

methodology toward human relationship. But, of course, we cannot ignore the potency of the other character, Peter, from which we could distinguish the contrasted character to the previous one. Peter's role is to perfect Jerry's existence in the play that, through him, Jerry is able to bring us to see such a state of mind, which accordingly, refers to existentialist and so to speak.

## **A.1. The Alienated Personalities**

### **A.1.1. Jerry's Way of life**

Jerry, as the playwright informs us at the prologue, is an American figure who has lost his golden age of muscled body, who has lost his energy, and he has lost the best part of his attractiveness, which in the past, he would probably have been proud of.

A man in his late thirties, not poorly dressed, but carelessly. What was once a trim and lightly muscled body has begun to go fat; and while he is no longer handsome, it is evident that he once was. His fall from physical grace should not suggest debauchery; he has, to come closest to it, a great weariness. (11)

Early in his conversation with Peter, we are offered confession about his mode of living that he rarely talked to other people except in formal situations:

"I seldom talk to many people-except to say like; give me a beer, or where's the john, or what time does the feature go on, or keep your hands to yourself, buddy. You know-things like that." (19)

Up to this point we still learn very little until Peter calls Jerry him as a bohemian who lives unconventionally in normal society. Jerry, in turn, responds with telling his way of life, his isolation, and revealing his most secret experiences.

He lives in a four-story brownstone rooming house, on the top floor with made-of-beaverboard walls. He notices some of the tenants there as, a colored queen, a Puerto Rican family, someone living in one of the front rooms, but he does not know who they are. His personal belongings, as he enumerates in detail, are toilet articles, a few clothes, a hot plate, a can opener, a knife, two forks, two spoons, three plates, a cup, a saucer, a drinking glass, two picture frames, both empty,

eight or nine books, a pack of pornographic playing cards, regular deck, an old Western Union typewriter that prints nothing but capital letters, a small strong-box containing some rocks, and some please letters and when letters (25-27).

The detailed information of his belongings, is an attempt to emphasizing what kind of things he owns, for a man in his age, who is supposedly to living properly, has got no security except for a very few things. The "please letters" which he explains soon after such as: "please why don't you do this, please when will you do those letters"; and "when letters", when will you write? When will you come? When?" all indicate his isolation from any attempt of contact.

As Peter asks him about the two empty picture frames, he answers with a flat explanation that he does not have pictures of anyone to put in. Moreover, he flatly comments on Peter's ignorance about why it is so, and, what about his parents' or his girlfriend's picture.

"You're a very sweet man, and you're possessed of a truly enviable innocence." (28)

It sounds as if Jerry really feels no need to have any picture of anyone, neither father nor mother. Concerning girl's pictures he tells Peter that his relationships with women are restricted to solitary encounters with prostitute, sex without love, because he is a homosexual. From here we will sum up Jerry's attitude toward his own life as an indifferent person. He does not make any attempt to fill his life, by living conventionally, for instance. He could have got a particular dwelling and a certain job that could afford him proper living. And most importantly, he could have committed himself to making contact with other people, but he prefers to lead his life in solitary confinement, in which he brings himself into a state of isolation. Jerry lives alone and avoids any meaningful human relationship.

#### **A.1.2. Peter's Way of Life**

Peter is introduced as a man in his early forties, neither fat nor gaunt, neither handsome nor homely, wearing tweeds, smoking a pipe, carrying horn-rimmed glasses. He dresses himself well; his manner and the way he dresses would suggest a younger man.

At first, Peter reluctantly responds to Jerry's opening of the conversation, but after Jerry's insistence that Peter finally reveals his lifestyle. Let us observe what Jerry discover from his attacking questions to Peter.

Peter is a married man with two daughters, works in a small publishing house in an executive position with an annual income of \$18,000. He owns two parakeets for each of his daughters, two television sets, one of which is for the children. He reads *Time* magazine, has literary opinions, and he and his wife are practicing birth control (16-22).

