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Alienation as Depicted in Edward Albee

The Zoo Story

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The Zoo Story

ABSTRACT

The present study attempts to bring into light the theme of self-imposed alienation as portrayed in Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story* as a famous American drama. It aims at making a study of the alienated existence of man in the modern world as presented in Albee's *The Zoo Story*. Generally speaking, Albee's plays are concerned with the predicaments of modern man. Albee presents the characters who are somehow estranged from the outside world and lead a marginalized existence. An alienating mind undergoes the process of being marginalized from the family, society, country and thus lastly from his own self. S/he becomes ostracized and is being excluded. The theme of alienation pervades the whole of *The Zoo Story* in which modern society is depicted as a large zoo in which each individual is living in a cage of his own, protected by bars from the others. Peter, a true representative of such society, is considered an incarnation of the modern American man with his own sense of complacency and conformist ideas. Formidable as he is, Peter is writhing under the pressure of the modern absurd world with its brutality, indifference and lack of

regard for human values. As a result, he takes refuge in his own shell of isolation. This self-imposed alienation on the part of Peter takes the form of artificial politeness and is reflected in that sense of fear of facing the real world with its potential threats and frustrations. On the other hand, Jerry is a clear representation of those people who are alienated from each other and are victims of such a deadening loneliness. He is like a caged animal of a Zoo that lives and dies without trying to make any impact on others' lives. In *The Zoo Story*, alienation is brought into existence when men are confined to the cubical houses which make up the yoked city under the seemingly liberal systems. The present study would offer an overview analysis of the concept of alienation that pervades throughout Albee's *The Zoo Story*.

Keywords: Self-imposed, Alienation, Predicament, American Drama, Conformist, Loneliness

مستخلص البحث

فكرة الاغتراب كما هو مجسد في مسرحية "حديقة الحيوان" للكاتب الأمريكي إدوارد البي

تستهدف الدراسة تسليط الضوء علي فكرة الاغتراب كما تم تصويره وتجسيده في مسرحية "حديقة الحيوان" للكاتب الأمريكي الشهير إدوارد البي في حقيقة الأمر، فإن فكرة الاغتراب تفرض نفسها علي أحداث مسرحية "حديقة الحيوان" للكاتب إدوارد البي التي بدورها تقوم بتصوير المجتمع الأمريكي المعاصر علي أنه حديقة حيوان كبيرة يقطن داخلها كل إنسان في محبسه طواعية متشحا بعزلته التي هي من صنع يديه، محاطا بعدد من القيود والحواجز التي تفصله عن الانخراط في العلاقات الإنسانية وفي إطار القالب الدرامي للمسرحية يبرز دور شخصية "بيتر" الذي يجسد شخصية الإنسان الأمريكي المعاصر الملتزم بالقيود الطوعية الزائفة كذلك يحاول "بيتر" تجسيد دور الشخصية المعاصرة المتحفظة والمتوقعة علي نفسها رافضا الانخراط في العلاقات الإنسانية، محاولا الالتفاف حول المجتمع العبثي المعاصر بكل أطيافه وحاشيته وعدم اكرائه بالقيم. في حين تظهر شخصية "جيرى" الذي تخلت عنه الحياة ويعيش فقيرا وحيدا في بيته بعد أن توفي والداه، محاولا كسر تلك القيود والحواجز التي صنعا "بيتر" لنفسه من أجل عدم الانخراط في العلاقات الإنسانية، محتفظا بعزلته الطوعية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الاغتراب الطوعي - الاغتراب - الحاجة للتواصل - العزلة - ممثل للأعراف والعادات.

INTRODUCTION

Generally, alienation is regarded and defined as an emotional isolation of an individual arising out of disenchantment, frustration or even a slight dissatisfaction in life. Karl Marx had talked about this theme of alienation during the days to come in the industrial revolution period. However, it was left to the American writers to exploit this subject threadbare – most notably Nathaniel Hawthorne and Eugene O’Neil.

Marx categorizes alienation into three different phenomena. Firstly, alienation occurs when a person is not satisfied in his/her own family. Herein starts the first type of alienation, where an individual member of a family is denied the proper attention that s/he expects at home. Hence the person starts to be in a self-isolatory mood. From here, the disappointed person in a family prepares to seek refuge amongst his/her friends and when this too is denied s/he extends further his/her recognition outside the circle of his/her family and friends – from the society. Here comes, the alienation of the second type – alienation from society and finally when this too is denied, next step in this encounter is his/her own self – alienation of the third kind – that is alienation from himself and God (Mukhopadhyay, pp.٣-٤). Alienation leads to ostracism as it is effectively portrayed in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s “*The*

Scarlet Letter". Hester Pyrenne, the major protagonist in this story is ostracized from the society – denied social justice and instead of fighting against the male dominated system of patriarchy, she accepts it with grace and goes about in her own way carrying out her daily routines without seeking anything in return.

