


**Twentieth Century American Drama**  
**Prof. Merin Simi Raj**  
**Department of Humanities and Social Sciences**  
**Indian Institute of Technology, Madras**

**Lecture - 38**  
**Albee's *The Zoo Story***  
**Part 4**

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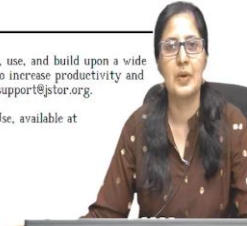
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Symbolism and Naturalism in Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story*  
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This NPTEL lecture is to have a more comprehensive and particular understanding of Edward Albee's play *The Zoo Story*. We will also look at this essay which talks about the elements of symbolism and naturalism in the play.

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## SYMBOLISM AND NATURALISM IN EDWARD ALBEE'S *THE ZOO STORY*



ROSE A. ZIMBARDO

The acclaim, both popular and critical, which has greeted Albee's *The Zoo Story* leads one to speculate upon the direction American drama is likely to take in the future. Concern with idea, rather than character or plot, is not new in the American theatre, nor is the use of symbolism for the realization of idea. There is, however, about American plays which employ symbolism—from O'Neill to Williams—a strong suggestion of the gimmick. Because American playwrights have been self-conscious in employing symbols, their symbolism is almost always embarrassingly obvious. It calls attention to itself and exists as a kind of scaffolding which the audience feels the playwright should either have built

his theme. Somewhat startling is the realization that Albee's are traditional Christian symbols which, despite their modern dress, retain their original significance—or, more precisely, express their original significance in modern terms. The relationship between traditional symbol and naturalistic dialogue, situation and setting is, however, never forced, as it so often is in, say, a Williams play. Rather symbolism is part of the very fabric of the play functioning within, as well as enlarging, its surface meaning. On the simplest level *The Zoo Story* is concerned with human isolation. The world is a zoo "with everyone separated by bars from everyone else, the animals for the most part from each other, and



As we discussed, the American Drama in the Twentieth Century began experimenting with various features including naturalism and symbolism and those were all very neatly fitted within the realist genre with the realist technique of the storytelling.

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ing which the audience feels the playwright should either have built over or removed. For example, O'Neill's symbolic drama, which has, of course, shaped all later American drama, directs attention toward the symbol as symbol rather than upon a whole dramatic structure within which symbolism operates. The audience must identify the symbols and their equivalents to work out the play's meaning. Symbol and meaning are, therefore, external to the play's design. *Mourning Becomes Electra* provides an excellent example.

What marks *The Zoo Story* as a new development of our drama is the way in which Albee blends symbolism with naturalism to realize

everyone else, the animals for the most part from each other, and always the people from the animals" (49); that is, men are not only separated from each other, but from their own basic animal natures (as Peter, one of "the people" is, until the end of the play, separated from his own animal nature).

The play opens upon Peter, who is seated on a bench in the park. As Albee tells us in his description of the dramatis personae, Peter is "neither fat nor gaunt, neither handsome nor homely." He is, in fact, in no way distinctive. Peter is the modern version, in middle-class stereotype, of Everyman. He reads the "right" books, lives on the



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This is an essay by Zimbaro which begins by arguing that some of those elements look very forced particularly in the early plays, but however, their self-consciousness seems to be disappearing when it comes to Edward Albee's play. He is also seen as the finest, this play is also seen as one of the finest American plays where the naturalism the symbolist

elements have come to coexist. As per the critical opinion this is also a play which fits in perfectly with the absurdist tradition of which dominated the European theatre as well.

We find that the level of symbolism or the elements of symbolism they act at various levels, given that this is a one act play and that most of these most of the play is also about the dialogue and the symbols which emerge through words there is a way in which this blending of symbolism and naturalism it gives a lot to the theme as well because there are very few actions in terms of movement.

It all happens in one single setting, but the play takes us back and forth through the many memories of Jerry, particularly when he is talking about his family and certain episodes in his life the one that features the dog. Before we get into those details, we find that from the title *The Zoo* itself emerges as a very symbolic element, a symbolic site.

Some of the aspects of the play in which this essay also neatly foregrounds and also the objective behind looking at this essay is also to get used to a certain critical way in which a critical vocabulary with which we could begin to look at these plays and to be familiar with the organization of these different themes and the organization of arguments within the structure of an academic paper.

Here, it says on the simplest level *The Zoo Story* is concerned with human isolation, and this is something which is very evident from the outset of the play and in every single strand of conversation that we identify between Jerry and Peter. There is a world of isolation and both of them inhabit in two different ways one more visible, one is more vocal and one is the isolation in one is of a more tragic nature than the other.

But, at the heart of it, one could say that it is entirely about human isolation within the social setting, socio political and cultural setting of 1950's America. The world itself is seen as a zoo to quote from the play itself with everyone separated by bars from everyone else the animals for the most part from each other and always the people from the animals. The zoo symbol is used particularly for this compartmentalization. It is seemingly one single space the zoo one single site.

But, the compartmentalization operates at different layers within which happens the social stratification that divides the class divide, the economic divide and the worlds of the difference of value system which separates Jerry's world from that of Peter's. Men

are not only separated from each other, but from their own basic animal nature as Peter, one of the people is until at the end of the play separated from his own animal nature.

