expression of the African American cultural identity. Their works proved that the Afro-

American life and history is full of creative possibilities that can confront or even overshadow the dominant culture of the Whites. The Black Arts Movement therefore represented the cultural legion of the African Americans' struggle against the Whites' discrimination and oppression. It proved that no matter how assimilative the Black people might be, their cultural and identity awareness was always alive.

In short, considering the clear divisions in the American society around the 1960s, the chances for a meaningful contact between people are too low. The capitalist system with its unjust practices and the White majority's narcissist pursuit for the dream distanced people from each other. Hence, when it comes to the relationship between people of different socio-economic backgrounds despite living in the same society, their interaction is eventually inhibited by the opposing values and conventions.

It is noteworthy to restate that such values were imposed by the dominant culture and consequently embodied by those fleeing socio-economic alienation. It is unlikely that the fake middle class can communicate effectively and naturally with someone belonging to the low class or the "have-nots". This is because the awareness of the individual's true belonging surpasses that of the adopted status. The African-Americans, who tried to benefit from the dream in the White way, could not escape their actual identity and therefore had to confront the imposing reality. Their resistance against the majority's hegemony and their conscious clinging to their community values, instead of the oppressor's, represent an explicit rejection of the ever misleading American dream. Therefore, our plays' characters are inextricably reproducing this ambivalent climate of identity struggle and people's inability to reconcile with each other. At the surface level, Jones's *Dutchman* and Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro* stand as some of the fine artistic contributions to the Black Arts Movement in its search for the cultural assertion of the Black race. But deep in the characters' monologues and dialogues, they reflect the psychological effects of the Whites' cultural and socio-economic

imperialism. Meanwhile, Albee's *the Zoo Story* is but a plain representation of the socio-economic alienation of both the lower class and the middle class Americans of the late 1950s.

Endnotes:

¹ Cohen Elizabeth, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*, *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 31, (2004), 236, Viewed 10 May 2017, https://dash.harvard.edu/bitstream/handle/1/4699747/cohen_conrepublic.pdf?sequence=2

² Joana Zangrando and Robert Zangrando, *Black Protest: A Rejection of the American Dream*, *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol.1, (1970), 141-159, Viewed 10 May 2017, <https://www.freedomarchives.org/Documents/Finder/Black%20Liberation%20Disk/Black%20Power!/SugahData/Essays/Zangrando.S.pdf>

³ *Ibid.*, 142.

⁴ Thomas C. Reeves, *Twentieth Century America: A Brief History*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 156.

⁵ Zangrando and Zangrando, *Black Protest*, 143.

⁶ Iris Young, *Five Faces of Oppression*, (2004), 1-2, Viewed 10 May 2017, <http://mrdevin.files.wordpress.com/2009/06/five-face-of-oppression.pdf>

(2008), 6, Viewed 10 May 2017,

⁷ Zangrando and Zangrando, *Black Protest*, 152.

⁸ Larry Neal, *the Black Arts Movement*, *the Drama Review*, Vol. 12, No. 4, (1968), 29, Viewed 15 May 2017, <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/maai3/community/text8/blackartsmovement.pdf>

⁹ Nina Gillford, *The Harlem Renaissance*, (2005), 3, Viewed 15 May 2017, https://www.learner.org/courses/amerhistory/pdf/Harlem-Ren_L-One.pdf

Chapter Two

CHAPTER 2: The Characters' Existential Alienation and its Impact on their Communication.

This chapter attempts to delve into the state of alienation experienced by the plays' characters from an existential perspective. Since the characters' interaction is affected by their incarnation of irrelevant and sometimes multiple identities, they eventually choose to consciously obliterate their alienated existence. Hence, understanding how the characters are alienated from themselves and from each other, and how they strive to achieve their 'being-for-itself' will help grasp their biased communication. Therefore, since existentialism treats an individual as a conscious being who leads a life of anguish, absurdity and alienation within the encircling nothingness and to whom death is as unimportant as the birth, Jean Paul Sartre's existential ideas on alienation will be called for to prop our analysis of the characters' existential alienation. Sartre's theory stresses the fact that every human being is free and responsible to choose his nature and value and to create his personality because before any aspect that defines the nature of the world and the nature of humanity, people do exist first. In addition, to say that man is alienated is to imply that man is estranged from himself, from the world and from his fellow men.

Alienation is a concept that incorporates many dimensions as powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, social isolation, cultural estrangement and self-alienation.¹ It is that sense of estrangement from oneself and from the other accompanied with a feeling that this should not be so. Although, the notion of alienation is primarily indebted to Marxism, it was also one of the central interests in the Sartrean phenomenology.

According to Sartre, it entails the condition of "otherness" and it is rooted in human existence, in one's relation with the other.¹ He adds the term 'look' to emphasize the alienating condition of the individual in the face of the other's existence. In "*Being and Nothingness*", Sartre posits that "Man is 'a lack' who secretes a nothingness which isolates

him. In bringing nothingness to the world, man brings alienation.”³ In such a condition, man is ‘being-for-others’, one of the three basic concepts deployed by Sartre to define the human being. It is a ‘being’ that becomes relevant in contexts where human beings encounter each other. Sartre contends that our relations to other people are of the very essence of man.⁴ Unlike our encounter with objects, we here experience the other and encounter the subjectivity of the other. The realization that the other we encounter is a subject posits a potential threat to our own subjectivity, as it raises the possibility that we may become an object to the subjectivity of the other consciousness. One experiences oneself as being subjected to the objectification of another subject. In addition, Sartre defines human being as: “though the being-in-itself and being-for-itself mutually exclude, they are nevertheless combined in human being. Man is both being-in-itself and being-for-itself.”⁵

