

## Review

# The Zoo Story

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### Abstrakt

The following contribution on The Zoo Story by Edward Albee focuses on the feeling of being lonely, estrangement, different social classes and statuses as well as disregard of others to the issues of people in need. It also shows the difficulty people have while holding the conversation and the power of manipulating with the others. The writer urges readers to break this sensation of not to belong anywhere. The play is very topical in our environment in its way.

**Klíčová slova:** feeling, lonely, social classes, manipulate, estrangement

## Introduction

### Edward Albee

American playwright who was born in 1928, he was not brought up by his own parents but by adoptive ones by family Albee. Albee's and his adoptive parents' relationship was full of clashes whose attempts were to raise a respectable member of society. However, young Albee kept in touch with artists and intellectuals. In his early twenties, he moved from his parents' place and worked as e.g. office boy, messenger. His plays gave birth to "The Theatre of Absurd". In short, the absurd drama expression points out the meaningless and illogicality of a human being existence. As for his plays, *Who is afraid of Virginia Woolf* or *The American Dream* can be named. Samuel Beckett with his text *Waiting for Godot* represents this movement in Europe [1; 2].

## **Historical context**

American drama revived in the 1950s, having been pressed by the Great Depression, WWII as well as the Cold War. The contemporary period was seen as perspective time. People crave to enjoy their life, to live without existential and economic fears. A significant emphasis is put on the material part of life which happened to be may plays' topics. [3]

## **The Story**

The play follows one day of Jerry who happened to enter the life of Peter in the Central Park and changed him the life course forever. The story is retold below.

This morning seemed to be different in comparison to the previous ones. Not that Jerry would get up at a different time or the weather would address to me more than on other days. But he was determined to stop living the life which didn't make him happy, only forced him to feel lonely day by day. And in his thirties he felt really fed up with this kind of life. Jerry could not carry on living this way – he needed to find someone to tell them his story, to share his current conditions (which would be found as not appropriate by many of middle or upper-class society; what do they know about the real life?), to be understood for once...

Encouraged by the special morning mood, Jerry went in the direction of the Zoo. While walking he was completely buried in his thoughts when he realised that he happened to be in the Central Park, in not a very frequent part. Jerry noticed a bench which was taken by a reading man, in an expensive suit. Feeling rather tired from a long walk, Jerry approached the bench, sat down and started to chat up to the man (Peter). First of all, Peter didn't know how to tell Jerry he is not interested in his company at all. Jerry learnt that the guy was from a publishing field, married, with two kids, girls... Peter appeared to be happy but while being asked questions, it got more and more obvious that he didn't enjoy his life very much. Peter's park reading was a sort of running away from his family where he felt hen-pecked, where he was expected to earn money and play the role of a satisfied daddy and husband. As Jerry saw it pretty clearly, Peter was not aware of this fact. Jerry would appreciate such living conditions in a different way; he would know how to use them properly. But Peter was never in Jerry's shoes therefore his present situations seemed deadlock. Jerry suddenly got the feeling he can show Peter what the life is...

Jerry was irritated by the kind of people like Peter. Jerry wanted him so badly to see that there are others whose major concern is not which tie matches to the suit but accommodation and job of any kind, dealing with weird persons he wouldn't ever dream they exist. Jerry wanted Peter to listen to him at any

cost and he managed it. Jerry gave Peter a short description of his landlady as "*fat, ugly, mean, stupid and unwashed, misanthropic, cheap, drunken bag of garbage*", and added how terrible her sexual lust was and the way how he managed to get rid of her. He, Peter (on the one hand a very successful businessman but on the other hand in his personal life such a wimp), was clearly at a loss and did not have the guts to get up and leave. Somehow, Jerry wanted Peter to make feel uncomfortable at least for a few minutes to enable him to understand how some people might have been feeling all their lives. Jerry told Peter a story of his landlady's dog which kept attacking him. Jerry could not see the reason for the dog's behaviour, but he was determined not to give up and either make the dog love him or kill it. Peter did not comment on Jerry's attempts with burgers for the dog but when Jerry gave away the information about the poison, Peter was surely shocked as he wanted to have a dog instead of the cats and parakeets. Also Jerry's answer about a relationship to his parents and towards women startled Peter. This was what Jerry was heading to, to make Peter think, to get him out of the stupid life pattern which only created the safe shell with very strict rules he was obliged to follow for the guaranteed safety. All of a sudden something moved in Peter and gave him the power to express his real feelings. But Jerry managed to calm him down to wind him up again in a few moments when pushing him out of the bench they had been sharing for a sometime. Jerry pushed Peter on purpose more and more towards the end of the bench to move him to act as himself, as Peter. Jerry could have been satisfied with the result; Peter let his life frustration out. He showed his attachment to the bench, it symbolised his asylum, his world without being ruled by his wife... Peter was ready to defend it. Jerry felt it the right moment for him; he took a knife out of his pocket, did not pay attention to Peter's utter surprise and threw it on the ground. Peter picked it up, obviously very nervous, unsure, insecure about the whole situation. But Jerry did not really care; he impaled himself on the knife. Finally, Jerry experienced the peace and quiet inside; he knew that the life he had been living was over. What a relief! Also, Jerry felt happy for Peter whom he forced to be himself. And of course, now Peter might understand Jerry's situation, his past battles with windmills.

## Conclusion

Although written some decades ago, the story is still very up-to-date as there are on the one hand countries with immense riches and on the other hand, there are countries where the famine, wars, diseases of different kinds kills every day. Next, the attention has been drawn to overwhelming differences between social classes and the lack of awareness of it.

## Reference

- [1] PAL: *Edward Albee (1928-)*. [online]. [cit. 2011-04-07]. WWW: <<http://www.csustan.edu/english/reuben/pal/chap8/albee.html>>.
- [2] HIGH, B. P. *An Outline of American Literature*. Longman : London and New York, 1993. P.232. ISBN 0-582-74502-0.
- [3] O'CALLAGHAN, B. *An Illustrated History of the USA*. Longman : Harlow. 1992. 144 p.ISBN 0-582-74921-2.

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