

Search for Self in Albee's the Zoo Story

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Abstract

One of the important things that made Albee a significant figure in the history of American theater is that all his literary works address the issues being faced by the individual and the state of American society after the Second World War. In his literary works, Albee criticized the new material state that prevailed in the American society during his period and called for adherence to the values and ideals in human relationships. This paper will attempt to analyze the Albee's first play, *The Zoo Story*, particularly the character of Jerry. Then explores the reasons for the anxiety, psychological disorders, and loneliness felt by this character. This paper also will attempt to explore the sense of loss as well as describe the impact of the absence of family role and the American materialistic society on the behavior of the individual.

Keywords; Albee, *The Zoo Story*, Self, Social classes, loneliness

About the Play:

The Zoo Story revolves around a lonely, isolated man looking for a way to communicate with others. He starts a conversation with another man sitting on a public bench in Central Park who initially did not feel like talking, but was eventually forced into participating in the conversation. In a 1974 interview with Albee, Roudané argued that "he got the idea for *The Zoo Story* while working for the Western Union: I was always delivering telegrams to people in rooming houses. The models for all those people in the play in rooming houses. Jerry, the hero, is still around" (Roudané 196). In this play, Albee combines realistic and absurd elements. Despite its short length, *The Zoo Story* has addressed the issues of human isolation, loneliness, class differences, and dangers in the American society.

The play only has two characters. The first character is the 40-year-old Peter, who is seated on a bench while smoking a pipe and reading a book. The second and main character is Jerry, a man in his late 30s who is dressed shabbily and has a slender body. In contrast to Peter, whose attire suggests that he is from the upper class, Jerry's outward appearance suggests that he is an uninterested and indifferent man.

The story takes place on a Sunday afternoon in New York City Central Park. Peter is seated on a bench while reading a book. Jerry begins to speak and tells Peter that he has just come from the zoo. Peter does not answer. Jerry continues to speak and says that he is lonely and desperate, so he needs to communicate with someone. Jerry becomes annoyed by Peter's indifference, but he continues to talk and even tells Peter that smoking will give him cancer. Jerry also asks Peter some personal questions, and Peter eventually agrees to participate in the conversation.

Jerry tells Peter that he lives in a small and cheap apartment. He talks about his simple worthless possessions, including a pair of frames for two blank pictures. Intrigued, Peter asks Jerry about the blank pictures, and Jerry says that after his parents died when he was young, he was forced to live with his aunt who had a bad moral reputation. Jerry also tells Peter about the only romantic relationship he ever had in his life that did not mean anything to him. He then starts to tell about his visit to the zoo, but his story takes another direction.

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Jerry begins talking about his landlady. He tells Peter about how his landlady is in an alcohol addict, how she tried to seduce him in the past, and how her dog refused to communicate with him and tried to bite him in several instances. After failing to establish contact with the dog, Jerry kills the animal by feeding him a poisoned hamburger. Meanwhile, Peter wonders why Jerry is telling him these stories.

Peter tries to leave and Jerry tries to stop him from going. Jerry tries to take Peter's place on the bench and gives him multiple punches and insults. Peter notices that Jerry has become aggressive, but he still continues defending his place on the bench. The events quickly escalate as Jerry pulls out a knife and asks Peter to fight. Although surprised by this sudden change in behavior, Peter refuses to go along with what Jerry wants. Jerry then puts the knife in Peter's hand and asks him to stab him, but Peter continues to refuse. At this point, Jerry loses his self-control and stabs himself with the knife being held by Peter. Jerry starts to fall asleep and thanks Peter for listening to him and his story. He also scans Peter's fingerprints on the knife and asks him to leave before the police arrive. Jerry eventually dies, leaving Peter with many questions in mind that make him decide to change his life.