Edward Albee is primarily the poet of human anguish. In his plays, we feel a deep sense of agony and frustration underlying the behaviour and actions of his characters. This sense of agony pervades almost all of his plays. Indeed, this heart-rending sense of agony results from a deep sense of alienation from oneself as well as from the others and fear of facing the reality. Hence, the need arises for building a world of illusion around oneself as some sort of compensation.

DISCUSSION

The Zoo Story, a drama written by Edward Albee in ١٩٥٨. *The Zoo Story* is considered to be Edward Albee's first play. It actually marks Albee's beginning as a successful playwright. *The Zoo Story* is a seminal work in that it introduces themes which recur in almost all of Albee's plays. The principal fact is the lack of contact between human beings and the reluctant apathy, indifference, self-destructiveness, and cruelty. The point is brought home by a meeting between two characters, Jerry and Peter. The whole action is in the form of a paradox conversation between them until it culminates in the death of Jerry. While, traditionally audiences expect the "well-made" play-life-like, psychologically realistic characters, witty dialogue, and well-crafted, causal plots with neatly tied up beginnings, middles, and ends. But the theatre of the absurd subverts these expectations at every turn.

The theme of alienation pervades the whole of *The Zoo Story* in which modern society is depicted as a large zoo in which each individual is living in a cage of his own, protected by bars from the others. Peter, a true representative of such society, is considered an incarnation of the modern American man with his own sense of complacency and conformist ideas. Formidable as he is, Peter is writhing under the pressure of the modern absurd world

with its brutality, indifference and lack of regard for human values. As a result, he takes refuge in his own shell of isolation. This self-imposed alienation on the part of Peter takes the form of artificial politeness and is reflected in that sense of fear of facing the real world with its potential threats and frustrations. Commenting on the character of Peter, Ronald Hayman states that "Peter is trapped by his ingrained habit of politeness. His instinct is always to play safe and he has been conditioned to believe there is always safety in politeness".

Haunted by that sense of frustrating alienation, Peter chooses to lead a life of conformity and complacency. Such a kind of life with its passivity and negation has the advantage of allowing him to survive by suppressing his instinctive need for communication with others. Such a life shorn of any commitments or obligations, is aptly lived by a character which is described as being "neither fat nor gaunt, neither handsome nor homely" (Z.S, p. 11).

The opening scene in *The Zoo Story* with its attendant exchanges unravels this kind of antithesis between Jerry and Peter; the former desperately lacks real human contact "I really like to talk to somebody, really talk" (Z S, p. 10), but the latter desperately needs to be left alone in his self-imposed cage of

isolation. This kind of apparent antithesis is emphatically brought out in Albee's following comment:

The Zoo Story concerns a meeting between two men: peter, who has accommodated too much to life, to his society, to his environment, who has made too much to life, to his society, to his environment, who has made too many final choices too soon; and a younger man called Jerry who in the course of the play tries to transfer a sense of all the anguish and joy of being alive to peter in order to accomplish this transference he must precipitate an act of extreme violence . (Qtd, in Bigsby:١٩٨٤, p.٢٥٧)

In this abyss of self-imposed alienation and of escape from facing the real world, Peter is much disturbed and horrified when he is attacked by Jerry who tries to allure him out of this cage of self-imposed exile, seeking to establish some sort of contact with him. Acting as saviour , Jerry decides to assume the responsibility of saving Peter , and others of his kind, from this very disappointing state of alienation . Being aware of the dismal state of modern man , Jerry declares :

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. (Z S, pp. ۳۹-۴۰)

Thus, Jerry has been awakened to this miserable state of isolation, exemplified by his rooming-house mates who suffer from a deplorable sense of anguish and agony of their own making. They live in separate rooms, like animals in a zoo, denying access to other animals and hence denying themselves both self-definition and consolation. Indeed, human beings are no different from those animals which are kept in barred cages; it is a kind of living which intensifies their painful sense of isolation. Zaki M. Abdulla in his *An Unfashionable Realist* remarks "the world is a zoo with everyone separated by bars from everyone else, the animals for the most part from each other, and always the people from the animals" (۲۱).

Moreover, this kind of solitary free passage, which modern man with his complacency and passivity thinks he has won, is nothing but a mere loss. This kind of self-imposed alienation, in fact, intensifies the absurdity and the state of anguish which pervade modern society.

Instead of wallowing in that sense of self-pity, Albee is intent on creating an atmosphere of optimism which alleviates as well as dispels the clouds of despair in his plays. So, he depicts the character of Jerry as a saviour, a guide who wishes to direct Peter towards the right way by every possible means. Hence, Jerry

forms a well-knit plan in order to shatter that sense of lethargy and complacency in the character of Peter. Once getting to the park, Jerry starts his first preparation of his own resolved plan to break through the alienated world of Peter by instigating him to violence by asking many questions, invading his space, tickling his ribs, insulting him, and taking his bench to get Peter enraged to harm him:

Peter: MY BENCH! **Jerry:** (*pushes Peter almost, but not quite, off the bench*). Get out of my sight.

