

Moral Decadence in Edward Albee`s The Zoo Story

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ABSTRACT:

The current study tackles the philosophical concept of moral decadence in the modern American play *The Zoo Story* by Edward Albee. The research concentrates on how specific characters tend to have low moral standards, and what detrimental and deteriorating effects of their immorality could harm the people around them. The research follows Aristotle`s philosophical concept of morality, what Greeks used to consider to be moral and immoral. Immanuel Kant`s views are also taken into account to measure characters` misconducts as well. As an existential play, the study sheds light on various social and family problems, such as poverty, lack of education, prostitution, hopelessness and bereavement. These appalling circumstances inevitably could have a tremendous effect on the low-class people in the American society of the late 1950s. Most notably, both Jerry and Petter are the embodiment of this society, where each one belongs to a distinct social class. The research exemplifies how such social predicaments could change the direction of each one of the mentioned characters. The main focus is on Jerry as he is the most talkative, absurdist, problematic, confused and suicidal character in the play.

KEYWORDS: Immorality, morality, class distinction, sexual perversion, absurdity, suicide.

INTRODUCTION

We discover a contemporary investigation of moral decadence, a complicated idea that has drawn academics and artists throughout history, in Edward Albee's well-known American drama "*The Zoo Story*." This study asks us to investigate the moral conundrums faced by particular play characters, looking at their dubious moral standards and the detrimental effects of their immoral actions on people around them. We analyze the characters' deeds in light of moral precepts from the Enlightenment and classical Greek philosophy, drawing on the theories of Immanuel Kant and Aristotle.

The drama *The Zoo Story* explores existential ideas and illuminates a number of familial and societal themes that were prominent in late 1950s American culture. These issues comprise lack of education, poverty, hopelessness, prostitution and sadness, which doubtlessly have a critical influence on people from lower socioeconomic classes. Particularly, the two characters Jerry and Peter symbolize various social strata, and this research demonstrates how they clash with these societal disputes and redesign their lives. The main emphasis is on Jerry, who is the play's most chatty, ridiculous, troublesome, perplexed, and ultimately self-damaging character. This study investigates primary notions such as immorality, morality, class distinctions,

sexual deviations, absurdity, and suicide within the context of the play. Within a cautious analysis of these notions, we aim to discover the complex web of moral involvedness in Albee's work and study how the characters deal with their own moral dilemmas in a speedily changing society.

1. Edward Albee`s Serious Drama

Edward Albee as a prominent white American playwright is a leading figure in the modern history of the American drama whose high and elevated reputation ranked with the other playwrights of his time such as Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller and Eugene O`Neill. With the emergence of Albee`s plays, serious questions started to be looming large as they would have to be answered as a result of the plays of Albee that have been performed in the Broadway. (Bottoms 1). Albee began his early career with writing short one-act plays, he had diverted the course of the American history of drama with his most powerful and influential dramatic works, the writer would feel too comfortable with his early short plays such as *Box* (1968), *Listening* (1976), *Counting the Ways* (1976), *Finding the Sun* (1983), and *Marriage Play* (1987). in his play *The Death of Bessie Smith* (1959), he would specify certain topics to divulge in his staged works such as materialism, racism, artificial values, complacency, lack of

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communication, and the debilitating effects of illusions (Bottoms 16).

As one of Albee's early plays, *The American Dream* (1960) depicts a childless U.S. family of the late fifties, composed of a middle-class husband Daddy, a housewife Mommy and her mother Grandma. With his *The American Dream*, the sensitive topic of the gender roles in the American society is being dramatized and discussed. It is similar to his earlier work *The Zoo Story* where characters' actions and words seem to convey no particular purpose. Evidently, Mommy who firstly appears on the stage recalls an event in the shopping mall where she found a very lovely hat, she has been fooled by shopkeeper, who ridiculed her regarding the color of the hat she bought, she believes she has bought a beige colored hat, while in fact the color of the hat was whitish. Thus, after being told that the color of the hat was whitish, she returned to the store and the storekeeper gave her another color, believing to be a beige color, again it was the same hat. Despite this image of the futility and purposeless life that Albee depicts, the gender role is the most daring subject he introduces to his audience at a time that such topics would hardly be accepted or absorbed, much like Jerry, Daddy, is being in two-minds regarding his muscularity, whether he is masculine or not h cannot be assertive (60.61.74 *Dream*).