So, this segregation, just the way we will find it in a physical site of the zoo. It is quite evident in the interplay of these two characters when they encounter. We find that the division is between not just between these two individuals and the worlds that they inhabit, but in the case of Peter particularly there is a world within, there is a divided life within him there is a divided world within him, which he is a part of. He always engages through in terms of denial, there is an animal instinct, there is a world which wants to open up and be free like Jerry.

But, who is acutely isolated just like Jerry, but there is a certain surface, a very superficial protective seemingly protective layer under which he is burying everything. The play opens up on Peter who is seated on a bench in the park as Albee tells us in his description. Both of these people even Peter he is not a distinctive sort of a gentleman. He is not an overachiever he is not a super achiever in that economic setting. He is just like the protagonist in the other plays.

He is a modern man, he is a middle class stereotype. He is the symbol of someone who is doing well for himself, for his family and who is also working towards the prosperity of the nation and that is in that process getting prosperous himself too who is thriving under these new economic and socio-political conditions.

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"right" side of the park, has the average number of children, and the "right" Madison Avenue job. His is the New Yorker ad life to which most middle-class citizens, consciously or unconsciously, aspire. He blends perfectly into the brightly-packaged emptiness of the modern landscape. The "bars" which separate Peter from his own nature and from other people are the material goods and the pre-fabricated ideas with which he surrounds himself. He has himself carefully constructed his isolation. Peter would prefer not to talk with Jerry but is too polite and too afraid of anyone's bad opinion, even Jerry's, to ignore him. Once engaged in conversation, he 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. When Jerry, trying to establish some real contact with Peter, questions him about his having more children, he withdraws from the conversation, furious that

own physicality, is furious and frightened that a stranger should try to expose it.

Although Peter, in spite of himself, becomes interested in Jerry's confessions, he is embarrassed by Jerry's candor. He would much prefer to steer the conversation to the safe, if shallow, waters of conventional small talk. He tries to restrict himself to talk about the weather or books. And the only time during the conversation that he feels comfortable, indeed expansive, is when he launches into a "canned" evaluation of the comparative merits of Marquand and Baudelaire, which Jerry, to his dismay, cuts short and dismisses as pretentious. Jerry disturbs Peter because he cannot easily be fit into any of Peter's neatly labelled pigeonholes.

Peter--Oh, you live in the Village (this seems to enlighten Peter)

Jerry--No, I don't . . .

Peter--(almost pouting) Oh, I thought you lived in the Village.



He is also someone who reads the right kind of books and has the right kind of literary and aesthetic taste, and his family is a perfection about him which is almost unreal when we contrast it with that of Jerry. So, he has the right kind of job, the right number of kids the average number as this writer also puts it and he is a New Yorker.

There is a way in which he blends into that modern landscape. That is where, it is a bench in the central park in New York City where he spends his Sunday afternoon. It almost looks like a routine which is true very soon we will get to play when we make further progress with the play. He has himself carefully constructed his isolation. His isolation, there is another difference between the character of Peter and Jerry.

Jerry's isolation seems to be forced by many conditions and situations over which he has absolutely no control. But, there is something very constructed, very artificial about the isolation that Peter finds himself in. It is not a condition into which he is thrown into it there is a process involved in it. He is it is part and parcel of the world that he inhabits the political world, the social world, the material world, his professional world.

It is part and parcel of the world that he inhabits in order to position himself in the right way just the way he positions himself in the right side of the bench and has the right kind of preferences and right makes the right kind of decisions. This is also a carefully constructed choice unlike Jerry who seemed to have received no agency in terms of exercising his choice, , right from his childhood.

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from the conversation, furious that Jerry might have spotted a chink in his armor.  
 Jerry—And you're not going to have any more kids, are you?  
 Peter—(a bit distantly) No. No more. (Then back and irksome) Why did you say that? How would you know 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. Do you understand? (18)  
 Peter, who hardly acknowledges his village.  
 Jerry—What were you trying to do? Make sense out of things, bring order? The old pigeonhole bit? (25)  
 Peter, then, is self-isolated. His life of things and prejudices protects him from himself and from the world. While it provides no gut-pleasures, neither does it allow for gut-pain. Peter's is a kind of middle-class stoicism. But while genuine stoicism raises a man above pleasure and pain, this middle-class variety protects by anesthetizing him in the commonplace.  
 While Peter is one of the "people" who is separated from the animal in himself and others, Jerry is



Peter would prefer not to talk with Jerry, but he is too polite and too afraid of anyone's bad opinion even Jerry's to ignore him. That also comes in a certain say moral compass which is always at work even when there is no decision to be made. Peter comes across as that middle class typical individual who does not know confrontational in the least, who does not want to be in the bad books of anyone even if it is a random person like Jerry who is imposing who is literally imposing himself upon Peter.

He does not want to annoy him, he does not want to come across as someone who is not polite. Once engaged in conversation he also tries to have a very superficial, very artificial conversation, but with Jerry that is entirely not possible. So, the reason is that Peter in fact, is hiding his personality maybe inadvertently not just to the world, but also to himself.

There is a large part of himself which he covers up quite succinctly, quite carefully in a manicured way with these various choices that he has made. The system the structure which he inhabits, the structure from which he draws his privileges also becomes this protective layer which does not allow him, where it is easier for him not to expose himself.