Sartre also identifies a third structure of being, ‘being-for-others’ which is one’s being as it exists in the consciousness of another. The being-in-itself has to do with man’s creation that cannot be changed. It is the unconscious being of Man on which he has no choice such as gender and color. By contrast, the being-for-itself has to do with the conscious being of man. That is, the fears, hopes, wishes, desires, emotions and memories that constitutes his soul and body.⁶ Sartre argues that being-for-itself arouses from being-in-itself in a sense that the latter in its unconsciousness makes up the ground for the entity of conscious being. Take the case of *Dutchman’s* Clay, for instance, his being-in-itself lies in his blackness; he has no control over it while his black culture and identity constitute his conscious being, that is, the being-for-itself for which he has freedom of choice. Besides this dualism of being-in-itself and being-for-itself. Jean Paul Sartre developed the concept of ‘Bad faith’ or self-deception. It is a matter of lying to oneself by hiding the truth and denying the situation-birth. In this, he contends that individuals who act in bad faith are attempting to hide themselves, their

transcendence, their freedom, their ability to negate, to separate themselves from, to change, alter or at least reinforce their situation.⁷

2.1. Existential Alienation of the Characters Jerry and Peter in *The Zoo Story*:

Edward Albee's play brings forward the crisis of modern life through its two central characters Jerry and Peter. Their lack of communication is due to their social alienation, materialism and lack of motivation for living life. Jerry is a social outcast lost in solitude and lower class with no family or personal properties while Peter is a typical middle class man having all what a modern man would wish for, though he lacks the very enjoyment of this status. Both characters are conscious subjects of their existence since each one of them had a choice at hand to make.

Both Jerry and Peter are aware of the fact that the world they live in is a hostile universe. Peter chooses to lead his life following the rules of material conformity while Jerry decides to accept the cruelties of life just the way they are. Believing that to achieve success in life is to be just like others, Peter thinks he has secured himself socially and economically in this hostile world by having a family, a respectful job and a house. He is much more interested in his socio-economic status rather than his inner satisfaction and happiness because for him the others' 'look' is much more important. Jerry in fact accuses him of this, "What were you trying to do? Make sense out of things? Bring order."⁸ However, neither Peter nor Jerry is actually safe from alienation since they admit and are conscious of their life conditions. Ironically, Jerry is astray alone with no relationships while Peter, even though he lives according to the rules of society, still manages to isolate himself because he lives in a household of females. He thinks he could achieve his sense of satisfaction with the world by coming to the same part of the park to read. "I've come here for years; I have hours of great pleasure, great satisfaction. And that's important to a man."⁹ He does spend hours every Sunday in the park not only because he longs for peace of mind and avoids disturbance but

also he tries to mitigate his sense of alienation being away from his family and isolate himself.

As we go through the play, we see that Jerry has the most conscious mind. He may belong to the lower class of the society, but still he is highly conscious about his isolation from the other humans and also the general loneliness and anguish of existence. The way he gives the description of his dwelling, his personal life and his relation with other characters shows that he is very much aware of the his existence. Jerry tells Peter about his drab and dreary existence. He lives in a crowded four-storey brown-stone rooming house and has no contact with other dwellers of the building. He tells Peter about his story about the dog which he attempted vainly to befriend. Bearing in mind that all his attempts to communicate with humans ended in failure and his coming across with Peter provides him another chance to establish a human contact. Jerry's life is dramatically hollow as he lacks proper familial structure. It is desolate and absurd. He tells Peter about two picture frames, both empty:

PETER. (Stares glumly at his shoes, then) About those two empty picture frames ...? JERRY. I don't see why they need any explanation at all. Isn't it clear? I don't have pictures of anyone to put in them. PETER. Your parents ... perhaps ... a girlfriend ... JERRY. You are a very sweet man, [...]. But good old Mom and good old Pop are dead ... you know? ... I'm broken up about it, too ... I mean really. [...] so I don't see how I can look at them, all neat and framed.¹⁰

Jerry's alienation is a total existential nothingness. His parents are dead and apparently they had not meant much to him when they were alive. He is socially isolated in a sense that he has never been able to establish and maintain communication. From his conversation with Peter, it becomes apparent that he also does not believe in God. So, Jerry reaches the conclusion that God has abandoned him, just as his parents did.

The alienation experienced by both Jerry and Peter is a mere depiction of the existential problem of the American people in the late 1950s. They are completely different from each other and each one had to make a decision as to his being-for-itself. Jerry makes a conscious choice of wanting to end his life, while Peter, after having conceded to act as the "guinea pig"

and stayed and listened to Jerry's story, makes a conscious choice of picking up same knife that killed Jerry. Thus the most significant moment of Jerry's life is the moment of his death. So, Jerry's suicide must be perceived not as negative escape from life, but as a positive existentialist choice which succeeds in conveying to Peter the superior consciousness of the absurd. From the death of Jerry, Peter learns the meaninglessness and absurdity of life in a sense that Peter becomes wiser after the death of Jerry. From now he will be more conscious about the meaninglessness and futility of human life.

2.2. Existential Alienation of the Character Clay in *Dutchman*:

Le Roi Jones's *Dutchman* targets the problem of alienation as one of its central themes. It is concerned with two people, a Negro male Clay and a White woman Lula who meet on a subway train. Clay represents the alienated category of people in the modern American society who are suffering from racial discrimination, segregation in social life and widespread insecurity. Lula the White woman who criticizes Clay's identity "I bet you never once thought you were a black nigger. A black Baudlaire".¹¹ Here Lula reminds Clay about his identity and that he never becomes as Whites. Clay is born this way; a black man and he cannot change this reality. This is what Jean Paul Sartre in his book '*Being and Nothingness*' describes as the "being-in-itself". He argues that the being-in-itself is created without consciousness and it cannot be changed.¹² But in the case of Clay, we notice that he ignores his being-in-itself in order to avoid Lula's provocations. Whereas, Lula as a White and beautiful woman sees herself as superior to Clay and even she is better than him, and she is a god. Here Sartre argues that the being-in-itself accomplishes the idea that the person is a god and it has the freedom to construct itself. Clay tries to hide his identity by wearing and behaving like Whites and he doesn't respond to Lula's insults. He did nothing to change his situation and this is what Jean Paul Sartre calls "being-for-itself" which is the conscious part in the human being. He says that the 'being-for-itself' is the human reaction towards the