The fact, however, creates an image of middle-class, respectability, stability, contentment, conservatism and control. His ordered list indicates his straight personality.

Peter's possessions are much different from Jerry's. He leads a normal life, builds a happy marriage, obtains a good job, and fortunately he gets sufficient income to afford his lifestyle, all of which Jerry does not have. But as a matter of fact, they both have a lot in common.

In one aspect, Jerry obviously contrasts to Peter in the way he sees earthly things, but in another one, we do not see any evidence that shows the difference between them in their attitude toward human relations. So far, from what each character tells about their lives we have seen the same notion of alienation. What makes them both become alienated? That Question is worth consideration to reveal some characteristics spread through every part of the term alienation itself.

#### **A.1.3. Pessimism, Frustration, Anxiety, and Withdrawals**

If we look back to Jerry's family background we will understand why he becomes so pessimistic toward life. The unhappy childhood, being dumped and abandoned by his parents, the tragic deaths of his father, mother, and aunt are all parts of his gloomy experiences that later effect his attitude toward the forthcoming relationship. It begins with his being-a-homosexual since he was fifteen, he fails to have sex with girls; and this condition causes him to decide not to get married or to have a family of his own. In the rooming house, he also undergoes failures in building relationships with other people. Since he feels alienated, he does not intend to

make contact with people around him. He even feel rejected dumped by the dog when it refuses to acknowledge him. Refusing to respond to the landlady's sexual advances is also an example of his failure. He obtains only failure and betrayal, and it seems to him that it is not getting better. Indeed, Jerry experiences an emotional condition in which there is fear and uncertainty about the future.

This pessimism leads him to commit suicide-murder at the end of the play. He feels desperate and frustrated since his attempt in building a new relationship with Peter does not seem to work. He attacks Peter by throwing a knife down at Peter's feet. He felt compelled to do this. His relationship with the dog is also frustrating. The dog will not respond to him even though his misguided attempt to show affection with a poisonous burger is rebuffed. Still it does not work out.

Jerry's inner conflict leads him to his confrontation with his own choices. We agree with the fact that every individual is free to make choices, including the choices, which are characterized by refusal of making contact with other human beings. Freedom of

choice, which surely entails commitment that he must live alone, has brought him in a deeper anxiety. Thus Jerry feels as if life is nothing but absurd; he can never understand himself or the world he lives in unless he tries to break his own solitary confinement. What about Peter then? The way Peter tries to avoid the conversation with Jerry or his reluctance to respond the outsider is a clue that his whole life is directed toward avoiding conflict with others. He protects himself from such troubles in isolation.

The last characteristic is withdrawal, shown either by Jerry or Peter. Since they are alienated and isolated by their indifference they prefer to meditate on their inner lives instead of letting other people enter their worlds. Jerry, of course, very much enjoys the way he lives until there is an attempt to break his isolation created by the dog. Whereas Peter, whom we cannot characterize as a man who has concern for other people, or someone who is eager in socializing with others except that he is an individual with a happy family behind him. To support this we will observe how Peter undergoes a series of disturbances, how he protects himself not to



get involved, and finally intrudes himself into a somewhat shocking experience with Jerry in the next sub-point.

### **A.2. A Sequence of Isolation and Intrusion**

From the very beginning Peter shows his reluctance toward Jerry's existence that he is not (and never will be) in the mood to talk to the perfect stranger, Jerry. We are told by the playwright's use of brackets indicating Peter's first reaction and the tone toward the outsider. Observe the following informative words!

{Peter doesn't notice}, {anxious to get back to his reading}, {lightly, by reflex}, {looks up, a little annoyed, then smiles}, {uncomfortable}, {he turns to his book}, {obviously minding}, {finally decided}, {stares unnecessarily at the sky}, {bewildered by the seeming lack of communication}, {annoyed}. (16-18)

The outcome of Jerry's insistence is not too bad since Peter is finally willing to listen to Jerry's story. Yet it does not take too long. Just after Jerry finishes his story telling of the dog, we can find some repetitions that indicate disturbance and irritation:

PETER. (*numb*) I...don't understand what....I don't think I...(now almost tearfully) Why did you tell me all of this?

