

Illusion and Reality in Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story*

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Received 28 March 2015; accepted 14 May 2015
Published online 26 June 2015

Abstract

Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story* is about the interaction between its two main characters Peter and Jerry dramatizing the former's disillusionment in the hands of the latter; Jerry's speech and action aim at shattering Peter's obsession with material things, his easy justification for stability, and his reluctance to understand the alienation at the core of his life. Jerry's success in changing Peter comes at the cost of his life; however, there are interesting techniques deployed by him in order to convert Peter from an incommunicative person to someone who finally understands the value of human connection. Concentration on the conflicts between the two characters, detecting the causes of their alienation, and finally analyzing the techniques that Jerry employs to convert Peter, are the main issues discussed in this study with the hope to enlighten the hidden corners and revealing the implied meanings of a play which is quite rich in its symbolic suggestiveness.

Key words: Albee; Alienation; Communication; Illusion; Reality

Aliakbari Harehdasht, H., Hajjari, L., & Sheikhi Shahidzadeh, Z. (2015). Illusion and Reality in Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story*. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 10(6), 15-21. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/view/7182>
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/7182>

INTRODUCTION

Edward Albee's ability to dramatically present states of illusion and truth is one of his many strong points

through which he lays emphasis on what is destructive. He provides us with an idea which haunts most of his early works: The choice between illusion and a life built on false opinion and reality and honest thinking. *The Zoo Story* is one of his best plays that demonstrate the dichotomy between illusion and reality. It is about the interaction between its two main characters Peter and Jerry dramatizing the former's disillusionment in the hands of the latter. The disillusionment comes at a price; Jerry has to play the role of a savior, a Christ figure (however sentimental or un-Absurdist it would sound (see Bennett, 1977, pp.55-56); he sacrifices himself to save humanity, represented by Peter.

A. Peter's Eluding Personality

Albee (1963), in an interview with Digby Diehl, asserts that "People would rather sleep their way through life than stay awake for it" (p.62). Throughout the play, and except for the last part, Peter stands for the people who would rather sleep. He is an upper middle class publishing executive reading a book on a bench in New York City's Central Park where he goes on Sunday afternoons without the members of his family—a wife and two daughters. He is neither good-looking nor uncomely; he has a home, two parakeets, two cats, and two televisions. Jill R. Deans (1999) states that Peter's secure family is "complete with wife, two daughters, two cats and two parakeets (each pair suitable for framing)" (p.68). Nonetheless, Peter's representative family "is as or even more dangerous than individual alienation because it serves to mask alienation without remedying it" (Deans, p.68). If Peter enthusiastically longs to know about what happened at the zoo throughout the play, it is because Jerry has referred to it uninterruptedly. Besides, since Peter needs a means of avoiding the truth, the *zoo story* could work as a deviation and escape from the stark reality of his life. He desires to build a world of illusion which furnishes an escape from his personal insufficiencies. Rose A. Zimbaro (1962)

declares, "Once engaged in conversation, [Peter] tries to avoid talking about any subject that has real relevance, anything that has roots penetrating the carefully prepared mask which he presents to the world, and even to himself" (p.11). Carol A. Sykes (1973) emphasizes the importance of the "stage directions" showing that Peter "resists communication with others, or at any rate, with Jerry" (p.449). When Jerry asks Peter if he minds having a small talk, Peter answers: "[*Obviously minding*] why . . . no, no" (Albee, 1959, p.2). He seems to give up his doubt only when Jerry insists on his minding the conversation.

JERRY: Yes you do; you do.

PETER: [*Puts his book down, his pipe out and away, smiling*]

No, I really; I don't mind.

JERRY: Yes you do.

PETER: [*Finally decided*] No; I don't mind at all, really. (Albee, 1959, p.3)

James L. Roberts (1979) declares, "In Edward Albee's plays, each character is existing in his own private ego" (11). Gabriel Miller (1986) confirms, "Isolated from their environments, their families and themselves, [Edward Albee's characters] prefer to live in a vacuum so sterile that nothing can touch them" (p.149). Peter is annoyed at Jerry's wonder whether or not having no more children is a decision made by his wife since he does not like anyone to intrude into his private life or in fact into his private illusion.