other's gaze.¹³ Unlike Clay, Lula's being-for-itself is her desire to control Clay's emotions. The feeling of discrimination and social alienation is very clear in Clay's reaction toward Lula's provocation. He doesn't reply because he knows that even if he is intellectual and a well-dressed man he is still that alienated Negro in the eyes of the White community. Clay doesn't see himself as a free being and he is the master of himself. He lets Lula control and patronize him because she thinks that she is the master, in return Clay doesn't react towards Lula's domination. Sartre in his 'Being and Nothingness' calls this phenomenon the 'Bad Faith' and he defines it as the fact of ignoring his status as a human being because the in-itself dominates him. Clay is alienated because of the presence of Lula "the other". He ignores his real identity as a Black in order to satisfy a White woman "the meeting of the other can change our life; it can influence us in a negative way. Because the other rejects on us his ideas, the way it views us can be subjective, so our life will be based on his(her) arguments".¹⁴ So "the other" can limit our freedom and develop the feeling of alienation. Clay is influenced by this negative view which leads him to ignore his being-in-itself. To get rid of this feeling of inferiority and detachment, Clay hides behind the culture of the Whites. He is considered as a double outsider. Ougnyami, one of Jones's critics, argues that Clay is a double outsider: he is an outsider for the Blacks because he is separated by his aspiration, and he is an outsider for Whites because of the different nature of his culture.¹⁵

The racial discrimination and the social alienation can be seen clearly in the absurd conversations between the two characters. Thereby comes the problem of communication between the two different social classes. The interaction between Lula and Clay is full of racism and violence. Throughout the play, Lula throws many prejudices on Clay; "Did your people ever burn witches or start revolution over the price of tea,...your grandfather was a slave, he didn't go to Harvard.[...] 'cause you're an escaped nigger.[...] Cause you crawled through the wire and made tracks to my side."¹⁶ Violence and social discrimination is clearly

shown in Lula's conversations, and she accuses Clay to be a murderer "you're a murderer, Clay, and you know it. You know goddamn well what I mean".¹⁷ We notice that Baraka started his play with short dialogues and the two characters ask questions without answers but later on the conversations become too long and full of significance.

Existential Alienation of the Negro Sarah in *Funnyhouse of a Negro*:

Kennedy presents a story of a young woman with a mixed identity. She is a daughter of a White woman and a Black man. The Negro Sarah finds herself in a narrow space between whiteness and blackness. Her alienation was a result of the intersectional dimensions of race, gender and hybridity. Olga Barrios notes that the multiple characters of Sarah in the play provide good evidence of her shattered consciousness, which we think reflects her deep alienation.¹⁸ Sarah refuses her Black identity and in order to escape her reality she projects herself into other imagined 'selves' who represents White figures. She suffers from other's gaze; she is alienated because of her color and race. As Clay in *Dutchman*, Sarah ignores her being-in-itself. She hates her black father "I hoped he was dead [...] the wild black beast"¹⁹ and prefers her white mother. She sees her mother as a queen and her father as a wild man who comes from the jungle. Sarah rejects her being-in-itself and her refusal of accepting her origins transformed her into a kind of object that does not have any aim for existing. She lives out of the world, completely detached from the real world. This problem imprisons her in the being-in-itself and pushes her to surround herself by walls of loneliness and passivity that isolate her from the society. Sarah doesn't react to change her actual status, as Clay, her being-for-itself is dominated by the being-in-itself. Sartre argues that the being-for-itself, in contrast to the being-in-itself stands for "subject", and can be changed. It is this side of the human being that pushes him to improve himself, to make efforts, to do some accomplishments and create his own being. We notice from the play that there is a soft desire for change. She dreams of a better life, in which she could forget her suffering and start a new

life. Sarah like Clay in *Dutchman* doesn't accept her existence; she wants to be anyone else except her own self. She prefers to live in imagination rather than her real life which results in the creation of multiple identities in her mind. And this, again, is what Sartre calls the "bad faith". Sartre contends that when a person is acting in bad-faith, he or she is very much aware of the truth that he is hiding. Those who are in bad faith they are attempting to hide themselves, their transcendence and their freedom.²⁰

The alienation of Adrienne Kennedy's main character leads to her extreme suffering in terms of her inability to achieve reconciliation with herself and the people around her. Her self-estrangement can be noticed in her dialogues with her 'selves' "I know no places. That is, I cannot believe in places. To believe in places is to know hope and to know the emotion of hope is to know beauty. It links us across a horizon and connects us to the world."²¹ She ignores everything that has to do with beauty and hope; she wants to stay alone in her room without making any relationship with anyone "I try to create a space for myself in cities, New York, the Midwest, a southern town, but it becomes a lie. I try to give myself a logical relationship but that too is a lie".²² Sarah is afraid to go outside and make relationships she cannot even make a connection between her characters "I clung loyalty to the lie of relationships, again and again seeking to establish a connection between my characters. Jesus is Victoria's son [...] A loving relationship exists between myself and Queen Victoria, a love between myself and Jesus but they are lies."²³ She sees herself as an eliminated person who has no right to live like the other people. She blames her father for her situation and she considers him as the reason for her loneliness, she never allows him to embrace her. Salah Chariti argues that Kennedy's use of the mirror is not accidental, but it is made emblematic to further symbolize Sarah's crisis of being.²⁴ It is the moment of alienation since to know one self through an external image is to be defined through self-alienation. And this is one

example of the 'mirror stage' "In the mirror I saw that, although my hair remains on both sides, clearly on the crown and at my temples my scalp was bare".²⁵

So far, we have seen how *the Zoo Story*, *Dutchman* and *Funnyhouse of a Negro*'s characters are existentially alienated from themselves and from one another and how this estrangement affected their interaction. Hence, their consciousness of their being-in-itself increased their suffering and isolation. In this context, the communication between the plays' characters is greatly altered by their conscious pursuit of their being-for-itself in a failed attempt to reduce the sense of alienation.