Peter: (*regaining his position*) God da ... mn you. That's enough. I've had enough of you. I will not give up this bench; you can have it, and that's that. You can go away. (*Jerry snores, but does not move*). Go away, I said ... if you don't move on, I'll get a policeman here and make you go... (*His fury and self-consciousness have possessed him*). . . GET AWAY FROM MY BENCH. (Z.S, p. ٤٣)

Indeed, it is quite clear that in attacking Peter's passivity, Jerry acts as a mouthpiece for Albee's views and fulfills the author's desire to attack that sense of complacency and conformity, characterizing the American audience who would like

to be entertained rather than disturbed or awakened out of their sense of lethargy. On this attitude on the part of Jerry, Ronald Hayman observes that "Jerry's calculated assault on Peter's lazy desire to be left in peace is a projection of the playwright's calculated assault on the audience's desire not to be disturbed" (17)

In the midst of this modern American society with its exaltation of materialistic values which have become the only criterion of success, human values have undergone a drastic change, an upheaval, for "Life is measured in terms of loss, love by its failure, contact by its absence" (Weales 14).

In such materialistic world, Peter, the typical businessman, devalues every human trait for money, and discards any human contact not essential for materialistic advance. Immersed in this kind of life, Peter is utterly unaware of the hellish nature of this kind of death-in-life. In that hell, objects and things have come to substitute human relationships as a source of solace and comfort. Weales goes on to reveal that "there are many mansions-one of which is Peter's bench-and all of them are cages in the great zoo story of life" (14).

To Peter, the bench is considered a kind of sanctuary where he finds the long-sought-for protection, the desired refuge from the harsh realities of modern life. In this way , the bench is a cage in which Peter wants to keep self shut in order to have the advantage of enjoying his own self-imposed alienation. So, Peter considers it as one of his own possessions which no one else has the right to use. Allan Lewis maintains that "the bench is public property, but becomes the place each seeks to carve out as his own, the object to be possessed, the arena for assertion (٣٣).

Peter is not essentially different from the inhabitants of Eliot's Waste Land , who fear the coming of spring with its showers of rain, who are content with a life-in-death which "stirs no roots" in their life, for such a life would protect them from memories and reminiscences of a past real life .

The only hope in Eliot's poem The Waste Land lies in the success of the saviour, who can break the spell of infertility and spiritual aridity; the only hope lies in the reviving showers of the rain of faith, in the breaking of that vicious circle of sensuality, selfishness and isolation . Jerry acts as such a saviour in Albee's play. Being fully aware of the tragedy and suffering of human beings and after his previous experiences with the landlady and

the dog, Jerry, like the Evangelist in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, tries his best to get Peter out of that hell in which he dwells. In this way, Jerry acts as a saviour who redirects Peter towards the right path in which he and the others would establish true contact with each other. "Jerry", as Alvin B. Kernan mentions, "has cultivated his sensibility and integrity but has paid for it with social failure to make significant contact with a man called Peter, who is a success and a conformist" (16).

Jerry's desperate need for communication has made him hypersensitive to the falsity and tragedy of his own society which forces him into adopting a life of self-imposed isolation. Indeed, Jerry is a representation of "the anti-establishment, counterculture hero... He is the dark stranger, the social outcast, the orphan, the other" (Bottoms 19). Refusing to cope with this sort of his awareness of the hazards implied as concerning his social success, Jerry, in this sense, can be labeled as "a sensitive beatnik" (Hewes, p. 32) and he is also much less "a hipster-drifter" (Cohn and Dukore, 1966, p. 60). He is intent on breaking the spell, the curse of a dehumanized society, lacking in compassion and love. Such an outcast who has failed to adopt the role of a moral reformer at the beginning "is not intimidated and tries another tactic to attract Peter's attention" (Wakid 12).

Jerry, on his own part, undergoes such an extended sense of not belonging and of not being part of the community he lives in due to the social system of the community which is based on a false and excessive individualism. Indeed, Jerry is unable to cater to the individualistic American Society in which he lives because he is a homosexual. Jerry himself states " I've never been able to have sex, with or, how is it put? . . . make love to anybody more than once; that's it . . . Oh, wait; for a week and a half when I was fifteen. I was a h-o-m-o-s-e-x-u-a-l. I mean, I was queer (ZS, p.٢٥)

This is the insight which Jerry, from the very beginning of the play, is intent on transferring to any human being – here it happens to be Peter. Actually, it takes the desperate Jerry the whole course of the play to make Peter stay and not shy away from talking to him:

Oh, Peter, I was so Afraid I'd drive you away 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 while I was at the Zoo I decided that I would walk north until I found you ... or somebody ... and I decided that I would talk to you ... I would tell

you things ... and things I would tell you ... well, here we are. You see ? (Z S, p. 44).

This sort of human anguish that Jerry feels is obviously underscored George Wellwarth's following words:

The theme is the enormous and usually insuperable difficulty that human beings find in communicating with each other. More precisely, it is about the maddening effect that the enforced loneliness of the human condition has on the person who is cursed (for in our society it undoubtedly is a curse) with infinite capacity for love. (322).