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

JERRY: The way you cross your legs, perhaps; something in the voice. Or maybe I'm just guessing. Is it your wife?

PETER: [*Furious*] That's none of your business! [*A silence.*] Do you understand? [*JERRY nods. PETER is quiet now.*] Well, you're right. We'll have no more children. (Albee, 1959, p.5)

Peter's passive acceptance of Jerry's opinion is very interesting which foreshadows his final conversion to Jerry's desired type of communicative person. Jerry's unremitting questioning and Peter's listless replies prove Peter's potentiality to change and eventually make him a proper candidate for whom Jerry will perform his final sacrificial action.

B. Illusion's Unlimited Territory

Illusion is the only means by which the characters find some kind of satisfaction in life and existence. It is pleasing and vivifying. It creates hypnotic or even orgasmic pleasure. That is why addiction to it is very hard to cure. Those who are possessed by the illusion, they are surely alienated, incommunicative with others and the world.

Sweet as it tastes the need for fancy or illusion is not just limited to Peter; other characters also show some sort of addiction or liking to/for it. As an instance, we can refer to Jerry's lying to the land lady. He could find a way to make the landlady leave by making her think that they had

sex in the previous days, saying: "Love, wasn't yesterday enough for you, and the day before? Then she puzzles, she makes slits of her tiny eyes, she... thinks about yesterday and the day before; as she believes and relives what never happened..." (Albee, 1959, pp.8-9). Carol A. Sykes (1973) affirms, "That she believes this ploy and is appeased by it suggests 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 perverted-can be satisfied by a delusion" (p.449).

Even Jerry who is a tramp, an outcast who lives alone, regularly goes through the pain in his communication with others. Jerry explains that he lives alone in a small room on the top of the floor of a rooming-house on the upper West Side where all of his neighbors are isolated from each other. Jill R. Deans (1999) asserts, "To ease his sense of alienation, Jerry attempts to escape from the zoo-like boardinghouse to explore Peter's stable, middle-class model family..." (Albee, 1959, p.68). Jerry explains that his neighbors are a colored queen indulging in plucking his eyebrows, an entertaining Puerto Rican family, a lady who always cries and other people whom Jerry doesn't see at all. Peter tells Jerry, "It doesn't sound like a very nice place ... where you live"; Jerry agrees, but he makes Peter understand that he has nothing to make room for them: "Well, no; it isn't an apartment in the East Seventies. But, then again, I don't have one wife, two daughters, two cats and two parakeets. What I do have, I have toilet articles, a few clothes..." (Albee, 1959, pp.5-6). Jerry's "two empty picture frames" signal his alienation (Albee, 1959, p.6). He doesn't have pictures of any person to place in them. He speaks about his lusty mother and his alcoholic father who are not alive. His aunt is also gone: "She dropped dead on the stairs to her apartment, my apartment then, too, on the afternoon of my high school graduation..." (Albee, 1959, pp.6-7).

Jerry has no feelings about his family members any longer. He didn't live a normal life as a homosexual in his teens, and now he is not capable of falling in love with "the pretty little ladies" whom he never sees "more than once" (Albee, 1959, p.7). Jill R. Deans (1999) argues, the absence of "love— from parents or romantic partners" reinforces "the presence of his loss" representing Jerry's "alienation" (p.67). Thus, Jerry seeks a replacement for his losses, he seeks a remedy. The people around him are incommunicative. He finds no one to share his feelings with. He cannot even have sex with or make love to one person more than once.

