

Hodge Analysis

Benjo Verge

Play Title and Author: Zoo Story by Edward Albee

I. **Dramaturgical Research (at least a paragraph of each, can be pages of info)**

A. **Author (bio, influences & style):** Edward Albee was born in Washington, DC on March 12, 1928, and died on September 16, 2016. He was adopted by the family who his biological father was working for, when he was a young child. Albee grew up in New York City and attended Trinity College after he graduated from Choate School. He started short novels that turned into plays in the late 1950s. The Zoo Story, The Sandbox, and The American Dream were his early works. Albee began writing full-length plays in the late 1960s and continued to write all the way up to 2009. He is considered one of the great modern playwrights; his style was related to the Theatre of the Absurd. Albee's playwright influences were Samuel Beckett, Jean Genet, and Eugene Ionesco.

B. **Play (reviews & production history):** The play was originally a short novel he wrote in 1958 but he turned it into a one-act play. The first production of it was in Berlin because no New York producer would agree to stage it. It was successful overseas and later produced at Off Broadway in a double bill with Sam Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*. It is addressed as the birth of American style absurdist drama. In 2004, he expanded *The Zoo Story* into a two-act play but renamed it *Peter and Jerry*. In 2009, the play was renamed to *At Home at the Zoo*.

C. **Period information of when the play was written (social, political, historical, literary, & artistic):** The time-period was post-World War II, so nations were still recovering financially from that. Also, it was the beginning of the civil rights movement where black people were fighting for equal rights and opportunities in America. The literary period is known as The Contemporary Period which is 1945 to present day. The abstract expressionism was the artistic period which started in the 1950s.

II. **Given Circumstances (at the beginning of the play)**

A. **Environmental Facts:** The weather isn't terrible, nor does it have precipitation. I don't believe they would be sitting on a bench casually talking if it was raining, snowing, or hailing.

I. **Geographical Location:** They were at a public park sitting at a bench

ii. **Date/Year/Season/Time:** It had to be circa 1950s. I would say it would probably have been in the warm weather seasons like spring, summer, or early part of autumn.

iii. **Economic Environment:** According to Jerry, he is poor and doesn't give a detailed description of what he does for a living. He lives in a poor neighborhood and doesn't have much in his tiny apartment. He seems to be lower class. Peter makes around 18k a year which was a lot back in that day. He lives with his family in a nice neighborhood, and he has to be upper middle class or upper class.

- iv. **Political Environment:** The story did not reveal a political point of view.
- v. **Religious Environment:** Religion was not mentioned in the script.
- vi. **Social Environment, particularly regarding protected classes (race, color, national origin, religion, genetic or family medical history, protected veteran status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, pregnancy, age, disability):** The play was written in 1958 so I'm going to assume that both characters were white. That was before the Civil Rights Act of 1964. I can't imagine a black man and white man sharing the same bench during that time without a more hostile situation at the beginning of their conversation. As far as we know, Peter is a forty something year old heterosexual male, married with two children(girls). Jerry is a thirty something year old, single man who explained his childhood where he might have possibly been in love with a boy but now, he's into women. His sexual preference didn't have a clear answer and to so that I won't offend anyone I don't want to assume. Pregnancy, disability, veteran status, or medical history was not mentioned.
- vii. **Play Summary (can copy from online):** Publishing executive Peter is an upper middle-class man with a wife, two daughters, and two cats. He is in his forties and sits on the bench reading a book. Another man, Jerry, a few years younger and dressed in a sloppy manner, joins Peter, and tells him that he has just come from the Central Park Zoo. Peter does not offer a response, but Jerry persists in trying to start a conversation. He is lonely and desperate for a connection with another person. Jerry quickly becomes an annoyance, with his boisterous personality and his disruption of Peter's quiet time. He rambles on, telling Peter that smoking will cause him cancer and suggests that having cats rather than dogs is a sign of being effeminate. Jerry continues to probe Peter for information about his life and interests. Eventually Peter engages in conversation with Jerry and begins to learn about the stranger's life.