In this sense, Jerry seems to have this curse handed down to him by pragmatic values of modern society. He is entrapped in a state of neurosis by his society's pragmatism. Being ensnared in this state of human anguish, Jerry takes refuge in a cage of self-imposed alienation. In this way, Jerry comes close to Erich Fromm's definitions of the neurotic person. "The neurotic person", as Fromm describes, is:

An alienated person. His actions are not his own; while he is under the illusion of doing what he wants, he is

driven by forces which are separated from his self; he is a stranger to himself , Just as his fellow man is a stranger to himThe insane person is the absolutely alienated person ; he has completely lost himself as the centre of his own experience ; he has lost the sense of loss . (١١٤)

Although Jerry is depicted as a person who greatly suffers from neurosis, yet he seems to be sane enough to have the desire of getting himself out of his own cage of self-imposed alienation. He is fully aware of the fact that in order to get himself out of this state of anguish, he needs a moment of confrontation with the self. This moment of confrontation with the self will bring him, as it is hoped, to human contact:

Jerry has more sense of the urgent necessity for human contact than does society itself. Jerry has reached a moment of crisis, the purposelessness of his life evidences itself in his appearance. He is not poorly dressed, but carelessly ... As Albee says, "His fall from grace" is due to "a great weariness" ... The origin of this weariness is his realization of the gulf which exists between him and his fellow men ... Herry's isolation is

complete . Not only does he know nothing of those who share his rooming house-itself in a state of dilapidation which mirrors Jerry's own decline – but he is also effectively cut off from the past.(Qtd, in Al-Said, p. ٥٠)

In an attempt on the part of Jerry to divulge the secrets of his private life to Peter, he begins to tell him about the problems he had with his landlady on the one hand, and her dog on the other. The landlady, as Jerry describes her, is "fat, ugly, mean, stupid, unwashed, misanthropic, cheap, drunken bag of garbage" (ZS, p.٥٣)

The landlady makes passes at him, stands in his way whenever he returns home and invites him to her room to find a way to thwart her sexual designs on him, Jerry keeps her lust at bay by confusing her mentally, by convincing her of the reality of previous, but non-existent, sexual sessions between them. This deception, this illusion of satisfaction, to a certain extent, gives her pleasure. Indeed, the landlady's advances, though they are wholly sexual, are, after all, attempts at human contact and relationship, which Jerry rejects. In refusing contact with the landlady as a human being, Jerry becomes, to some extent, like Peter, preferring his own self-imposed isolation to any kind of

human interaction. Describing his experience with the landlady, Jerry states:

When she talks to me , when she presses herself to my body and mumbles about her room and how I should come there , I merely say : but , love , wasn't yesterday enough for you , and the day before ? Then she puzzles, and makes slits of her tiny eyes, she sways a little ... and she giggles and groans as she thinks about yesterday and the day before; as she believes and relives what never happened. (Z S, p. ٥٤)

The anecdote about the landlady is an introduction to "THE STORY OF JERRY AND THE DOG!" (Z S, p. ٣٠). Indeed, the story of the dog bears some resemblance to that of the landlady. Though a mere animal, the dog feels the impact of this universal tragedy in the modern wasteland. The dog feels the need for making contact with one of the inhabitants in order to shock him out of his own shell of self-imposed isolation. Whatever the hazards or obstacles the dog may face, his decision to make contact does not waver. Thus, the dog is portrayed as an obvious contrast to modern wastelanders who show their own indifference to human contact and relationship. Thus "far from being as

indifferent as the human inhabitants of his rooming-house", Bigsby declares that "the dog had consistently challenged Jerry, attacking him in the lobby as he dashed for the stairs" (1984, 208).

The relationship between Jerry and the old, ugly dog is, in the beginning, characterized by uncompromising hostility. Everyday when Jerry tries to enter the house, the dog attacks him savagely by biting his ankles. Alienated as he is, Jerry shows no care for the dog's serious attempts to make contact with him. So, he decides to shoo the dog's advances as he has previously done with the landlady. In this respect, Wakid illuminates the fact that "Jerry has gained the landlady's acceptance by giving her fantasy instead of real experience, but he handled the dog in a different manner" (Wakid 10).

Jerry tries to dissuade the dog from pursuing his intentions by offering him hamburger sandwiches as an instrument through which he can win the dog's affection, and frustrate its never-ceasing attempts at breaking down the barriers between them. Failing to do so, Jerry has thought of following another severe tactic, a kind of hatred. He decides to kill the dog by giving it poisoned hamburger sandwiches. It is supposed that through these attempts on the part of Jerry to prevent that animal from shattering

his own shell of self-imposed isolation, Jerry, in this way, does not differentiate between the instruments of love and those of hatred. Weales, a staunch admirer and defender of Edward Albee, comments on Jerry's story of the dog saying:

Accepting the dog's attack on him as a form of recognition, Jerry tries first to win his affection (with Hamburger and, failing that, to kill him with poisoned hamburger: it is difficult to differentiate between the tools of love and hate (Weales ١٥).