JERRY: No. I wonder if it's sad that I never see the little ladies more than once. I've never been able to have sex with, or, how is it put? ... make love to anybody more than once. Once; that's it ... Oh, wait; for a week and a half, when I was fifteen ... and I hang my head in shame that puberty was late ... I was a h-o-m-o-s-e-x-u-a-l. I mean, I was queer ... [*Very fast*] ... queer, queer, queer ... with bells ringing, banners snapping in the wind. And

for those eleven days, I met at least twice a day with the park superintendent's son ... a Greek boy, whose birthday was the same as mine, except he was a year older. I think I was very much in love ... maybe just with sex. But that was the jazz of a very special hotel, wasn't it? And now; oh, do I love the little ladies; really, I love them. For about an hour. (Albee, 1959, p.10)

Jerry being the elder of the two foreshadows Peter's future. He worries that Peter might turn into someone like him. He knows that nothing finally saves people from the horrific loneliness in society; neither parents, nor neighbors, relatives, nor friends. All relations are doomed and will last "for about an hour." Love is even short-lived and ephemeral. What should one do in this situation? Which one will remedy: illusion or reality?

C. The Impossible Communication

The Zoo Story portrays the confrontation of Peter and Jerry who belong to different classes of American society. Some critics including Peter Wolfe (1965) believe that the class barrier prevents Peter and Jerry from the "development of a true personal relationship marked by mutual respect and dignity" (p.250). As Carolyn E. Johnson (1968) argues, "[Peter and Jerry] do not say what they actually mean or are thinking" (p.22). Jerry is class conscious and his question about the "dividing line between upper middle-middle-class and lower-upper-middle class" perplexes Peter (p.4). Cynthia Thomiszer (1982) explains that Jerry asks many questions in order to "arrive at a truth" about Peter's life (56) whereas Ruth Meyer (1968) believes that "what is truth for one may seem illusion to the other" (p.69), hence the impossibility of true connection and/or understanding. Jerry sits on the bench very much late in the course of their conversation; he is fascinated to know Peter's reaction towards his monologue, but Peter doesn't find it interesting: "I DON'T WANT TO HEAR ANY MORE. I don't understand you, or your landlady, or her dog...." (Albee, 1959, p.14). Edward Albee and Thomas P. Adler (1973) assert that Peter and Jerry fail to get into contact and Jerry is the one who "gives more than he receives" (p.70). Peter's reaction is devoid of any sign of sympathizing with Jerry's ideas. Miller (1986) suggests, "For Albee, the need for recognition of the human communion of pain and suffering is absolute" (p.150). Jerry tries to understand the reasons behind Peter's behavior as he asserts: "Of course you don't understand. [*In a monotone, wearily*] I don't live on your block; I'm not married to two parakeets, or whatever your set-up is. I am a permanent transient..." (Albee, 1959, p.14). In other words, Jerry suggests that people like Peter are confined in their own private worlds like animals in a zoo, and are "separated by bars from everyone else..." (Albee, 1959, p.16); the only way one gets through to them is by means of intruding their cage and making them aware of their false beliefs. According to Peter Wolfe, the class barrier leads to a breakdown in communication between Peter and Jerry (p.250).

1. JERRY'S NEED FOR COMMUNICATION

It appears that Jerry tired of the hypnotic incommunicativeness of illusion or fancy, opts for reality instead of illusion or fancy. Paul Witherington (1970) confirms that "the experience with Peter is that last step for Jerry (p.161). Although Jerry is as alienated as Peter, he tries to become more communicative. Since he has realized that true communication is of vital importance to the survival of love and humanity, he tries to find some ways of making contact with people like Peter who escape from the realization of this need. Carolyn E. Johnson (1968) argues, "[people] must have someone with whom they make contact, with whom they can talk and be understood" (p.23). She affirms, "If people do not make contact with someone, they resort to various per-versions trying to find something with which to identify" (p.23). Jerry expresses the grief he feels over his need— communication: "It's just that if you can't deal with people, you have to make a start somewhere. WITH ANIMALS! [*Much faster now, and like a conspirator.*] Don't you see? A person has to have some way of dealing with SOMETHING. If not with people ... SOMETHING..." (Albee, 1959, p.13); he also says hopelessly, "We neither love nor hurt because we do not try to reach each other" (Albee, 1959, p.14). Thus, Jerry initiates the conversation by repeating "I've been to the zoo" several times (Albee, 1959, p.1). He is a conversation starter. He shows an overwhelming desire to communicate: "Every once in a while I like to talk to somebody, really talk..." (Albee, 1959, p.3). He constantly asks questions about the right direction although Peter wants to get back to his reading all the time. Jerry heads in the direction of the zoo purposefully since he appreciates the significance of confronting the reality of his life. He says, "Do you know what I did before I went to the zoo today? I walked all the way up Fifth Avenue from Washington Square; all the way" (Albee, 1959, p.5). His departure from the zoo and his arrival in the park shows his willingness to find a person with whom he can truly share his feelings. As Carol A. Sykes (1973) affirms, Jerry persists in "knowing the truth" and "facing it squarely" (p.455).