JERRY. Why not?

PETER. I DON'T UNDERSTAND!

JERRY. (*furious, but whispering*) That's a lie

PETER. No. No, it's not.

JERRY. (*quietly*) I tried to explain it to you as I went along. I went slowly; it's all has to do with..

PETER. I DON'T WANT TO HEAR ANYMORE.. I don't understand you, or your landlady, or her dog.. (44-45)

Peter also repeats the words 'Oh my God', many times and very rapidly. First when he finds Jerry impaling himself on the knife he, Peter, is holding; second between Jerry's last words. Those words are all Peter can utter while Jerry is dying. These all indicate his involvement into Jerry's suicide, his confusion, his emotion that he finally has to get himself intruded into a deep, real, and lasting relationship.

### A.3. The Lack of Attention and Communication

This section attempts to reveal how Jerry, after a long journey, desperately expects a satisfying relationship with Peter. He has experienced a bad relationship with the dog, and now he tries to renew the condition of his attitude toward human interaction and directs it to Peter.

From the very beginning of the play we are presented a series of Jerry's emphasis upon some stresses.

JERRY. I've been to the zoo. (Peter doesn't notice) I said, I've been to the zoo. MISTER, I'VE BEEN TO THE ZOO!

PETER. Hm?...What?...I'm sorry, were you talking to me? (12)

The topic of the zoo has finally been repeated several times (I counted up the repetition thirty-three times in all), that must have an emphasis on the coming significance of the zoo later on.

In early dialogues we have seen some acts of Peter's reluctance in recognizing Jerry's existence. He does not intend to consider Jerry to be a man to be reckoned with. But we see how Jerry insists on the conversation by

forcing Peter to answer all of his questions and drives him to deal with him:

PETER. Oh *(He returns to his book)*

JERRY. *(He stands for a few seconds, looking at Peter, who finally looks up again, puzzled)* Do you mind if we talk?

PETER. *(Obviously minding)* Why...no, no.

JERRY. Yes, you do; you do.

PETER. *(Puts his book down,, his pipe out and away, smiling)* No, really; I don't mind.

JERRY. Yes you do.

PETER. *(Finally decided)* No; I don't mind at all, really. (15-16)

While as a whole, the play suggests that Jerry takes control over the conversation with Peter, and over the consequence of his action in killing himself in actual in fact, he must rescue Peter from any possibility which will get him into trouble. Just before Jerry tells Peter about 'The story of Jerry and the Dog', for instance, he is clearly seen begging Peter to stay, even though in another

instance he tells Peter that he can go if he wants to:

JERRY. Don't go. You're not thinking of going, are you?

PETER. Well...no, I don't think so.

JERRY. (*As if to a child*) Because after I tell you about the dog, do you know what then? Then...then I'll tell you about what happened at the zoo.

PETER. (*laughing faintly*) You're full of stories, aren't you?

JERRY. You don't *have* to listen. Nobody is holding you here; remember that. Keep that in your mind. (35)

Ever since Jerry finds out the way Peter treats him, his continued unwillingness to respond to him, even after he related the dog story, he tries many ways to get Peter's attention:

JERRY. Peter, do I annoy you, or confuse you?

Peter. (*lightly*) well, I must confess that this wasn't the kind of afternoon I'd anticipated.

JERRY. You mean, I'm not the gentleman you were expecting.

PETER. I wasn't expecting anybody.

JERRY. No, I don't imagine you were. But I'm here, and I'm not leaving.

PETER. (*Consulting his watch*) Well, you may not be, but I must be getting home soon.

JERRY. Oh, come on; stay a while longer.