After the dog has eaten the poisoned hamburger, it falls seriously ill and is on the verge of death. Suddenly it has dawned on Jerry that he no longer wants the dog to die, and he is haunted by a keen desire to know what this kind of relationship will come to. He no longer considers the dog as a foe, but a friend. Jerry realizes that if he has the ability to make and retain contact with that animal, he will be on the road to making contact with other people. It is quite evident that this change in Jerry's attitude towards the dog has occurred only after he has made certain gestures both of friendship and of enmity. Each of these strategies, in their form of bribery or murder, is seen as essentially one act in spirit. Each attempts to prevent contact, to keep Jerry isolated in

his own cell, alienated from the others. As once offered and not taken, the moment of communication will never come again for both Jerry and the dog. And from that moment, Jerry and the dog cease to bother each other, lapsing into the compromise of indifference, believing that:

Whenever the dog and I see each other we both stop where we are. We regard each other with a mixture of sadness and suspicion, and then we feign indifference. We walk past each other safely ; we have an understanding ... The dog has returned to garbage , and I to solitary free passage ... I have gained solitary free passage , if that much further loss can be said to be gain . 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 . And what is gained is loss. What has been the result, We neither love nor hurt because we do not try to reach each other. And, was trying to feed the dog an act of love? And, perhaps, was the dog's attempt to bite me not an act of love? (Z S, p. 36)

Indeed, Jerry realizes that this condition of compromise, as exemplified in his refusal to love or to hate, is the most destructive condition of all. As a consequence, Jerry now sees that the dog's attacks, though savage to some extent, were but serious attempts at establishing real contact. This fact is underscored by Bigsby when he states that "only when he (Jerry) has regained his isolation does he realize that what he had seen as a threat was perhaps an attempt at contact , and that the isolation to which he has returned is itself the source of his absurdity" (١٩٨٤ . ٢٥٨)

The episode of the dog suggests that kindness by itself, as embodied in Jerry's hamburger sandwiches, and cruelty by itself, as portrayed in the poisoned hamburger, are equally fruitless attempts at making communication with others. For each seeks to sustain a single, constant state of being, thereby preventing the development of any real kind of human relationship. That is because any real human relationship involves, indeed, both love and hatred, conflict and peace, ecstasy and depression, happiness and sadness. These are, indeed, valid and valuable aspects of interpersonal communion. Jerry asserts:

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 (Z.S., p. ૩૦).

Thus, Jerry has changed to a great extent and he is desperately trying hard to seize every opportunity to express his knowledge of the teaching emotion, to make a kind of human contact. Jerry now searches for a way out of this urban hell by destroying the barriers of human isolation and spiritual lethargy. Sharon D. Spencer in his *Edward Albee: The Anger Artist* highlights this attitude on the part of Jerry and observes that "Jerry reveals himself as a seedy sort of romanticist, as a man who can not accept a normal or usual blend of affection and antagonism, interpreting a mixed attitude as indifference. Like all romantics, he yearns to strain beyond the confines of the real" (૨૧).

It is an undeniable fact that the story of Jerry and the dog is not a mere ordinary descriptive story, but it is a profoundly symbolical one. On the deepest and profoundest level, this well-sewed story has a real morale through which Jerry by narrating it aims at freeing Peter from this self-imposed exile, from this shell of isolation and selfishness. His aim is to release him from the prison of indifference, to shock him into an awareness of the

necessity for establishing relations with the other inhabitants in the same zoo. He becomes more intent on achieving this aim after his failure to establish contact with the dog. Such an experience with the dog has provided Jerry with an illuminating insight into the nature of human relationships. Ronald Hayman states that "the story of Jerry and the dog has become an analogue of Albee's view of human relationships" (١١). The same vision is expressed by Weales who remarks that "Jerry's story about his landlady's vicious dog is still Albee's most effective account of an attempt to get through those bars , out of that skin" (١٥)

It is suggested that there is some sort of similarity between Jerry and the dog, for both act as potential saviors: for what Jerry does with Peter is a reenactment of the role played by the dog to help Jerry out of his shell of human isolation. Though the dog has failed to persuade Jerry to make some sort of communion with it, the experience has been of great benefit to Jerry. Armed with such a revelation, Jerry's experience with the dog has provided him with the means of shocking Peter into realizing his own dismal state.

