CHAPTER II
THEORETICAL REVIEW

2.1 The Essence of Literature

In general, literature is related to compositions that tell stories, dramatize situation, express emotions, and analyze and advocate ideas. The word ‘compositions’ is synonymous to fictitious kind of writing which is far from objective or scientific writing. To say simply, literature is containing more feeling than reasoning. As what Welleck (1965: 1) has stated that the subject matter of literature is irrational or at least contains strongly irrational elements.

What literature has provided is reading material for pleasure and appreciation. It is possible to understand literature by killing time in terms of within minutes all ideas in literature would be found out. For the truth, it is not that easy since literature has large insights to see. Its connection to philosophy, sociology and even psychology has made literature rich in ideas which are not easy, of course. Respectively, literature is a means of communication through medium language. Language itself is universal that contains arbitrary as the way literature exists.

Roberts (1995: 1) suggests that literature helps us grow, both personally and intellectually. It provides an objective base for knowledge and understanding. It links us with the broader cultural. Philosophic and religious world of which we are a part. It enables us to recognize human dreams and struggle in different places and times that we would otherwise know. It helps us develop mature
sensibility and compassion for the condition of all living things, human, animals, to say some examples.

Released from what literature is the point needs considering seems to look at literature as product of mind. It has its own system for its own world. The way literature comes in not like the wind passes by. It may be based on observation through imagination which is shaped systematically. Thus, literature is a kind of knowledge or science at the very base, though it is not objectively arranged. Literature is like philosophy or history which belongs to humanly social knowledge.

For that reason, it is worthless arguing literature whether it is science or not. At least, it offers understanding of what man is. In short, literature is a kind of mirror to see our own faces in terms of humane understanding.

Whether or not, a vague term which usually denotes literary works belong to the major genres such as drama, novel, short story, poetry or lyric. If we describe something as ‘literature’, as opposed to anything else, the term carries with it qualitative connotations which imply written works. Yet, it is unique to know that George Eliot’s novels are literature, whereas Fleming’s James Bond books or even comic books are unquestionably not.

Commonly, literature consists of three large genres that is epic or narrative kind of writing, poetry and drama. This categorization is slightly confusing as the epic occurs in verse, too, but is not classified as poetry. It is, in fact, a precursor of the modern novel that is prose fiction because of its structural features such as plot, character, presentation and narrative perspective. Although
this old classification is still in use, the tendency today is abandon the term ‘epic’ and introduce “prose”, “fiction” or “prose fiction” for the relatively young literary forms of the novel and short story, to quote Klarer (2004 : 3).

Poetry is one of the oldest genre in literary history. Its earliest examples go back to ancient Greek literature. In spite of this long tradition, it is harder to define than any other genre. Poetry is closely related to the term “lyric” which derives etymologically from the Greek musical instrument “lyra” (‘lyre’ or ‘harp’) and points to an origin in the sphere of music. The term “poetry”, however, goes back to the Greek word “poieo” (“to make”, “to produce”), indicating that the poet is the person who “makes” verse. Although etymology sheds light on some of the aspects of the lyric and the poetic, it cannot offer a satisfactory explanation of the phenomenon as such (Klarer, 2004: 27).

Drama is literature designed to be performed by actors. Like fiction, drama may focus on a single character or a small number of characters, and it enacts fictional events as if they were happening in the present, to be witnessed by an audience. Although most modern plays use prose dialogue, in the belief that dramatic speech should be as lifelike as possible, many plays from the past, like those of ancient Greek and Renaissance England, are in poetic form (Roberts, 1995 : 2).

The most common elements which are very important in literature or fiction are character, theme, plot and structure. Stories, like plays, are about characters who though not real people, are drawn from life. A character is a reasonable facsimile of a human being, with all the good and bad traits of being
human. A story is usually concerned with a major problem that a character must face. This may involve interaction with another character, with a difficult situation, or with an idea or general circumstances that force action. The character may win, lose, or tie. He or she may learn and be the better for the experience or may miss the point and be unchanged.