Jerry on the other hand, does not have that covering; that is the only thing perhaps separates the one from the other. So, when Jerry is asking certain questions which are evidently uncomfortable, initially Peter tries to withdraw from the conversation especially we may recall this instance where they are having this conversation about kids.

“Jerry beginning with this very provocative statement, almost an impolite to say in a company like that you are not going to have any more kids, are you? And, he becomes furious. Peter in that sense he hardly acknowledges his own physicality and he becomes furious this defensive nature is out of fear that a stranger might expose him.”

Because deep inside he has been longing for one son and this again we can find these threads connecting with some aspects of the earlier plays to where the typical American adult, the American male wants to have this father-son relationship which could be situated within the larger ambit of the American dream where together they pursue this and make things comfortable and secure for the family as well as for the nation.

So, in some such obscure abstract way, we find Peter also longing for a son, but that is not something that he would want to admit to himself. Although Peter in spite of himself becomes interested in Jerry's confessions, he is embarrassed by Jerry's candor. So, it is a mixture of feelings. He is embarrassed when Jerry reveals certain things. So, this is how the propriety within society is operating.

One is not always embarrassed by the things that happens to oneself but, also about the things that one encounters. The embarrassment which operates in this sense is also emerging out of the larger value system which by and large has validated and legitimized certain kinds of behavior and certain kinds of manifestations more than the other.

Peter is very clear, it is very clear that Peter throughout the play he prefers to have a shallow conversation, does not want to go deep. But, the kind of intimate private details that Jerry ends up revealing and the prejudices the stereotypes that are within Peter they also come out as and when Jerry is revealing things one after the other.

So, this and Peter's isolation comes to light only when the conversation proceeds in such way because in a superficial setting there is this facade that he can always use. There is this he can always escape to these little zones of comfort the prominent zones of comfort that he has built for himself.

Peter, then is self-isolated. His life of things and prejudices protects him from himself and from the world. While it provides no gut-pleasures, neither does it allow for gut-pain. So, this is also another thing in a very bodily thing a sense a very sense oriented thing which separates Jerry and Peter.

Peter's is a kind of middle-class stoicism. But while genuine stoicism raises a man above pleasure and pain, this middle-class variety protects by anesthetizing him in the common-place. He is immune to everything there is a numbness, and this is not the kind of numbness which liberates him. It is a kind not some kind of immunity which liberates him, but it is something which suffocates him which leaves him isolated, suffocated, which leaves him in this box like life where he cannot articulate his real self.

We have discussed Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, for instance. We find that he there he is unable to he thinks he wants to be a salesman, but there are also other things that he longs to do in life, but there are certain choices that he makes out of which he

cannot come out there and he has to employ this stoic approach to life which he thinks will eventually give him a formula towards success.

While Peter is one of the people who separated from the animal and himself and others, here as we can see the human and the animal are used in a very metaphorical sense. The human as something which is covered by nurture, which is not entirely natural, but the animal within him as this raw natural instinct.

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an animal (he knows his own nature) who fights separation from the other animals. In part his isolation is forced upon him. But in large measure it grows out of his need for truth. He is determined to discover the essential nature of the human condition. Therefore, he strips himself of goods, things, obvious relationships. He has a strong box without a lock, picture frames without pictures, and pornographic playing cards that remind him of the difference between love and sexual need. Deprived of the usual family relationships, he refuses either to sentimentalize them or to console himself for what he is with comforting justifications built upon memories of an unhappy childhood.

The same urge for truth that enables Jerry to know himself makes communication between him and the other animals almost impossible, for the truth about human relationships that Jerry recognizes is that men are islands irrevocably

siders the park bench which he has appropriated his. Both Peter and the dog are willing to fight to the death any invader of their territories.

We cannot buy love or understanding, nor can we establish real contact by any easy means. Jerry bribes the dog with hamburgers but this gains him only the tactical advantage of a few extra minutes to race up the stairs before the dog attacks him.

Poor bastard, he never learned that the moment he took to smile before he went for me gave me time enough to get out of range. But there he was, malevolence with an erection waiting. (19)

The dog reflects with deadly accuracy all of the qualities which Jerry finds in the animals of his own species (his parents, for instance, or the landlady): hatred, lust, smiling exploitation, and treachery. Jerry and the dog stand in antithetical relation to one another. They are a pair of armed enemies sizing each other up, wait-



Jerry is an animal. Jerry is what he or what is what makes Jerry very distinctive in the park and in that entire setting is how about how comfortable he is with his natural self. He is marginalized in so many different ways from his childhood not just in terms of the family setting the economic social setting.

But, also in terms of his body, in terms of his sexuality he is clearly marginalized, but he is able to acknowledge and he is not in denial of that, and which is why there is a separation. He fights separation from the other animals. So, part of his isolation is forced upon him and he has absolutely no choice of it, but he is also determined to discover the essential nature of human condition.

That is very evident the set of objects that he has as his possessions they are flawed in some sense they are incomplete in some sense, they are useless in some sense, but they are also they also they could be presented as many metaphors which and lead to his life.



Deprived of the usual family of relationships he refuses either to sentimentalize them or to console himself for what he is with comforting justifications built upon memories of an unhappy childhood. So, that is another thing that we noticed over here that he refuses to sentimentalize any of these tragedies. He has come to terms with it, looks at them in a very matter of fact way does not makes an active effort to not let them affect him in any way, but we also find that he is craving for some human contact he is deprived of human contact partly it is imposed upon him the isolation is largely imposed upon him, but he also wants to come out of it.