Peter, in fact, understands that Jerry , in telling him the story of the dog , is yearning for making contact with him , and

therefore he pretends that he does not understand what Jerry is saying . In this respect Bigsby remarks:

Plainly a displaced account of his encounter with Peter, who now plays Jerry's role as Jerry plays that of the dog. And eventually the truth of this does penetrate Peter's mind but he refuses to acknowledge its relevance to himself, so his response is firstly to insist that he doesn't understand. (1984. 208)

In spite of Jerry's feverish efforts to conquer Peter's isolation, Peter fails to respond, asserting "I don't want to hear any more. I don't understand, or your landlady, Or her dog." (Z. S, p.37)

Indeed, Jerry has exerted a great effort to bring the message home to Peter, first through coaxing and persuading and finally by resorting to brute force in order to shock him out of his self-imposed isolation. But Peter is adamant in his resistance to Jerry's attempts, to avoid facing the truth that will shatter the myth of his being:

A person has to have some way of dealing with SOMETHING. If not with people ... If not with people ... SOMETHING. With a bed, with a cockroach, with a

mirror ... no, that's too hard, that's one of the last steps.
(Z S, p.٣٤)

It is worth noting here that Peter's attitude is reminiscent of a similar attitude adopted by almost all of the characters in Ibsen's *The Wild Duck*, namely, their preference for a world of illusion which would protect them from facing the harsh reality. A similar attitude is also adopted by Martha in Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* who together with her husband , invents a saving lie, Dr. Relling's phrase in Ibsen's *The Wild Duck*, the lie of having a son to avert facing the truth of her own sterility and the spiritual vacuity of her own life. Carol A. Sykes asserts that "human contact in the world of Albee's play has become a lie, that even those who still seek some kind of contact-however prevented-can be satisfied by a delusion" (٤٤٩).

Thus Jerry is forced to adopt a more oblique approach, that is, by ticking Peter as a kind of bodily contact. This approach might smack of homosexual tendencies, but it primarily refers, of course, to the fact that at least, by doing such a tickling, minimal emotional contact has been established. Consequently, Peter now recognizes Jerry as a human being to make contact with, rather than avoid. Indeed, this kind of approach has provided a moment

of relief in the play as it has changed the course of action by making Peter ready to listen to Jerry, by arousing his interest to figure out the reason behind Jerry's visit to the zoo.

Peter: Tell me what happened at the zoo. Oh, my. I don't know what happened to me.

Jerry: I went to the zoo to find 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. (Z S, pp. ۳۹-۴۰)

It is obvious that Edward Albee, in the above dialogue, has summed up the crisis of modern man, his self-imposed isolation and his fear to face this painful truth, to uncover the brutality and sense of complacency underlying modern man's life. In other words, Albee implies that modern man lives in a cage in a zoo, haunted by false illusions and beliefs. Each lives behind bars of his own making, giving him a false sense of satisfaction and security.

On the basis of the contact established by tickling, Peter has psychologically become ready to make a slight contact with Jerry. Jerry, as a result, attempts to force Peter to allow their relationship to develop intending to do something more impressive and effective so as to give Peter an opportunity to allow another human being into his cage. After a series of demands, Jerry has managed to strike a kind of challenge between him and Peter. Peter becomes more upset, but Jerry feels very close to victory; that is why this kind of challenge, by itself, signifies one's willingness to grapple with life and become involved. Hayman comments on Jerry's ever-lasting determination to inflict defeat on Peter and to make him aware of his isolation and aloneness and observes:

Jerry inflicts himself on Peter with such uncompromising determination that in spite of all Peter's efforts to fend him off, he gets to know anyone else. In fact, Peter will be lonelier than before, because more aware of his aloneness. (٤)

After a series of attempts on the part of Jerry at breaking Peter's shell of isolation by telling him about his previous experiences and then by tickling him, Jerry realizes that this is not

enough to break into Peter's cage. Hence, he intends to do something more effective, however painful it is, to get Peter out of his own aloneness. So, suddenly he gets out a knife from his pocket and throws it at Peter's feet, and begins to assault Peter himself, his possessions, his way of life, his potency endeavouring to infuriate him to become aroused enough to pick up the knife.

Jerry: Very well, Peter, we'll battle for the bench, but we're not evenly matched.

Peter: You are mad! You're stark raving mad! **YOU'RE GOING TO KILL ME!**

Jerry: There you go. Pick it up... You have the knife and we'll be more evenly matched. (Z S, p. 46)

Once Peter holds the knife in his hand Jerry rushes at him with resolution uttering a sigh of relief deliberately forcing Peter to kill him. In doing so, Jerry seems to act as an obliging man who achieves his martyrdom in order to save his own people from living in separate cages of their own making, and to drive them to make contact with each other. Hayman reveals that "to make real contact with a fellow human being, he (Jerry) has to take his life

in his hands Just as Columbus did when he set out on a voyage from which there would have been no return if he had found what he was looking for" (١٦) .