Plot covers all the actions or incidents, speeches, thoughts and observations which are linked together to make up an entirety, sometimes called an organic unity. The essence of this unity is the development and resolution of a conflict or conflicts in which the protagonist, or the central character, is engaged. The plot is based on the interpretations of causes and effects as they develop sequentially or chronologically. That is the story’s actions follow one another in time as the protagonist meets and tries to overcome the forces of opposition. Often the protagonist’s struggle is directed against another character that is an antagonist (Roberts, 1995: 52).

The term structure refers to the way a plot is assembled. Chronologically, all stories are similar because they all move from beginning to end in accord with the time it takes for causes to produce effects. But authors choose many different ways to develop their plots. While some stories are told in chronological order, others may get pieced together through out of sequence and widely separated episodes, speeches, remembrances, dreams, nightmares, overheard conversations, and the like. In dealing with structure, therefore, we deal with the arrangement and development of individual stories. Usually we study an
entire, but we may also direct our attention toward a smaller aspect of arrangement (Roberts, 1995: 53).

The very basic from of mind working in literary element is theme. It necessarily embodies issues and ideas. Even stories written for entertainment alone are based in an idea or position. Thus, writers of comic works are committed to the idea that human difficulties can be treated with humor. More serious works may force characters to make moral choices, in the thought that in a losing situation the only winner is the one who maintains honor and self-respect. Mystery and suspense stories rest on the belief that problems have solutions, even if they may not at first seem apparent. Writers may deal with the triumphs and defeats of life, the admirable and the despicable, the humorous and the pathetic, but whatever their goal, they are always expressing ideas about human experience (Roberts, 1995: 53). To say simply, in fiction the ideas take the form of an underlying theme or central idea which helps to tie the work together.

2.2 Play as a Genre of Literary Works

Identical distinct features belonging to literary common genres such as poetry, novel or drama rely on the written or spoken words as their primary means of expression. The dramatic or performing arts, however, combine the verbal with a number of non-verbal or visual means, including stage, scenery, shifting of scenes, facial expressions, gestures, make-up and lighting. This emphasis is also reflected in the word ‘drama’ itself, which derives from the Greek “draein”
meaning *to do, to act*, thereby referring to a performance or representation by actors (Klarer, 2004: 41).

The word ‘drama’ seems to be interchangeable with the word play. That is why the well known Shakespeare can be said as a dramatist or a playwright. The former suggests a performance and a stage in terms of theatrical viewpoint, the latter is the written drama or closet dram which functions as reading material. To say short, the dramatist invites audience and the playwright gathers the reader.

What makes drama a drama is an important point to answer. Commonly, there must be two ideas of understanding drama that is doing and seeing. The act of doing and seeing is complementary and defines the area of the study of drama or play in its largest sense. The sense that includes both the play and the performance lie behind the common pairings that repeatedly appear in dramatic criticism: play and performance, script and production, text and staging, author and actor, creation and interpretation, theory and practice. In short, the rood ideas contain the essence and the range of the whole field of the study of drama or play, to quote Tennyson (1966: 1).

John Dryden in Tennyson (1967: 1) states that a play ought to be a just and lively image of human nature, reproducing the passions and humors, and the changes of fortune to which it is subject, for the delight and instruction of mankind. Not the presentation of a passion for itself but of a passion which leads to action is the business of dramatic art; not the presentation of an event for itself, but for the effect on human soul is the dramatist’s mission. Thus, a play or drama is a presentation of an action or closely linked series of actions, expressed directly
by means of speech and gesture. Its subject-matter is the action and reaction of human will and it is treated with a view, not to the sequence of events, but to their essential relations as causes and effects.

From the explanation above, it can be simplified that a play is not really a piece of literature for reading. A true play is three-dimensional; it is literature that walks and talks before our eyes. The material process of verbs “walk” and “talk” show the characteristics of play as one genre of literature. In accordance to this, in a play there must be an action; that is, events and situations must be presented with accompanying tension, sudden changes and climax.