In *The Zoo Story*, Albee highlighted the clothes being worn by both characters. He described Peter as wearing fancy clothes, smoking a pipe, reading a book, and wearing glasses, thereby leaving an impression to the audience or reader that this character may be a scientist, philosopher, or a person of high standing in society. After a sequence of events, we realize that Peter is a businessman. Meanwhile, Albee described Jerry as wearing shabby clothes and having a slender body, thereby giving the audience with the impression that he is poor. Through these descriptions, Albee clearly indicates to the viewer that these characters belong to two separate groups. Albee noted that Peter "dress and his manner suggest a man younger" (Albee: 63).

Similar to most of Albee's literary works, an animal is involved in *The Zoo Story*. Peter tells Jerry that he has a pet cat at home and begins to talk about the pet's relationship with humanity. Jerry also tells the story about his landlady's dog. Through these symbolisms, Albee suggests that humans have inherent animalistic properties. He described the world as a zoo; such symbolism can be reflected in Jerry's statement that he has just come from the zoo as well as in the events and dialogues that take place between Jerry and Peter. In this way, Albee helps the audience or reader understand the purpose and meaning of his play.

The Zoo Story has two models, with each model representing a certain layer of American society. The first character is Jerry, who represents the oppressed and underprivileged class. He is suffering from isolation and is yearning for a society that accepts and understands him. In other words, Jerry needs someone he can talk with and listen to his worries and problems. The second character is Peter, who represents the upper middle class of the American society; he has a family, a job, and lives a stable and integrated life. He does not want to leave this life, at least before meeting Jerry. These two personalities are from two different worlds yet are living in the same society. Lewis described the meeting of these characters as "the meeting between two separate worlds in the heart of a modern city" (Lewis: 29-39).

1 The Isolated Self

Through *The Zoo Story*, Albee used dramatic characters to highlight the isolation of people from their communities and their lack of communication with others. He borrowed the image of the zoo to show a "horrifying image of a society where furious activity serves only to mask an essential inertia and which sociality" (Mishra 28). In this play, Albee equated the world with the zoo and equated its people with the caged animals. Some factors, such as lack of communication, delusion, isolation, loneliness, materialism, and class distinctions in the community, represent the cages that surround humans and isolate them from one another. Humans also have animal instincts that greatly influence the formation of their personalities, and such instincts may reach dangerous levels and may even lead to their death similar to what happened to Jerry in the play. "When the moment comes when it must appear, it is more dangerous and more likely to overwhelm the rest of the personality" (Fordham 51).

Although Jerry and Peter belong to two different classes in the society and are living different lives, they discover in their conversation that they are sharing the same sense of isolation and loss. Although Peter lives a normal life with a family and a job, he feels an inner sadness that is only revealed through the events in the play. Therefore, despite Peter's attempt to ignore Jerry, he eventually discovers that his life is meaningless. On the contrary, Jerry only aims to communicate with a human being or an animal. Jerry's visit to the zoo before meeting Peter strongly suggests his desire to communicate and integrate himself with the outside world. Jerry's attempts to force Peter into talking to him also reflect the loss and despair that he experienced: "I went to the zoo" (14).

Jerry: "Do you mind if we talk?"

Peter: (Obviously minding) "Why? No, no."

Jerry: "Yes, yes do, you do" (17).

Jerry's poverty, deprivation, and a small room in a poor suburb of New York make him feel classless when he is seated beside Peter. Therefore, Peter is reluctant to talk to him because he looks disgusting and suspicious. Peter eventually realizes that he had never met such a personality before, and after exchanging a few stories, Peter discovers that he is talking to a man who has no meaning in this world. However, Jerry continues in his struggle to connect to a world where he does not belong, while Peter continues avoiding Jerry's attempts to engage in an animated conversation.

The social status of these characters indicates that the class difference between them is almost multi-layered. For instance, Peter lives in high-end suburbs, while Jerry dwells in poor neighborhoods. The words spoken by Peter also denote his psychological stability, while those spoken by Jerry indicate the psychological stress that he has experienced. According to Anderson, "Jerry lives on the top floor, the place closest to the consciousness" (99).

Jerry then begins to tell Peter about why he went to the zoo. He explains that he was looking for answers to many questions related to his life that brought him anxiety and a sense of loss. When Peter asked him why he is living in such an intense psychological state, Jerry is unable to answer, thereby highlighting his state of loss and aimlessness.