It is not like the careful manicured constructed kind of isolation within which Peter seems to be comfortable until this moment of exposition comes his way quite unexpectedly.

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is that men are islands irrevocably cut off from one another. Contact is from time to time made, but always with great pain and difficulty and never with any assurance that it can be sustained. Jerry tells Peter what he has learned about human relations in his tale of Jerry and The Dog.

Being cut off from one another, we fear, and fearing, we hate with an unreasoning hatred any creature who threatens to invade that little area of the world that provides us with security. The dog attacks Jerry only when Jerry tries to enter the house, "whenever I came in; but never when I went out. . . . I could pack up and live in the street for all the dog cared." (37) The dog considers the house his domain just as Peter, later in the play, con-

enemies sizing each other up, waiting to spring or to outmaneuver one another. There is a perfect model of most human relationships, as Jerry sees them. Any superficial attempt at conciliation merely lulls for a moment the enmity which is caused by their isolation and fear.

To establish contact one must reach below the surface to the level of pain and pleasure, to the animal core. "I have learned," Jerry says, "that neither kindness or cruelty, 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." One must reach into the realm where emotions themselves are not sharply differentiated. But, as Jerry explains, even the flash of understand-



Jerry at some level is also aware of this fact that there is an impossibility of communication there. It is just like again zoo analogy fits in quite well there is an impossibility of communication and one when one attempts to have a communication it might lead to chaos and violence which is what happens at the end at the end of the play too.

The little tale in between about Jerry and the dog that is how its relevance could be situated as well. "He tells the story that Jerry tells the story about this dog who always attacks him, tries to attack him when he tries to enter the house whenever I came in, but

never when I went out.” It is only when this the space of the animal the pet dog is intruded into it tries to attack.

He is trying to blend these elements of symbolism into these natural aspects, by trying to identify human nature with that of animal nature. He is coming up with these symbols the play is coming up with these symbols to make sense of this world, make sense of this new economy which has produced new set of relationships which has produced a new set of arrangement within which people like Jerry are outliers who are left out whose lives end up in such tragedies.

This essay tries to analyze this situation this tale that Jerry is narrating between the encounter that he has with the dog. The dog considers the house his domain, just as Peter later in the play considers a park bench which he has appropriated as his both Peter and the dog are willing to fight to the death any invader of their territories. This is a different kind of reading altogether that the play is offering to us.

Here, Peter middle-class, successful, sophisticated gentleman and the dog who has very territorial about the space that he occupies, they are equated, and who gets it is not even about what is overtly seen as nature. It is about something deeply inherent, this territoriality this instinct to protect ones territory that is what is dominating Peter’s life, Peter’s actions we can find over here.

In some sense, Jerry seems to be left out of all of these worlds because he has no territory to claim to, there is no moral territory, there is no economic territory, there is no ideological, political or a territory value system that he can claim or appropriate there seems to be no space real or metaphorical, that he can claim that he can appropriate as his.

On the other hand, a person like Peter even if it is a park bench, his social standing, the way in which he is placed within these social conditions that allows him to appropriate that. There is a sense of ownership. He can stake his claims over that space, that territoriality is something that comes naturally to him. But, here in even in any whichever way one looks at it if we see a person like Peter and Jerry in such in this public space that park bench.

We can easily say who belongs there and who is an intruder, which is why right from the beginning even in our vocabulary, even in the terms in which we were trying to situate the play we were always seeing Peter as someone who belonged there. That has been his routine and he has been using the bench and it is his Sunday afternoon, it is his time, his leisure being spent and it becomes his space and his territory too.

Jerry by default is the one who is intruding into that space, into that physical space, into his mental space, into his privacy, asking about details why he himself has undergone he himself has been living this territorialist life this spaceless life in some sense since his childhood.

He also recalls in this tale with the dog that how he learnt to manipulate the dog, but that is not something that he has been successful using with people unfortunately. So, Jerry bribes the dog with hamburgers, but this gains him only the tactical advantage of a few extra minutes to raise up the stairs before the dog attacks him just keep the momentary keep the dog momentarily occupied just so he can cross over.

The precarious nature of this existence is something he cannot even remotely try out with the other humans with whom he come to contact with they do not even have with at least what the play is also trying to tell us is that with the dog at least there is an engagement, but with another fellow human even that engagement which is of violent in nature, it is not there.

So, maybe that is what forced him to such an ending to at the end of this play where even if it is violent in nature, even it is tragic in nature, he is craving for human contact something which something which can result from one human being engaging with another human being even if there is nothing romantic or nice about it.

Because so far if we look back at his life based on what he recollects and shares with Peter and the readers, we get to know that there is hardly anything over there which could be romanticized, relationships in terms of the natural relationships and the relationships that he has to have tries to have outside of his family everything is more or less a failure and nothing really comes to fruition. The empty photo frame is a very powerful metaphor a very powerful symbol in that sense.

So, in Jerry and the dog there is an antithetical position that one can identify, and they are they could be seen as a pair of armed enemies sizing of each other waiting to spring on or to outmaneuver one another. This is a perfect model of most human relationships as Jerry sees them which is why he particularly thinks about telling that tale from his eventful life.