The other most crucial and controversial issue Albee is concerned about is the American dream. People all over the world struggled to reach America in the hope of achieving numerous goals; such as finding decent jobs, being equal member in society, and achieving what the rich has already gained (Alqadhi and Pawar 629). Indeed, the American dream was developed further with the help of the middle-class, the class brought wealth and prosperity to America until it became a great country (Smith 6). The impact of the dream is obviously seen in *The American Dream* as the family seems clearly busy with material wealth. Mommy does not bear a child; therefore, she has adopted a young boy called Bumble from Bye-Bye adoption Service. Mommy believes that the boy would be able to make the American dream come true for her. Unfortunately, he does not succeed to fulfill her desires and wishes, for this reason she decides to abandon the son entirely. As the family's failure looms large, the family's living conditions become utterly ridiculous and futile (Alqadhi and Pawar 630).

As a national playwright, President Clinton once in a TV show praised the drama of Albee as "Tonight our nation – born in rebellion – pays tribute to you, Edward Albee. In your rebellion, the American theatre was reborn." (quoted in Bottoms 1) Albee was the first rebellious dramatist who dealt with bestial subjects sympathetically. Open-mindedly, Albee's dramatic abilities empowered him to be a figure who could engender miscellaneous characteristics and features to prove that he could put on stage various issues of his time (Bottoms 1,2). Albee, as a young man in his early twenties, lead a bohemian life among various New York artists. He tried his hands on various dramatic works such as *The City of People* (1949) and *The Making of a Saint* (1953–54). The later was dedicated to his contemporary Thornton Wilder. The play centers on the concept of the existential topic of the modern age

represented by a number of passengers waiting for the train of life to arrive. Albee did not gain much fame with the performance of his *The Invalid* (1952), and *A Delicate Balance* (1967), unless he had written *The Zoo Story* in 1958. He could eventually be recognized as a dramatist with the aforementioned play (Bottoms 2-3). As an autobiographical play, the playwright could show on stage his repressed unconscious impulses as well as to reflect the weary and tiresome lives of the low-class Americans throughout the character of Jerry. By contrast, he also represents the Aristocratic or bourgeois class throughout the character of Petter.

A highly hilarious, comic and controversial play *Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf* (1962) attracted the attention of the audience to a great degree. It was performed consecutively for two years, yet the play has sharply been criticized by critics (Bottoms 4). The play shows a deformed image of a domestic life, a family made of George and Martha, both married couples, teachers in the university. Martha, due to her unfulfilled dreams, combats her husband with insults and slurs throughout the entire play. Martha's first marriage to her family gardener has been nullified by her father, thus, in order to retaliate against him, she married George believing that he will succumb her father's passion in the university. Failing to realize his wife's goals, George becomes the victim of her insults every now and then "Will you put a record and shut up" (Albee 127). The other minor character is Nick, he is a 30-year-old professor at university. He is shrewd and cunning to exploit his wife, Honey. In order to achieve his goals, he even engaged in a sexual relationship with some of the faculty wives to meet his carnal desires. Nick only married Honey for her handsome and abundant fortune. He also cleverly participates in Martha's mortification of George. Throughout this play, Albee is capable to dramatize the emptiness of the modern American life on the stage. In *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, the playwright endeavored to reveal the hollowness of modern American life, the play shows that the American people were struggling to achieve their dreams no matter what illegal ways they might use. The concept of manipulation and deception is revealed represented through the both intellectual class in the society. The first family is plunged in a deep sense of remorse and loss as Martha keeps getting drunk due to her failure, while Nick is deceiving his wife in order to ascend to a high social status by taking advantage of his wife's wealth that has been inherited by her late father (Kaibr and Jingjing 1-2).

2. The Concept of Moral Decadence

Literature values every act of man to analyze and understand Acts of immorality and violence pervade in *The Zoo Story*. Most importantly, moral decadence is the most recurrent predicament in the play. Intrinsically, both moral and decadence can be defined separately; however, they can also come together to reflect the fall of human morals. Brastad and Knudsen refer to the origin of the word, they assert that the term is derived Latin "decadentia" which is something that collapses or roots. The word has repeatedly been used in the sixteenth century as well in France. Albeit, the meaning of the decadence could imply ascending from a state of excellence, importance, and warfare. It also

alludes to how certain situations go from bad to worse. Such a term in its own was a specific literary genre in France "decadent literature" in the 19th century (X). However, both words, morality and decadence can come together to indicate a state of having low moral values.

The Greek philosopher Aristotle (322-384BC) studied at the Academy in Athens for twenty years, from the age 17 to 37. Throughout all these years he had continued receiving various lessons on topics like his teacher's theory of Forms, virtue, politics, justice, and moral issues. Aristotle also worked at the academy along with Plato as a tutor. Sometimes he would often disagree with his teacher's views on different topics. Nonetheless, when it comes to the idea of morality, he similarly holds the view that morality must be implanted in the human body (Hughes 4.7.8). After the death of Plato, Aristotle left the Academy and began establishing a philosophical school called Lyceum, where in the school his interest in ethics has developed as at that particular time he wrote on Ethics (Hughes 10). His theory of morality or ethics is concerned with achieving a fulfilled life, how an individual could gain a fulfilled life throughout his daily life. According to him, doing good is what makes a person having a fulfilled life. By doing good, a person becomes fair and just, without performing good deeds nobody is able to be a good person. In order to have a purified soul, Aristotle confirms that the individual should not be like a patient who listens to the advice and consultations of his physician while in fact he does not follow the instructions given by his physician. In such case, a person should not only think he is morally good, but he must do good to assert that his good deeds reflect his high moral standards (Hughes 13).

