THE ZOO STORY

The root cause of man’s isolation and alienation lies in his avoidance to have real and meaningful communication with other individuals. This “turning off” as Albee calls it, is a deliberate attempt, an easy way out of the dilemma of making choices whether social and economic or political and aesthetic. Social and economic adjustments force him to repress his true emotions and the social face thus projected before the world is a façade behind which is hidden his true individuality. This is an escapist strategy which isolates and alienates man from self and society. In The Zoo Story Albee has tried to dramatize such uncommunicative people. Albee has used the metaphor of zoo to present a “horrifying image of society where furious activity serves only to mask an essential inertia and whose sociability conceals a fundamental isolation” (Mishra 28). He has equated the world with zoo where like animals, people are separated from each other due to communication gap, the illusions which surround them act as bars, the rooms they live in resemble zoo cages, and their animal instinct is suppressed beneath the illusion of civilization. Although some repression is thought to be a necessity of social life but when it grows in strength in the subconscious it so grips the personality of the individual that “when the moment comes when it must appear, it is more dangerous and more likely to overwhelm the rest of the personality” (Fordham 51). It can sometimes even lead to death, as in the case of Jerry.

Peter and Jerry meet in a central park. Both inhabit different worlds: Peter is an executive in a publishing house, wears fashionable clothes, smokes cigars and owns a house in high society lane; Jerry is carelessly dressed, lives in penury and stays in a rented rooming house along with many others. Peter’s world is safe and predictable while Jerry’s world is unpredictable and emotionally chaotic. This contrast is deliberately created to lend dramatic effect to the play. What is common in them is their solitariness- Peter being solitary despite being a family man; Jerry being solitary owing to circumstances. The encounter between them ends their solitariness as Jerry passes Peter the lesson learnt at the zoo that life lived without pain is a life without
consciousness. He ends his life while passing this awareness to reluctant Peter (who keeps avoiding listening to him). For Jerry, communication is the only channel through which he can pass on the lessons learnt through his own experiences to another individual.

As the play opens, Jerry is seen approaching Peter who is busy reading a book, sitting on the bench in the central park. Jerry’s visit to the zoo has aroused in him a great desire to have greater amalgamation with the outer world. He feels an irrepressible urge to communicate and so he forcibly draws Peter into conversation by declaring: I have been to the zoo (14). Peter is visibly irritated by this intrusion as he considers it an attack on his privacy.

Jerry : Do you mind if we talk?

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

Jerry : Yes, yes do, you do.

Peter : No really; I don't mind. (17)

Peter’s good manners restrain him but there is no restraining Jerry. He is bent on breaking the ice. Peter’s sitting alone on the bench is his way of escaping from the social pressures. He comes to park week after week because there is no one around: It’s secluded here; there is never anyone sitting here, so I have it all to myself (35). Both of them represent the two extremes of the social spectrum where contact is not possible because of apathy and indifference due to class divide. However, Jerry’s persistence makes Peter listen to him and he quizzes Peter about his family as he has an uncanny feeling that family man Peter is as lonely at heart as he is. Peter relates the basic facts about his family that he has two daughters and no son; that he and his wife are not going to have any more children. He also confides that he has a good job though it is not a dream job he craved for; that he lives in elegant East Seventies; that he has parakeets and cats. His haltering and uneasy answers to Jerry's queries point towards the fact that he fears saying anything that society may find unacceptable. Jerry's style is unconventional because he does not believe in societal norms. When Jerry prods him
further he admits his disillusionment with marriage. Jerry strips Peter of his defenses and we find that underneath calm and complacent exterior he hides an insecure and frustrated interior. He tries to escape this insecurity, frustration and anguish by burying himself into books which provide an intellectual escape from life-related worries. His having no son provides Jerry an opportunity to carry the conversation forward:

Jerry : But you wanted boys.

Peter : Well... naturally, everyman wants a son, but....

