

Tribhuvan University

Irony of Human Condition in Edward Albee's Play *The Zoo Story*

A Thesis Submitted of the Central Department of English, T.U.

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the

Degree of Master of Arts in English

By

Kamal Poudel

Symbol No: 280287/1064/065

T.U. Regd. No: 6-1-3-493-2001

Central Department of English

Kritipur, Kathmandu

August 2019

Acknowledgements

I want to express immense gratitude towards my respected research supervisor, Raj Kumar Baral, Lecturer at the Central Department of English for his valuable guidance, suggestion, inspiration and supervision to accomplish my thesis in its present form.

I would also like to thank Prof. Anirudra Thapa, the Head of the Central Department of English for granting me permission to carry out my research on this topic. Along with him, I will always be grateful towards the teachers, librarians and staff of C.D.E who have guided, encouraged and shown the path to the success of this research directly or indirectly.

Along with the teachers, I would like to acknowledge my family and friends who have supported me morally, emotionally, physically and economically for the accomplishment of this academic journey.

August 2019

Kamal Poudel

Abstract

This research is a study of irony in general human condition in modern American society in Edward Albee's play *The Zoo Story*. The irony in the life of Jerry, a social outcast alienated in the society due to factors like class, sexuality and orphanage are singled out. The selfish, lonely and irrational circumstance in which Jerry is living makes him compare human society with zoo and his condition can be equated to general human condition. The difference in saying and the actual meaning of saying is seen frequently fulfilling the basic condition in which irony operates. Jerry's failure to establish fruitful contact and communication with the society desperately, even with the dog of his landlady, marks the irony of the so-called civilized society. This play can also be read as allegory of the modern society as it has turned a human zoo with all the irrationality and animal-like behaviors pervading it. Jerry's suicide at the end of the play marks the resistance to the miserable life devoid of any fruitful communication that underscores the need of social correction, one of the major functions of irony in Hutcheon's terms. So as to discuss various facets of irony, the theorists of irony like Colebrook, Muecke, Hutcheon and Paul de Man are brought into debate.

Key Words: Irony, human condition, alienation, temporality, American society, sexuality

Contents

	Page No.
Letter of Approval	
Acknowledgements	
Abstract	
I: Irony in Edward Albee's Play <i>The Zoo Story</i>	1-11
II: Irony of Human Condition in Edward Albee's Play <i>The Zoo Story</i>	12-33
III: Conclusion: Ironic ending of <i>The Zoo Story</i>	34-35
Works Cited	

I. Irony in Edward Albee's Play *The Zoo Story*

This research studies Albee's first play *The Zoo Story* as an irony in the general living condition of human beings with reference to the social alienation and irrationality rampant in modern human society. Albee's play has pointed to the ironic human condition with the portrayal of socially alienated character Jerry and his failure to communicate with the society. Society has gone irrational and selfish and all the communications in the society are for some kind of gain or transaction rather than being fruitful communication out of love.

The play is set in Central Park in Sunday afternoon. Peter is reading a book on a table in the park. When he is reading he is interrupted by Jerry, a man of nearly forty years age. He says he had been to zoo. They start talking and Jerry tells him about his social alienation. The place where he lives nobody cares him. His landlady's sexual desire is insatiate and she attempts to fulfill her sexual needs using Jerry but he manages to escape every time when she embraces him and starts rubbing her body in his. She has a dog with erected penis all the time. Jerry thinks it evil and attempts to kill the dog but fails. His social surrounding is like a zoo, people are like animals and thus, he sees no meaning in life. Finally, he quarrels with Peter for the bench of the park, challenges him to fight against him giving him a knife and dies voluntarily falling to the knife in Peter's hand.

Jerry, one of the two dramatic personae in the play, is an orphan; both of his parents are long dead. His parents are the only persons who loved him in the world. All the other people with whom he lives in the society are cold and they only want to use him to fulfill their desire. No humane love exists among the people rather there is only the animal-like desires and the quest for the desire fulfillment. This research focuses on the study of the irony inherent to this weird human condition in American

society. What are the reasons behind Jerry's lack of fruitful contact with the society and be alienated even in the time human society is regarded at the apex of its development? Is it fast turning into human zoo with all of the people following the irrational and animal-like desires rather than communicating with other fellow beings? How does Jerry resist this ironic living condition? These are the basic questions this research tries to answer.

Jerry's landlady has an insatiable hunger for sex and whenever she sees Jerry, she comes to rub her body in his trying to use him as a sexual object. She has got a dog that has got always erected penis. Jerry cannot develop a friendship with that dog let alone the human beings; there is no fruitful communication between Jerry and animals like the dog of landlady. It baffles him and he goes to the zoo to see how animals exist with each other and with the human beings. He is confused whether it is human society or a zoo; each of the persons appears to have their own cage of their own desires like the animals have in the zoo; there is no humane love in the society. The living condition is bitter, ironic and frustrating for Jerry. So, he commits suicide on the park after telling his story to a stranger, Peter.

The main objective of this research is to explore the condition of modern life in American society in the play. The study of coldness in human relation and lack of love as shaping factors of society and the consequences the characters face is the objective of the study. Even though this research primarily examines the ironic issues related to modern life and the social condition he finds himself in and its impact to shape his/her character, the analysis is totally textual. Only the textual evidences are drawn into the discussion. Even though, this research uses the theoretical basis of irony, it does not clarify all the aspects of irony due to limitation of time. Only the

supportive theoretical premises are used. This research becomes a remarkable contribution for the study of irony in modern American plays.

The Zoo Story was first produced by the Schiller Theater in Berlin in 1959. It brought Albee's prolific writing to the light and drew attention of plenty of the critics due to its hypnotic effect on the stage. The highlighted play deals with the theme of alienation and absurdity of the modern man as reflected in the character of Jerry. Since the premiere of this play, it invited the large number of criticisms from various quarters. Normand Berlin, in his essay "Traffic of Our Stage: Albee's "Peter and Jerry"" compares Albee's dramatic art as a admixture of realism, absurdity and 'comedy of menace' having rooted the play to the great American dramatist Eugene O'Neill, European dramatist Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter's plays; "Albee, certainly in *The Zoo Story*, seemed to be bringing together the realism of O'Neill and Miller with the European absurdism of Beckett, with a dash of Pinters "comedy of menace" thrown in. There's no question about the respect that Albee has for Beckett" (770). Berlin points out the dramatic techniques Albee brings on stage. For him, Albee appears to use the techniques of major playwrights of the time.