Endnotes

- ¹ Pallavi Sharma, *The Problem of the Other in Jean Paul Sartre's Existential Phenomenology*, (India, 2015), 83, Viewed 20 September 2017, http://gyan.iitg.ernet.in/bitstream/handle/123456789/390/TH1383_09614102.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y
- ² Ibid., 94.
- ³ Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 42, <http://www.thinkphilosophy.org/uploads/6/1/0/9/6109978/jeanpaul-sartre-being-and-nothingness-1.pdf>
- ⁴ Ibid., 45.
- ⁵ Ibid., 629.
- ⁶ Paul Vincent Spade, *Jean-Paul Sartre's Being and Nothingness: Class Lecture Notes*, (2010), 98, Viewed 20 September 2017, <http://pvspade.com/Sartre/pdf/sartre1.pdf>
- ⁷ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 52.
- ⁸ Edward Albee, *The Zoo Story*, (1958), 4, Viewed 10 June 2017, <https://scholarblogs.emory.edu/thea100fullerton/files/2014/04/The-Zoo-Story-SCRIPT.pdf>
- ⁹ Ibid., 14.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., 5.
- ¹¹ Amiri Baraka, *Dutchman* 1964, 5, Viewed 15 June 2017, <http://faculty.atu.edu/cbrucker/Engl2013/texts/Dutchman.pdf> ,
- ¹² Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*,
- ¹³ Ibid., 456.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., 507.
- ¹⁵ Abdelli, Fatima, *Edward Albee, Harold Pinter and Le Roi Jones: Their Ideas For The Absurd*, (UMMTO:2009), 111.
- ¹⁶ Baraka, *Dutchman*, 5-8,
- ¹⁷ Ibid., 5.
- ¹⁸ Olga Barrios, *From Seeking One's Voice to Uttering the Scream, The Pioneering Journey of African American Women Playwrights through the 1960s and 1970s*. *American Review* (2003), 628-661,
- ¹⁹ Adrienne Kennedy, *Funnyhouse of a Negro, Adrienne Kennedy in One Act*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press: 1969), 170.
- ²⁰ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*,
- ²¹ Kennedy, *Funnyhouse of a Negro, Adrienne Kennedy in One Act*, 169.
- ²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Salah Chariti, *Identity-Crisis in Adrienne Kennedy's Funnyhouse of a Negro: A Celebration of Sarah's Loss and Fragmentation*, Viewed 15 September 2017, <https://www.ijhcs.com/index.php/ijhcs/article/viewFile/198/208>

²¹ Kennedy, *Funnyhouse of a Negro, Adrienne Kennedy in One Act*, 172.

Chapter Three

CHAPTER 3: The Archetypal Interpretation of the Characters' Ironic Communication.

This chapter seeks to provide a mythical study of the characters' contact and interaction. By referring to the patterns underlying the archetype of satire and irony, the implications behind the absurd communication between the characters are to be figured out. Hence, it is necessary, as the analysis gets along, to identify the characters of each play with the two central archetypes in satire and irony who are the *eiron* and the *alazon*. To proceed in finding the mythical relevant interpretation for each character, the behaviors, attitudes, social and racial backgrounds of the latter are looked upon deeply and interpreted in accordance with the five phases of the mythos of winter.

According to Aristotle's Ethics, the name *eiron* stems out from the word irony. He is conceived to be the man who deprecates himself. He is a predestined artist just as the *alazon* who is one of his predestined victims.¹ (Frye: 40) *Eiron* is an ironic dissembler and a deceiver and unlike the *alazon*, he tends to speak in understatement i.e. conveying the meaning implicitly. On the other side of the myth, there is the *alazon* who usually represents humorous and stereotypical conventions, beliefs and values of a society or a group of people. The *alazon* is usually an impostor; someone who pretends or tries to be someone more than he is.² In other words, a person who behaves in a way that is not inherent to his true character. Thus, when we speak of the *eiron-alazon* interaction in terms of irony and satire, there is a conflict between what is accepted and what is not. This implies that there is the idea of attack. The attack targets an individual who is generally a part of a larger group by bringing up unpleasant or inconvenient information or facts about the individual who is being the object of ridicule and satire. In this context, when we the readers understand that the *eiron* is attacking certain values or beliefs of the *alazon*, it is the playwright who is being satiric, i.e his or her stand against an issue is made clear through characters' actions. Northrop Frye confirms that "the

chief difference between irony and satire is that satire is a militant irony: its moral norms are relatively clear and it assumes standards against which the grotesque and absurd are measured”³

Here the absurd is measured through irony. That is, the derogatory actions of the *iron* that put the *alazon* and his society into question. For a general reading of the plays, one might figure out the hero in each one easily but we will not consider that for in the myth of satire and irony there is no hero. Based on this and as far as the absurdity of human contact in the three plays is concerned, identifying which character is *iron* and which one is the *alazon* constitutes a major step in understanding our characters’ abnormal interaction.

3. 1. The *Eiron* and *Alazon* in *The Zoo Story*, *Dutchman* and *Funnyhouse of a Negro*

Within the mythos of satire and irony, there are certain qualities and patterns that constitute the code of behavior of the *iron* and *alazon*. Thus, it is paramount to pinpoint the representation of those patterns in our plays’ characters for the sake of a better interpretation of their ironic interaction.

Beginning with Albee’s *The Zoo Story*, the play is about two central characters: Jerry a man in his late thirties who comes from the zoo heading to his rooming house and on the way through in Central Park he meets Peter, a man in his early forties; a well-paid publishing executive who lacks adequate real life experiences and who is a solid representative of the capitalist and bourgeois society with its values and institutions. Peter is a respectable citizen, a quiet family man with a wife, two daughters, a cat and two parakeets as pets that one might find in any middle class household. Their interaction in Central Park suggests that the play is a complete failure of communication where what Jerry and Peter say do not go anywhere. They don’t reach the listener, and even if they do, the listener makes different interpretations out of it. Jerry’s loneliness and isolation makes him yearn for communication by being deceitfully aggressive and even at the cost of his life. Therefore, throughout the play, he

attacks Peter with a set of provocations and stories about his own life experiences and about Peter's steady, well-off life and all he gets is "WHAT! I DON'T UNDERSTAND."⁴ Jerry makes a perfect *eiron* particularly when he launches a series of questions to Peter giving the impression that he is mocking him out especially by anticipating Peter's answers as if he knows all about the typical life of higher class folks. Here is an example of Jerry being derogatory towards Peter's life:

Jerry "Birds".