There is another contrast that one could see over here in terms of his material possessions, his life seems to be cluttered, but very limited. There are these empty and useless things flawed things, very limited, things that he could perhaps just put in one bag and walk away, but in terms of when you look back at his life, . It is so eventful the kind of tragedies that has befallen him is in an epic scale compared to the neat the neatness which it is so very evident in Peter's life.

This takes us to this the next question where Jerry seems to be have seems to have been thinking about some way to establish contact with another person because towards the end of the play he also he leaves his truth is this he throws this open ended question.

In this, we can find a lot of insight in what he shares halfway through the play right after he tells in detail this his tale between his encounter with the dog. Neither kindness or cruelty, independent of each other creates any effect beyond themselves; and have learned that the two combined, together, at the same time are the teaching emotion. One must reach into the realm where emotions themselves are not sharply differentiated.

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ing that can result from such a contact gives no assurance that the contact can endure for more than an instant. "And what is gained is loss. And what has been the result; 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." Jerry applies the knowledge he has gained from his contact with the dog in trying to establish contact with Peter. Realizing that Peter cannot be drawn out of his tough shell with talk, that words when they do penetrate Peter's surface, merely cause him to throw up further barriers to contact, Jerry tries to touch Peter beneath this consciously preserved surface. He begins by tickling Peter. Tickling, being a pleasure-pain experience, perfectly implements Jerry's theory that the teaching emotion involves cruelty and kindness combined. It must perforce elicit a primitive, animal response. The effect upon Peter of the tickling is startling and

watches him with a curious, fixed smile.) Peter goes on laughing and Jerry reminds him that something has happened at the zoo about which Peter is curious. Peter—Ah ha, ha, the what? Oh, yes, the zoo. Well, I had my own zoo there for a moment with . . . hee, hee, the parakeets getting dinner ready. . . . Oh my, I don't know what happened to me. (48) The teaching, pleasure-pain emotion has enabled Peter to see clearly for a brief moment the emptiness of his life, a life in which cats, children, wife, and parakeets are interchangeable because they are all merely props whose function it is to disguise nothingness and isolation. After he has established this first contact, which is comparable to the contact he had achieved with the dog in that its purpose was to enlighten, Jerry goads Peter into a



But, as Jerry explains even the flash of understanding that can result from such a contact gives no assurance that the contact can endure for more than an instant Jerry's words and what is gained is loss. The dog that have been attained as a compromise more of a bargain we neither love nor hurt each other because we do not try to reach each other. That sort of symbolizes, that sort of perfectly sums up the kind of relationship that different people from across these social strata have with each other.

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Using a pleasure-pain experience, perfectly implements Jerry's theory that the teaching emotion involves cruelty and kindness combined. It must perforce elicit a primitive, animal response. The effect upon Peter of the tickling is startling and immediate. It enables him, for the first time, to relax his grip upon the shield that his "perfect" life provides.

Peter—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. And the cats are setting the table. Stop, stop . . . and we're having . . .

(Jerry stops tickling Peter but the combination of the tickling and his own mad whimsy has Peter laughing almost hysterically. As his laughter continues, then subsides, Jerry

is to disguise loneliness and isolation. After he has established this first contact, which is comparable to the contact he had achieved with the dog in that its purpose was to enlighten, Jerry goads Peter into a fight. 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. Peter responds to the invasion of his "property" with the same ferocity that the dog has shown. Peter is again forced by Jerry to respond at the animal level, like a savage fighting for a bone. Finally, Jerry makes Peter kill him. Peter, we assume, can never again exist on the surface level, can never again avoid contact with himself. And Jerry has at last established a contact that must endure, for Peter will never be able to forget a man he has killed.

It is within the naturalism that



There is something very unusual which happens over here, Jerry tries to tickle Peter realizing that he cannot be drawn out of his shell he is it is a carefully constructed shell which is also grown onto him which has become perhaps part of his body itself over the last many years. Jerry begins by tickling Peter. This is something which is considered entirely inappropriate within the social within the norms of social propriety.

Tickling, he begins by tickling Peter tickling being a pleasure pain experience, perfectly implements Jerry's theory that the teaching emotion involves cruelty and kindness combined. It must perforce elicit a primitive, animal response the effect upon Peter of the tickling is startling and immediate it enables him for the first time to relax his grip upon the shield that his perfect life provides.

He begins to loosen up with some contact. We find that more than Jerry perhaps Peter had also been longing for this kind of a contact which will help him come break out of his shell something that the society that he is part of cannot provide something the

society that he is part of cannot reach out to him such ways if we could take a look at this incident from the play which you must be familiar with too.

“Oh hee, hee, hee. I must go. After all, stop, stop, after all the parakeets will be getting dinner ready soon. And the cats are setting the table. Stop and we are having. Jerry stops tickling Peter but the combination of the tickling and his own mad whimsy has Peter laughing almost hysterically. As his laughter continues, then subsides, Jerry watches him with a curious fixed smile. Peter goes on laughing and Jerry reminds him that something has happened at the zoo about which Peter is curious.

Well, I had my own zoo there for a moment with. Oh my, I do not know what happened to me.” This is the teaching moment. It is very liberating for Peter and he is also able to see the emptiness of his life. He is going back to the cats, the children, wife, parakeets and they are all like they are mere props he realizes the way he is talking about it the that sentence he is getting tickled and he has no grip over himself.