Peter Spielberg in his essay "The Albatross in Albee's Zoo" explores the possibility of studying the play as an allegory. He observes:

Most readers, I believe, would agree that there is ample ground for identifying Jerry as a Christ figure, and they might also accept the Peter-St. Peter coupling (although some might argue that Peter should rather be associated with the Pharisees in a Biblical interpretation). The play, quite obviously, invites such allegorical equations, and can, perhaps, be better understood through such interpretations. (563)

Spielberg, thus, gives the play the Biblical meaning. The suicide of Jerry falling to the knife in Peter's hand is meaningful for him. Jerry can be read as the Christ figure and Peter can be read as St. Peter giving the play a biblical interpretation.

Critic A. Robert Lee explores the meaning behind using zoo as the background to shape the play. In his essay "Illusion and Betrayal: Edward Albee's Theatre," he explores reason behind employing zoo in the play as:

A zoo is an enclosure in which energy, passion, wildness is tamed and domesticated. It is a place of cages and barriers. Just as the animals are domesticated out of their original freedom and movement, so Jerry taunts his 'good' citizen with living by the consensus. He charges a shocked 'reasonable' Peter with sexual inadequacy, with having become a vegetable. He charges him with the crime of being an accomplice to the destruction of real energy, love, sexuality in America. (53)

Lee points out the Jerry's frustration over the destruction of energy, love and sexuality in American individuals and the society; he questions about the love life of Peter and finds him sexually weak. When one becomes weak in humane activities, his freedom can be tamed like the animals in zoo.

Carol A. Sykes, in his essay "Albee's Beast Fables: "The Zoo Story" and "A Delicate Balance"" observes that it is pessimistic, modern American version of human condition. He writes:

The Zoo Story is a pessimistic, but not totally hopeless, statement about what Albee sees as the contemporary American version of the human condition, especially the lack of love and real contact between people. Jerry understands this plight and seeks to remedy it on a personal level. Yet it has only been

since his experience with the dog that he has really understood the problem and, more importantly, known how to cope with it. (448)

Thus, the lack of love and attachment of the people in American society is the factor behind the tragedy of the modern people. To point out the irony in this condition of life in American society is the major emphasis of this research keeping all the criticisms of the play in the mind. This research unravels the ironic sides of the modern living condition with minute analysis into the social and familial conditions of the characters, Peter and Jerry in Albee's play.

This research uses the theories and theorists of irony to justify the hypothesis. It is carried out by bringing useful materials like reviews, criticism, thoughts and opinions of the renowned scholars related to the issues of this project on a close textual analysis. While analyzing and interpreting textual evidences, the most appropriate theoretical concepts are brought to substantiate the research. While conducting this research, library consultations, internet search and secondary materials collection and guidance from university scholars are used with credit. Reading the theoretical references, the theorists and the critics like Paul de Man, Linda Hutcheon, Claire Colebrook etcare brought into discussion. Irony is at the same time, very simple and very complex concept. Saying what is contrary to what is meant is the simple definition not only Colebrook but most of the scholars of irony agree unanimously. But the notion of irony has long history and its nature and functions are analyzed from various angles. The necessity and popularity of this notion of irony becomes clear as the simple definition, meaning contrary to saying dates back to first century Roman orator Quintilian who defined the term being based to Socrates and ancient Greek literature and even the postmodern theorists are engaging them to understand the nature of irony. Colebrook shows this in his observation:

Despite its unwieldy complexity, irony has a frequent and common definition: saying what is contrary to what is meant . . . a definition that is usually attributed to the first-century Roman orator Quintilian who was already looking back to Socrates and Ancient Greek literature. But this definition is so simple that it covers everything from simple figures of speech to entire historical epochs. Irony can mean as little as saying, ‘Another day in paradise’, when the weather is appalling. It can also refer to the huge problems of postmodernity; our very historical context is ironic because today nothing really means what it says. We live in a world of quotation, pastiche, simulation and cynicism: a general and all-encompassing irony. Irony, then, by the very simplicity of its definition becomes curiously undefinable. (1)

Colebrook does not only define the notion of irony here rather he also points out the historical root of irony. Irony dates back to the time of Socrates and ancient Greek literature and it was first defined by Roman orator Quintilian. Since it is so simple concept in its general definition, it is also very difficult concept. Actually, irony lies in the perspective of the observer and a keen person may see irony everywhere like the dictum beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder. The problems of postmodernity, historical contexts, social conditions all are ironic and irony pervades virtually everything in the world.

Several critics who write on irony are aware of its problem too, but continue write about it bravely on it anyway. D.C. Muecke observes:

Getting to grips with irony seems to have something in common with gathering the mist; there is plenty to take hold of if only one could... Yet if, upon examination, irony becomes less nebulous, as it does, it

remains exclusively Protean. Its forms and functions are so diverse as to seem scarcely amenable to a single definition. (3)

Muecke goes on to note that “irony, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder and is not a quality inherent in any remark, event or situation” (12). Since this apparently is the case, Muecke’s solution would be to catalogue as many definitions of irony as possible. He operates on two assumptions: firstly, that irony would become less amorphous upon closer examination and that secondly, one would be able to catalogue the number of forms that this “Protean” phenomenon takes. Doing this, of course, is like trying to enumerate all the possible shapes that water can take by attempting to take into account any thing that could act as a container for it. In short, it strikes one as somewhat futile and ironic because Muecke is simply proving that irony might be nebulous after all.

Muecke generates a long list not only in this book but continues the task in another book, titled *Irony and the Ironic* incredibly. Muecke is, of course, not alone. In his article, “Approximately Irony,” Jonathan Tittler decides that he has to do a similar accounting of irony: “If irony is not to be crushed under the weight of its own protean polymorphism, it must be set forth systemically” (32). And just like Muecke, Tittler insists on carrying on despite the futility of his task: “[Even] if totalization is impossible (because irony is the essence of unachieved totalization), we are at present so far from threatening that limit, surely much can be gained from a rigorous failure” (32). Similar conclusions have prompted critics like Wayne Booth, Linda Hutcheon and D.J. Enright to try to record all the different forms of irony that are currently in use. If forming a list of the different types of irony is not the most feasible approach towards understanding the phenomenon, then we have to look for the ways that could help us to understand it.

Kierkegaard's book titled *The Concept of Irony* was written in 1841 in which he has discussed about his notion of irony. Kierkegaard does not talk about different kinds of ironies that might arise in different kinds of texts and/or situations in life. He thinks his study of irony is important because: "As philosophy cannot be indifferent to the subsequent history of this concept, so neither can it content itself with the history of its origin, though it be ever so complete and interesting a history as such. Philosophy requires something more..." (48). Instead of listing the various kinds of ironies that might exist, Kierkegaard tries to find out what characterizes irony by examining Socrates, whom he calls is the very first ironist in the world (47).