Peter: "Why... Why do you live there?"

Jerry: (From a distance) "I don't know" (22).

Jerry cannot change his lifestyle or get out of his daily routine; he describes himself as a passing person who does not feel in belongingness to any place or anyone in this world. He lives an isolated and self-contained life, even though such isolation only brings him pain. He cannot understand and is unaware of how he can overcome such feeling. As a consequence, he becomes unable to love or find someone to love him. This isolation turns Jerry into a soul trapped inside a cage, thereby driving him to go to the zoo because he saw himself as a caged animal. "As in Jerry's relationship with girls and as in Peter's relationship with his wife, physical contact does not necessarily mean that the individuals are breaking through the bars to each other" (Hayman 12).

Although Peter has a stable and stereotypical life, his encounter with Jerry has made him realize that he does not know much about the meaning of the life that he is living. Therefore, he listens to Jerry's speech and becomes anxious to know more about his life. Jerry's words wake up in Peter a passion for knowledge and perception that he has never felt before. Jerry tells Peter about his landlady's dog, how this dog shows his fangs whenever Jerry goes to his room, and how this dog tried to attack him several times. He also tells Peter how he thought about killing this dog by feeding him with a poisoned hamburger.

After Jerry tries to kill the dog and sees the dog in a fight against death, he begins to pity the animal, sits quietly next to the dog, and begins a conversation:

Jerry: We regard each other with a mixture of sadness and suspicion, and then we feign indifference... we had made many attempts at contact, and we had failed (31).

After failing to establish a connection with the dog, Jerry goes to the zoo to learn how he can build a relationship with an animal, but later realizes that this visit has only increased his misery, loneliness, and despair. He realizes that he is no different from these animals and that he is living in his own cage. After hearing Jerry's story about the dog, Peter realizes that he cannot understand the real meaning of his life. As the conversation goes:

Jerry: "The dog and I have attained a compromise; more of a bargain, really, we neither love nor hurt because we do not try to reach each other" (31).

Bennet claimed that Jerry's story about the dog forces Peter to think that in life, "love-hate combination works better than separately as the antithesis between the two dissolves giving rise to the feeling of indifference" (57).

This experience makes Jerry see the relationship between man and animals in a new light.

Jerry: "...and I had tried to love and I had tried to kill, and both had been unsuccessful by themselves..." (30).

Jerry's unsuccessful attempts to build a relationship with the dog reflect his eagerness to establish a meaningful relationship with another human being. "The Story of Jerry and the dog has become an analog of Albee's views of human relationships" (Hayman 6).

Jerry's attempt to communicate with the dog also resembles his attempt to converse with Peter. Such attempt is an image of both desire and resistance. Jerry is willing to communicate with any human being or animal, but he always finds resistance from the other. Engaging in a conversation with Peter is difficult because he flatly refuses to participate and listen until after several attempts. Peter also refuses to share certain things about himself to Jerry. His answers are short and hesitant, and he rejects any words from Jerry that are not in keeping with his direction. Peter's sedentary life contrasts Jerry's absurd life, which is empty of love and misery for the poor because he has lost his parents at an early age. Suddenly, Peter is forced to listen to a lonely and socially ostracized person who seeks someone who can free him from his isolation. However, at the same time, Peter sees Jerry as a free man who does not care about the rules of society and the illusions of life.

Unlike Jerry, Peter is committed to his social beliefs. He believes that the transition from adolescence to adulthood means cutting off his previous relationships and separating himself from the previous stage of his life. This separation creates a sense of loneliness that Peter always tries to conceal to satisfy societal demands. Instead of taking this as a sign to live a new life and assume a different character, Peter flees from his reality and suppresses his feelings to satisfy the demands of his community. Therefore, he avoids talking about his personal life in his conversation with Jerry.