Peter "My daughters keep them in a cage in their bedroom"

Jerry "Do they carry disease? The bird."⁵

Jerry implicitly shows his partner that although the latter has got all a man is supposed to have, he doesn't feel the satisfaction of it. He is resentful to that kind of life and thus makes him, in ironic questions, aware of his unhappiness; that he had wished to get boys instead of girls, dogs instead of parakeets...But that's the way the cookie crumbles, as Jerry puts it. Jerry doesn't cease mocking out his partner, "Look! Are you going to tell me to get married and have parakeets?"⁶ Sayed Salahuddin sees that the whole dialogue between Jerry and Peter is on a basis of inquisitive-on-answer type (Jerry-Peter) or of confession (Jerry).⁷

From the forced "real talk" between Jerry and Peter, we understand that they are completely different as if they are from different planets although they live in the same city. In addition, this word 'zoo' is of high symbolic significance in the sense that Albee uses it as a title in his play in order to show that people in America live just like animals in a way that they are barred by complacency, self-interest, and indifference to one another. Animals in the zoo are barred by bars, but Americans are separated from one another by the barriers of social class resulting in the absence of real human relationships.⁸ Hence, the two characters stand in two opposite angles. Peter as *alazon* in the side of the conventional, typical middle class individual who is eventually being ridiculed and satirized by the *eiron* Jerry. There is an

ironic attack carried out by the latter on the values of conformity and materialism embodied by the *alazon* Peter.

Baraka's *Dutchman* is also concerned with two people, a Negro male Clay and a White woman Lula, who seize up a chance acquaintance on a subway train. Lula is a White liberal and a bohemian flirty girl whereas Clay is a typical middle-class, intellectual young Negro who is anxious to achieve success in White America.

Atallah contends that the play stresses the conflict between two hostile visions. The White culture is guilty of oppressing and exploiting the Black minority which challenges the possibility of Whites and Blacks to be equal.⁹ Lula in the play represents White America in its unjust practices against the African Americans. Clay represents the Black Americans who, being immersed in the White American culture and lifestyle, try to find back their true identity as Jones puts it "Dutchman is about the difficulty of becoming a man in America"¹⁰ At the surface level Clay strives to imitate the White Americans by behaving with courtesy and politeness with Lula but deep down he feels and is convinced of his Black identity. Therefore, Lula, just like the White Americans treated the blacks, plays the perfect role of *iron*. She upbraids Clay with provocations about his true identity. She tries to seduce him though he rejects that politely. Besides, she insults, embarrasses and humiliates him aggressively blaming him for repudiating his identity: "Boy, those narrow-shoulder clothes come from a tradition you ought to feel oppressed by....What right do you have to be wearing a three-button suit and a stupid tie? Your grandfather was a slave, he didn't go to Harvard."¹¹

After various similar aggressive speeches on Clay's pretensions and his ancestors' life, he loses his composure and blasts up in anger. She urges him to put off the veil on his true identity as an African American. He reveals his hatred for her and for all the Whites. Consequently, Clay is but an *alazon* embodying his race's troubles with identity and

alienation in the 1960s America. His disguise as an adoptive of the White culture neglecting his own identity is in fact being subjugated to irony by the deceitful White *iron* Lula.

As to Adrienne Kennedy's one act play, *Funnyhouse of a Negro* highlights the struggle of a central character, Negro Sarah, whose Black skin creates in her a lack of identity and an inability to find social placement in a White dominant society. Sarah's rejection of her race and her obsession with the White culture renders her psychologically paranoid in her funnyhouse leading her to project herself onto multiple 'selves' who punish and betray her: Duchess of Hapsburg, Queen Victoria Regina, Jesus and Patrice Lumumba. These characters are only in Sarah's mind; in her subconscious and they occupy her 'funnyhouse' rooms. They reveal her longing for whiteness and admiration of her yellow-skinned mother. They also tell us of her extreme hatred of her African father and her obsessive fear of his return from the "jungle":

Victoria: (Listening to the knocking.) It is my father. He is arriving again for the night. He comes through the jungle to find me.

Duchess: How dare he enter the castle, he who is the darkest of them all, the darkest one? My mother looked like a white woman, hair as straight as any white woman's. And at least I am yellow, but he is black, the darkest of them all. I hoped he was dead. Yet he still comes through the jungle to find me.¹²

Sarah's selves continue to portray the reality of her thoughts and hopes. In reality, she is an African American Negro but she rejects this fact and wears the mask of the White identity. In this context, Sarah represents the oppressed African American women in general and the mulattos (children whose parents are of different races) in particular whereas 'herselves' represent the oppressors and the dissemblers who strive to obliterate the black women's true identity. They embody Sarah's fragmented self by the opposing forces of race and gender.

The Negro Sarah cannot establish an authentic relationship with herself nor can she reconcile with her divided selves. On the one hand, she has assimilated herself into the dominant culture and at the same time she is haunted by the 'selves' she has created in her universe or 'funnyhouse':

When I am the Duchess of Hapsburg I sit opposite Victoria in my headpiece and we talk. The other time I wear the dress of a student, dark clothes and dark stockings. Victoria always wants me to tell her of whiteness. She wants me to tell her of a royal world where everything and everyone is white and there are no unfortunate black ones. For as we of royal blood know, black is evil and has been from the beginning. Even before my mother's hair started to fall out. Before she was raped by a wild black beast. Black is evil. As for my self I long to become a more pallid Negro than I am now; pallid like Negroes on the covers of African Negro magazines, soulless, educated and irreligious. I want to possess no moral value, particularly value as to my being. I want not to be. I ask nothing except anonymity.¹³

Sarah's spiritual link with God is Jesus Christ but in the play Jesus is another ironic figure, a hunchbacked dwarf dressed in white rags and sandals. Ramon contends that this character is linked with her father, who wanted to be Jesus, "to walk in Genesis and save the race [...] and heal the pain of the race, heal the misery of the black men"¹⁴ In doing so, she tries to obliterate the reality and deceive herself by identifying Jesus with her father as she thinks he is on a mission to Africa to kill an African noble Black man, Patrice Lumumba.

