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**Segregation of Individual Existence
in Edward Albee's Play *The Zoo Story***

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Abstract:

My aim through this article is to propagate that Albee's plays are the true depiction of the dilemma of suppressed modern man. He has evinced existential philosophy in a way which eventually discern the fragmentation of human personality in the modern age. Existentialism Literary Theory deals with man's disappointment and despairs as far as the fundamental continuity between text and world interpreted within social and cultural creation. Existential analysis raises questions on the established codes and conducts of the state and the socio-political norms. It raises profound questions on the personality of the human being passionately ponders over the nature of anxiety, despair, grief, loneliness, and isolation. Edward Albee has obsessively occupied with the individual's quest for meaning and value, freedom and truth that provides to the alienated self in a seemingly disordered and meaningless world.

Key words: *Existentialism, reality, terror and isolation*

My aim through this article is to propagate that Albee plays are strongly influenced by the existential philosophy. He has shown existential philosophy in a very dominant and, authoritative way as far as his plays are concerned. Albee has got the worldwide distinction through his plays. Edward Albee is recognized to be one of the best American contemporary dramatists. The human world is the organization of significant relationships in which a human being exists and in the plan of which he or she partakes. Existentialism Literary Theory as a modern philosophic association deals with man's disappointment and despairs as far as a fundamental continuity between text and world interpreted within social and cultural creation. Existential analysis asks profound questions about the personality of the human being and the nature of anxiety, despair, grief, loneliness, and isolation. Anxiety is more basic than fear. He is also considered as the most controversial one, and his work attracts a plenty range of criticism and mixed literary treatment. Albee became perceived as a leader of a new theatrical movement in America. Edward Albee, who appears onto the American theatrical stage, is one of leading dramatists of his generation after Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller. He is also prejudiced by European playwrights like Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter. His name is invariably associated with the Theatre of the Absurd.

As Foster Hirsch writes:

The plays that established his reputation-The Zoo Story, The American Dream, The Sandbox, The Death of Bessie Smith, and Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? Are written with youthful exuberance... since the pinnacle of Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? He has moved, gradually to writing high-toned dramas, among 'our betters' and his work has become

noticeably smaller, dryer, and more airless and enclosed (Hirsch, 1978, pp. 7-8).

The Zoo Story is a dramatic piece by Edward Albee, narrating the dilemma of suppressed modern man. The play is a distressing depiction of a young man alienated from the human race. It is a story of loneliness and the anxious need for appreciation that builds to a brutal, devastating climax. There is no doubt that he is inclined by the famous critic Satre's existentialism which persists human life is absurd at all. In this play the dramatist is unable to give any active solutions to the readers on social illness which he condemns.

In the play Albee focuses on neurotic anxieties, about aloneness, identity and about envy. Albee has written by and large about male characters and no question of most of his plays move around male characters. In this play he has tried to show the inner Psyche of two characters Peter and Jerry. *The ZOO Story* is a play of a depressed man who, stirred with isolation, starts talking with an unfamiliar person in a park and ultimately forces him to conduct a violent behavior. *The ZOO Story* comprises a short one-act with three characters. The prominent characters in it carry with them a sense of alienation and pessimism but Albee handled to deliberate in it the multi-levelled problems of human isolation. Albee has shared his views:

Something very, very interesting happened with the writing of that play. I didn't discover suddenly that I was a playwright; I discovered that I had *been* a playwright all my life, but I didn't know it because I hadn't written plays [. . .] And so when I wrote *The Zoo Story*, I was able to start practicing my 'nature' fully (qtd. in Roudane, Understanding 3).

In the play two strangers meet on a bench in Central Park. Jerry, a lonesome man anxious to make some kind of connection with another person Peter, falls out his life story to the other man. Peter is a reticent, reputable, middle-aged family man in the play. Jerry longs so violently to converse that, when he does make the effort, he alternately scares and fend off his listener. His efforts are not received by Peter, and their discussion soon rises into a harsh argument during which Jerry stabs himself upon a knife which he placed into Peter's hands. Edward Albee educates a close vision of the traumas and the problems of a middle-class man. And he has caught the slight thread of psychological disturbance of human beings, especially Albee lies in the exploration of the inner world of human psyche and sensibility. In his very first play, Albee built a memorial to the intensity of human isolation which can force the person to challenge communication even at the cost of the most precious thing of his own life. The zoo, in fact, provides the ultimate symbolic representation for human isolation.

JERRY. I went to the zoo to find out more about the way people exist with animals, and the way the animals exist with each other, and with people too. It probably wasn't a fair test, what with everyone separated 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 (40).

In the play *The ZOO Story* Albee concerned with isolation of an individual in society and the unresponsiveness and callosity *in* human relations. The intolerable sense of loneliness may amount to such strength that even the maximum forfeit is worth it.