This very view of morality has already been mentioned as well in Plato's *The Republic*, Plato himself would focus on how a citizen could gain a decent and moral life as a member of the community (Hughes 13) Aristotle pioneers the term "arête" a word that convey multiple meanings to refer to a person's qualities and characteristics; one of the inferred meanings of the word is being open-handed and gallant, while the other meaning would be demonstrating a person's cognitive capacities to be able to be good at something and to be able to understand things to some extent (23). For the philosopher, doing good is what makes an individual morally virtuous. His understanding of the moral virtue is that "So, a [moral] virtue is a habitual disposition connected with choice, lying in a mean relative to us, a mean which is determined by reason, by which the person of practical wisdom would determine it" (Hughes 54). The philosopher affirms that when we have ill intentions, without putting such intentions into actions, we would not be immorally malefactors, because the thoughts and actions do not bring about similar results, but when we have the tendency to do a heinous deed, by then we are being immoral. In such cases, individuals cannot be considered people of moral virtue. He further adds that virtue or *arête* is a cult of life, by which a person normally learns to acquire numerous habits throughout his lifetime (Hughes 56).

Considering the origin of morality; Göran Fransson elaborates that "the word 'moral' comes from the Latin word 'moralis' to refer to human conduct and traditions"

(73). Moreover, Aristotle concerned himself with the issue of morality, coining the term "Arkasia" to denote the loss of one's control over himself. He has already learned this term from Plato. While Socrates asserts that intrinsically nobody has any inclination to do harm to himself or herself, thus, for him all human misdeeds stem from ignorance. By contrast, he declares that all good deeds come from knowledge. His student, Plato, almost holds a similar understanding as he opines that it is hard for people to stand against what they really know to be virtuous, as the virtuous people do not do any harm to themselves. Albeit, the notion of morality is often gained or leaned by individuals (Hughes 146).

In the modern philosophy, Immanuel Kant is well-known for his theories on human conduct. According to him being immoral is doing what one should not do. Kant further explicates that having low moral standard would doubtlessly empower the immoralist to take advantage of someone else's capabilities on the purpose of achieving his own personal goals and aspirations (Nelson 391.304). The philosopher best clarifies the issue evil deeds are the source of narcissistic views an individual holds, that is to say self-love, could seem positive to the narcissistic person but fatal for the other person. He also adds that inner evil that a person possesses is not only harmful but also unethical (Kant 6-146).

As far as the act of suicide is concerned, Kant does not agree with a person's decisions to commit suicide, for him to escape a hardship by ending one's life is an immoral act. He also believes that to end everyday misery and sufferings throughout the act of suicide is not a reasonable justification (Nelson 422). Likewise, in modern times, the father of the sociology "Emil Durkheim" has written on a body of various social topics, politics, morality, religion, and suicide is the most crucial topic he writes about. Most importantly, he states that a person has no right or privilege to end his life. Knowing that though he may have the power to take his own life by his own hands, this is utterly an act that shows the loss of morals. He further clarifies his view on the subject of suicide, stating that no individual should end his life under any circumstances, and he should not also act as culprit in helping others to commit suicide. In both cases, the act is forbidden and totally immoral. In so doing, the individual shirks his own social duties as a member of the society; he refuses to be a member of the society that is why to end this feeling of frustration self-destruction is the best choice for the suicidal individual (Durkheim, translation Spaulding/Simpson 302-303).

The act of suicide implies that there is no meaning and importance of religion. An individual, who intentionally kills himself, reflects his absence of faith in religion. In such a horrible act, the individual does wrong but to himself as he destroys his own life. Therefore, it is totally a huge mistake; it also wounds the society as a whole, as the society does not approve such heinous deeds (Brandt 302-304).

3. Jerry's Moral Failure

The Zoo Story introduces two distinct moral issues: moral decay and morality. The two main characters Jerry and Petter embody the two philosophical views. Most interestingly, Jerry represents the idea of immorality to a great degree especially when his life is being compared with Petter's. The core essence of the moral decadence refers to the lack of morality or ethics; it also refers to the traditional views on sexual tendencies. The concept is connected with virtuous and evil conducts of human beings. The deviated moral conduct can be seen and practiced in various social situations. It is also referred to as imbalanced behavior, meaning that whenever someone loses their balance, they can easily behave immorally. When individuals tend to act immorally, it becomes evident for others to notice that such people hardly ever consider the social norms and moral principles of the entire society (Anggraini 9).