Jerry : (Lightly mocking): But that is the way cookie crumbles. (18)

When Jerry further probes him about the reason for not having a son he loses his cool and retorts furiously: … that is none of your business! Do you understand? (18). Peter’s façade of a calm and complacent man proves superficial when Jerry wants to have a peep into his personal life. His admission of his desire for a son brings about a sudden change in his attitude. He feels himself in danger of facing his real self. Peter has so alienated himself into his own world that his faltering replies to Jerry’s queries give the impression that he avoids saying anything unacceptable due to social inhibitions. For him societal approval means a lot than being his natural self. He avoids conversing with Jerry for fear of establishing a contact. His admitted reticence is a strategy to keep repressed instincts under control. Actually Peter is afraid that further questioning will unmask him and the pain of his unfulfilled dreams would be visible. Inability to produce a son casts doubts on man’s masculinity in the modern society. The pain of not being a son’s father alienates him from his family and he tries to find solace in the world of books. His reason for coming to the same park and to the same bench is his solitariness, which is, in fact, the symbol of his own isolation. C.W.E. Bigsby keeping Peter’s character in mind comments:

*Solitariness is not an inescapable aspect of the human condition, but a strategy whereby the individual attempts to escape the consequences of freedom. Peter’s actions are deliberately geared to escape from the world around him.* (18)
He is unable to find emotional support within family as the bond of love between husband and wife is missing. Perhaps for a conformist person like him, who measures his failure and success according to social conventions, marriage is considered an asset. The inability to produce a son becomes the major reason behind his cultivated isolation. It is, in fact, an attempt to keep himself away from the searching questions and pitying glances of his friends and relatives for whom his having no son makes him a culprit. So, his self-isolation is deliberately cultivated. He is content to be alone, away from the prying eyes of the society.

His persona represents a man who projects the acceptance of societal norms “His instinct has been to play safe and he has been conditioned to believe there is always safety in politeness” (Hayman 6). His alienation is his modus operandi to play safe from any danger of intimacy. After listening to Peter’s family history Jerry teases him: Why you have everything in the world you want. You have told me about your home and your family and your little zoo. (37). Presence of Jerry, a stranger, casts a disturbing effect on Peter. Peter’s hesitant and cautious approach is also perhaps due to the fact the Jerry has not used any conventional style of dialogue. It is unthinkable for him to believe that somebody can invade his privacy by asking questions about such a basic custom as marriage and its relevance. Jerry in fact wants to throw light on the fact that marriage as such does not satisfy the fantasies associated with it but acts as a substitute for the real. He refuses to acknowledge its sanctity and considers it a meaningless social custom. Peter, who identifies himself with the society, finds it hard to digest Jerry’s outburst.

But Jerry has a reason for saying so as he has seen the marriage of his parents turning into a fiasco; his mother walking out of it for another man and leaving his father all alone behind her. For him, marriage does not definitely mean the union of mind, body and soul of the individuals. But Peter being a conformist has never dared to think along these lines. He senses danger in pursuing dialogue with Jerry and so thwarts Jerry’s attempts at contact. Jerry in fact wants to draw Peter out of cultivated isolation and see the world around as a free human being. He wants to engage Peter on a deeper level and force him to look inside.
“Jerry differs from Peter and from us not in his complex human nature but in his particularly tragic experience and his plight sets in bold relief a universal human problem”. (Bennett 58)

Jerry draws parallel between Peter’s family members and his own inanimate possessions. Like Jerry’s empty picture frames Peter’s family too serves an equally vacuous purpose due to lack of personal rapport and emotional bonding among the members. Peter has merely fulfilled a social ritual without bothering about the real human touch or contact involved. Jerry defies this conventionality as it fails in providing a meaningful human contact. Peter’s inability to assert himself in small house-hold matters like cats and parakeets that he considers a nuisance leads to his aloneness and isolation. This isolation forces him to take shelter behind inertia. Anne Paolucci rightly captures the nature of Peter’s actions when she states that he “moves monotonously on the surface of life, pushed by a kind of inertia which is mistaken for intension”. (40). Peter’s isolated sitting on the bench during weekly sojourns is an attempt to probe his loneliness which brings him closer to his real self but he avoids going too deep so as not to lose his way back to escapism. Peter talks to Jerry not out of interest but out of courtesy as practiced in his world. His world is shown to be safe, comfortable well ordered but emotionally barren.