This may seem, on the surface, as a mere suicidal desperate act, but in reality, it reflects a serious attempt at making human contact and relationship in order to shatter the vicious circle of human isolation and alienation. In this sense, Jerry seems to be, as George Wellwarth observes, "a man cursed with an infinite capacity for love" (١٩٦٤. ٢٧٦). That is why, Jerry, while dying, thanks Peter, feeling that he has finally succeeded in breaking open the shell of human isolation by his own sacrificial act "Oh, Peter, I was so afraid I'd drive you away. You don't know how afraid I was you'd go away and leave me ... Peter ... thank you." (Z S, p. ٤٨)

Although the difficulty implied in making contact has been greater than Jerry has first imagined it to be, yet the sense of fulfillment, the sense of communion, has been achieved. That is to say, Peter has now touched and been touched by another human being in a profound and irrevocable experience. No longer will Peter feel this sort of self-satisfaction in keeping himself in a cage of his own making. At the same time Jerry after a series of trials,

has finally become involved in a meaningful and deep relationship with another person. There is a real bond struck between Jerry and Peter by which Jerry could root both himself and Peter out of their separate cages.

Thus, one should refer to the fact that Jerry's sacrificial act is not a mere absurdist action, as some critics claim, but it is rather a weapon through which Jerry has conquered the barriers of isolation which prevent contact between him and Peter. Moreover, by this sacrificial act, Jerry has managed to shatter the bars of the zoo, both for himself and for Peter as well, creating some sort of hope, the possibility of salvation for both of them. As a result, Peter becomes involved, and Jerry's act of suicide has not gone in vain.

While some critics regard *The Zoo Story* as an absurdist study of the artificiality of American values and the failure of communication, others describe it as a wonderful panorama of purgation in which the young man martyrs himself to prove the value of making a sort of meaningful communication. For example, Gerald Weales, in his *Don't Make Waves*, criticizes Jerry's sacrificial act stating "there is nothing in *The Zoo Story* to indicate that he succeeds. At the end, Peter is plainly a man

knocked off his balance, but there is no indication that he has fallen into an awareness of life" (٢٠).

In fact, I beg to differ with Weales in this point, for Peter, at the end of the play, is shocked out of his own complacency and conformity, and becomes ready to make contact with other human beings as he is pervaded with a sense of his own complicity and apathetic conformity, and becomes ready to make contact with other human beings as he is pervaded with a sense of complicity in the modern tragedy of life:

There is symbolic richness in this tableau of death. On the face of it, Jerry is relieved of his unremitting conflict with the Peters. The social process of life destroying forces in stealthy conquest of life enhancing forces becomes public and accountable; Peter can no longer deny complicity. (Baxandall ٨٩)

By sacrificing himself for the sake of making contact with others, Jerry acts as "a Christ figure or a prophet" (Zimbardo, ١٥-١٦), the saviour who has sacrificed himself on the cross to redeem the sins of the world. Hence, Peter, at the end of the play, has been freed from his false principles, and is purged of his illusions. No

longer will he be able to retreat into his alienated and noncommittal old self.

Jerry: You won't be coming back here anymore, Peter; You've been dispossessed. You've lost your bench, but you've defended your honor. And Peter, I'll tell you something now; you're not really a vegetable; it's all right, you're an animal. (Z S, pp. 48-49)

As a consequence, the possibility of human dignity, the potential for meaningful sacrifice, and validity of some kind of real contact are all established by the end of the play. From the above quote, one discerns that Jerry's death is not an act of futility or absurdity, a meaningless act, as Gerald Weales has claimed, but, rather, a well-planned act through which both Jerry and Peter have realized mutual understanding and awareness. Jordan Y. Miller has interpreted Jerry's sacrificial act by saying that "Jerry must sacrifice everything he owns, taste the sins of the world, and die. In dying he can then join the others who are able to face the surrounding desert with any hope of escape" (198).

Weales further illuminates this act of sacrificial suicide and its significance and declares that "in the suicidal act, Jerry

becomes a scapegoat who gives his own life so that Peter will be knocked out of his complacency and learn to live" (٢٠) .

Such critics view Jerry's act of suicide as a creative act through which Jerry has managed to penetrate into Peter's shell of isolation, and force him to reject his rotten society's values. On the other hand, Jerry's sacrificial act may be considered as a kind of condemnation of, and rebellion against the American way of life. It is a kind of revolt against the false and immoral values of modern society. Alvin B. Kernan comments on the significance of this act stating that "this might be nothing but a brute, desperate act, yet it becomes much more because it is instilled with rich overtones of the circumstances which made Jerry abstain from the social order" (٨٦).

It is quite obvious that The Zoo Story can be considered as a satirical allegory of modern man's sense of isolation and alienation, and of the need for a quest for salvation and redemption. For example, Jerry is like the Fisher king in Eliot's The Waste Land, who tries to redeem humanity:

I sat upon the shore.

Fishing, with arid
plain behind me.