Linda Hutcheon's book, *Irony's Edge*, talks about effects of irony. Hutcheon believes that irony is characterized by its effect:

Unlike metaphor or metonymy, irony has an edge; unlike paradox, irony is decidedly edgy . . . irony is a "weighted" mode of discourse in the sense that it is asymmetrical, unbalanced in favor of the silent and unsaid . . . irony involves the attribution of an evaluative, even judgmental attitude, and this is where the emotive or affective dimension also enters – much to the dismay of most critical discourse and most critics. (37)

Pointing to the edgy nature of irony, Hutcheon favors the position that irony can be used to create certain effect and thus, it can show certain way of human conduct. As the affective dimension of irony has not been much discussed in Albee's play, it is examined through this viewpoint in this research. This shows how irony can be used as the means to correct the course of society creating certain effect.

This research paper focuses on the irony of living condition for a man in modern American society. The confusion, lack of communication, disillusionment of social reality and frustration of the society that has turned more as a human zoo with

individual cages rather than social intermingling are traced throughout the play. One of the two dramatic personae of the play, Jerry, is a “man in his late thirties, not poorly dressed, but carelessly” and his “fall from physical grace should not suggest debauchery; he has, to come closest to it, a great weariness” and the other, Peter is “moving into middleage, his dress and his manner would suggest a man younger” (11). Jerry is alone both physically and psychologically and it becomes a society when he meets another individual in the Central Park. It is suggested in the stage direction of the dramatist that Jerry has fallen from his physical grace not because of his own wrong behaviors rather it is caused by weariness. Soon, it becomes clear that he is weary living in the society alienated and without social contact with other people in the society. His careless dress up suggests that he is cared by nobody and there is no need to be presentable before anybody in the society. At the same time, Peter has got higher social contact and a job in a “small publishing house” in “an executive position” that suggests he needs to be presentable to his staff, customers and be responsible for the people around him. (18) So, he is better dressed up. There is sharp contrast between these two characters.

It is shown that Jerry is completely alienated individual without proper social contact with other people. In that Sunday morning, he walks alone to zoo and enters the park where he sees Peter reading a book on a park bench. He enters into his conversation forcefully catching his attention and a lot to communication difficulties. He tells him the reason behind going to the zoo:

JERRY: Now I'll let you in on what happened at the zoo; but first, I should tell you why I went to the zoo. I went to the zoo to find out more about the way people exist with animals, and the way animals exist with each other, and with people too. It probably wasn't a fair test, what with everyone separated by bars

from everyone else, the animals for the most part from each other, and always the people from the animals. But, if it's a zoo, that's the way it is. [He pokes Peter on the arm.] Move over. (39-40)

There is an ironical picture of human society. Jerry says he went to zoo to find out more about the way people exist with animals and the way animals exist with each other and with people too. In simple meaning, it sounds normal but as we analyze the deeper meaning, we realize that there is no care for animals and their desire in anthropocentric society; only thing a man cares is his own desires. Animals exist in human society in the way human desire demands. Human and other animals are different species and there is no communication between different species. Not only that, there is no communication between different class, race, ethnicity and personality in American society. Jerry feels that he is an animal and other people are animals from different species. There is question upon their existence together in the society. This realization is irony upon his belief that man is a social animal and he is frustrated with the society.

II. Irony of Human Condition in Edward Albee's Play *The Zoo Story*

Albee's has presented an alienated protagonist, Jerry, to show the irony of American society and human condition in the society. He tries to make sense of a senseless world, *The Zoo Story* may belong in the category of the Theatre of the Absurd. Martin Esslin, finds aspects of the play, particularly Jerry's "inability to establish genuine contact with a dog, let alone a human being" as absurdist. (267) But while deciding that *The Zoo Story* contains absurdist tones and moods, Esslin argues that Albee's play ultimately fails as an absurdist drama:

In the realism of its dialogue and in its subject matter -an outsider's inability to establish genuine contact with a dog, let alone any human being - *The Zoo Story* is closely akin to the world of Harold Pinter. But the effect of this brilliant one-act duologue between Jerry, the outcast, and Peter, the conformist bourgeois, is marred by its melodramatic climax; when Jerry provokes Peter into drawing a knife and then impales himself on it, the plight of the schizophrenic outcast is turned into an act of sentimentality, especially as the victim expires in touching solicitude and fellow-feeling for his involuntary murderer. (267)

Esslin seems correct in his as the play does not end on an absurdist note. The audience is not left with a feeling of senselessness of purpose or the absurdity of life. Instead, this researcher argues that the characters and the audience are left with a story full of purpose and meaning. Jerry wants love and attention by the other people in the society; he wants real communication with other people and does not want to feel that he is living with animals. From the beginning, Jerry hopes that he can make a difference, that his actions can create some kind of change.

On the time Jerry comes to the park, Jerry is frustrated observing the human society, its lack of communication with him in real sense, and the human and animals' relation in zoo. He feels completely alienated and seems to have made up his mind to intrude into the society. So, he interferes Peter, who was reading a book on the bench of the park and forcefully draws him in conversation:

JERRY: [*He stands for a few seconds, looking at PETER, who finally looks up again, puzzled*] Do you mind if we talk?

PETER: [*Obviously minding*] Why . . . no, no.

JERRY: Yes you do; you do.

PETER: [*Puts his book down, his pipe out and away, smiling*] No, I really; I don't mind.

JERRY: Yes you do.

PETER: [*Finally decided*] No; I don't mind at all, really. (14)

When Jerry interferes into Peter's privacy, he is not interfering with an individual rather he is clearly interfering with the society to get its attention and care. It is very ironical to see that an individual needs to interfere into the society and forcefully break into it when it is commonly believed that man is a social animal. Even when Jerry wants to communicate with Peter and be understood, he needs to convince him; or out of formality, he needs to ask him the question whether he minds if Jerry talks to him. It is very hard to communicate with the society. It is the irony of Jerry's condition; in broader sense, it is irony upon the human condition. Human being is more and more alienated in the society in the modern times. When Jerry asks whether Peter minds if he talks to him; he says no, but the dramatist has given the direction that says he is obviously minding some stranger talking to him. It is very ironical to see that the society says a word but means another thing with it. It fits the general

definition of irony that irony is “A mode of speech of which the meaning is contrary to the words” (qtd. in Enright 5). Jerry lives in this ironic human condition.

Another irony lies in the very communication; that can be termed as a situational irony. There seems to be great communication gaps, misunderstanding, and non-transference of message in the communication itself. Peter, a socially responsible and more educated person fails to communicate with Jerry on the one hand and Jerry’s alienated condition and lack of habit of communication with society becomes clear. Jerry lacks the ability to make people understand what he says is the result of his long alienation and exclusion from the society.