In his efforts to connect with Peter, Jerry reverses the roles to keep the conversation going and using Peter as a listener relates his own life-story. He discloses that he lives in a drab rooming house with strange inmates such as the coloured queen who wears a kimono and plucks her eyebrows; another mysterious woman who weeps behind closed doors; a land-lady resembling a bag of garbage, who remains busy making sexual advances towards him whenever he is available; and a dog who starts barking on seeing him. He is unmarried and among the articles he possesses are a few clothes, toilet articles, a knife and two forks, a cup and a saucer, a glass and three plates, eight books, two empty-picture frames, a pack of pornographic cards, a type-writer, a box without lock and some ‘please’ and ‘when’ letters. These possessions give the impression of a frustrated, lonely man belonging to the lower strata of society. This reversal of roles is Jerry's ploy to create communicative rapport with someone to break
the monotony of his life. When Peter demands an explanation for empty frames he tells about the death of his parents and the resultant emotional insecurity.

Peter : (Stares firmly at his shoes, then)

About those two empty frames?

Jerry : I don’t see why they need any explanation at all.

Isn’t it clear?

I don’t have pictures of anyone to put in them. (22)

He tells Peter that he lost his parents early in life at the age of 12, but before they left him an orphan he saw his mother committing adultery and his father bearing silently the stigma of a neglected husband. His (Jerry’s) aggressive manner and sexual inadequacy is the outcome of tension and anxiety he faced during this period. His confession of his homosexual relationship with the Park Superintendent’s son is a symbol of revolt against his father’s act of breaking the model of masculinity by letting go his mother unpunished. He has faced the transitional trauma of going through the adolescence period all alone with no one to support him or share his anxieties. As a result, he has turned into an isolated and alienated individual full of frustration and anguish. Emotionally haunted by his past Jerry struggles with self and tries to come out of the trauma by making efforts for real contact with someone. Failing in his efforts to establish a meaningful relationship with a human being he starts from the animals and hence the dog-story: Where better to make a beginning … than with A Dog. (30) Despite his troubled state of mind, he tries to come to terms with his alienated condition and also gains understanding that a meaningful relationship is needed to regain self-belief. The zoo, like life, confounds Jerry and his repeatedly telling Peter that he has been to the zoo highlights his disturbed state of mind. Jerry’s capacity for suffering has reached that point where life ceases to hold any meaning. Brian Way opines:

_The entire human condition for Jerry, is a zoo of people (and animals) forever separated by bars–Jerry of course seeks to break down the bars and cages which keep Peter, his family and those like him isolated in their own little zoos._ (44)
His visit to the zoo instead of providing answers to his life-related queries has actually added to his feeling of loneliness and increased his anguish manifold: 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. (34) Analyzing the reasons for his mental agony Ruby Chatterjee remarks:

As a social outcast Jerry has experienced the existentialist agony of total isolation and discovered the meaninglessness of concepts—such as ‘sense’ and ‘order’. To Jerry, both society and entire human condition are as frustrating as the image of zoo. (92)

Jerry’s poverty and his rooming house experience separate him from Peter. Jerry’s world is shown to be peopled by those who like him are living on the edge and making a struggle to survive. In Peter's ordered world Jerry's world is “disgusting and horrible”. Peter has never met anyone like Jerry before and so Jerry's furious talk elicit hesitant response from Peter. Jerry's speech and dialogues reveal the repressed power of unconscious. The only time Peter speaks with enthusiasm is when the question of his favourite writer crops up. He is wary at first but later on warmly declares: Baudelaire, of course …. (21). He enthusiastically explains that Baudelaire is better than Marquand because he “is by far the finer of the two”. (21). However, Peter avoids getting involved in an animated conversation with Jerry.