PETER. I really should get home; you see... (46-47)

What happens next is that Jerry tickles Peter, which indicates that Jerry has made, at least, minimal contact. It finally makes Peter recognize him as someone to be with rather than to avoid. The end of the play also provides Jerry's control over the responsibility he must take over the act of suicide-murder. He protects Peter by wiping the knife clean of fingerprints and reminds him to take the book from the bench. He does it to keep Peter

away from any trouble that might come after the police find his dead body later.

### **A.3. The Depressing Atmosphere**

On the whole, the play suggests that it is constructed by the complexity of the cyclical plot. The absurd atmosphere is not only presented by Peter with his monotonous way of life, or his straight personality, or his isolation from the necessity of human contact, but in contrast, it is Jerry who develops a depressing atmosphere with his experiences, his attitude toward human relationship and toward life in general.

Jerry's experiences (failure, tragedy, refusal, and betrayal) have driven him to a bleak vision of life. His attitude toward life nevertheless justifies an act of cowardice, that to him, committing suicide can be the only way to get over all problems. Such circumstances, of course, raise depressing atmosphere from every part of the play, that is, both characters are surrounded by something mysterious, an unsolved problem and a sense of

nausea or misery. And eventually, life itself has successfully driven Jerry into some kind of death-in-life.

## **B. The Nature of Human Interaction as Revealed Through Jerry's Message about the Teaching Emotion**

Many critics judge *The Zoo Story* as a parable since it is simply designed to teach a moral lesson, accordingly from Jerry to Peter. In this respect, we will very carefully observe Jerry's methodology in enlightening Peter about the nature of human interaction.

### **B.1. The Revelation of the Teaching Emotion**

#### **B.1.1. The Indirect and Direct Way of the Revelation**

One event follows another. That is probably the correct starting point to discuss what makes Jerry deliberately break his own solitude. It is Jerry's insistence to open the conversation, no matter how plain Peter is in showing his reluctance. But knowing the fact that Jerry rarely chats with people, it deserves an



answer as to why he decides to speak with Peter under such pressure. We will then see what causes Jerry to do so.

Since he apparently keeps telling Peter that he has been to the zoo, we must wonder what happened at the zoo. Jerry presents his methodology, firstly by repeating his 'out of the way' twice:

"I took the subway down to the village so I could walk all the way up Fifth Avenue to the zoo. It's one of those things a person has to do, sometimes a person has to go a very long distance out of his way to come back the short distance correctly" (25)

Eventually, Jerry's long walk would have been unnecessary if he took a short cut or any cross-town bus, but he did not do so. He took a circuitous route throughout Fifth-Avenue; otherwise he would not have observed anything. From down the village, he walked all the way up Fifth-Avenue, which is simply "the distance out of his way to come back a short distance correctly" to the zoo, his final goal. This indirect methodology will later be repeated in the prologue to the dog story on page 36.

We are now entering the interesting part of the play: Jerry's analogue about 'The Story of Jerry and the Dog', that in many ways presents the nature of human interaction created by the dog. The dog wants to establish contact with Jerry by attacking him. Jerry denies it rather than accepts the dog's existence. He even plans to kill the dog with kindness; that is, by getting it consumed with his every-day-given hamburger. The dog accepts the burger until one day Jerry puts poison in it which causes the dog to become extremely ill. However, while the dog is ill, Jerry discovers that he does not want it to die any longer. He wants it to live and is anxious for their new relationship to commence. The change in Jerry's attitude effects nothing regarding his first meeting with the dog after it recovers, except that the dog becomes more aware of Jerry's existence. The following condition is then either Jerry or the dog ceases one another; and it brings them into their previous condition of indifference:

"We neither love nor hurt because we do not try to reach each other." (44)

So far we know that such sequences of refusal, failure, and betrayal come into an existence again through the way Peter notices Jerry's existence. Jerry's pressures and insistence of talking and having conversation with Peter are merely similar with the dog's attacks. Peter is unwilling to communicate with Jerry, and so is Jerry with the dog. Therefore, the fact is that Peter replaces the dog. Thus the dog story helps him to show Peter such condition, yet it makes no difference in Peter's attitude toward the outsider Jerry; "he still wish to disengage himself from Jerry (45)." This failure however leads him to the next way, the direct one.