Jerry has used different ways to force Peter to listen to him and participate in the conversation. Through a combination of gentle and strong words, Jerry eventually achieves his goal of finding someone who can listen to him. However, Jerry yearns for more. He begins to harass Peter and asks him to leave his position on the bench in an attempt to provoke Peter into stabbing him with his own knife. In sum, Jerry has the desire to end his life. He was "Intent on playing the game of territorial acquisitiveness. He wants to dispossess Peter of the bench" (Hayman 8).

Jerry grabs Peter's hand vigorously and orders him to leave the bench, thereby making Peter angry. Jerry's attempts to occupy Peter's place was only a trick to provoke Peter and motivate him to react. Peter tries to avoid Jerry by giving an angry speech. He tells Jerry that he does not have the right to take his place where he has stayed for years and has developed many memories. Jerry slaps Peter and shouts abusive words to incite him to fight. Peter's anger mounts yet he insists on staying in his current position. Jerry throws a knife on the ground and asks Peter to pick it up and stab him, but Peter refuses. Jerry then picks up the knife, places it in Peter's hands, and stabs himself. The conflict between these characters ends with Jerry's death amid Peter's hesitate to kill him. Peter then throws the knife on the ground.

The tragic death of Jerry involves two important dimensions that Albee tries to share with his audience or readers. The first dimension is the realization of the state of communication being sought by Jerry, which he achieved by involving Peter in his plans to kill himself. In other words, by killing himself, Jerry achieved his goal to communicate with someone. The second dimension immediately follows Jerry's death during which Peter experienced an awakening and changed his perception of the life he had lived before this strange encounter. In other words, this tragic scene, both represents a point of contact for Jerry and a point of separation for Peter. Although Jerry and Peter belong to two different worlds, Jerry's death has brought them together. The fact that both characters are holding the knife that killed Jerry indicates that people from all classes sometimes band together to shoulder the same pain and face the same death. Peter's shock of Jerry's death has changed the course of his future. Jerry's distraught character, his fickle mood, and his sense of hopelessness have pushed him to take the easy way out of his bitter reality by committing suicide instead of seeking radical solutions that can help him confront and coexist with such reality. Both Peter and Jerry are victims of a society that has instilled in them a deep struggle and a sense of isolation as reflected in their actions. Jerry seeks to communicate with someone who understands him, while Peter seeks to change his stereotypical life. In Jerry's words, "you won't be coming back here anymore, Peter you have been dispossessed" (39). R.C. Sharma wrote that "The zoo and the bench are correlated to the human face signifying as it was the absurdity of all human identity" (48).

After his shock of Jerry's death, Peter decides not to return to his old life because he will not be able to forget what just happened. His spirit is shaken, and his mind is filled with many questions that made him revisit everything about his life and family. He decides to continue living his life with a different consciousness.

Hayman asserted that “Jerry’s death like the death of many tragic heroes in earlier plays-is an illustration of the impossibility of living in accordance with the values he represents” (11). Jerry’s death has liberated him from his isolation, internal strife, and suffering from the miserable conditions of the society in which he finds no affiliation.

Albee used the zoo as the setting of his play because he wanted to tell the world that these gardens are made by man to serve as a habitat for animals and that man does not greatly differ from animals. Although animals do not appear on stage during the play, the audience can feel their presence through the dialogues between the characters. For instance, in one scene, Jerry tells Peter that he is an animal. After he was stabbed, Jerry starts screaming and “wakes up” like an injured animal. These two characters are also depicted as fighting animals, with Jerry acting as the attacker and Peter is acting as the defender. However, instead of fangs and claws, these characters use words to defend themselves from each other.

These characters are also portrayed as imprisoned animals in a zoo that is isolated from each other. The cages that imprison these characters remain locked until Jerry’s death. Despite his attempts not to participate in Jerry’s death, Peter eventually finds himself partaking in the act because of his refusal to leave when Jerry tries to speak to him and take his place on the bench. At the end of the play, Peter becomes filled with guilt and remorse because he is unable to save Jerry from his own death. Peter also feels sorrowful after having lost his peace of mind, especially when Jerry, during his last moments, thanks Peter and asks him to leave the place before the police arrive.