2. JERRY'S STORIES AS REMEDY

Whether Jerry has a pre-thought plan or not is not known, but he has decided to change Peter. This makes Jerry a good candidate as the *authorial* voice, the voice of Edward Albee, the writer of the play who uses fiction to change both characters and the audience. As Robert S. Wallace (1973) emphasizes,

Albee's attack on fiction as a substitute for life is developed throughout *The Zoo Story* in such a way that the audience will come to understand not only Peter's dependence on fiction but its own as well. Albee has acknowledged that it is 'one of the

responsibilities of playwrights to show people how they are and what their time is like in the hope that perhaps they'll change it.' (p.50)

Besides establishing a sort of intimacy in order to make Peter feel at ease, Jerry uses his life story, his experience of visiting the zoo (*The Zoo Story*), and the story of the land lady's dog as his narratives of healing. He uses stories, (the title name, *The Zoo Story* only being the prominent one) to emphasize the fictional character of Peter's life and/or of all life. One cannot know in what kind of story he/she is in unless there is someone who can read it to them.

Jerry's stories attract Peter into the hypnotic realm of fiction which in itself is a means of deviation and illusion. However, Jerry uses it in order to match its content with the content of Peter's life and eventually awaken him to the fictional (illusive) nature of it. Lisa M. Siefker Bailey (2005) emphasizes the importance of "Jerry's attempts at storytelling": "If Jerry's story can somehow become real in another's mind, Jerry can help end the alienation" (p.34). In order to change Peter, Jerry uses fiction as a cure as if he were an audience sitting in the theatre.

2.1 Questions and the Conflicts of Perception

Before everything, he has to prepare Peter for his stories. He makes Peter feel quite comfortable establishing some kind of virtual intimacy asking questions about Peter's job, marital status, his children, and even his income. His questions gradually point to the conflicting forces in Peter's life; his tone becomes teasing or edgy in order to make a sort of theatrical alienation effect as one sees in the epic drama of Brecht. These questions gradually aim at undermining Peter's sense of secure self-indulgence and at commencing the conflict of the plot of the story.

JERRY: And you have a wife.

PETER: [*Bewildered by the seeming lack of communication*] Yes!

JERRY: And you have children.

PETER: Yes; two.

JERRY: Boys?

PETER: No, girls ... both girls.

JERRY: But you wanted boys.

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

JERRY: [*Lightly mocking*] But that's the way the cookie crumbles?

PETER: [*Annoyed*] I wasn't going to say that. (Albee, 1959, 4)

JERRY: Do they carry disease? The birds.

PETER: I don't believe so.

JERRY: That's too bad. If they did you could set them loose in the house and the cats could eat them and die, maybe. [*PETER look blank for a moment, then laughs.*] And what else? What do you do to support your enormous household? (Albee, 1959, p.6)

Peter's replies are all marked by some kind of reluctance and doubt. Unlike Peter, however, Jerry is quite determined and talks about his private life easily in order to prepare Peter for more important stories. He constantly reminds Peter of appreciating the value of making contact. He describes the landlady clearly: "The landlady is a fat, ugly, mean, stupid, unwashed, misanthropic, cheap,

drunken bag of garbage..." (Albee, 1959, p.8). It is hard for Peter to believe that people like Jerry's neighbors exist since he doesn't lead an undisciplined life: "It's so ... unthinkable. I find it hard to believe that people such as that really are" (Albee, 1959, p.9). Richard Hornby (1994) suggests that Jerry has planned to "intimidate or shock" Peter by telling his stories (p.109). The stage directions indicate that Jerry aims at beginning a conversation with the intention of affecting Peter:

PETER. [*Laughing faintly*] You're ... 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.