JERRY: You're married!

PETER: [*With pleased emphasis*] Why, certainly.

JERRY: It isn't a law, for God's sake.

PETER: No ... no, of course not.

JERRY: And you have a wife.

PETER: [*Bewildered by the seeming lack of communication*] Yes! (15)

Lack of communication with Peter shows Jerry’s lack of communication with the society. Anybody can understand that if a man is married, he must have a wife. But even after Jerry knows that Peter is a married man, he asks him if he has got a wife. The stage direction of the dramatist points to the lack of communication between Jerry and Peter. It is very ironical to see that a man has got no proper communication rather there is lack of communication and misunderstanding in the social interaction.

The communication between Peter and Jerry continues and Jerry shows the irrational side of the society that leads him to give the human being the tag of being an animal rather than being a human being.

JERRY: And you have children.

PETER: Yes; two.

JERRY: Boys?

PETER: No, girls ... both girls.

JERRY: But you wanted boys.

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

JERRY: [*Lightly mocking*] But that's the way the cookie crumbles? (15-16)

It is ironical to see that a male parent wants his wife to give birth to a male child. Jerry mocks this irrational side of the male attitude in the human being irrespective of the society they live. When Jerry nails on his thought that he wanted a boy instead of girl child, Peter has to accept it as a natural fact. But actually it is not a natural fact rather it is a cultural trend and androcentric irrationality that pervades that human society. Jerry mocks him for this weakness with the phrase ‘that’s the way the cookie crumbles’ that suggests that man is unable to control the nature or the unavoidable things whatever proud and powerful he thinks himself to be. In the last part of the play, when Jerry challenges Peter, he again charges against him as being impotent and vegetable: “JERRY: [*Slaps Peter on each "fight"*] You fight, you miserable bastard; fight for that bench; fight for your parakees; fight for your cats; fight for your two daughters; fight for your wife; fight for your manhood, you pathetic little vegetable. [*Spits in Peter's face*] You couldn't even get your wife with a male child” (46-47). Jerry challenges the impotence and weakness of the society while challenging and provoking Peter to fight against him. The society, like Peter, has forgotten to resist and save its honor. The society has forgotten to fight for the manhood; it has gone pathetic and detached. Jerry terms this fall of the society as pathetic and Peter, an individual of the society, as vegetable. His slapping and spitting are to bring the society to awareness; wake the society from its slumber. It is ironical to see that the

alienated individuals like Jerry futilely want to wake the society from its irrationality and animal-like slumber.

Though it is futile and frustrating to wake up the society to its rational and original awareness, Jerry expects changes in society; he criticizes the irrationality, impotence and animal-like aloofness in this human zoo. It is a radical use of irony that expects social change. It is one of the corrective functions of irony as Linda Hutcheon suggests the function of irony is:

Arguably all irony has some corrective function . . . , and since satire is usually corrective or ameliorative in intent . . . , it frequently turns to irony as one way of ridiculing and implicitly correcting the vices and follies of humankind. Clearly there is a wide tonal range possible within this corrective function, as in all the other - from the scorning and disdainful to the playfully teasing. The classic example of the former is Swift's "A Modest Proposal", a political pamphlet whose dispassionate, business-like, grave tone is played off against the utterly immodest proposal that the situation of famine and poverty in eighteenth-century Ireland would be solved if people bred and marketed babies for food. (226)

The corrective function is evident in Albee's *The Zoo Story* in ironic portrayal of the irrational American society. The play is optimistic and the people are ironically presented as the creatures in need of improvement and the course of the society in the need of correction.

The zoo appears to have ironical meaning and the very title of the play, *The Zoo Story*, suggests that the story is about human society where the animal-like human beings reside in their separate cages like in zoo without much communication with each other and they are more and more alienated from the society with the passage of

time. Jerry has failed time and again to communicate both with man and animals; the animal is presented as the dog of her landlady in the play. His lack of meaningful communication is clearly seen when he wants Peter to talk to him:

JERRY: I'll tell you why I do it; I don't talk to many people - except to say like: give me a beer, or where's the john, or what time does the feature go on, or keep your hands to yourself, buddy. You know - things like that.

PETER: I must say I don't . . .

JERRY: But every once in a while I like to talk to somebody, really talk; like to get to know somebody, know all about him. (17)

It is ironical to see that Jerry's communication with the society is only commercial communication; there is certain transaction involved in each of the communication he carries out in the society. He pays money in the bar and tells the bartender give him a beer is a commercial communication. He exists in the consumerist American society in which the society understands only the commercial communication. Other kind of communication he does with is to protect his rights as he frequently requests other people to keep their hands to themselves in case they reach out to disturb him. People have become so careless and they only want the communication that is necessary for the transaction, warning or formality. Society is thus, gone inhuman and irrational as there is no fruitful and unconditional communication becomes possible. In such a frustrating situation, Jerry attempts for the fruitful and unconditional communication with Peter. It is an irony that a social being is gone from the society and a commercial being has replaced him.

In the play, we see that Jerry's basic target is to make meaningful contact with another human being. His behavior with Peter parallels his experiment with the dog. At the conclusion of the play, if Jerry could miraculously live, like the dog lived, Peter

and he could be “friends”; Jerry could “see what our new relationship might come to” (33). In an interview, Albee admits, “I suppose the dog story in *The Zoo Story*, to a certain extent, is a microcosm of the play by the fact that people are not communicating, ultimately failing and trying and failing” (qtd. in Sullivan 184). Jerry wants to initiate communication with someone, so he begins his attempts with the dog. As he explains, “if you can’t deal with people, you have to make a start somewhere. WITH ANIMALS!” (34). He then draws on what he has learned from the dog to attempt communication with a human being. But it is Jerry’s insensitive society that forces him to select a violent act, like the extreme action he took with the dog, to provoke a response. The final image of Jerry’s brutal death does communicate with Peter and the audience, and this intense desire on Jerry’s part to accomplish connection keeps this play out of the realm of the Theatre of the Absurd. With its hope for change, *The Zoo Story* presents itself as an American play.

JERRY: On a sun-drenched Sunday afternoon like this? Who better than a nice married man with two daughters and ... uh ... a dog? [PETER *shakes his head.*] No? Two dogs. [PETER *shakes his head again.*] Hm. No dogs? [PETER *shakes his head, sadly.*] Oh, that's a shame. But you look like an animal man. CATS? [PETER *nods his head, ruefully.*] Cats! But, that can't be your idea. No, sir. Your wife and daughters? [PETER *nods his head.*] Is there anything else I should know?

