

Loneliness and Suffering in the Zoo Story

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Abstract- The major theme of zoo story is aloneness. The entire play set on a central park in a bench. Peter is an upper middle class family man and Jerry was a slopping dressed and he announces that he comes to central park. Aloneness is which comes in many ways. It comes as partition of class and posture, it also comes as loneliness on which the part of Jerry and his incapability to communicate, or to shtick passable in society. Another resonant theme in the story is between vision and fact.

Index Terms- Aloneness, partition, fact.

LONELINESS AND SUFFERING

Edward Albee's The Zoo Story is a long one act play in which "nothing happens" except conversation-until the violent ending. Shorn of much of the richness of Albee's utterly arresting language, and his astonishing nuances of psychological attack and retreat, the play can be described as follows:

A man named Peter, a complacent publishing executive of middle age and upper-middle income, is comfortably reading a book on his favourite bench in New York's Central Park on a sunny afternoon. Along comes Jerry, an aggressive, seedy, erratic loner, Jerry announces that he has been to the (Central Park) Zoo and eventually gets Peter, who clearly would rather be left alone, to put down his book and actually enter into a conversation. With pushy questions, Jerry learns that Peter lives on the fashionable East Side of the Park (they are near Fifth Avenue and 74th Street), that the firm for which he works publishes textbooks, and that his household is female-dominated: one wife, two daughters, two cats, and two parakeets. Jerry easily guesses that Peter would rather have a dog than cat and that he wishes he had son. More perceptively, Jerry guesses that there will be no more children, and that decision was made by Peter's wife. Ruefully, Peter admits the truth of these guesses.

The subject of the Zoo and Jerry's visit to it comes up several times, at one of which Jerry says mysteriously, "You'll read about it in the papers tomorrow, if you don't see it on your TV tonight". The play never completely clarifies this remark. Some critic think, because of statements Jerry makes about the animals, that he may have released some from their cages, while others think Jerry is talking about a death which has not yet happened, which might be headlined "Murder Near Central Park Zoo". The focus now turns to Jerry, who tells Peter that he walked all the way up Fifth Avenue from Washington Square to the Zoo, a trip of over fifty blocks. Adding Washington Square to Jerry's appearances and behavior, Peter assumes that Jerry lives in Greenwich Village, which in 1960, the year the play was first produced, was the principal "bohemian" section of Manhattan. Jerry says no, that he lives across the Park on the (then slum-ridden) West Side, and took the subway downtown for the express purpose of walking back up Fifth Avenue. No reason is given for this but Jerry "explains" it in one of the most quoted sentences of the play: "sometimes a person has to go a very long distance out of his way to come back a short distance correctly". It is possible that Jerry saw his trip up Fifth Avenue, which gradually improves from the addicts and prostitutes of Washington Square to such bastions of prosperity as the famous Plaza Hotel, as a symbolic journey through the American class system to the source of his problem-not millionaire's row but the affluent, indifferent upper middle class.

Without any prompting from Peter, Jerry describes his living arrangements: a tiny room in a rooming house, with a very short list of possessions; some clothes, a can-opener and hotplate, eating utensils, empty pictures frames, a few books, a deck of pornographic playing cards, an old typewriter, and a box with many unanswered "Please!" letters and "when ?" letters. Jerry's building is like something

out of Dante's *Inferno*, with several different kinds of suffering on each floor, including a woman Jerry has never seen who cries all the time, a black "queen" who plucks his eyebrows "with Buddhist concentration" and hogs the bathroom, and a disgusting landlady whom Jerry describes vividly. Jerry also reveals the loss of both parents—his mother to whoring and drinking and his father to drinking and an encounter with "a somewhat moving city omnibus"—events that seem to have had little emotional effect on him. Jerry's love life is also discussed: an early and very intense homosexual infatuation and, at present, one night stands with nameless women whom he never sees again.

It is clear in this section of the play that Jerry is trying to make Peter understand something about loneliness and suffering—not so much Jerry's own pain which he treats cynically, but the pain of the people in his building, the zoo animals isolated in their cages, and more generally the societal dregs that Peter is more comfortable not having to think about. Peter is repelled by Jerry's information but moved except to exasperation and discomfort. Desperate to communicate with Peter or at least to teach him something about the difficulties of communication, Jerry comes up with "The Story of Jerry and the Dog". It is a long, disgusting, and eventually pathetic tale of his attempt to find some kind of communication or at least relationship, with the vile landlady's vile dog (the hound who guards the entrance to Jerry's particular hell). Jerry fails to reach the dog though he goes from trying to kill it with kindness to just plain trying to kill it; the two finally achieve mutual indifference, and Jerry gains free entry to the building without being attacked, "If that much further loss can be said to be gain".

Jerry also fails to reach Peter, who is bewildered but not moved by this story and who prepares to leave his now-disturbed sanctuary for his comfortable home. Desperately grasping at one last chance, Jerry tickles Peter, then punches him on the arm and pushes him to the ground. He challenges Peter to fight for "his" bench, but Peter will not. Jerry produces a knife, which he throws on the ground between them. He grabs Peter, slapping and taunting him ("fight for your manhood, you pathetic little vegetable") until Peter, at last enraged, picks up the knife. Even then, as Albee points out, "Peter holds the knife with a firm arm, but far in front of him, not to attack, but to

defend". Jerry says, "So be it," and "With a rush he charges Peter and impales himself on the knife". Peter is paralyzed. Jerry thanks Peter and hurries him away for his own safety, reminding Peter to take his book from "your bench...my bench, rather". Peter runs off, crying "Oh, my God!" Jerry echoes these with "a combination of scornful mimicry" and dies.

CONCLUSION

Portions of Albee's dialogue and stage directions have been included in this summary in an attempt to indicate the huge importance of Albee's incisive use of language and psychology in the play. The play resides, in fact, not in the physical actions of the plot but in the acuteness of the language, in the range of kinds of aggression shown by Jerry—from insult and assault to the subtlest of insinuations—and even in the symbolism which becomes more apparent near the end of the action.

REFERENCE

- [1] Goyal, Bhagwat S; "Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story*", published by Surjeet: New Delhi.