PETER. [*Irritably*] I know that.

JERRY. You do? Good. [*The following long speech, it seems to me, should be done with a great deal of action, to achieve a hypnotic effect on Peter... the director and the actor playing*

JERRY might best work it out for themselves.] (Albee, 1959, p.9)

2.2. Jerry's Own (Zoo) Story

Jerry now and then becomes autobiographical telling Peter where he lived or who he met, what directions he took in order to get there, etc., all with utmost details:

JERRY: What were you trying to do? Make sense out of things? Bring order? The old pigeonhole bit? Well, that's easy; I'll tell you. I live in a four-storey brownstone roominghouse on the upper West Side between Columbus Avenue and Central Park West. I live on the top floor; rear; west. It's a laughably small room, and one of my walls is made of beaverboard; this beaverboard separates my room from another laughably small room, so I assume that the two rooms were once one room, a small room, but not necessarily laughable. The room beyond my beaver board wall is occupied by a coloured queen who always keeps his door open; well, not always but always when he's plucking his eyebrows, which he does with Buddhist concentration. This coloured queen has rotten teeth, which is rare, and he has a Japanese kimono, which is also pretty rare; and he wears this kimono to and from the john in the hall, which is pretty frequent. I mean, he goes to the john a lot. He never bothers me, and never brings anyone up to his room. All he does is pluck his eyebrows, wear his kimono and go to the john. Now, the two front rooms on my floor are a little larger, I guess; but they're pretty small, too. There's a Puerto Rican family in one of them, a husband, a wife, and some kids; I don't know how many. These people entertain a lot. And in the other front room, there's somebody living there, but I don't know who it is. I've never seen who it is. Never. Never ever. (Albee, 1959, pp.8-9)

The long first person narrative should be quite difficult for an actor to utter; it must even be more difficult for the partner on the stage to listen to all of it. The same is true for the audience. However, the story is so interesting that you can enjoy that famous willing suspension of disbelief and follow every word uttered by Jerry, the story teller. This and other stories told by Jerry about his life are the means by which he can shatter the unreal image at the center of Peter's life.

2.3 The Land Lady's Zoo: The Parable of the Dog

Patrick O'Connor (1963) declares that "the heart of the play lies in the parable about the dog which the beatnik,

Jerry, relates” (p.524). Jerry’s story of the dog is of crucial importance because it has compelled him to go to the zoo and set off in a northerly direction until he meets Peter:

PETER: ALL RIGHT. [As if reading from a huge billboard]
THE STORY OF JERRY AND THE DOG! [Natural again]
What I am going to tell you has something to do with how
sometimes it’s necessary to go a long distance out of the way in
order to come back a short distance correctly.... (Albee, 1959, p.9)

Carolyn E. Johnson (1968) declares, “The experiences [Jerry] relates about the dog only indicate the distance one will go to satisfy a need, to make contact” (p.22). Jerry expresses his disappointment at communicating with people: “animals are indifferent to me . . . like people [*He smiles slightly*] . . . most of the time” (Albee, 1959, p.10). Jerry was hopeful of communicating with the dog which caught one of his legs every time he entered the rooming-house. At first, he decided to treat the dog with kindness by giving good hamburgers, but it was not effective. He changed his mind and gave poisonous one. The next day, the landlady blamed Jerry for the dog’s sickness. Jerry honestly told her that he had no intention of killing the dog; he wanted the dog to survive. Jerry faces opposition from Peter who is not capable of understanding Jerry’s growing need for seeing the dog’s new reaction in the entrance hall: “Please understand, Peter; that sort of thing is important. You must believe me; it is important. We have to know the effect of our actions. [*Another deep sigh*]” (Albee, 1959, p.12).