The sense of action is sometimes confusing for common readers. It emphasizes the actual movement and speech of person performing the action. One who reads a book shows an action too, but he does not show a drama because the action does not contain a story. Within the frame of the story, there must be a concept of beginning, middle and an end which refers to action. For further understanding, the action at least involves the sense of conflict which resolves at the end. Thus, the action wraps well the story that reflects tension or conflict to make it alive. Of course, the principle of action says little about the way in which the action to be presented.

Beyond the essential action of conflict and encounter, a given play will embody particular actions peculiar to a given time. However, these particular actions will contribute to the total meaningful action of the play. To cite an example, the witches in Macbeth, written by William Shakespeare, are intrinsically interesting and they claim our attention as such; but they also serve a
purpose in the rise and fall of Macbeth’s fortune and in the shaping of our understanding of it. The play, then, exploits our interests in the particular and, often, idiosyncratic while it uses the particular for the purpose of the whole play.

It is understood that action is an indispensable element of all drama or play. It covers the dialogue, gesture of actors of the stage and pattern of events that the movements depict and manifest to the audience, a pattern based on human life. This should be clear that play or drama must centre on an action; by nature, drama presents that action, to consider Tennyson’s ideas (1967: 5-6).

In broadest term, drama can be grouped into sub-genres such as tragedy, comedy, tragicomedy and melodrama, to say a few. Tragedy implies the tragic events which arise sense of pity and fear. In general, tragedy tends to invite death as final end though it should not be always so. In short, tragedy contains sad ending as the solution or the effect of the tension. Different from tragedy, comedy is a happy ending story. It is filled with humors that invite laugh rather than something serious. The combination of the tragedy and comedy is called tragicomedy which contains some serious matter and the other light matters. Melodrama tends to be semi God-like character which emphasizes romantic situation by combining songs to end the happiness through the escape from bitterness or attempts of life.
2.3 A Brief View on Absurdity

By 1942, Albert Camus was calmly putting the question why, since life had lost all meaning, man should not seek escape in suicide. In one of the great, seminal heart-searching of our time, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus tried to diagnose the human situation in a world of shattered beliefs. There has been a sense of divorce between man and his life which is better known as the feeling of absurd (Esslin, 1969: xix).

In a dictionary definition, the word *absurd* may simply mean ‘ridiculous’. Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose, cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless. A similar sense of the senselessness of life, of the inevitable devaluation of ideals, purity, and purpose, is also the theme of much of the work of dramatists like Giraudoux, Sartre and Camus himself. Yet these writers differ from the dramatists of the Absurd in an important respect: they present their sense of the irrationality of the human condition. The sense of the human condition and the inadequacy of the rational approach by the open abandonment of rational devices and discursive thought (Esslin, 1969: xix).

The plays of Samuel Beckett, Adamov, and Eugene Ionesco have been performed with astonishing success in France, Germany, Scandinavia, and the English speaking countries. This reception is all the more puzzling when one considers that the audience concerned were amused by and applauded these plays aware they could not understand what they meant or what their author driving at. At first sight, the plays confronted their public with a bewildering experience, a
veritable barrage of wildly irrational, often nonsensical going-on that seem to go counter to all accepted standards of stage convention (Esslin, 1969: 204).

The unsatisfying search for the meaning of real life has made man bored on the earth he lives. There is no clear boundary anymore between right or wrong, true or false, love and hatred which restricts man to hold principle on going lives whatever the reason is. When the feeling of uncertainty is over the man’s mind, the situation results the sense of absurdity. The basic question of “What am I?”, “Who are you?” and “Does life make sense?” has left unanswered satisfactorily. Titus (1959: 138) quoted one psychologist’s idea as follows:

“Below the level of the problem situation about which the individual is complaining, behind the trouble with studies or wife or employer, or with his own controllable or bizarre behavior, or with his frightening feelings, lies one central search. It seems to me that at bottom each person is asking “Who am I, really? How can I get in touch with this real self, underlying all my surface behavior? How can I become myself?”