PETER: [*He has to clear his throat*] There are . . . there are two parakeets. One . . . uh ... one for each of my daughters. (17-18)

Jerry calls Peter a nice married man at first but soon points that he looks like an animal man. The animal man of the human society that can be allegorically read as human society is clearly hinted at the play. Continual reference to the animal-like,

irrational side of the human beings and human society presents the ironic dimension to the play. The society can be taken as an allegory of the zoo. There is a close connection between allegory and irony but de Man sees allegory having big temporal void. Both allegory and irony are related by their common nature to expose the truth:

It dissolves in the narrowing spiral of a linguistic sign that becomes more and more remote from its meaning, and it can find no escape from this spiral. The temporal void that it reveals is the same void we encountered when we found allegory always implying an unreachable anteriority. Allegory and irony are thus linked in their common discovery of a truly temporal predicament. They are also linked in their common de-mystification of an organic world postulated in a symbolic mode of analogical correspondences or in a mimetic mode of representation in which fiction and reality could coincide. (17)

De Man points out that irony is a narrowing spiral of linguistic signs and we cannot escape it while reading a text. There is only a little temporal void between what is said and what the actual truth is. The temporal void in allegory and irony is similar and they are similar in the nature but the difference between them lies in the fact that allegory generally leads the reader to unreachable and incorrigible solution. In contrast, irony has the possibility in which the reality can be coincided with the fictional solution.

When Jerry relates the story about his failure to develop relation with landlady's dog and the horrible, disgusting presence of landlady who always wants Jerry to fulfill his sexual needs, Peter does not understand him. Actually he is different man from Jerry with different social contact and class ideology. Not understanding the other man informs the reason why Jerry is socially alienated and

frustrated. His communication with dog and failure to make him a friend is similarly repeated with a gentleman of the society, Peter. It makes him even more frustrated:

The Story of Jerry and the Dog: the end.

[PETER *is silent.*]

Well, Peter? [JERRY *is suddenly cheerful.*] Well, Peter? Do you think I could sell that story to the *Reader's Digest* and make a couple of hundred bucks for *The Most Unforgettable Character I've ever Met*? Huh? [JERRY *is animated, but PETER is disturbed.*] Oh, come on now, Peter; tell me what you think.

PETER: [*Numb*] I ... I don't understand what ... I don't think I ... [*Now almost tearfully*] Why did you tell me all of this? (36)

It is clear that the stories of socially alienated and marginalized people are neither understood nor sold. An executive of a small publishing company, Peter does not understand them. It is very ironical situation. The human society at the same time is in no interest to understand those stories rather it wants to avoid them. They are not sold in *Reader's Digest* giving the alienated and marginalized groups of the society a chance to make some money. It is the complete failure of meaningful communication in the society and the chance of alienated characters to be united with the society with some fruitful communication is impossible. The society has this ironic side.

There are number of issues and ideological differences that do not let the fruitful communication between Jerry and the society. The first problem is that there are myriads of classes in American society that draw margin among the people like the cages do for the animals in the zoo. The cages of classes have made Jerry unable to communicate with everybody he wants and be understood. His class confusion is apparently seen with his dialogue: "JERRY [*Still distant, but returning abruptly*]: The zoo? Oh, yes; the zoo. I was there before I came here. I told you that. Say, what's the

dividing line between upper-middle-middle-class and lower-upper-middle-class?"

(20). Jerry juxtaposition of zoo and class system of the society is ironical. In surface he seems to get only information about the function of class mechanism in the society but there is deeper ironical meaning. With the juxtaposition, he allegorically presents human society divided by the fault lines of classes as the zoo, which is divided by the individual cages of the animals.

Jerry's story tells that the only people who loved him were his father and mother but they are long dead. He is lonely because he became orphan when he was ten and half years old. Both of his parents left him to face this world with which he could never communicate. His lower class status and helplessness also contribute to the lack of communication with the society; he says to Peter, "You're a very sweet man, and you're possessed of a truly enviable innocence. But good old Mom and good old Pop are dead ... you know? ... I'm broken up about it, too ... I mean really" (23). He sees Peter as the good man because he is the only man with whom he is communicating little bit after the death of his parents.

Next factor that does not let Jerry communicate with the society is the social ideology and approach to the sexuality. In other words, the cages of the human zoo or the society are also made in terms of sexuality. The society regards heterosexual people as social being and regards heterosexuality as natural but to his dismay, Jerry finds that he was a homosexual upon his late puberty. He concedes that he has never had sex with a woman because he is unable to do so.

JERRY: No. I wonder if it's sad that I never see the little ladies more than once. I've never been able to have sex with, or, how is it put? ... make love to anybody more than once. Once; that's it ... Oh, wait; for a week and a half, when I was fifteen ... and I hang my head in shame that puberty was late ... I

was a h-o-m-o-s-e-x-u-a-l. I mean, I was queer ... [*Very fast*] ...queer, queer, queer ... with bells ringing, banners snapping in the wind. (25)

First, we see that it is considered the matter of shame to reach puberty late in the society. Second, the realization that one is homosexual by sexual orientation is very hard to digest for the society that regards heterosexual as normal sexual orientation. The cage made by the sexuality in the human zoo is another factor that alienates him in the society. It is ironical to see that the so-called civilized society of America has made so many a cages that separate individuals from each other.

Jerry's living condition is miserable due to number of factors. His loneliness in the poor region of the town is depicted in the play:

I don't have onewife, two daughters, two cats and two parakeets. What I do have, I have toilet articles, a fewclothes, a hot plate that I'm not supposed to have, a can opener, one that works with a key, youknow: a Knife, two forks, and two spoons, one small, one large; three plates, a cup, a saucer, adrinking glass, two picture frames, both empty, eight or nine books, a pack of pornographicplaying cards, regular deck, an old Western Union typewriter that prints nothing but capitalletters, and a small strong-box without a lock which has in it ... what ? Rocks ! (23)

Jerry compares his loneliness with Peter's and says he does not have had a wife, daughters and pet animals like Peter. He only has got inanimate objects like toilet articles, a few clothes, and a plate. He has got no equipments like an upper middle class person generally possesses. He even does not possess a can opener; only the basic utensils, a few books and pornographic cards for his pastime and luxury. This shows Jerry is doing with very few possessions in this world in comparison of the fellow human beings in the society. His scarcity itself is irony of the human society;

especially when one sees from the angle of general provision for a person in a developed human society to spend a life smoothly. Jerry's condition is the reflection of his poverty and inferior condition in terms of the resources he possesses. It is more about the general human condition in this world rather than the historical fact of a lower class people like Jerry.