Jerry says what he has learnt from his interaction with the dog, “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” (Albee, 1959, p.14). When Jerry and the dog saw each other once again, they paused and passed each other securely indicating an understanding which is hard to concede. Jerry tells Peter about his new encounter with the dog surviving the illness: “Now, here is what I had wanted to happen: I loved the dog now, and I wanted him to love me. I had tried to love, and I had tried to kill, and both had been unsuccessful by themselves” (Albee, 1959, p.13). Unfortunately, Jerry has gained “solitary free passage” in his encounter with the dog (Albee, 1959, 14). According to Carol A. Sykes, Jerry “recognizes that ‘what is gained is loss’ for the dog’s initial hostility has been replaced by indifference, and hostility is preferable for at least it indicates that two beings are in some kind of contact with each other” (p.449). C. W. E. Bigsby (1938) affirms that “the teaching emotion, as Jerry had insisted in *The Zoo Story*... opens the heart to truth” (p.233). Although Jerry couldn’t get the dog’s friendship, he hopes that he can persuade Peter into understanding the insufficiencies of his life through his tactic of kindness. C. W. E. Bigsby (1938) states that the lesson that Peter must learn from Jerry is that “the immunity from experience which he imagined to be a necessary protection was in

fact a self-imposed imprisonment; that a life lived without pain is a life without consciousness” (p.129).

2.4. (Jerry’s) Action Speaks Louder Than Words

When all his other techniques fail, Jerry thinks of action instead of words; fiction fails him. Jerry tickles Peter in order to make him stay longer, but it doesn’t work. Peter goes on escaping from reality of his existence by insisting on going home: “[as *JERRY tickles*] Oh, hee, hee, hee. I must go. I ... hee, hee, hee. After all, stop, stop, hee, hee, hee, after all, the parakeets will be getting dinner ready soon...” (Albee, 1959, p.15). Bigsby asserts that Jerry uses this tactic in order to make a communication which is a “parody of contact” (as cited in Carol A. Sykes, 1973, p.450). This tactic of kindness has momentarily helped Peter to be aware of his illusion concerning a life in which the “bars” are used to conceal his isolation shared with Jerry: “Yes. Yes, by all means; tell me what happened at the zoo. Oh, my. I don’t know what happened to me” (Albee, 1959, p.16). Jerry’s tactic is not helpful enough in order to coerce Peter into understanding that he is responsible for providing what Jerry needs. As Gabriel Miller (1986) declares, no “life’s possibilities” can stir up Peter (p.154). He is the type of a person who is in the habit of spending his Sunday afternoons alone, so he resents any instability in his normal life style: “I wasn’t expecting anybody” (Albee, 1959, p.15). Nonetheless, Jerry feels that he has to destroy Peter’s illusion by using violent action. He explains to Peter why he visited the zoo:

JERRY. ... 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’s the way it is. [*He pokes Peter on the arm.*] Move over.

PETER. [*Friendly*] I’m sorry, haven’t you enough room? [*He shifts a little.*] (Albee, 1959, p.16)

Edward Albee and Thomas P. Adler (1973) assert that “if love does fail then one must be willing to hurt the other person in order to reach him” (p.67). Jerry converts his tickling into rigidity in the hope of true communication making Peter feel offended. He thrusts and kicks Peter roughly in order to make him change his position on the bench. Jerry asks Peter to sit on another bench if he wants to know about the remainder of the story. Peter does not give the bench to Jerry because the park is seldom visited by people who want to occupy his bench: “[*flustered*] But ... whatever for? What is the matter with you? Besides, I see no reason why I should give up this bench. I sit on this bench almost every Sunday afternoon, in good weather. It’s secluded here; there’s never anyone sitting here...” (Albee, 1959, p.16). The bench signifies Peter’s solitariness that Jerry likes to demolish.