In this play, Albee criticized the American way of dealing with the individual, particularly after the Second World War. Through Jerry’s death and Peter’s disappointment, Albee highlighted the need for members of the society to communicate with one another, observe the ideal values, move away from a materialistic society produced by man’s ruthlessness, and look at life from another perspective.

2 Family Disintegration

After Jerry’s successfully in coercion Peter to talk to him, he begins asking him about his family. Peter tells Jerry that he is married, has two daughters, and wishes to have a baby, but his wife is unable to bear any children. He also has a good job, lives in a high-end the neighborhood, and takes care of parrots and cats. Jerry notices that Peter avoids mentioning too many details about his family, thereby giving him the impression that Peter is hiding a deep sadness inside him even though he has everything that meets the standards of the society in which he lives.

Peter’s cautious and traditional answers indicate that he is a socially acceptable person who is afraid of entering anything new and contradicting the social norms that he is trying to uphold. Hiding a feeling of anxiety and sense of meaninglessness, Peter runs away from his reality by reading books. By contrast, Jerry can freely speak because he is rejecting and is not convinced of the standards of his society. Therefore, he is not afraid that his words will contradict the customs and traditions being observed by Peter.

Peter continues giving Jerry simple, short answers about his family life while maintaining his usual calm. However, he suddenly rises up, loses his calm, and speaks in a strong tone of voice when Jerry asks him why he wants to have a son. Peter responds, “that is none of your business! Do you understand?” (18). Jerry’s question has triggered Peter’s fears by revealing to him the reality from which he is trying to escape.

Peter avoids engaging in detailed conversations about his personal life to preserve his internalized convictions that he is trying to hide from his community. Jerry’s question has triggered in Peter a sense of loss (he has had daughters but never had a son), which leads him to distance himself from his family, visit the park, and sit on the same bench every week. According to Bigsby, “...strategy whereby the individual attempts to escape the consequences of freedom. Peter’s actions are deliberately geared to escape from the world around him” (18).

Although the family has a very important role in determining the identity of the individual within the community, Peter has neither received support nor established a bond with his family. For Peter, marriage was a social imposition that he should perform. Not having a son was a major driver of his self-isolation to live in a world of his own and avoid prying eyes. “His instinct has been playing safe and he has been conditioned to believe there is always safety in politeness” (Hayman 6).

Jerry’s absurdity and forceful style of dialogue make his presence a source of discomfort for Peter, who in turn is bothered by Jerry’s frequent attempts to invade his privacy and question his personal life. Sensing the danger in Jerry’s words, Peter continuously refuses his attempts to start a detailed discussion.

Meanwhile, Jerry is trying to enter Peter's deepest thoughts and make him see the world as a free man unrestricted by the traditional rules imposed by the society. He wants to define the concepts of marriage and family from his point of view and not based on the outlook of a materialistic society. Unlike Peter, Jerry defines marriage as the existence of the self and the existence of identity for every individual in the family. In other words, Jerry refuses to recognize the sanctity of marriage and associate such concept with societal norms. He also does not see the need to marry just to be accepted by his society. Although Peter tries to make himself appear as a respectable person living a stable life, he cannot stop listening to Jerry's explanations about the role of marriage and family in determining the identity of the individual. Jerry has even used the failed marriage of his parents as a starting point of his discussion regarding the poor state of his family, but at the same time, he shows the desire to have parents and feels sorry for himself because he cannot live with a typical family. Jerry grew up with an alcoholic father and an adulteress mother who left her family to run away with her boyfriend. After his father died in a bus accident, Jerry moved to live with his authoritarian aunt who died on the day of his high school graduation.