The social set up of both these characters is suggestive of their inherent attitudes. Peter's living in the affluent Fifth Avenue psychoanalytically speaking is symbolic of unconscious itself while rooming house is symbolic of psychic totality. “Jerry lives on the top floor, the place closest to the consciousness” (Anderson 99). In the course of the play Jerry confesses to Peter that he went to the zoo to find answers to some life-related questions which have been disturbing him. His visit to the zoo impresses upon him the meaninglessness of his existence and also delivers a strong message of a wasted life. After listening to his life story when Peter wants to know why
he is living among such strange and funny people, Jerry has no answer. This exposes the emptiness and aimlessness associated with his life.

Peter: Why... Why do you live there...?
Jerry: (From a distance again) I don’t know (22).

Jerry has never dared before to break away from his stereotyped and jarring routine so he can also be labelled as a conformist. Jerry calls himself a “permanent transient” – a man who lacks the sense of belonging to any place or person. He makes money with his body but does not involve himself with any lady. Conscious of his isolation and painfully aware of his inability to overcome it, Jerry remains incapable of loving anyone. His loneliness takes him to the zoo. In Jerry’s relation with the girls and Peter’s relationship with his wife, physical contact does not eliminate the bars of isolation. “As in Jerry's relationship with girls, and as in Peter's relationship with his wife, physical contact does not necessarily mean that the individuals are breaking through the bars to each other” (Hayman 12). Jerry has seen poverty and unhappy childhood and so he does not care about what society thinks of him. Jerry holds no illusions like Peter and so he openly criticizes such basic custom as marriage. The mention of pornographic playing cards during the conversation stresses the fact that marriage is no cure for loneliness. Jerry reveals the importance of cards to Peter like this: ...what I wanted to get at is the value difference between pornographic playing cards when you’re a kid and pornographic playing card when you’re older. It’s that when you are a kid you use the cards as a substitute for a real experience, and when you are older you use real experience as a substitute for fantasy (25). Fantasy and real experience tend to substitute each other in life and become the source of pleasure and pain. Jerry tells Peter how he handles his land-lady when she presses her body against him by offering her fantasy as a substitute for real experience: I merely say: ... but, love; wasn’t yesterday enough for you and the day before? ... A simple minded smile begins to form on her lips and she giggles and groans as she thinks about the yesterday and the day before; as she believes and relives what never happened. (26).
Peter, who is ignorant of uglier aspects of life, is shocked on hearing landlady’s sexual assaults on Jerry. To him, it seems a story straight out of books and not a real happening. Peter belongs to that cultural spectrum where genuine emotions hold no meaning so he does not want to listen to the ugly aspects of life. He is unable to understand the irrational, funny and unimaginable aspects of human existence:

Peter : That is disgusting that is horrible.

It’s so unthinkable. I find it hard to believe that people such as that really are.

Jerry : (Lightly Mocking) It’s for reading about isn’t it? (26)

Peter : Yes.

Jerry : And fact is better left to fiction. (26)