Dinner is getting ready soon, the parakeets will be getting ready soon, and cats are setting up the table. These figures in his life the human and the pet figures in his life they are all interchangeable really does not make a difference and there are mere props whose function as this essay also elicits to disguise nothingness and isolation.

So, it is difficult to say whose tragedy is worse. One is more visible, one is more tangible, the other is very carefully protected and one could perhaps live an entire lifetime without ever getting into touch with that reality.

But, living this hollow life which does not which is very deeply engraved in this isolation.

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God who is a colored queen who wears a kimono and plucks his eyebrows, who is a woman who cries with determination behind her closed door . . . with God, who I'm told, turned his back on the whole thing some time ago. . . .” And there is Peter, St. Peter, an average worldling who is stripped by the irresistible Jerry or his material goods and led toward a revelation of truth. So carefully constructed and maintained is the symbolic pattern that it skirts being allegory. What preserves it as symbol is that its function in the naturalistic design of the play is never lost. Let us examine the symbolic pattern more closely and observe its relation to the pattern of meaning we have discussed.

Jerry, when we meet him, has lived for a short time in a rooming house on the West Side. The inhabitants of the rooming house are a Negro homosexual, a Puerto Rican family, and a woman who cries incessantly. They are, in effect, the outcasts, the doomed, the “least of these.” The gate keepers

is an unmistakable allusion to the myth in which Theseus throws drugged honey-cakes to Cerebus to gain entrance to the Underworld. The West Side rooming house, then, is Hell and Jerry's adventures with the dog symbolize the mythical hero's or God's descent into Hell. We see here Albee's method of symbolism. He chooses old symbols, that carry with them a wealth of meaning but that yet do no violence to the naturalistic surface of his play.

To go on to the identification of Jerry as Jesus—when the landlady asks him to pray for her sick dog, Jerry replies, “Madam, I have myself to pray for, the colored queen, the Puerto Rican family, the person whom I have never seen, the woman who cries behind the closed door, and the rest of the people in all the rooming houses everywhere.” This modernized Messiah first identifies himself with the outcasts and the afflicted and then assumes responsibility for them.

From time to time Albee gives the audience broad clues to his



This essay picks up these various instances from the text and teaches us how to read it critically we will skip to this session where it talks about where Jerry is being identified as Jesus and look at that brief exchange between the landlady and Jerry.

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ing house on the West Side. The inhabitants of the rooming house are a Negro homosexual, a Puerto Rican family, and a woman who cries incessantly. They are, in effect, the outcasts, the doomed, the “least of these.” The gate keepers (the word is Jerry's) of the rooming house are a foul woman and a dog, “a black monster of a beast: an oversized head, tiny, tiny ears and eyes. . . . The dog is black, all black except for the bloodshot eyes.” (36) The description immediately identifies the dog as Cerebus, the monster, all black with flaming eyes, who guards Hell. The drunken, lewd woman whose affection for the dog is almost ma-

all the rooming houses everywhere.” This modernized Messiah first identifies himself with the outcasts and the afflicted and then assumes responsibility for them.

From time to time Albee gives the audience broad clues to his symbolic equivalents so that his meaning cannot be mistaken. For example, when Jerry is revealing to Peter the nature of the human condition by means of the parable of the dog (for that, indeed, is what the Tale of Jerry and the Dog is, a parable), he uses, in broad parody, a Biblical locution, “And it came to pass that the beast was deathly ill.”<sup>4</sup> Or again, after Jerry-Jesus has harrowed Hell (that is,



“Land lady asked him to pray for the sick dog. Jerry replies, Madam, I have myself to pray for, the colored queen, the Puerto Rican family, the person whom I have never seen, the woman who cries behind the closed door, and the rest of the people in all the rooming houses everywhere.” So, here, he comes across as this modern Messiah, who

takes responsibility for all these other characters who are equally isolated like him, who are in an equally tragic condition such as his own.

He refuses to engage with the landlady when land lady requests him to pray for the sick dog he takes upon this larger responsibility like a modern Messiah and makes it very clear what his priorities are. So, this also helps us to see Jerry in a different light altogether. The kind of accountability that he seems to be having for his fellow humans which is something clearly missing in a person.

This is the kind of prioritizing, this is the kind of response perhaps someone like Peter cannot even think of cannot even comprehend. This essay also encourages us to extend this biblical allegory this these biblical symbols and to see where this takes us. So, here if we are looking at the Tale of Jerry and the Dog as a parable, and it makes a lot of sense in terms of the moral that he is trying to convey in terms of the situations that he is trying to explicate.

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gained entrance into the rooming house and assumed responsibility for its inmates) and is ready for the job of salvation, he must come to Peter by a very curious route.

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

The journey downtown and up, at the end of which lies the salvation of a man is, of course, Christ's descent into Hell and Resurrection which are necessary before the Redemption can begin.

Peter refuses Jerry-Jesus' message when it appears in the parable of the dog. He first deliberately resists understanding, then he pretends that he has not understood, and finally he covers his ears to escape the truth that has been revealed to him.

Jerry—Oh, come on now, Peter, tell me what you think.  
Peter—(numb) I . . . I don't un-

simplest terms. But, like the Gospels, it is rejected by Everyman who pretends not to understand, who pleads confusion, and who finally flees from the responsibility that understanding would demand. Jerry's truth cannot be conveyed in words.