Jerry lives a lowly life in a run-down apartment in an Upper West Side flophouse. He talks of the worthless items that make up his belongings, among them a pair of empty picture frames which Peter inquires about. Jerry tells him he is totally alone in the world. He was young when his parents died, and he has had only one romantic relationship that had any meaning for him. That was a brief affair with another boy in his teens. Jerry then says he will tell Peter about his visit to the zoo, but his conversation goes in another direction.

Jerry begins talking to Peter about his landlady. She is always drunk and frequently propositions Jerry. At one point, the landlady acquired a dog which Jerry attempted to befriend, but which attacked him. When his continued attempts to befriend the dog were all rejected, Jerry decided to kill the animal by giving it poisoned hamburger meat. While this made the dog sick, it did not kill it and Jerry decided to just avoid it thereafter. Peter is perplexed and disturbed as he wonders why Jerry would tell him such a story. Jerry tells him that he uses people's pets to try to start friendships with other people.

Peter politely tries to leave and Jerry tickles him in hopes to prevent him from doing so. He then tries to force Peter to move from the bench and punches him. Peter is aware that Jerry's conduct is irrational, but for some reason finds himself feeling possessive of the bench that was "his" before Jerry arrived. Jerry pulls out a knife and says that the two of them should fight. Peter

is surprised by this and refuses. Jerry then gives the knife to Peter who holds it as if protecting himself. Upon seeing this Jerry runs at Peter and into the knife. Jerry loses control at this point but then becomes calm and he accepts that death is upon him. He thanks Peter and as his life leaves him, he wipes Peter's fingerprints from the knife to prevent him being accused of murder. Before anyone might pass by and see the dying Jerry, Peter retrieves his book and leaves

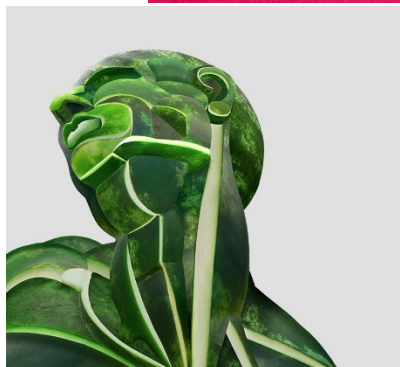
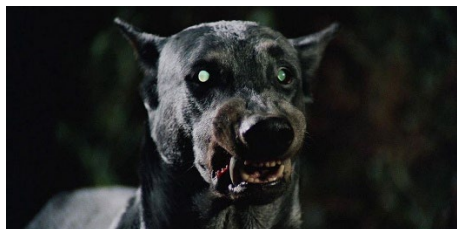
<http://edwardalbeesociety.org/works/the-zoo-story/>

III. Dramatic Action

- A. **Previous Action** (what happened before the play started): Peter was just sitting on the park bench minding his own business and reading a book.
- B. **Inciting Incident:** When Jerry asks Peter to stand up and fight over "his" bench.
- C. **Summarize the key plot points of the play (x leads to y leads to z):** Peter was reading his book and a stranger, Jerry, began talking to him. This led Jerry to talk to Peter about his own life, economic status, how he ended up at the park, and his interactions with a fellow tenant and her dog. Peter gave a brief synopsis of his life as well. After the story Jerry tells Peter about the tenant's dog, Peter began to feel uneasy. This led to Peter wanting to leave but Jerry forcefully suggested

IV. Dialogue in the script

- A. **Structure of lines and speeches:** It didn't really have a structure.
- B. **Choice of phrases and sentence structure:** Jerry was bolstering his self-righteousness and zoo ideology. Peter was just anxiously listening to Jerry's problems and stories.
- C. **Choice of key words (look for repetition):** Zoo, Vegetable, Stories, Dog, etc.