It tells the story of a wanderer who performs his own murder with the innocent support of an upper-middle-class editor. The two men are alienated by social class, academic interests, goals, and ways of life. Jerry is from the Upper West Side of, which represents poor living circumstances, while Peter resides in the prosperous East Side. Jerry lives alone in a four-story brownstone rooming house; Peter shares an apartment with his family:

As Lisa Siefker Bailey writes: "Jerry carries with him a need to tell stories in the same way he keeps the picture frames empty in his apartment. If he can just fill the need, fill the frames, he can make a connection that will overshadow the alienation of his existence" (35). The fluent protagonists, Jerry and Erie correspondingly, ask simple and charming questions about personal lives of their inactive listeners who do not wish to be concerned.

JERRY. I loved the dog now, and I wanted him to Jove me. I had tried to love, and I had tried to kill, and both had been unsuccessful by themselves. . . It's just that . . . it's just that if you can't deal with people, you have to make a start somewhere. WITH ANIMALS! . .

And where better, where ever better to communicate one single, simple-minded idea than in an entrance hall?... than with A DOG. Just that; a dog (34-35).

The Zoo Story introduces a subject that will consume the tendency of people to straight emotional walls in order to avoid relationship. Jerry pays with his life for his effort to communicate, to go through into contact with another man. His death is an escape from the antagonism and hopelessness of being rejected by the outer world. The play represents the existential dilemma of its main character in antagonistic world but this predicament, however, has been replaced by the sociopolitical crisis of the city, which is a corporation of persons and can be said to represent the whole civilization. Therefore the important characters in the play, suffer from existential predicament for different reasons. They suffer from alienation, weariness, monotony; meaninglessness in their lives.

The Zoo Story expresses the disaffection and disenchantment of the existentialist drama and Albee has proved in numerous later plays that his interest deception in a rudiments sense of alienation, but the vital need for communication even at the price of death was most expressively articulated in play *The Zoo Story*. He explores the psychological recesses of an individual's quest for life itself, trying, thus to draw the meaning and reason behind the thinking prototype of an individual.

As Lavine (2002) describes:

Granted, says the existentialist, I am my own existence but this existence is absurd. To exist as a human being is inexplicable, and wholly absurd. Each of us is simply here, thrown into this time and place... only contingently, and so my life is an absurd contingent fact. Lavine continues I have stripped myself of all acceptable structure, the structure of knowledge, moral value, and human relationship; I stand in anguish at the edge of the abyss. I am looking into emptiness and the void, hovering over the abyss in fear and trembling and living the life of dread.

In this play we see that Peter in *The Zoo Story*, while reading a book on a bench in Central Park, is harmed by a stranger called Jerry for no reason at all. Then the two men fall into a dreadful conversation until it reaches a calamity that one is killed.

In this play we see the sense of menace is imitated in certain human feelings like fear, insecurity and hopelessness. Menace may appear in a number of ways including physical, psychological and mental ways.

Albee, like other absurdist's, is doubtful of language. He creates his dramatic lines in such a way that its meaning as a communication tool completely fails. Albee employs easy, ordinary and sometimes even childish language, and his intention is not only to exhibit the paralysis of language but also to demonstrate the absurdity of life. For examples:

Jerry. I've been to the Zoo. (Peter doesn't notice) I said, I've been to the zoo. MISTER, I'VE BEEN TO THE ZOO!

Peter. Hm? What? I'm sorry, were you talking to me? Jerry. I went to the zoo, and then I walked until I came here. Have I been walking north? Peter :.(Puzzled) North? Why... I... I think so. Let me see.

Jerry : (Pointing past the audience) Is that Fifth Avenue? Peter: Why, yes; yes, it is.

The character Peter contradicts Jerry, just as the original Peter denied Jesus, whose name also began with a "J." Both Jesus and Jerry are crucified, in a way, by a world which cannot or will not recognize them. Peter, like the sophisticated person, has been living in a dream world from which he must one day be impolitely awoken, and is hardly aware of the reality that surrounds him. He delectably misplaces himself in his book, preferring art to the fundamentals of genuine life. In the play, the sociopathic Jerry is disappointed by the state of American society.

Incapable to fake and maintain meaningful relationships (even with a dog), and disdainful of housing America's happy indifference to anything past its white picket fences, Jerry sets upon the "All-American"

Peter in an attempt to wake him up to the living death of his narrow-minded, worldly existence. Peter the tramp, who unintentionally talks to stranger, is himself a hopeless individual who is very eager to get the emotional support. It is clear from the outset that he has been deprived of a healthy social relationship throughout his life. As Foster Hirsoh mentions:

It is apparent in any historical overview of dramatic writing in the country that it has been Edward Albee (though Miller should be included but a lesser degree) who has shown the theatre writers that they can no longer remain aloof to social and political commitment as their predecessors did for more than a quarter of a century after the demise of social drama in the late thirties.