Jesus: I am going to Africa and kill this black man named Patrice Lumumba. Why? Because all my life I believed my Holy Father to be God, but now I know that my father is a Blackman. I have no fear for whatever I do, I will do in the name of God, I will do in the name of Albert Saxe Coburg, in the name of Victoria, Queen Victoria Regina, the monarch of England, I will.¹⁵

On the other hand, Sarah's anguish is deepened by Raymond and the Landlady who, although they are the only two real characters outside her mind, they are the ones who tell the real version of Sarah's multifaceted stories. Raymond is indifferent to Sarah's fears and torments; he rather watches her suffering and when he discovers her death, his only remark is, "She was a funny liar."¹⁶ Together with the Landlady, they discount Sarah's stories and selves, discrediting them in the most patronizing and apathetic ways:

LANDLADY. The poor bitch has hung herself. (FUNNYMAN RAYMOND appears from his room at the commotion.) The poor bitch has hung herself.

RAYMOND. (Observing her hanging figure.) She was a funny little liar.

LANDLADY. (Informing him.) Her father hung himself in a Harlem hotel when Patrice Lumumba died.

RAYMOND. Her father never hung himself in a Harlem hotel when Patrice Lumumba was murdered. I know the man. He is a doctor, married to a white whore. He lives in the city in rooms with European antiques, photographs of Roman ruins, walls of books and oriental carpets. Her father is a nigger who eats his meals on a white glass table.¹⁷

In short, Sarah's 'selves' led to her death. They are the *iron* archetype as they deceived and disappointed her simply because they are no more but a dream. They confirm she lives in a fake reality through which she escapes the true one of being a Black African American. The Negro Sarah, the *alazon*, is being intensely ridiculed and reduced by her fictitious personas.

3. 2. The *Eirons*' Ironic Pursuit of Communication with the *Alazons* in *The Zoo Story*, *Dutchman* and *Funnyhouse of a Negro*

Albee's *The Zoo Story*, Baraka's *Dutchman* and Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro* lay forward the problem of human contact in the most ironic way. They are, thus, propped by the same mythos of winter since each story holds within it a cunning *iron* seeking to set up communication with his self-deceived prey *alazon*. It is argued that *The Zoo Story* and *Dutchman* unmistakably fulfill the ideal characteristics of the absurd drama merely because they depict the frailty and meaninglessness of human relationships and the falling apart of the economic and social values that once used to hold people together. Not much difference lies in *Funnyhouse of a Negro* in a sense that the absurdity of human contact lies in the African American woman's fragmented identity and her inability to reconcile with herself psychologically. Therefore, we are faced with three *eirons* attempting to make a successful real communication in the most deceitful ways.

Considering *The Zoo Story* and *Dutchman*, the beginning of the plays is marked by the *eirons*' intruding on their *alazons*' solitude. Both *alazons*, who are Peter and Clay, respectively, seem to enjoy their quietude doing their usual reading in a demonstration of the typical middle class intellect. But unexpectedly their presumed peace of mind is destabilized by the *eirons* who appear suddenly from nowhere, yearning for communication and intimacy. While Jerry begins his conversation by mentioning several times the zoo where he has been, Lula chimes in and after some bantering she offers her prey, Clay, an apple "You want this [...] Eating apples together is always the first step"¹⁸ Above all, there is much allegory

underlying the use of ‘the zoo’ and ‘the apple’ in the plays. The zoo is symbolic of people’s lives that look much like those of the incommunicative animals in the zoo cages. It purports to the animalistic dimension of the modern society as people got more and more reclusive from each other, separated by class barriers and locked in their cages, having little connection with the miserable reality around. Whereas the apple that Lula tempts Clay with stands for the irresistible ‘forbidden fruit’ that will lead to his downfall once he takes the first bite. “Sure. Why not? A beautiful woman like you. Huh, I’d be a fool not to”¹⁹ Clay is not yet aware of Lula’s toxic nature because he is blinded by her beauty.

As to *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, the detailed initial settings deployed by the playwright are of high allegorical significance. The funnyhouse with its array of rooms full of European antiques represents the Negro Sarah’s world that exists in her mind and dreams. In addition, the falling hair of Sarah and her mother symbolizes Sarah’s determination to kill and disdain her African identity because for her, hair is the only aesthetic that distinguishes her from the Whites.

As far as the *eirons*’ thirst for communication is concerned, it does not seem that easy for them to get the self-centered *alazons* to respond. Therefore, they resort to assault them with a set of ironic provocations and intimidations targeting the internalized beliefs and conventions that constitute the *alazons*’ personas. It is necessary to remind that the *alazons* Peter, Clay and Sarah in *The Zoo Story*, *Dutchman* and *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, respectively, have created their own personas at the expense of who they truly are, which in fact renders them self-deceived and self-deprecated. Peter attributes his happiness to his middle class status and to the fact that he belongs to the conformist mainstream materialism. Clay, on the other hand, dresses the cultural coat of the White people in general and middle class in particular at the expense of his Black identity and community values. Quite similarly, *Funnyhouse of a Negro*’s *alazon*, Sarah, disguises under the White culture and she

deliberately despises everything that has to do with her African American identity as manifested in her strong hatred and paranoia of her Negro father. Hence, it is those pretensions of the *alazons* that make up the object of ironic attacks for the *eirons* in their cunning pursuit of communication. This being said, the *eirons*' cogently critical provocations are intended to unveil the realities ever eschewed by the *alazons*. Since the latter's embodied personas are easily identifiable as an established society or group, the *eirons*' questions and inquisitions presume their knowledge and awareness of the type of life their interlocutors' lead. Any natural acquaintance with a stranger would not get along in this way suggesting that much absurdity lies in the way our *eirons* and *alazons* get to know each other. For instance, speaking of Peter's family, Jerry seems to always and not haphazardly make good guesses:

JERRY: You're married!

PETER: [with pleased emphasis] Why, certainly.

JERRY: It isn't a law, for God's sake.

PETER: No ... no, of course not.