In tickling Peter and causing him for a second to lose his grip, to penetrate the falsity of his life, Jerry is, in effect, symbolically stripping Peter of his worldly goods and causing him to "follow" him. Once Peter has, even whimsically, questioned the "happiness" of having the right life, the right family, the right pets, he has taken the first steps toward his salvation. He has taken the first step in a journey that will lead him to the realization of what it is like to be essentially human and to be an outcast. Finally, realizing the futility of trying to reach Peter with words, realizing too the fragility of the vision of truth that has flashed before Peter's mind during the tickling, Jerry dies for Peter. He dies to give Peter's soul from death



His act of taking the subway to the village so that he could walk all the way up The Fifth Avenue to the zoo despite the Sisyphean nature of it what one could also see is this journey the journey that Christ took, the journey downtown and up, at the end of which lies the salvation of a man, Christ's descent into Hell and Resurrection which are necessary before the redemption can begin.



Here, Jerry who assumes the persona of a modern Messiah in terms of locating his priorities in terms of preparing himself before the final redemption.

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Jerry—(Numb) I . . . I don't understand what . . . I don't think I . . . (Now almost tearfully) Why did you tell me all of this?  
Peter—(numb) I . . . I don't understand what . . . I don't think I . . . (Now almost tearfully) Why did you tell me all of this?  
Jerry—Why not?  
Peter—I DON'T UNDERSTAND.  
Jerry—(Furious, but whispering) That's a lie.  
Peter—No, no, it's not.  
Jerry—(Quietly) I tried to explain to you as I went along. I went slowly; it all has to do with—  
Peter—I DON'T WANT TO HEAR ANY MORE. (44, 45)  
Jerry's parable, like the Gospels, is spoken slowly and framed in the simplest terms.

more Peter's mind during the tickling, Jerry dies for Peter. He dies to save Peter's soul from death by spiritual starvation. Peter will be forced by Jerry's death to know himself and to feel kinship with the outcasts for whom Jerry has prayed.  
In the dialogue of the death scene Albee again makes his allusions very broad. In the instant before Jerry decides to impale himself upon the knife there is a suggestion of his momentary indecision, followed by acceptance of his fate which he declares in a spoken resolution.  
Peter—I'll give you one last chance to get out of here and leave me alone.  
(He holds the knife with a firm hand but far in



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This is sacrilegious to a person like Peter, he does not engage with that at all. When Jerry is persisting him. “Peter tell me what you think. I do not understand what I do not think I why did you tell me all of this? He wants to be in denial he deliberately resists understanding and then he pretends that he has not understood it at all. Why not? I do not understand. That is a lie. No, no, it is not. I tried to explain to you as I went along. I went slowly; it all has nothing to do with. I do not want to hear any more.”

Jerry's parable, like the Gospels, is spoken slowly and framed in the simplest terms. But, like the Gospels, it is rejected by every man who pretends not to understand, who pleads confusion, and who finally, flees from the responsibility that understanding would demand. Jerry's truth cannot be conveyed in words.

It is just in very biblical terms again there are a series of teachings which is rejected by the every man in that situation, but eventually it leads to this action of redemption only through which people like Peter can perhaps escape from the self-isolation.

So, here the figure of Jerry becomes becoming the sacrificial figure that becomes more and more evident towards the end of the play. We find that Jerry tries his best to convey

through his words and he realizes that it is entirely lost on Peter maybe because of the different worlds that they inhabit and it leads to this inevitable ending.

Towards the end of the play we realize that Jerry is actually dies for Peter. So, the tragedy is more accentuated. There is a lot of tenderness in this story in some sense it is very violent, but it is also the tragedy is also very tender over here he try he dies to save Peters soul from dead by spiritual starvation.

It is very metaphorical over here and Jerry realizes that there is no way in which Peter could be woken out of his denial, woken up out of his denial or Peter could be made to come to begin to address his self isolation until and until something like this happens. Peter will be forced by Jerry's death to know himself and to feel kinship with the outcasts for whom Jerry has prayed.

This is the intention towards the end of the play to try and bridge this divide. While this bridging becomes almost impossible through words through the stories that they try to share and Jerry goes out of his way to share the intimate details share some intimate details a lot of metaphorical stories and what happened to his life and he craves for human contact that is one thing.

But, he also wants to bridge this divide that entirely falls flat and he is becomes a sacrificial lamb over there. Just so Peter would begin to identify with him Peter would begin to feel kinship with the likes of Jerry. So, there is a completion over here in terms of the prayer that he articulates that the kind of prayer that he says he would want to pray and this ending.

The dialogue of the death scene Albee makes his illusions very broad in the instant before Jerry decides to impale himself upon the knife. This is how this the death happens he is impaling himself upon knife that is there is absolutely no way in which Peter becomes a murderer over here there is death, but it is neither a suicide nor a murder, it is more like a sacrifice over here.

There is a suggestion of a momentary decision followed by acceptance and this he articulates well too. Peter says, "I will give you one last chance to get out of here and leave me alone."

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front of him, not to attack, but to defend.)  
Jerry— (Sighs heavily) So be it.  
(59)

This decision to accept death for man's salvation, with its air of the culmination of a foreordained pattern, is the modernized scene at Gethsemane. Again the somewhat archaic locution strengthens the allusion.