Since indirectness does not seem to work, Jerry continues to use some physical movements. Jerry tickles Peter as he sees that he is about to go. He begs him to stay by tickling him in order to get closer, physically, and emotionally. It works; Peter reacts hysterically for being so ticklish, and he stays and becomes eager to know what happened at the zoo.

Jerry, revealing what happened at the zoo, keeps poking Peter on the arm and asks him to move over. As

the tone gets higher, he is trying to develop their relationship; by testing the man to give up the bench:

JERRY. (*Softly*) Get off this bench, Peter; I want it.

PETER. (*almost whining*) No.

JERRY. I said I want this bench, and I'm going to have it. Now, get over there.

PETER. People can't have everything they want. You should know that; It's a rule; people can have some of the things they want, but they can't have everything.

(52)

They continues to argue; Jerry insults Peter, saying that he already owns everything:

JERRY. Why? You have everything in the world you want; you've told me about your home, and your family, and *your own* little zoo. You have everything, and now you want this bench. Are these the things men fight for? Tell me, Peter, is this bench, this iron and this wood, is this your honor? Is this the thing in the world you'd fight for? Can you think of anything more absurd?

(55-56)

Peter becoming more upset and his challenge to fight over the bench signifies his willingness to grapple and to get involved. But Jerry is not content. The next step is forcing Peter to pick up the knife he throws, deliberately impaling himself on it, and deliberately forcing Peter to kill him. Dying, smiling; Jerry has broken the bars of Peter's isolation that way.

There is a parallelism here. The search for communion between the dog with Jerry has been repeated through the relationship between Jerry and Peter. As the play is introduced with an initial move by Jerry, the way he encounters Peter's world is the same as the dog encounters his. The same tendency of a broken relationship is caused by the failure in reaching other human. He fails to reach Peter as the dog fails to reach him.

## **B.2. The significance of the zoo**

Now we are coming to what 'the zoo' really signifies in the play. I deliberately place this point here before we enter the main thematic content of this thesis, the nature of human interaction, simply because I need to

discuss first what Jerry thinks of the zoo. If we asked anyone, who had never heard of the play, what *The Zoo Story* might concern, or what the play could be about, he would probably say about a common zoo, in which we can find numerous varieties of animals put in cages; or the zoo as the place in which parents used to bring their children to introduce them to the various animals there. It is surprising that we do not see any clear explanation about the zoo in a denotative meaning, until almost the end of the play when finally Jerry tells Peter what happened at the zoo.

A number of facts concerning with the notion of zoo in *The Zoo Story*:

1. Jerry was at the zoo before he met Peter at the park bench.
2. Jerry mentions the word 'the zoo' many times throughout the play.
3. He is always eager to tell Peter about the zoo, but something else comes up to them and breaks in on their conversation about the zoo. Thus we can only understand what Jerry means about the zoo toward at the end of the play.

4. The zoo, of course, is in effect the title of the play, which must have a particular meaning Albee tries to present to the readers.

Accordingly, the zoo is symbolic as is revealed by Jerry soon after he finishes telling 'The Story of Jerry and the Dog.'

"Now I'll let you in on what happened at the zoo; but first, I should tell you why I went to the zoo. I went to the zoo to find out more about the way people exist with animals, and the way animals exist with each other and with people too. It probably wasn't a fair test, what with everyone separated by bars from everyone else, the animals for the most part from each other, and always the people from the animals. But, if it's a zoo, that the way it is." (49)

It cannot be argued that the zoo symbolizes man's caged animality in the human zoo. The zoo represents the world in which Jerry and Peter live; each is separated by the barriers of fear and indifference. In the rooming house Jerry lives in his cage. He never wants to get acquainted with the neighbors next door; he refuses to respond to the landlady, and furthermore will not relate to a dog.