Jerry attempts to awaken Peter from his dependence on material things to teach him the destructiveness of his illusions. Rose A. Zimbardo (1962) asserts, “The ‘bars’

which separate Peter from his own nature and from other people are the material goods and the prefabricated ideas with which he surrounds himself" (p.11). Peter does not let Jerry have the bench and he tries to justify himself: "[*Quivering*] I've come here for years; I have hours of great pleasure, great satisfaction, right here. And that's important to a man.... This is my bench, and you have no right to take it away from me" (Albee, 1959, p.18). Jerry questions the absurdity of Peter's search that delves deeply into such small things: "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? ..." (Albee, 1959, p.18). Jerry calls Peter, who is entangled in illusions, mentally impotent and a "vegetable" (p.18). Carolyn E. Johnson (1968) acknowledges, "[Peter] has found comfort and security in the everyday things that do not need explaining, so much so that he cannot bear the thought of losing one" (p.23). Jerry feels scorn for Peter's indifference: "This is probably the first time in your life you've had anything more trying to face than changing your cats' toilet box. Stupid! Don't you have any idea, not even the slightest, what other people need?" (Albee, 1959, p.18). Peter Wolfe (1965) suggests, "[Jerry's] collision with Peter represents a strenuous re-enactment of his earlier failure with the dog" (p.251). Neither did tickleg nor rigidity have any effects on Peter.

Jerry has reached a critical point in his encounter with Peter where he feels that he cannot take anymore. He has reached a point in his encounter with Peter when he feels that he must sacrifice himself as the last alternative through which he can make Peter shed his bourgeois self-indulgence and experience some kind of communication. As Lee Baxandall (1965) asserts, "Jerry, weary of the indecisive encounters with Peter, decides to once upon an indelible communication" (p.28). He invites Peter to defend himself in order to obtain the bench. Jerry throws Peter a knife so that he will fight. Jerry does not give up questioning the illusions encompassing Peter's life. Rose A. Zimbardo (1962) asserts, "In forcing Peter to fight for the park bench, Jerry is once again challenging Peter's attachment to material things that are in themselves without value to him" (p.13):

JERRY. There you go. Pick it up. You have the knife and we'll be more evenly matched.

PETER. [*Horrified*] No! [JERRY rushes over to Peter, grabs him by the collar; PETER rises; their faces almost touch.]

JERRY. Now you pick up that knife and you fight with me. You fight for your self-respect; you fight for that goddamned bench (Albee, 1959, p.19)

Very frightened, Peter grabs the knife to defend himself, he tells: "I'll give you one last chance; get out of here and leave me alone! [*He holds the knife with a firm arm, but far in front of him, not to attack, but to defend*]" (Albee, 1959, p.19). Jerry, who is wearied of the lack of

communication, holds Peter pitifully and thrusts himself upon the knife in Peter's hand. Being mortally wounded, he is pleased and thanks Peter who has not abandoned him: "Thank you, Peter... You don't know how afraid I was you'd go away and leave me" (Albee, 1959, p.20). Annette J. Saddik (2007) asserts that Peter "thanks [Jerry] for that one bizarre and ironic moment of human connection" (p.55). Everything has gone according to what Jerry planned 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 ..." (Albee, 1959, p.20). Jerry believes that Peter has changed: "[*most faintly, now; he is very near death*] 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..." (Albee, 1959, p.20). Peter will no longer see life with the destructive illusion that the world is as stable as he had thought it was. According to Lee Baxandall (1965), the word "dispossessed" indicates that Peter has been "robbed of certitude about his way of life" (p.29).

CONCLUSION

Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story* dramatizes the states of illusion and reality emphasizing what is destructive to human life. It demonstrates the conflicting attitudes of the two main characters, Peter and Jerry, who despite their conversations are unable to mentally and emotionally connect. The conflict reaches its climactic point when Jerry sacrifices himself to change Peter into a more communicative, and understanding person, one who is able to feel the alienation hidden behind the masks of a wife, two daughters, two parakeets, and an elegant job. Peter finally rids himself of the illusions of his bourgeois self-indulgence in the hands of Jerry. In other words, Jerry's stories and actions aim at shattering his indulgence in material things, his easy justification for stability, and his reluctance to recognize the alienation at the core of his life.

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