E. **The sound of the dialogue:** Peter: Unsure & anxious, Jerry: Self-centered & aggressive

F. **Any peculiar characteristics (e.g. dialects, etc.):** No peculiar characteristics.

V. **Principal Characters (COMPLETE FOR EACH OF THE PRINCIPALS)**

A. **Polar Attitudes of Principal Characters:** Peter, in my opinion does not show signs of having a polar attitude. Jerry believes he's caged in a "zoo", and he needs Peter's help to break out of that lonely predicament.

B. **Identity**

a. **Age:** Peter is in his 40s and Jerry is in his 30s

b. **Race:** Unknown but I assume that both are Caucasian

c. **Ethnic identity:** European American or White

d. **National origin:** It never specified

e. **Religion:** Never brought up

f. **Gender identity & expression:** Both considered themselves as men

g. **Sexual orientation:** Peter is heterosexual, and Jerry could possibly be bisexual, pansexual, or bicurious

h. **Disability:** Peter is okay, but Jerry may suffer from a mental disability

C. **Desire (what they want):** Peter just wanted to sit on his bench that he goes to every Sunday to read. That's his way of relaxing. Jerry wanted somebody to talk too and wanted to end his own life around someone. I think suicide was his way of uncaging himself from his own hell of a zoo.

D. **Will (what they are willing to do to get it):** Peter came there every Sunday, so he continuously gets what he wants. Jerry wanted to be uncaged from his "zoo". He tried love, relations, sex, and animal torture. None of these seemed to work until he met Peter. He wanted Peter to kill him but when Peter could not, he punctured himself with the knife while Peter was still holding it.

E. **Moral stance (what rules must they follow for themselves):** I question whether Jerry even has a sense of morality. Peter has a sense of right and wrong. He cares about taking care of his family and was willing to defend himself with Jerry's knife to get back to his family.

F. **Decorum (what rules must they follow for others):** Jerry doesn't follow any set of rules. Peter tries to be polite and kind as possible to a stranger. Peter allows the conversation to keep going even when his book reading was interrupted.

G. **Summary list of adjectives:** Combative, thin-skinned, cruel, self-centered, agitation, patronizing, solitary, companionless, feisty, aggressive, etc.

VI. Your idea

A. **Meaning of the title:** It is a story about the mentality of being isolated and caged from the world like animals.

B. **Premise (YOUR phrase that expresses the idea or spine of the play):** Jerry found a random man to talk to that he may have felt was more economically stable than he was. He wanted to share his story in hopes of getting a hostile reaction from Peter. Eventually, he started a fight with Peter and pulled out a knife. He has Peter a chance to fight back, even giving him the knife. Jerry realized that Peter wasn't going to stab him, so instead he approached Peter and forcefully pushed the knife into his own stomach. He told Peter to grab his book and leave so he won't be arrested. Also, he cleaned the knife, so Peter's fingerprints were not on the knife. I believe Jerry's end goal was to kill himself, but he didn't want to be alone during this act.

C. **Philosophical statements in the text of the play (cite actual quotations):** "What I wanted to get at is the value difference between pornographic playing-cards when you're a kid, and pornographic playing-cards when you're older. It's that when you're a kid you use the cards as a substitute for real experience, and when you're older you use real experience as a substitute for the fantasy."-**Jerry**

"Sometimes it's necessary to go a long distance out of the way in order to come back a short distance correctly."-**Jerry**

"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."-**Peter**

D. **How the actions lead directly to the premise or meaning; how does the play achieve its purpose (you can analyze pretty deeply here):** In my professional opinion, Jerry is suffering from one of two things. He probably suffers from antisocial personality disorder or borderline personality disorder. He goes back and forth between apathy and empathy when discussing his own life and the neighbor's dog. The author wanted to show social inequality and disparities can shape a person's life and ideology. I believe this short story gives you that.

VII. Metaphor

A. **Assign a specific metaphor to the play (is): Zoo story** doesn't represent an actual zoo. Jerry was speaking on how human isolation and loneliness is no different than animals being caged up in a zoo and how his small apartment represents the sadness a person may feel from being in that zoo separated by bars from everyone else.