Shall I at least set my hands
in Order? (Eliot, p. ٤٧)

On the other hand, Peter represents modern man suffering from spiritual sterility and frightened of regeneration. In this way, he is like the wastelanders in Eliot's monumental and epoch-creating work who choose death-in-life rather than undergo the pains of spiritual delivery:

Winter Kept as
warm, covering
Earth in forgetful
snow, feeding ...
A little life with
dried tubers.
(Eliot, ٦١)

In this sense *The Zoo Story* is a short simple story through which Albee is intent on laying bare the real facts about the modern American society with its spiritual sterility and aridity. Albee wants to stress on the fact that whatever materialistic and

scientific achievements America has realized, yet it has lost its clarity and energy:

The Zoo story is a parable. Its two characters constitute a modern American experience as Albee himself sees it. Indeed the description of Jerry could equally be applied to his sense of an America which has become flaccid and enervated Which has lost its clarity of outline, its energy and its vision. (Biggsby: ١٩٨٤, p. ٢٥٧)

Peter, thanks to Jerry's feverish effort, has come to experience an interplay of sympathy in which attack and defense, violence and kindness, murder and suicide become one. As a consequence , the knot is undone and the curse if lifted through this spiritual sacrifice of the self to the other , namely , Jerry's forfeiting of his own life , and Peter's sacrifice , at the end of the play , of his innocence . In allowing Jerry to carry out his well-arranged plan to break open Peter's solitary confinement, Albee:

Has shared the Gothic writers assuming levels of communication beyond the rational, an extra sensory awareness. The means of identification is often a

gradual awareness of similarities through a prolonged confrontation, though the actual recognition may come in a moment of intense emotion or even violence. (Witherington ١٦٠)

Moreover, in his presentation of Jerry's failure in establishing permanent relationships of any kind with girls , or even with the landlady , and of Peter's physical relation with his wife , Albee has emphasized that sex can never be a way of breaking the self-made circle of isolation . Hayman states that "as in Jerry's relationships 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". (١٢)

Once discerns in Hayman's comment a refutation of the claims of those critics who have accused Albee of being fond of introducing a lot of sexual scenes for their own sake . In this respect, it may be revealing to quote Gerland Weales' words again:

Although failed sex is a convenient metaphor for the failure of love, its opposite will not work so well. That is why connection is not necessarily contact, and it is

contact or rather its absence, those bars that bother Jerry- that preoccupies Albee.(١٥)

From the spiritual and religious point of view. The incidents of The Zoo Story are considered a series of confessions expressing inhuman and immoral sins. Throughout the play, Jerry acts as a man haunted by an agonizing sense of guilt in front of the priest in the church confessing his own sins and guilt so as to purge his soul of these burdens, asking for God's mercy and forgiveness. In this way, Jerry tries to establish a kind of mutual understanding and contact with the other inhabitants in the zoo. Hence, Jerry's sacrificial act is a spiritual necessity, an act of redemption. Gilbert Debusscher observes that Jerry's death is:

An escape from an unbearable world and a hellish life, a capitulation to the interior contradictions which tear him apart. His last words do not express the Jubilation of a victor but the humble thanks of a wounded animal put out of its misery at last (١٢-١٣).

Like any other really great play, The Zoo Story is inherently moral, dealing with the human values of compassion and care for others. Amacher has aptly and revealingly commented that:

The Zoo Story stands up as a tragedy in the Greek manner: Its plot hangs together well in terms of its cause – effect sequence of episodes or main parts, and it contains a reversal and more than one discovery. (๑๓)

The Zoo Story has as its main theme, that of lack of communication and absurdity of modern living with its materialistic values and worship of worldly gains. We may quote Bigsby again, "it is a play which combines a critique of American values with an acknowledgement of the fragility of language, but which does so in the context of that drive for communication which Albee sees as central to a reconstruction of the moral world" (1984, 209)

CONCLUSION

Albee is mainly a moralistic playwright. That is to say, through the medium of his plays he hopes to influence people to change their attitudes and behaviour in life. In some of Albee's plays, one finds one person or more arrive at the home or territory of someone else with one or another of the parties. The contingent confrontation between the two parties enables both of them to examine their values , review their past lives , and serve as a therapeutic session that helps to purge and exorcise them from the false illusions and spiritual aridity from which they suffer . In *The Zoo Story*, Jerry arrives at central Park and fights Peter for the bench. Jerry dies but Peter becomes a newly born man.

Albee's *The Zoo Story* is centered on social alienation and emotional detachment that lead the play's protagonist, Jerry, to end his life. Jerry behaves like a caged animal. He feels that the world has nothing to do with him. That is why, he keeps talking and asking questions in an attempt of his own to capture others'

focus. Being self-alienated and detached from others, Jerry wants to give voice to the people of his own dilemma.

Edward Albee's *The Zoo story* is a drama about human beings who are alienated creatures, dehumanized by the gross materialism of a world that does not care for feelings and emotions. Here one has to find some meaning of life through death. It is only through death Jerry hopes to get identity for his nameless existence.

Through the objective examination of Albee's drama as a whole, one has come to the conclusion that Albee is primarily the poet of human anguish. Actually, he has addressed that heart-rendering sense of agony which, it is suggested, results from a deep sense of self-imposed alienation from oneself as well as from the others on the one hand and fear of confronting the reality and the truth on the other hand. This sense of agony pervades almost all of Albee's plays. In his unravelling of this sort of human

anguish, Albee is intent on cleansing his people from their illusions and false dreams.

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