Whereas Peter in constructing his 'own zoo' seems to always refuse every contact offered by other person. His lifestyle seems to be directed toward avoiding conflict or emotional involvement. The isolation he creates through his zoo protects him from the necessity of human interaction.

Certainly, the symbolism of the human zoo in *The Zoo Story* gives an inevitable contribution to the play's idea and impact. By telling the dog story, followed by the revelation of what happened at the zoo, we are filled with the realization of the nature of human interaction Jerry has finally accepted and decided to give the message to someone; that is Peter.

### **B.3. Jerry's Recognition of the Nature of Human Interaction**

We have seen previously recognition within the zoo: the symbol of the zoo itself. It is time now to reveal another thing that is essential to Jerry becoming a new man. There is one thing in his relationship with Peter that distinguishes him from the dog: he learns; he discovers some findings. Observe the following finding:



"I have learned that neither kindness nor cruelty by themselves, independent of each other, creates any effect beyond themselves; and I have learned that the two combined, together, at the same time, are the teaching emotion." (43-44)

Or this one:

"And, was trying to feed the dog an act of love? And, perhaps, was the dog's attempt to bite me an act of love? If we can so misunderstand, well then, why have we invented the word love in the first place?"  
(44)

Both quotations are types of self learning: Jerry has changed from student to teacher. Jerry has gained from his experience with the dog and decided to pass it on to someone. He realizes that either kindness or cruelty are profitless qualities of behavior: each maintains a single, constant state of being, which prevents the development of any real relationship. If the two is combined, emotional lessons develop. Accordingly, real relationship involves both love and hate, conflict and peace, happiness and depression, and a willingness to

acknowledge both kindness and cruelty as valid and valuable aspects of interpersonal communion (Coles 4).

Nevertheless, he relates to the dog's cruelty in attacking him with his aggressive behavior toward Peter: assaulting, insulting, punching, throwing a switch blade on his feet, etc. He believes that reaching Peter, either with love or hurt, is an attempt to make contact, to build relationships with other human being. The dog's way of protecting his territory or Peter's way in defending his bench is a destructive condition of compromise, that is, to refuse, to be indiffererent, and to withdraw themselves toward other man's existence. He does try to bring this message to Peter in several ways; as the conformist Peter rejects the revelation until at the end he is forced to get involved in Jerry's suicide murder.

Jerry's becoming a teacher is clear enough now that he used to be that way; living in the rooming house, avoiding any contact of human relationship, refusing the landlady's sexual advances, and refusing the dog's existence, all have changed to the new Jerry. A renewed confidence in the significance of being human is that he is able to see the nature of human interaction as a part

of life and to get rid of the anxiety of the absurdity of life he lives in. Thus, in this acceptance and realization Jerry finds what it is to be a human, how human beings should live, how man regards his freedom of choice, and what consequences man should take following his freedom of choice. These are all the objects of his findings. Now, we will see what Jerry's last words to Peter were whilst was dying:

"Oh Peter, I was so afraid I'd drive you away (*He laughs as best as he can*) You don't know how afraid I was you'd go away and leave me. And now I'll tell you what happened at the zoo..I think..I think that while I was at the zoo I decided that I would walk north.. northerly.. rather until I found you or somebody.. and I decided that I would talk to you, I would tell you things.. and things that I would tell you would.. Well, here we are. But I don't know.. could I have planned all this?" (60)

Jerry realizes that reaching other human is harder than he thought. He has already planned all this and decides to give the message of his findings to someone. Jerry is finally comforted by Peter's involvement, "...Peter... thank

you. I come unto you... and you have comforted me (60).” Up to this Jerry has opened Peter’s eyes. The end of the play provides neither solution nor answer. Jerry’s death does not solve the problem except that he thanks Peter for helping him finally to become meaningfully engaged in a deep relationship with another person, so he no longer feels alone. Conversely, Peter cannot return to being the same person after that experience at the park with that bohemian.

**CHAPTER IV**  
**CONCLUSION**