The conversation between Jerry and Peter reveals that both of them are facing isolation in different ways. On the one hand, Jerry never had a family and was neglected by his parents. He could not remember anything about them except for their deviant behavior that only brought him shame and humiliation. The situation in his family made Jerry lose his identity or meaning, which was among the most important reasons why his life turned toward loss. On the other hand, Peter has a wife, children, and other things that Jerry never had. However, he only started a typical, traditional family to establish a false identity in his community. In other words, Peter never truly identified himself with his family and only created a family only to satisfy the societal requirements of his community. He had no intentions to oppose these rituals or establish genuine contact with someone who found himself through him. By contrast, Jerry actively rebelled against these societal standards and was not aiming to build a fake family just to gain the acceptance of his community. Instead, he sought to establish meaningful contact with someone who can find his identity, self, and humanity through him. Both of these characters are living in despair, loss, and meaninglessness. Jerry's sense of isolation is clearly visible to the public, while that of Peter is repressed in the form of internal conflict. Paolucci stated that Peter "moves monotonously on the surface of life, pushed by a kind of inertia which is mistaken for intension" (40).

Jerry told Peter that his landlady tried to seduce him several times but failed to establish a sexual relationship with him because of his unwillingness. Such unwillingness reflected his susceptibility as a man, which could be attributed to his homosexuality as a child. Jerry also told Peter a story about his landlady's dog, how he failed to communicate with him, and how he thought of killing the animal. Peter thought of listening to Jerry's story as a way out of his isolation. Although unwilling to disclose personal details to Jerry, Peter was curious about his story and compared his internal conflict with that of Jerry.

Jerry was an orphan with an alcoholic father and a defiant mother. These dreadful circumstances led him to live as a homosexual during his childhood in retaliation to his parents' behavior and neglect. His semi-aggressive behavior resulted from the tension, anxiety, and despair that he faced throughout his miserable life. He lived his adolescence without a family that could support him or listen to his concerns. He lost his human feelings and became an isolated man full of frustration, a sense of loss, and burden that all could be attributed to his terrible past. He was unable to establish his identity given his inability to find someone with whom he could share his suffering and have a real relationship.

Jerry's visit to the zoo represented his attempt to understand the nature of relationships. He thought that he could learn things about the human society by observing the relations among animals. However, Jerry found that the zoo was no different from the human society, that is, both animals and humans are placed in cages that isolate them from one another. At the beginning of his conversation with Peter, Jerry repetitively mentioned that he just came from the zoo. This revelation reflected his state of psychological turmoil and confusion about the present stage of his life. His unstable psychological state reached the point where Jerry no longer saw the point of living and began thinking of killing himself. In fact, Jerry's visit to the zoo was also an attempt to find an identity in a place outside the human world. He thought that the zoo would cure him of his isolation and loneliness as well as give him a starting point from which he could begin a new life and establish a real goal. Chatterjee remarked, "To Jerry, both society and entire human condition are as frustrating as the image of the zoo" (92).

3 Class Differentiation

The Zoo Story, specifically the character of Jerry, presents an example of an individual who struggles to prove his identity. This struggle sometimes results in a fierce conflict with oneself. Jerry's story with the dog reflects his state of internal conflict and his desperate attempts to communicate with someone, even an animal. Peter's internal struggle can be manifested in his attempts to satisfy the demands of his community despite his lack of internal conviction. The difference between these characters is that Jerry outwardly shows his grudge and rejection of social habits, while Peter reluctantly follows social norms and never shows his internal suffering until the death of Jerry at the end of the play. Vorlicky asserted that Albee's characters "engage in violent power plays over their rights to self-identification, as well as to their connections with other men" (28). The internal conflict of Jerry can be attributed to many factors. He perceived himself as a social outcast who does not have any family or friends, does not talk much, and lives in a small room in a poor suburb. However, he yearns for someone who he can talk to and share his suffering. These things create an internal psychological conflict that makes Jerry feel lonely and isolated. Jerry also shows a strong desire to spread his suffering among a large number of people. He eventually chooses to end his life in a zoo because he expects that dying in such a place will attract media attention, by which he would achieve his goal of establishing contact with a large number of people.