Paul de Man opposes historicity of irony and favors that it is more of unhistorical trope that helps the writer to expose the general human condition. In his essay "Rhetoric of Temporality," he clarifies the nature of irony. Irony is not so simple to be easily demystified according to the historical context for him. Unlike allegory or symbol, we have to start from the structure of irony itself to demystify it and get its message. Though irony is often claimed to stand as if the human matters it speaks are historical matters, it is self-conscious in itself. So, it also demonstrates the impossibility of our being historical. De Man clarifies:

But in the case of irony one has to start out from the structure of the trope itself, taking one's cue from texts that are de-mystified and, to a large extent, themselves ironical. For that manner, the target of their irony is very often the claim to speak about human matters as if they were facts of history. It is a historical fact that irony becomes increasingly conscious of itself in the course of demonstrating the impossibility of our being historical. (11)

De Man demonstrates the uniqueness of irony in contrast to other rhetorical devices. Irony is hard to demystify according to our history. The problem does not lie in history but it lies within self. That is the reason we cannot escape irony by simply demystifying the ironical terms. De Man continues:

In speaking of irony we are dealing not with the history of an error but with a problem that exists within the self. We cannot escape . . . On the other hand, a

great deal of assistance can be gained from existing texts on irony. Curiously enough, it seems to be only in describing a mode of language which does not mean what it says that one can actually say what one means. (11)

Thus, De Man discusses the difficulty to deal with irony in his essay. He claims the nature of irony can be understood with the help of existing texts of irony. At surface, irony appears to be simple; it appears only as a mode of language that means different things than it actually says.

It is ironic in the play to see that human beings of this world have become animals who lack their rational faculty of mind. But Peter turns to animal from vegetable and ranks differently for Jerry in the play. There is even more irony as Jerry not only emphasizes that human beings are animals but also shows the way how they can go beyond animalhood and be even more degraded. There is another rank for people just under being an animal that is vegetable according to Jerry:

JERRY: [*Most faintly, now; he is very near death*]: You won't becoming back here anymore, Peter; you've been dispossessed. You've lost your bench, but you've defended your honour. And Peter, I'll tell you something now; you're not really a vegetable; it's all right, you're an animal. You're an animal, too. But you'd better hurry now, Peter. Hurry, you'd better go . . . see? . . . Hurry away, Peter. (48-49)

In the play, from the very beginning of the analysis of Peter's condition and character, Jerry calls him a vegetable. He refers to him as a vegetable number of times in the play and his lack of communication to Peter shows that he is unable to communicate with a vegetable because a vegetable has no mental power like an animal, the dog of his landlady ranks higher than Peter because it is an animal. But at the time of his death, which is caused with the knife that is in the hands of Peter, he calls him animal

and gives him more respect because he is improved in his rank from vegetable to animal. The reason Jerry gives to this improvement in rank for Peter is because of his fight for honor so as to save his bench in the park rather than letting it go to Jerry's hand without resistance. The very resistance and fighting from honor is the characteristic that makes a vegetable an animal. In the same manner, Jerry claims that Peter failed to fight his honor in the society because he just let his wife to bear two daughters while the society wants desperately for the male child to regard Peter as a respectful person. But Peter fails to conceive her with a male child and has given up his fight for honor because he has made up his mind not to bear a child again. It is the basic reason for Jerry to term him a vegetable. But at the end, he fights for his bench and redeems his status of animal in Jerry's eyes. When Jerry wants Peter to take his book rather than running away after the fatal blow to Jerry with his knife, he seems to suggest that Peter has further room to improve from the rank of human being from the rank of animal with more study and knowledge:

Wait . . . wait, Peter. Take your book . . . book. Right here . . . beside me . . . on your bench . . . my bench, rather. Come . . . take your book. [PETER *starts for the book, but retreats.*] Hurry . . . Peter. [PETER *rushes to the bench, grabs the book, retreats.*] Very good, Peter . . . very good. Now . . . hurry away. [PETER *hesitates for a moment, then flees, stage-left.*] Hurry away ... [His eyes are closed now.] Hurry away, your parakeets are making the dinner . . . the cats . . . are setting the table . . . (49)

As we see, the bench has been alternately termed as “your bench” and “my bench”. The bench is the symbol of material in the American society which is full of animalistic passion for it. “Your” refers to Peter's, belonging of the upper class and “my” refers to Jerry's or the belonging of lower, marginalized class. The upper class

animal like Peter must study gain more knowledge and turn to the rank of human being while the lower class people like Jerry are dying. Thus, the underlying meaning of Jerry's saying is totally different than his actual saying. It is very ironic and even full of sarcasm antidote to the human condition in the society.

Reinhold Niebuhr in his book *The Irony of American History* has pointed out the irony that can be seen in the philosophy of material progress and prosperity that informs the American history and culture. Discussing the emphasis of American history on American Dream, the material progress and happiness, Niebuhr writes:

The prosperity of America is legendary. Our standards of living are beyond the dreams of avarice of most of the world. We are a kind of paradise of domestic security and wealth. But we face the ironic situation that the same technical efficiency which provided our comfort has also placed us at the center of the tragic developments in world events. There are evidently limits to the achievements of science; and there are irresolvable contradictions both between prosperity and virtue, and between happiness and the "good life" which had not been anticipated in our philosophy. (45)

Niebuhr points out another side of the American history and social life. He is proud American with his belief on material progress and prosperity. He sees America as a paradise of domestic security and wealth. But it is ironic, according to him, to see that the comfort of the American life is the result of technical efficiency and the same has got tragic ends too. There is huge gap between prosperity and virtue, the happiness and good life. It is even more ironic to see Albee's characters from the lights of this boasting of material progress and prosperity. Peter's life is better in comparison to Jerry's life in the play; he is leading a good life that is closer to Niebuhr's observation of American domestic security and prosperity but Jerry's life is miserable. He both lacks material prosperity and happiness. Jerry says about his living condition, "I've told you about the

fourth floor of the roominghouse where I live. I think the rooms are better as you go down, floor by floor. I guess they are; I don't know" (27). Jerry continues relating about his living condition:

I don't know any of the people on the third and second floors. Oh, wait ! I do know that there's a lady living on the third floor, in the front. I know because she cries all the time. Whenever I go out or come back in, whenever I pass her door, I always hear her crying, muffled, but ... very determined. Very determined indeed. But the one I'm getting to, and all about the dog, is the landlady. I don't like to use words that are too harsh in describing people. I don't like to. But the landlady is a fat, ugly, mean, stupid, unwashed, misanthropic, cheap, drunken bag of garbage. (27)

The main point we notice is the lack of communication among the neighbors. Jerry does not know about the people living around him; he only guesses their life might be better floor by floor. He guesses there is a lady on the third floor because she cries most of the time when he passes through the third floor. It is even more ironic that a neighbor never stops and asks her the cause of her cries and never tries to understand her sufferings.