Peter’s lack of awareness of the world around him stands exposed here. Jerry's insistence to know everything about Peter pays off and Peter relevantly opens up and gets engaged in conversation. Jerry who represents the opposite to Peter has been himself awakened into realization by a dog that happened to be in the same building as he. Peter’s curiosity roused, he is all ears for the dog story. This dog lived in the same building as Jerry and bares his teeth at him whenever he enters the house. Jerry tries everything to be friends with him but nothing succeeds and he tries to kill him by offering him a poisonous hamburger. The dog survives but now, instead of snarling at him he ignores him. After recovering from sickness dog stops pouncing on him and just sits quietly staring at him. He allows Jerry to pass. Says Jerry: We regard each other with a mixture of sadness and suspicion, and then we feign indifference... we had made many attempts at contact, and we had failed. (31). He goes to the zoo only after his attempts to make contact at animal level fail. He goes there to find out how man and animals or man and man can have better contact and better communication. But zoo, by presenting the image of caged isolation, adds to his mental agony. His rooming house seems to resemble the image of a zoo. The dog-story leaves Peter hypnotized but he is unable to grasp the inherent message. However, this experiment makes Jerry wiser. He tells Peter:
… the Dog and I have attained a compromise; more of a bargain, really, we neither love nor hurt because we do not try to reach each other. (31)

This incident forces Jerry to think that in life “love-hate combination works better than separately as the anti-thesis between the two dissolves giving rise to a feeling of indifference” (Bennet 57). This experience makes him see relationship in life with everyone whether animals or men in new light: ... and I had tried to love and I had tried to kill, and both had been unsuccessful by themselves... (30). “These three attitude of love, hate and indifference provide the general framework of reference for the conflicting forces within Jerry himself and between Jerry and Peter” (Bennet 57).

The dog and Jerry encounter serves as a focal point of the play and it corresponds with the action that follows between Jerry and Peter. Jerry's encounter with the dog serves as a first step towards his search for meaningful relationships. This search then leads him to the zoo to find out how people exist with animals or animals live with animals and ultimately to park, where he meets Peter. The dog episode has made him conscious of the fact that “… sometimes a person has to go a long may to come back a short distance …” (27). Dog’s indifference produces a compelling desire in Jerry to win over dog’s love: “… I loved the dog now and I wanted him to love me ....” (30) Commenting on Jerry’s affinity for the dog, Anita Maria Stenz writes:

The product of a disastrous marriage and unhappy childhood, the victim of his parents’ vagaries and alcoholism, Jerry is not overburdened with a sense of his own worth... the man’s vulnerability and his affinity for the abused black monster of a dog that attacks him in the entrance hall where he lives hardly seem surprising. (Stenz 7)

His attempt to form a relationship with a dog having failed he yearns strongly for a meaningful relationship with another human being. “The Story of Jerry and the dog has become an analogue of Albee’s views of human relationships” (Hayman 6). His compromising attitude gained after the dog-encounter leads him to Peter who turns out to be a reticent person. As in the dog's case here too, Jerry's initial attempts for a
dialogue meet with resistance as Peter refuses to acknowledge anything that opposes his ‘orientation’. He thwarts Jerry's attempts to be personal with him. His responses are slow and hesitant. He breaks the ice only when Jerry passes a query about his favourite writer. As in the Dog–Jerry encounter the Peter–Jerry encounter is wrought with resistance as Peter is opposed to anything that goes against his orientation. Peter's comfortable life is in direct contrast to Jerry’s vacant life minus love and care of a family as he lost his parents early in life. Jerry comes across as a bitter, lonely and anguished man with a gaunt look on his face which points towards his being a social outcast. Peter comes across as a sophisticated, well-bred, successful and contented person from the upper crust of society fitting well into the emotional emptiness of modern social scenario. Jerry does not belong to any set of norms and declares himself free bird, forever shifting his priorities and caring two hoots for social principles. He holds no illusions about life. In contrast, Peter is bogged down by social conventions and illusions and hence is alienated and isolated self. An individual's transference from teenage to adulthood is marked by a sense of freedom and severing of ties. His separation from earlier phase generates a sense of loneliness. Instead of relating meaningfully to the outside world and enjoying his new found freedom and asserting his individuality he sometimes tries an escapist approach to life. Peter's relationship with society is achieved at the cost of his integrity and individuality. He evades conversation with Jerry lest his suppressed emotions find outlet and he may behave in a way unacceptable to society. Peter in his attempt to escape from feeling of isolation has developed a mutually beneficial relationship with society. In doing so, he has put his individuality in great peril.