Basically, the meaning of absurdity in literature has been influenced by the philosophical concept of existentialism. It is a revolt against some features of traditional philosophy of modern society. Existentialism is a protest in the name of individuality against the concept of “reason” and “nature” which were strongly emphasized during the eighteenth-century “Enlightenment.” Existentialism is an emphasis upon human situation and man’s prospects in the world, it is found in Judaism, among the early Christians, and in the attempts at self-analysis and self-understanding of philosophers like Heraclitus and Socrates. During the nineteenth century, however, certain ‘lonely prophets’ such as Kierkegaard, Nietzsche,
Dostoevsky, and others were voicing their protests and registering their concern about the condition of man, to quote Titus (1959: 290).

Existentialism is found wherever men are concerned with describing and diagnosing the human predicament. In this way it is a re-emphasis on some older ways of thinking. Existentialism as a universal element in all thinking is the attempt of man to describe his existence and its conflicts, the origin of these conflicts, and the anticipation of overcoming them. Wherever man’s predicament is described either theologically or philosophically, either poetically or artistically, there we have existentialist elements.

In his play *Caliguda*, Albert Camus has one of the characters say: ‘To lose one’s life is a little thing and I shall have the courage to do so if it is necessary; but to see the meaning of this life dissipated, to see our reason for existing disappear, that is what is unbearable. One cannot live without meaning. Yet, Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) in Titus (1959: 295) is usually considered the founder of modern existentialism. He was subject to melancholy and doubt and a sense of sin and guilt induced, in part, by his father’s sense of guilt. He wants men to come to an understanding of the central factors of existence, their own immortal souls, their destiny, and the reality of God the absolute sovereign.

According to Kierkegaard, there is an “unbridgeable gulf” between God and the world, the Creator and the creature, Super-nature and nature. God stands above all social and ethical standards. To be suspended in doubt is to experience existential anguish. Every man who has not tasted the bitterness of despair has missed the significance of life, however beautiful and joyous his life might be.
Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) in Titus (1959: 297) emphasizes the opposition on God by stating the man who has the will to power. He wanted to make way for the higher man and the super man that is the will to live becomes the will to power. The will to dominate is a fundamental principle in nature which will produce a race of supermen. The superman who is beyond good and evil is to be the creator of the new values for man.

Nietzsche’s main contribution was to confront men with the implications of existence in a world in which there were no secure values and goals. This nihilistic outlook has been reflected in much literature and art which expresses the sense of hopelessness and meaninglessness of today’s world. Yet Nietzsche’s works have some religious overtones in the desire to escape human finiteness and frustration and in the yearning for a new wholeness. He is one of many who see the dangers in a technical and industrial age that has discarded the guidance of human values and wisdom.

The spirit of revolt, the sense of the human predicament, and the emphasis on the inner experience of the individual has expressed itself in many literary and artistic forms: in the novels and plays of men like Kafka, Sartre, Camus; in the poetry of Eliot and Auden; in the paintings of Van Gogh, Picasso, de Chirico. Whereas nature can be systematized and objectified, man’s life can only be lived through if it is to be understood. Thus the emphasis in existentialism on confessions and memoirs, personal diaries and journals, autobiographies, novels and dramatic productions. Many sensitive men and women have turned to
these literary and artistic forms as a method of symbolizing what they experience in the depth of their lives (Titus, 1959:304).

Existentialism which is covering sense of absurdity may be the swing of the pendulum away from the extremely optimistic rationalism which was the product of a different set of conditions a half-century or more ago. To emphasize any one mood or set of feelings as the clue to the understanding of life and the world is rather dangerous. To stress anxiety and dread, which, unlike fear, are not directed toward specific objects, is likely to lead a sense of absurdity and nothingness. But to raise these issues is not to deny the fact that existentialism has called our attention to serious frustrations and disorders in modern life and to the fact that not only modern civilization but also human existence itself is in precarious condition.