After this, Jerry encounters with his landlady with her dog. He uses the term misanthropic while describing his landlady. For him, she has got all the negative characters and ugliness. She is mean and stupid; she is dirty and unwashed. The nauseating living condition amidst the people with whom Jerry neither communicates nor loves has been presented. This picture ironizes the American pride on prosperity, material progress and happiness.

Jerry's life outside the mainstream "doesn't sound like a very nice place" (22) to Peter, who lives in an easily definable and average apartment in the East 70s. Jerry desires to tell the story of what happened at the zoo, the story of the dog, the story of his family to someone outside his realm. If these stories can be told and consumed by

an audience, then Jerry can escape from his isolation. Albee's strategy mirrors Jerry's tactics. He entitles his play *The Zoo Story* and uses the drama to tell the story of society's alienation. 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. After hearing Jerry list his odd possessions, Peter asks, "About those empty picture frames . . . ?" To which Jerry answers: "I don't see why they need any explanation at all. Isn't it clear? I don't have any pictures of anyone to put in them" (23). Jerry's answer does not make sense to Peter, as he surely could have pictures of his parents or his aunt in those frames if he desired so. He tells Peter the story of his mother's "adulterous turn" (24) which ended with her death, and his father's subsequent two-week drinking celebration, which resulted in his being "slapped in front of a somewhat moving city omnibus" (24). With both parents dead before he was twelve, he moved in with his aunt who died "on the afternoon of [his] high school graduation" (24). He concludes these memories: "But that was a long time ago, and I have no feeling about any of it that I care to admit to myself. Perhaps you can see, though, why good old Mom and good old Pop are frameless" (24).

Jerry also tells Peter stories of his sex life. He summarizes his sexual behaviors as he says, "And let's see now; what's the point of having a girl's picture, especially in two frames? I have two picture frames, you remember. I never see the pretty little ladies more than once, and most of them wouldn't be caught in the same room with a camera" (25). His encounters with "the little ladies" are about only the physical sex act, not about remembering or connecting to the women in emotional, spiritual, or intellectual ways, so Jerry does not put their pictures in the frames. When his physical connection with one of them ends, the relationship is over and has served

its purpose. His casual sexual encounters do not rate a monumental frame. Jerry also tells Peter the story of his eleven-day homosexual relationship with the park superintendent's son, which occurred when he was fifteen. The way Jerry avoids using the word, homosexual, but must spell it out for Peter, indicates his shame in participating in acts of same-sex desire. This relationship appears to be the most meaningful partnership he has experienced, but he has closeted it and disallows himself to display it in picture frames at home. When Peter responds to these stories with an unfinished comment, "It seems perfectly simple to me . . .," Jerry overreacts; "Look! Are you going to tell me to get married and have parakeets?" (25). With traditional American boldness, Jerry territorializes from the margins. Jerry's paranoia charges out to face off with Peter, whose wife and daughters and parakeets provide familiar mainstream images easily framed, displayed, and presented to the world. Peter does not have episodes like these or sexual rendezvous to hide; Peter conforms.

Jerry has no images of people he desires to fill the empty frames, because he does not want to be reminded of the past. Jerry wants to create a memorable story in the present. Jerry does not care which story he tells, as long as he has an audience. His opening line declares as much. He states, "I've been to the zoo" (12). When Peter "*doesn't notice*" (12) Jerry repeats his sentence twice, with force; "I said, I've been to the zoo. MISTER, I'VE BEEN TO THE ZOO!" (12). Peter, not sure that this stranger is addressing him, does not know how to respond. Jerry opens the play by finding an audience and telling that audience a story, the story he conceived at the zoo. Until he relates this zoo story to someone, his actions remain unaccountable; they are not real. The narrative of the events, the characters, the staging of the plot of the zoo story do not exist until Jerry tells the story by acting it out.

That Peter the individual becomes a murderer is coincidence. However, Jerry has known about his own death since he anticipated it at the zoo. He begins conversing with Peter in order to create a scenario that he has planned to end with his death.

Thus, the play is not absurdist, because Jerry ultimately controls it. He has arrived at his purpose at the zoo and tells the story to Peter to end his narrative with the conclusion he discovered there. Ultimately, Peter is not the only audience for Jerry's story; Peter also simultaneously plays a part in the story that the audience witnesses at the theatre. Albee metatheatrically tells the story to the audience as Jerry tells it to Peter. Jerry indicates this plan when Peter questions Jerry's behavior, and Jerry replies: "I'll start walking around in a little while, and eventually I'll sit down. (*Recalling*) Wait until you see the expression on his face" (19). Jerry's "you" addresses the theatre audience; Jerry's "his" refers to Peter's face. Jerry's zoo story moves from Peter can hardly imagine it. Ontologically, Jerry's world did not exist for Peter until Jerry told him about it. Jerry himself is not real to Peter until he makes himself known through the stories he tells. Jerry nudges Peter's discomfort: "*(Lightly mocking)* It's for reading about, isn't it?" (28). Peter replies, "Yes." Jerry continues, "And fact is better left to fiction" (29). If Peter can keep the uncomfortable and alarming facts of the world at bay, then he will not have to deal with things that might threaten, scare, hurt, or change his environment. Peter, a reader, even makes his living in publishing. Jerry saw Peter's signifying book when he initially approached the man on the bench.

Jerry selects an audience who would absorb a story. He then uses a series of shorter stories to prepare his audience for the story of the dog: "Because after I tell you about the dog, so you know what then? Then . . . then I'll tell you about what

happened at the zoo” (29). Carefully and calculatedly, Jerry focuses on the execution of his plan. Peter begins to feel Jerry’s exertion of control: “You’re . . . you’re full of stories, aren’t you?” (29). Peter’s discomfort lies in being caught unawares, and in his surprise at how intensely Jerry presents the stories he tells. Jerry’s interruption of Peter’s Sunday ritual of reading in Central Park escalates from a conversation with a stranger to a clash of two very different worlds.

Jerry expects their collision to edify their positions, as he explains in his story of the dog, which he uses as a sort of experiment. “We have to know the effect of our actions,” he explains (33). He has told stories of his family and his lovers and his acquaintances, but none of these stories has had any real consequences. He does not feel the stories he has told so far have been significant in his life, except, perhaps the story of the park superintendent’s son. Even in that story, which he would like to believe means that he was “very much in love,” he admits that he was in love “maybe just with sex” (25). In the dog story, however, Jerry works on a relationship that starts out as an irritation and builds to a severe passion. In fact, it resulted in the most meaningful experience of his life so far. His relationship with the dog distills his desire to make contact with a human being.