JERRY: And you have a wife. [...] And you have children.

PETER: Yes; two.

JERRY: Boys?

PETER: No, girls ... both girls.

JERRY: But you wanted boys.

PETER: Well ... naturally, every man wants a son, but ...

JERRY: [lightly mocking] But that's the way the cookie crumbles? [...] And you're not going to have any more kids, are you?

PETER: [a bit distantly] No. No more. [Then back, and irksome] Why did you say that? How would you know about that? ²⁰

In quite the same way as Jerry, throughout *Dutchman*, Lula gives the impression that she knows Clay, knows his type, even though they have just met. "You look like you live in New Jersey with your parents and are trying to grow a beard. That's what. [...] How'd you know all that? Huh? Really, I mean about Jersey... and even the beard. I met you before?"²¹ Indeed, Lula does know things about Clay, and this is because up until the end of the play, Clay is the mediocre middle class depiction of Black America that Baraka so disdains.

The projected 'selves' of Sarah are the *eirons* who are fully aware of her fictitious personas merely because they are inextricably inherent to her thoughts. They add to her

suffering and reinforce her hatred for her African father and origin. Therefore, they continuously reveal her anguish and resentment to her Black identity. Victoria and Duchess, who are Sarah's White figures, tell of her inability to admit her blackness and her Black father:

Victoria: (Listening to the knocking.) It is my father. He is arriving again for the night. (The DUCHESS makes no reply.) He comes through the jungle to find me. He never tires of his journey.

DUCHESS: How dare he enter the castle, he who is the darkest of them all, the darkest one? My mother looked like a white woman, hair as straight as any white woman's. And at least I am yellow, but he is black, the darkest one of them all. I hoped he was dead. Yet he still comes through the jungle to find me.²²

The *Eirons* not only unveil the *Alazons'* inauthenticity regarding their set of beliefs and conventions and the society they belong to but also challenge their ineffectiveness in the face of reality. In so doing, they show their *Alazons* who they are actually supposed to be. Our *Eirons* carry out this task through incessantly exuberant speeches upbraiding the *Alazons* with a series of implicit reproaches and criticism which constitute in fact the most cogent of provocations to turn the incommunicative *Alazons* into violently exuberant speakers. Nevertheless, no wonder why *The Zoo Story's Eiron* spoke with profusion about his harsh and shocking life experiences to his *Alazon*. From his awkward sexuality in adolescence to the failed befriending of the dog and up to the landlady's story, Jerry uses such strategies to hook Peter to his stories through which he deridingly shows him how isolated he is in his middle class world and material conformity.

Peter: It's so... unthinkable. I find it hard to believe that people such as that really are. Jerry: [lightly mocking] It's for reading about it, isn't it? [...] Well, Peter? Do you think I could sell that story to the Reader's Digest and make a couple of hundred bucks for The Most Unforgettable Character I've ever Met, Huh? [...] Peter: I DON'T WANT TO HEAR ANY MORE. I don't understand you, or your landlady, or your dog...²³

The *Eiron* Jerry therefore maintains the pace of his ironic provocations making the *Alazon* realize the absurdity of his own life. Although being satirically attacked, Peter ultimately acquiesced to hear Jerry's story about the zoo. "Jerry: [...] But do you want to hear

about what happened at the zoo, or not? Peter: Yes. Yes, by all means; tell me what happened at the zoo.”²⁴

The attack on the *Alazon*'s pretentious beliefs is very common in *Dutchman*. They in fact constitute the object of ridicule and irony for the inquisitive White female *Eiron*. Clay is therefore one of the typical African Americans who surrender their Black identity and try to emulate the White bourgeois society in dress, speech and manners. These aspirations enslave him and make him look like a ready prey for Lula's ironic assault in a sense that each time her questions and comments are intended to disclose the truth about his real beliefs and conventions. In so doing, she turns down his borrowed conventions insisting on the fact that he is just a Black man who repudiates his racial identity. “Lula Oh boy [*Looking quickly at CLAY*] What a face. You know, you could be a handsome man.[...] You are too pretentious to be Jackson or Johnson.”²⁵ As she comments when guessing his name, suggesting that those two names are typically of Black people who usually cling to their Black identity unlike him. She further asserts his escape from his reality:

Lula: Everything you say is wrong. [...] What've you got that jacket and tie on in all this heat for? And why're you wearing a jacket and tie like that? Did your people ever burn witches or start revolutions over the price of tea? Boy, those narrow-shoulder clothes come from a tradition you ought to feel oppressed by. A three-button suit. What right do you have to be wearing a three-button suit and striped tie? Your grandfather was a slave, he didn't go to Harvard.²⁶

The *eiron* Lula lays forth Clay's denial of the vestiges of the racial past and thus she, either explicitly or in understatement, wonders why he makes such an effort to distance himself from the reality of Black existence in America. Hence, within such a sensible random relationship, their interaction does not lead anywhere but to a dead end as long as the *alazon*'s response is filled with rage and anger. At this point of total revelation and the reversal of irony into reality, Clay reveals his hatred for Lula and all the Whites though he has already led to his own deprecation and fall. Quite similarly, the ironic provocations and

inquisitiveness of *The Zoo Story* and *Funnyhouse of a Negro*'s *Eirons* lead to an inevitable turn in the wheel of fate.

Thus, at this level, the interaction between the *Eirons* and *Alazons* has reached the fifth phase of satire and irony as its logo says "there may be heaven, there must be hell".²⁷ On the one hand, it is the *Alazons* of *Dutchman* and *Funnyhouse of a Negro* who meet their fate. The dissembling *Eirons* served of the *Alazons*' inauthenticity as a source for their harsh ironies in their failed quest for successful communication. The *Alazons* ultimately self-deceived themselves at the first place by incarnating irrelevant identities. The end of *Funnyhouse of a Negro*'s *Alazon* Sarah has been fatal because she hasn't been able to admit the sour reality of her blackness as revealed by her conflicting 'selves'. The latter are so deceitful that they betrayed her in the end leading her to hang herself in her bed. In *The Zoo Story*, on the other hand, the *Eiron*'s violent intimidations to the *Alazon* do lead to his own downfall instead. His attempt to establish communication with humans has resulted in a complete failure in the same way as he failed to communicate with animals.

