The Zoo Story

By:

Edward Albee
Edward Franklin Albee, was born March 12, 1928) is an American playwright known for works such as The Zoo Story, The Sandbox, and Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf.

His works are often considered as well-crafted, realistic examinations of the modern condition.
The Zoo Story, originally titled Peter and Jerry, is a one-act play by American playwright Edward Albee. His first play, it was written in 1958 and completed in just three weeks.
This play is a great example of The Theatre of the Absurd. Unlike non-absurd plays, these plays usually lack things like plot and character development. They highlight humanity's pointlessness and isolation. There's a lot of standing around, doing very little, often in bizarre situations. If things happen, they happen for no reason. The message is basically that life has no purpose or meaning. We're just here for a while, we try to communicate, often failing, but we're mostly alone. Then we die
THE CHARACTERS:

* Peter:
   
   Is a middle-class publishing executive with a wife, two daughters, two cats and two parakeets.

* Jerry:
   
   An eccentric transient in his late thirties, Jerry lives in poverty on the Upper West Side and is profoundly lonely. This loneliness drives him to seek companionship from strangers.
SETTING:

*Place:

New York city, Central park where there are 2 benches.

*Time:

On Sunday afternoon
This one-act play concerns two characters, Peter and Jerry, who meet on a park bench in New York City, Central Park. Peter is a middle-class publishing executive with a wife, two daughters, two cats and two parakeets. Jerry is an isolated and disheartened man, desperate to have a meaningful conversation with another human being. He intrudes on Peter’s peaceful state by interrogating him and forcing him to listen to stories about his life, and the reason behind his visit to the zoo. The action is linear, unfolding in front of the audience in “real time”. The elements of ironic humor and unrelenting dramatic suspense are brought to a climax when Jerry brings his victim down to his own savage level.
Eventually, **Peter** has had enough of his strange companion and tries to leave. **Jerry** begins pushing Peter off the bench and challenges him to fight for his territory. Unexpectedly, **Jerry** pulls a knife on **Peter**, and then drops it as initiative for Peter to grab. When **Peter** holds the knife defensively, **Jerry** charges him and impales himself on the knife. Bleeding on the park bench, **Jerry** finishes **his story** by bringing it into the immediate present: "Could I have planned all this. No...NO, I couldn't have. But I think I did." Horrified, Peter runs away from **Jerry**, whose dying words, "Oh...my...God", are a combination of scornful mimicry and supplication.
THE THEME IN THE ZOO STORY:

* Social class
* Failures in communication
* Fantasy VS reality
there is a difference in their ‘Peter and Jerry’ life stories and their social class. While Peter enjoys a high salary and a stable family life, Jerry has no job and characterizes himself as a "permanent transient." This thing affects eve from their philosophical viewpoints to the way they perceive the world.
* FAILURES IN COMMUNICATION

In so many ways, Peter and Jerry are unable to bridge their differences to achieve any real communication. This communication failure occurs on both linguistic and philosophical levels.
* FANTASY VS REALITY

Another resonant theme in the story is fantasy VS reality. Jerry's isolation and separation from normal life is such that his stories are absurd, and his behavior might be confused as that of a psychopath rather than that of an eccentric man.
USE SYMBOLISM

- *The Zoo Story* is marked as a new development of American drama in a way in which Edward Albee blends symbolism.
- *In The zoo Story* symbolism is part of the very fabric of the play functioning within, as well as enlarging its surface meaning with naturalism to realize his theme.
- *It* has a greater depth of feeling and experience, and is more original in its conception. The zoo constitutes the central symbol of the play and is an image of human isolation and absence of contact and communication.
QUESTIONS :-

- Write a character sketch
  a) Jerry
  b) Peter
- Elaborate the theme of The Zoo Story.
- Discuss Albee’s depiction of homosexuality in the Zoo story.
- What does the Zoo story say about Capitalism?
- What is the symbolic significance of Jerry’s death?
- What role do animals play in the Zoo Story?
Thank You.

Divya Prajapat
Asst. Prof. (English Dept)
Dr. D. Y. Patil A.C.S. College, Pimpri, Pune.