Jerry builds his language to convince his audience that he has experienced heightened passion. Jerry rambles on and on in what Anne Paolucci calls his “compulsion to talk” (41), and the turning points in the plot are punctuated by Peter’s reactions. “I decided: First, I’ll kill the dog with kindness, and if that doesn’t work . . . I’ll just kill him” (31). This radical jump to violence earns a reaction from Jerry’s audience. Peter “*winces*” (31). His sympathy for the dog and disgust at Jerry’s idea is premature, and Jerry directs him to wait before he responds: “Don’t react, Peter; just listen” (31). Jerry then describes the way he fed the dog six hamburgers a

day for six days until he decided he could not overcome the dog's "antipathy" (31). He moves to his next step just as he said he would: "So, I decided to kill the dog" (32). Again, Peter reacts; he "*raises a hand in protest*" (32) but Jerry refuses to heed Peter's gesture. Jerry explains to Peter how much must be at stake to make a difference. He uses words one might choose to describe the longings of a would-be lover: "I was heartshatteringly anxious to see my friend again" (33). Jerry claims to have achieved love.

He says, "Now, here is what I wanted to happen: I loved the dog now, and I wanted him to love me. I had tried to love, and I had tried to kill, and both had been unsuccessful by themselves" (34). Jerry explains that "neither kindness nor cruelty by themselves, independent of each other, creates any effect beyond themselves; and I have learned that the two combined, together, at the same time, are the teaching emotion" (35–36).

In the end, Jerry and the dog are back in their respective places, like the animals held by society's constructs in their cages at the zoo. "We neither love nor hurt because we do not try to reach each other" (36). They, like people in general, retreat to their designated places in society. They have, however, reached a kind of truce, "Whenever the dog and I see each other we both stop where we are. We regard each other with a mixture of sadness and suspicion, and then we feign indifference. We walk past each other safely; we have an understanding. It's very sad, but you'll have to admit that it is an understanding" (35). While Jerry's attempts at contact with the dog "failed," they make a difference in their relationship. The dog and Jerry are no longer isolated from one another; they must "feign" their alienation. They have generated a history between them that they must pretend to forget. They repress what they know to ignore the battle that has connected them. Until Jerry challenged the dog

and all but killed him, Jerry felt that “animals are indifferent to me...like people (*he smiles slightly*)...most of the time” (30). By fighting a death-battle with the dog, Jerry has created a new relationship with the dog. He tells Peter the story of the dog to impress upon Peter the vital importance of such contact. He also wants to impress upon him the extremity of violence that his environment forced him to use to make such contact.

Peter, however, cannot understand. “I don’t know what I was thinking about;” says Jerry, “of course you don’t understand. (*In a monotone, wearily*) I don’t live in your block; I’m not married to two parakeets, or whatever your setup is” (37). Jerry realizes what he already learned at the zoo: Peter cannot understand his story only through hearing it; he must experience it through acting it out in a sensational drama. Jerry’s comic incongruity underscores how little he understands Peter’s milieu, just as Peter cannot relate to Jerry’s circumstances.

Peter and Jerry describe their positions to one another, but they are the only two characters who actually exist in the world of the play. They are opposites, yet they reflect one another. Like kindness and cruelty in the story of Jerry and the dog, the meanings of their positions become clear through their opposition. Just as was the case in the story of the dog, the reaction to the experience of their meeting will be what makes their encounter real. Jerry discovered this truth in his lessons from both the landlady and the dog. As he began telling the story of the dog, he indicated as much:

What I am going to tell you has something to do with how sometimes it’s necessary to go a long distance out of the way in order to come back a short distance correctly; or, maybe I only think it has something to do with that. But,

it's why I went to the zoo today, and why I walked north . . . northerly, rather . . . until I came here" (30).

The event he has planned belongs in the range of the unworldly, the unbelievable, and the unthinkable. Yet, the telling and dramatizing of it makes it real.

III. Conclusion: Ironic ending of *The Zoo Story*

The news reports will record it, and Peter's memory will relive it. The significance of what happened at the zoo is that Jerry determined the final act of his own drama. His subsequent onslaught of Peter casts and acts out an event significant enough to result in coverage on the evening news. Jerry tells Peter, "You'll read about it in the papers tomorrow, if you don't see it on your TV tonight" (15). Jerry wants to control (to direct) the outcome (the final scene) of his life. Jerry does not desire to harm Peter or his family, but he wants to "know" the end of the story. If he could, Jerry would play all the parts in his drama. He'd kill himself, but his suicide would not be remarkable enough to create much, if any, narrative in the media. Murder has a chance of making the news.

Jerry wants to tell the story that the oppressor kills him. He does not want Peter the individual to be blamed. In fact, he makes special efforts to ensure that Peter gets away unseen, that he does not leave his book as evidence. It is very ironic to see how the class mechanism and its dichotomy exists in American society. Though many of the people believe in American Dream and prosperity, the horrible reality of the American society has gone unnoticed, without becoming the news, without selling the story to the media and with utter apathy of the so-called social experts. This ironic portrayal of America is presented in Albee's play. The play is a story of an alienated outsider Jerry who finally and fatally makes a real connection with a fellow creature. Jerry indeed becomes successful in establishing relation with Peter though he loses his life in his hand. Because of his self-sacrifice, Jerry can also be associated with Christ figure and the play can also be read as a biblical allegory. Peter, after his own crime, realizes that he is an individual like Jerry, who needs some connection. His sense of superiority that was seen before it disappeared and made himself guilty.

To sum up, Albee has presented the predicament of a lower class, orphan, heterosexual person, Jerry, in modern American society that generally professed the material progress and American Dream. It is very ironical and frustrating to see his communication gap with the society and his continual failure to make a fruitful contact with society. Human society has turned irrational and become a human zoo in its manifestation and general people find it very difficult to carry on living. So, Jerry resists this society and finally commits suicide impaling himself on the knife that is in Peter's hand. At the end, Jerry who is referring Peter as a vegetable shows how he can go up to the rank of animal from the rank of vegetable. He highlights a quality – to fight for your honor and property – that helps a vegetable to go up to the rank of animal. Further, he ironically wants Peter not to leave his book behind so that he can get more knowledge about animal nature after reading the book and elevate his rank further to be a human being. How miserable and ironic is the world and living human condition in the growing irrational and materialistic world is shown with the experience of Jerry in Albee's play. There is a hope embedded to his death and Peter holding his book again that the world and living human condition may improve in the upcoming future. Optimism and the expectation of change correcting the animalistic human condition becomes the conclusion of the play.