In short, one may conclude that the absurdity of communication between our plays' characters lies in the ironic struggle of two societies: the embodied societies of the plays' *Alazons* and the real societies of the *Eirons*. There is no chance for the *Eiron-Alazon* interaction to be natural since the *Eirons* deliberately belittle and ridicule the *Elazons* and the societies they belong to. Accordingly, the absurdity underlying social class and identity constitute the overlaying ironies that altered communication. Such ironies dragged Jerry, Lula and Sarah's 'selves' to fail at establishing and maintaining a successful communication with Peter, Clay and Sarah, respectively.

Endnotes:

- ¹ Frye Northrop, *The Anatomy of Criticism*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957), 40.
- ² Ibid., 39.
- ³ Ibid., 223.
- ⁴ Edward Albee, *The Zoo Story*, (1959), 11, Viewed 10 June 2017, <https://scholarblogs.emory.edu/thea100fullerton/files/2014/04/The-Zoo-Story-SCRIPT.pdf>
- ⁵ Ibid., 3.
- ⁶ Ibid., 6.
- ⁷ Salahuddin Ahmed Sayed, *The Zoo Story: Regeneration Through Communication*, Journal of Language, Linguistics and Literature, (USA: American Institute of Science, 2016), 10, Viewed 10 May 2017, files.aiscience.org/journal/article/pdf/70360044.pdf
- ⁸ Hussein Aliakbari Harehdasht, Leila Hajjari and Zahra Sheikhi Shahidzadeh, *Illusion and Reality in Edward Albee's The Zoo Story*, Studies in Literature and Language, (Canada, 2015), 60, Viewed 10 May 2017, <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/viewFile/7182/7573>
- ⁹ Sabah Attalah K. A., *The Dilemma of the Black Man in LeRoi Jones' Play Dutchman*, 16, Viewed 10 May 2017, <https://iasj.net/iasj?func=fulltext&aId=16905>
- ¹⁰ Willene Taylor P., *The Fall of Man Theme in Imamu Amiri Baraka's (LeRoi Jones') "Dutchman."* Negro American Literature Forum, Vol. 7 No.4, (Winter, 1973): 128
- ¹¹ Amiri Bakara, *Dutchman*, (1964), 5, Viewed 10 May 2017, <http://faculty.atu.edu/cbrucker/Engl2013/texts/Dutchman.pdf>
- ¹² Adrienne Kennedy, *Funnyhouse of a Negro, Adrienne Kennedy in One Act*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press: 1969), 166.
- ¹³ Ibid., 168.
- ¹⁴ Emilio Ramon, *Funnyhouse of a Negro: Rejection of Womanness and Blackness as a "Melancholic" Cry for a True Diversity in American Society* ,ES. Revista de Filología Inglesa 32 (2011), 302, Viewed 15 September 2017, <http://www.academia.edu/9158425/>
- ¹⁵ Kennedy, *Funnyhouse of a Negro, Adrienne Kennedy in One Act*, 180.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., 184.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., 184.
- ¹⁸ Baraka, *Dutchman*, 3.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., 11.
- ²⁰ Albee, *The Zoo Story*, 2-3.
- ²¹ Baraka, *Dutchman*, 8-9.
- ²² Kennedy, *Funnyhouse of a Negro, Adrienne Kennedy in One Act*, 166.

²³ Albee, *The Zoo Story*, 7-11.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

²⁵ Baraka, *Dutchman*, 3.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁷ Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 223.

Conclusion

IV. Conclusion

We have attempted throughout the pages of our modest work to analyze the absurd communication underlying the characters' interaction in Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story*, Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman* and Adrienne Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro*. We, therefore, have claimed that the absurdity of human contact in the three plays lies in the characters' ironic pursuit for communication. As we have seen that the latter is undermined by socio-economic and racial ironies, the theory of Archetypal Criticism of Northrop Frye has been called forth since its Mythos of Satire and Irony provides accurate mythical account for the characters' absurd interaction.

The dissertation is beheaded by a general introduction in which some of the previous works relevant to this study have been briefly reviewed. Being a theoretical pillar for the study of the issue of communication breakdown, the main tenets of Northrop Frye's fourth mythos of Archetypal Theory have been plainly detailed. We have seen how the mythos of satire and irony with its five phases provide the mythical rationale that accounts for the ironic interaction, paving the way for the results and discussion. The latter has gone through three major chapters.

In the first chapter, we have shed light upon the socio-economic conditions in the 1950s and the 1950s America that, in a way or another, had an impact on the writing of the three plays. We have reviewed how the intended socio-economic division of the society and the African Americans' struggle for identity assertion and recognition contributed to the individuals' recoil from society and from themselves.

The second chapter has focused on the characters' existential alienation from each other and from themselves and how this state of mind aggravates the absurdity of their interaction. The analysis of such alienation has leaned on the ideas of Jean Paul Sartre on alienation, particularly his existential concepts on human existence that we extrapolated from his seminal book '*Being and Nothingness*.' Hence, we have seen throughout the interpretation of the

characters' interaction that their estrangement from the self and from the other resulted from their socio-economic and racial distancing from each other.

Lastly, in the third chapter we have placed the emphasis on the mythical implications behind the absurdity of the characters' communication. That is, we proceeded through the archetypal study of the ironic interaction between the characters for the sake of figuring out the elements undermining the broken-down communication. In so doing, it has been necessary to tackle such a problem commensurately with the phases of mythos of satire and irony and, indeed, it has proved worth the use. We have seen how the socio-economic and racial crack in the American society urged some characters to become more ironic as to their interlocutors' established conventions and beliefs.

In short, we can restate that the absurdity of communication between the plays' characters has so much to do with the absurdity of the Americans' lives during the 1950s and 1960s. The plethora of unjust practices, either ethnically or socio-economically, imposed some sort of conventions that eventually became the object of irony and ridicule. Thereby is the depiction of the broken down communication unmistakably overshadowing *The Zoo Story*, *Dutchman* and *Funnhouse of a Negro*.

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