Albee instructions a close vision of the disturbance and the problems of a middle-class man. And he has wedged the minor threads of psychological commotion of human beings, especially Albee lies in the exploration of the inner world of human psyche and sensibility. He explores the psychological recesses of an individual quest of life itself, trying, thus to sketch the meaning and purpose behind the thinking pattern of human being. Jerry's approach about American life is characterized by descriptions of incarceration. From the conversation of his hive-like rooming house to his story about the play's supposed zoo. Jerry paints a picture of a society in which people are fascinated and alienated from one another by socio- economic and interpersonal barriers. Jerry declares that for him, American life is like a zoo, and he just like an animal trapped in it. So distressed is his need to get away his isolation that he sets upon Peter, a complete stranger, and begins to talk with him.

In this play Peter unwillingly disclose the information of his life to Jerry. He told that he is married, has two daughters, two cats and two parakeets, and holds a supervisory place with a publishing firm. In reply, Jerry tells the story of his own hopeless life and relationships, describing the prison-like rooming house where he lives, and a landlady who lusts after him. Jerry suffers from isolation. He is alienated from the society, from his fellowmen, and from himself. The play portrays Jerry self doubts, fears and guilt. Jerry suffers from a split personality as well as a sense of disorientation which expresses his neurotic conflicts.

Jerry's greatest fear is that Peter will stand up and leave, but this never happens. Peter does not just walk away and let Jerry have the bench because Jerry is clever and clever enough to keep Peter there. In order to force Peter to face his delusions, a violent act is necessary. He begins pushing Peter, taking more of the bench for him. He provokes Peter, mockery his middle-class blankness: "You fight, you miserable bastard; fight for that bench; fight for your parakeets; fight for your cats, fight for your two daughters; fight for your wife; fight for your manhood, you pathetic vegetable" (47). In the play Jerry experiences the existential being-as-object, not as-subject; thus, he long stop become a subject adopting an alias. Exactly, he does not have his personal identity papers, which typify his failure of self-definition. Even his place of birth is vague, which highlights his already rootless identity. Jerry recommends Peter to engage, to shed his death-in-life

existence. Albee's plays struggling with modern themes, and their experiments in form, worried critics and audiences alike while changing the scenery of American drama. An argument of two conflicting characters, one impressive his presence on the other one, is by no means a novel situation employed in a work of drama. Albee presents Jerry's loneliness as a universal condition of the modern man. A relative need of self control over one's action is again quite in keeping with the sense of anxious suffering. Albert Mordell says:

Though author usually deals with mild cases of neuroses and the psychiatrists with severe ones, their provinces are often the same. The writer details his case with art, and lays stress on the emotional phases and deduces ideas, while the psychiatrist gives us base scientific analysis (92).

Albee regards drama as a mirror of society and it is the best medium to show the way character do behave and how they don't behave that way any longer. He believes that a good play can. Alter the self, the society. In this logic, neurotic characters are may be those who perform with psychological truth. The character Jerry makes significant discoveries about himself during his erotic suffering and in the lost psychoanalysis he finds a measure of completion in the relation to the world. *The Zoo Story*.. deals with the theme of death. He has found the reality that people usually avoid thinking about death and about living. Albee describes in this plat that a nonstop frustration can be disastrous to somebody like Jerry

The modern men live a purposeless and meaningless life. So Albee wants to teach them to live with the awareness of death so that they can possibly contribute in life fully, actively. He says about an artist's work, Albee said: "...the responsibility of the writer is to be a sort of demonic social ...to present the world and people in it as he sees..." (Kolin, 125).

The world is just like a zoo, where people are alienated from each other and living an apathetic life. For example, in *The Zoo Story* the two picture frames in Jerry's room remain empty, a symbol of his whitish touching life. Albee articulates his idea through sounds off stage. The story ends with shocked Peter escaping the scene, howling "OH MY GOD!" and dying Jerry breathing his last words "Oh...my... God..."

In modern times we see that with the great growth of American industrial civilization, people are becoming more and more money-oriented. Money, fame and position are the only things they pursue. Traditional moral sense doesn't work anymore. People particularly in big cities, are alienated in their apartments. Edward Albee has very well treated the neurotic factor by creating interesting personage. As Peter in *The Zoo Story*, while reading a book on a bench in Central Park, is molested by a stranger called Jerry for no cause at all. Then the two men fall into a dreadful conversation until it reaches a tragedy that one is killed, or, he commits suicide. Albee's characters also question the system to gain insight to its true nature. In fact, such kind of thing doesn't exist in our life.

Socialized construction makes life more convenient while results people alienated from each other, even from themselves. In spite of the pessimistic color in his plays, Albee is still an outstanding playwright. Edward Albee has obsessively occupied with the individual's quest for meaning and value, freedom and truth that provides to the alienated self in a seemingly disordered and meaningless world.

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