Efforts made by Jerry to arouse Peter to re-evaluate his set ideology and search his conscious draw a blank at the initial stage but Jerry’s persistence pays when he tells Peter to vacate the bench. Peter gets violent and a bit aggressive and refuses to do so as bench is symbolic of the values he has come to identify with. It also signifies an attempt (though for a short span of time) to spend some time in natural surroundings and be himself, far from the madding crowds. But he dares not go any further to retain his sense of
false security. Anderson interprets this isolation as Peter's way of compromising between freedom and security:

...the bench symbolizes both his desire for autonomy and the crutch he clings to in his effort to go just so far but no further. Peter has been coming to his bench, as he says, “for years” (182), years in which he has maintained his habit of compromise between freedom and security (95).

His sojourn is indicative of an attempt to maintain both freedom and a cultivated sense of social security.

Jerry : Get off this bench, Peter.
Peter : People can’t have everything they want. You should know that; it’s a rule; People can have some of the things they want; but they can’t have everything.

Through a combination of kindness and cruelty Jerry makes Peter listen to him and is successful in leading him towards the desired end. But before taking the story to the end he longs to have real physical contact with him. He deliberately leads the conversation from discussion of literature and personal confession to the personal struggle for the bench. He is “intent on playing the game of territorial acquisitiveness. He wants to dispossess Peter of the bench” (Hayman 8). He tickles and shoves Jerry and asks him to move over. Peter complies not knowing what is in store. Jerry’s pinching his arm and ordering him to leave the bench makes him furious. Jerry’s wanting the bench for himself is a ploy to arouse Peter to look within and do some soul searching. Peter senses the danger of collapse of his value system and tries hard to thwart Jerry’s designs by angry rejoinders. Frightened and territorially threatened he cries quiveringly: I have come here for years. I have hours of great pleasure and satisfaction right here and that is important to a man. I’m grown up. This is my bench and you have no right to take it away from me. (37). Jerry deliberately slaps him and uses abusive language to incite his anger: You fight, you miserable bastard, fight for bench; fight for life; fight for your
manhood; you little vegetable. (38) Peter’s illusory complacency is broken and he is ready to go to any extreme to save his honour by keeping possession of the bench. Jerry succeeds to a limit to draw out Peter from his cocoon. Peter’s getting furious over the bench is the result of an awakening that he is being challenged in his territory – the Park where he comes to relax. The verbal fight that follows culminates in Jerry’s death. Enraged by Jerry’s behavior Peter picks up the knife thrown by Jerry and holds it in front of him, not to attack but to defend. He implores Jerry to go away:

Peter : I’ll give you one, last chance; get out of here and leave me alone!
Jerry : So... be it. (39)

Peter holds out the knife as a weapon of self-defense unaware of the vile designs of Jerry who suddenly rushes in and impales himself on the knife inviting death. The suddenness with which it all happens leaves Peter flabbergasted. Jerry stumbles back to the bench which Peter has vacated and sits there in agony facing him. Peter just manages to say: Oh! My God. Oh! My God. (39) Dying Jerry writhing in pain smiles: Thank you, Peter I mean that, now thank you very much. (39). His nervous reaction of picking a knife to send Jerry away is indicative of the fact that he has been shaken from complacency. Peter and Jerry achieve contact for a moment when Jerry impales himself on the knife. In his death Jerry has forced Peter to get self awareness of his being. Albert Camus calls it a “definitive awakening”. Dying Jerry passes an awareness of life to Peter. He becomes conscious of his own mortality by comprehending Jerry’s desperation and man’s vulnerability. Their common anguish at the tragic event becomes the point of contact. This action lends a tragic dimension to the story. Paradoxically, knife serves as a mode of making contact as well as severing contact from this world. The disparate worlds of Peter and Jerry are joined enigmatically by knife blade. Peter feels human pain for the first time when he howls: oh my God! There is shock, bewilderment and then realization of participation in the act of death. The act liberates Jerry from the impossible present and also confirms the presence of “teaching emotion”
he had discovered earlier. The play starting on a positive note ends tragically. Peter’s familiar but illusionary world crashes with a bang. Had Peter understood earlier what Jerry wanted to convey perhaps the tragedy would not have happened. Although Peter cannot be held accountable legally for Jerry’s death but spiritually and morally, the onus will always fall on him.