In one scene, Jerry threw a knife on the ground and asked Peter to pick it up and stab him. This scene clearly suggests that Jerry is a surrendering man without an identity and whose source of strength is a knife. He placed the knife in Peter's hands as he perceived Peter as a man living a regular life and has an established identity in the society. Despite receiving plenty of insults from Jerry, Peter could not bring himself to take the knife and stab him because he wanted to show that he was also facing the isolation and disability of Jerry, but only in a different way. Jerry challenged and cursed Peter after he saw in him an image of the society that had wronged him and in which he could not integrate himself. Meanwhile, Peter resisted Jerry's attempts to start a fight because he saw in him the impulse to rebel from the same society that he keeps up with despite being unconvinced by its norms.

The conflict between Peter and Jerry is a struggle for identity, a struggle to prove one's existence, and a struggle between individual convictions and social habits. Compared with Peter, Jerry had more freedom and was more confident in speaking out because he did not care about his society and had no social restrictions. Therefore, he exhausted all possible approaches, such as using both polite and insulting words, to force Peter into participating in their conversation. Despite initially showing opposition, Peter eventually gave in to Jerry's demands and listened to his words. Jerry's insistence and success in forcing Peter to listen to him only highlight his willingness to give up the false identity that was set up for him by his society. Jerry also criticized his community by hurling various insults. No longer able to resist Jerry, Peter renounced his principles to preserve his identity in the society. In other words, the conflict between these two characters represents a conflict between the personal convictions of individuals who have surrendered their societal habits (as represented by Jerry) and the views of others (as represented by Peter).

Jerry lived a miserable and pathetic life and had no remaining sense of humanity or existence. Even his attempts to build relationships with animals all failed. He rebelled against his society and refused to live a life governed by its rules. Therefore, when he decided to take revenge on his miserable society, he found no better idea than committing suicide in a public place to make his message of protest heard by as many people as possible. Psychologically, Jerry's act of committing suicide can be called an act of "self-destructiveness," which indicates that some individuals see the elimination and destruction of their lives as the best way to avenge themselves from those things that have caused them great psychological stress. Stenz asserted that Peter and Jerry represent extremes in the social spectrum to show "the self-destructiveness and cruelty implicit in an education for conformity" (17). In addition, Jerry primarily dedicated his suicide to his mother, whose desertion greatly contributed to his sense of loss. In *The Zoo Story*, Albee presented two men belonging to two different classes and living in different conditions, yet share the same feelings of isolation and loss of identity. Jerry spent his entire life looking for his lost self. He experienced a difficult childhood in a disjointed family that produced a child who eventually grew up to an impostor who could not find his place in the society. Jerry failed to communicate with any living being or escape the feeling of isolation despite using all possible approaches. He even tried seducing his landlady's dog to earn his friendship, but still failed to achieve his aim. The dog even grew increasingly resentful of Jerry each passing day.

After failing to befriend the dog through a gentle approach, Jerry decided to kill the animal in retaliation. He repeated the same act with Peter; when his initial attempts to communicate with him in a timid and hesitant manner all failed, Jerry began to resort to violent methods by throwing insults and attempting to take Peter's place on the bench. Peter reacted by relenting to Jerry's demands to communicate and unintentionally taking part in his suicide plans. These two events, along with all other events in the play, went in the same direction, that is, the search for Jerry's lost self that he could find neither the human world nor the animal world. Jerry lived a miserable life full of hardships, despair, and feelings of loss. These circumstances led to his self-destruction and drove him to kill himself. Jerry's suicide represented his salvation from a world that he did not accept him and his entry into another world where he might find his true self. Nevertheless, Jerry managed to achieve his goal of finding someone who could listen to him and become part of his last moments. He also succeeded in making his death an impetus for Peter to change his life.

Conclusion

Peter suffered from internal conflicts and had many questions about his life. However, unlike Jerry, he was evading his struggle by trying to satisfy the requirements of his society and by reading books. By reintroducing all these questions into Peter's mind, his conversation with Jerry served a key role in motivating Peter to leave his cage and start a new life. Some critics even believe that Jerry has sacrificed his life to give Peter the chance to start anew.

The Zoo Story is a play centering on the loss and anxiety being experienced by the modern man. The play is essentially a story of an individual's search for his identity, self, and humanity in a society that is dominated by material aspects instead of ideals, values, and human bonds.

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