In the death scene itself the allusion is so broad that it becomes ironic. Peter's calling "Oh, my God" operates so well on both symbolic and naturalistic level that the one level becomes an ironic commentary upon the other. The words are, of course, the very words we feel we would utter were we caught in so horrible a situation, so that they are naturalistically "true" and yet, ironically, on the symbolic level it is God, the God he has slain, whom Peter is addressing.

gins to weep.) Oh my God, Oh my God.

Jerry— (His eyes still closed, he shakes his head and speaks: a combination of scornful and mimicry and supplication.) Oh . . . my . . . God. (62)

The allusion is perfectly sustained and in the mouth of a skillful actor Peter's repetition of the phrase contains infinite variety, expressing varying degrees of awareness. This Crucifixion scene is also underscored by Peter's betrayal when, taking his book and leaving the dying Jerry, he, in effect, denies that "he knows the man."

What Albee has written in *The Zoo Story* is a modern Morality play. The theme is the centuries old one of human isolation and salvation through sacrifice. Man in his natural state is alone, a prisoner of Self. If he succumbs to fear he enforces his isolation in denying it. Pretending that he is



He holds a knife with a firm hand, but far in front of him, not to attack, but to defend. So, what makes these tragedies are the fact that there are no bad people over here, the same implies in most of the other plays that we have read through as well.

There are no villainous figures over here. They are all victims of particular circumstances and the circumstances seem to be governed by a single overarching economic ambition. Jerry. So be it. This decision to accept death for man's salvation. This is also an essay which tries to see this the biblical image coming to life in these articulations.

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so that they are naturally "true" and yet, ironically, on the symbolic level it is God, the God he has slain, whom Peter is addressing.

Peter—Oh my God, Oh my God, Oh my God.

Jerry— (Jerry is dying, but now his expression seems to change. His features relax, and while his voice varies, sometimes wrenched with pain, for the most part, he seems removed from his dying.) Thank you, Peter, I mean that now; thank you very much. I came unto you and you have comforted me, dear Peter.

Peter— (Almost fainting) Oh my God.

Jerry—You'd better go now. Somebody might come by and you don't want to be here when anyone comes.

Peter— (Does not move, but be-

salvation through sacrifice. Man in his natural state is alone, a prisoner of Self. If he succumbs to fear he enforces his isolation in denying it. Pretending that he is not alone, he surrounds himself with things and ideas that bolster the barrier between himself and all other creatures. The good man first takes stock of himself. Once he has understood his condition, realized his animality and the limitations imposed upon him by Self, he is driven to prove his kinship with all other things and creatures, "with a bed, with a cockroach, with a mirror. . . ." (The progression that Jerry describes is Platonic.) In proving this kinship he is extending his boundaries, defying Self, proving his humanity, since the kinship of all nature can be recognized only by the animal who has within him a spark of divinity. He finds at last, if he has been completely truthful in his search, that the only way in which he can



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This is something just going through the final scene, where the Jerry's death happens. "Oh my God, Oh my God, Oh my God. Peter is completely terrified of what has happened."

Jerry is dying, but now his expression seems to change. His features relax, and while his voice varies, sometimes wrenched with pain, for the most part, he seems removed from his dying. "Thank you, Peter, I mean that now; I thank you very much. I come unto you and you have comforted me, dear Peter."

This is perhaps the only human being who had listened to his life story in these few we do not get a sense of the time which has passed during this their encounter. But in this Sunday afternoon during this encounter maybe it is for the first time that Jerry got a listener who could listen to the where he would pour out the his life story from his childhood, what happened to his childhood till the recent incident with the dog.

It is to articulate his philosophical take on these different conditions, human behavior and how he identifies the human condition with the zoo. This is very fulfilling for him and this perhaps is an act of redemption which he does for himself and also for the likes of Peter.

"You would better go now somebody might come by and you do not want to be here when anyone comes Peter does not move, but he begins to weep. Jerry, his eyes still

closed he shakes his head and speaks; a combination of scornful and mimicry and supplication Oh my God.”

So, this is there is a repetition of the phrase over here and there is a kind of an awareness which is hopefully beginning to grow in Peter’s mind and there is a sense of peace which settles down on Jerry’s life too. And, here, if again and the essay is also bringing in another biblical allegory over here where Peter denies Jesus.

So, here in the same way he is forced to go away the modern Messianic figure of Jerry is forcing Peter to go away from the scene unless he gets implicated in the crime. So, what in some sense means possible to argue like this essay does that Albee has written a morality play over here in the 1950’s.

Through a morality play he is trying to critique the socio-economic conditions of those times how it is about human isolation and salvation through sacrifice. There is something very ancient about this theme and this is how the naturalist elements come into come in very handy while critiquing a very modern setting, a modern economic system, a modern social system.

This perhaps is only just one way with which we can look at this play this is again like most of the other plays that we have read through. These are the plays which would lend themselves to multiple approaches and we can come and critique them come and interpret them through various ways.

So, here the element of sacrifice the sacrificial element at the end of it makes this gives this play a very different flavor the end becomes it is neither death nor murder, it is not the dead here the death is neither suicide nor murder it becomes a sacrifice and it becomes a redemptive activity. It becomes a service that Jerry is offering to his fellow humans which includes, everyone in the zoo, everyone across these different social strata.

Zoo here becomes an entry point into this conversation, an entry point into this discussion. Zoo here becomes a metaphor which will help us open up the compartmentalized ways in which relationships and different social structures are kept in either in difference or in alignment with each other.