Jerry can also be considered accountable to some extent for his own death. His temperament, his attitude where accountability for actions holds no meaning, push him towards taking an easy way out-of ending life, instead of finding middle path of forging meaningful bond. Both Peter and Jerry become victims of a profound conflict propelled by their actions and this conflict generates a sense of deep isolation. Jerry’s longing for a meaningful contact forces him to seek the possession of a bench through an encounter with Peter. His primary intention from the beginning of the play has been to make “contact’ with another person. Peter has been shaken to the core. Jerry’s words “you won’t be coming back here any more, Peter you have been dispossessed” (39) leave an indelible mark on his psyche. Peter has really been dispossessed of his facade of isolated and alienated man. Hopefully, after some soul-searching he will strive to make a meaningful contact with the world around him and also with his immediate family. Commenting on the symbolism of the zoo and the bench in the play R.C. Sharma writes: The zoo and the bench are correlated to the human face signifying as it were the absurdity of all human identity. (428)

Peter will never be the same man again as he won’t be able to forget Jerry now. He made conformist choices before this soul-shaking episode and lived complacently but now, when he returns home, he will look at himself, his marriage, his family and world at large with new found consciousness as he has perceived the emptiness of his life. “Jerry’s death like the death of many tragic heroes in earlier plays-is an illustration of the impossibility of living in accordance with the values he represents” (Hayman 11). Jerry’s death relieves him of inner conflict and agony arising out of his isolation and alienation and acts as deliverance from his miserable conditions.

The zoo, a man-made natural habitat for animals, is constantly replayed. Although there are no animals on stage but they are constantly referred to in the
dialogues thereby, stressing the fact of their interchangeability. Jerry tells Peter that he is “an animal too” - Peter acts as a defensive animal and Jerry as an attacker. After impaling himself on knife he screams like a fatally- wounded animal. There are no fangs or claws but words which are used as weapons. The zoo bars are broken only when the act of death happens. In his death, Jerry forces an action upon Peter that he would never have made himself. Peter’s inability to exert his right of choice has led him to a stage where he becomes instrumental in Jerry’s death. He had the choice to walk away when Jerry wanted to engage him in conversation; he could have left when Jerry stated: You don’t have to listen. Nobody is holding you here; remember that in your mind. (26); he could have left him before the fight for the bench; but he didn’t. Perhaps, there is a feeling of remorse and guilt but now it is too late. Peter grieves less for Jerry who invites death voluntarily and more for himself as he has lost peace of mind. Both men experience the anguish and pain at the turn of events. Jerry’s telling Peter in the last moments of his death that he has been “dispossessed” actually means that his complacency indifference and isolation has been replaced by awareness of the importance of human contact. Mary M. Milan opines that Jerry remains incapable of any “normal” communication with Peter, so his ultimate response culminating in the knifing scene represents the “perversion of a murder bond” (58)

The incident liberates Peter from his illusions and never again will he be able to retreat into alienation by shouting “leave me alone”. Albee has tried to link Jerry’s agony with wider social scenario by interpreting it as fallout of the American way of life where modern man, imprisoned in his own web, refuses to have contact with the outer world. In Jerry’s death and Peter’s disillusionment he has tried to convey that without meaningful communication or contact life holds no charm and appears futile and wasted.
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