Accordingly, what is deemed harmful to oneself is doubtlessly immoral as well. Hereby, considering the most compelling character, Jerry comes to recount his life events in great details to Petter whom Jerry meets in a park. As the play starts, Jerry is seen irritated as he walks around the park for no particular purpose. He encounters Petter sitting on a bench reading a book in a public park. He approaches him and tries to break the silence Petter has created for himself. Petter does not seem distracted by the presence of Jerry as he greets him unexpectedly, while Petter allows Jerry to sit next to him. Throughout the conversation between them, Jerry acts like a story-teller, he has rolled a number of stories under his sleeve. He begins to divulge that he leads a very difficult life. The hard social and family problems he encountered have a detrimental effect on his psyche. Whereas Petter is unconcerned about all the things he hears from Jerry, yet, Jerry does not stop speaking to Petter. Throughout the conversation, Jerry comes to reveal numerous aspects of his life, and those aspects are moral issues that cannot easily be accepted by Petter. First and foremost, Jerry recounts that he has no parents therefore he feels frustrated and lonely, all the things he possesses in his lodge seem to symbolize his lonely and miserable life:

But, then again, I don't have one wife, two daughters, two cats and two parakeets. What I do have, I have toilet articles, a few clothes, a hot plate that I'm not supposed to have, a can opener, one that works with a key, you know: a Knife, two forks, and two spoons, one small, one large; three plates, a cup, a saucer, a drinking glass, two picture frames, both empty, eight or nine books, a pack of pornographic playing cards, regular deck, an old Western Union typewriter that prints nothing but capital letters, and a small strong-box without a lock which has in it ... what? Rocks! Some rocks ... sea rounded rocks I picked up on the beach when I was a kid. Under which ... weighed down ... are some letters ... please letters ... please why don't you do this, and please when will you do that letters. And when letters, too. When will you write? When will you come? When? These letters are from more recent years (Albee, *Zoo* 65).

Jerry's language is hazardous; he seems thirsty for a good listener or a good communication that is the reason most of his speeches are quite long. It is interesting to note that

Jerry's speech is loaded with symbols that reveal his intense sexual repression. According to Sigmund Freud's theory of psychoanalysis, there are specific objects that demonstrate how repressed a person is. The phallic utensils Jerry is using could stand for his suppressed carnal desires. The other images Freud stresses upon are towers, rockets, guns, arrows, swords, and the like (Tyson 20). Furthermore, Jerry seems to be obsessed with pornographic playing cards. Therefore, for a lonely person, someone who does not have a partner, the easiest way to unleash his unmet desires is to watch these nude pictures. More interestingly, in Frederick Regard's study on the impact of pornography "Moral Pornography or Ethical Rhetoric", it is confirmed that pornography is an immoral act, and it has a deteriorating influence on the individual. For pornography is eminently injurious, it hurts; it hurts a class of people, damages the very idea of human subjectivity" (265). Thus, it is evident that Jerry harms himself while he fantasizes the nude playing cards, and doing what is harmful, accordingly it is what is called an act of immorality. Jerry resumes to speak about his life to Petter ceaselessly, he comes to recall how his parents passed away. He recounts that when he was ten years old his parents passed away, and he was left alone. Much more intriguing, his mother used to be a prostitute while he was still a little boy, as he reports the story of his parents to Petter stating that when the mother was still working as a sex-worker, she was once found murdered, later on his father died as well:

Good old Mom walked out on good old Pop when I was ten and a half years old; she embarked on an adulterous turn of our southern states ... a journey of a year's duration ... and her most constant companion ... among others, among many others ... was a Mr Barleycorn. At least, that's what good old Pop told me after he went down ... came back ... brought her body north (Albee, *Zoo* 66).

Jerry's mother used to be a prostitute, thus, he has become a victim of her, for she has loaded her son with such demoralizing memories. He is providing concrete and accurate information regarding his childhood upbringing. From a radical feminist perspective, prostitution lies outside the realm of morality and ethics, thus practicing it would definitely mean lacking moral values (Pateman 531). Moreover, John Stuart Mill states that prostitution is evil as it harms the clients as well. Additionally, he opines that this mere profession is both disgusting for both participants (Danielsson 43). Joshua Bailey in his *Freedom or Slavery? The Harm in Legalizing Prostitution*, comments that though some may regard prostitution as a benign business, the very act of prostitution can bring about chronic diseases such as AIDS and STD, he also adds that it could also result in unwanted pregnancy, rape, and violence (1). In the same token, Jerry's mother has been the subject of violence as she has been killed, and her murderer has not been found. At the same time his father's attitude toward his mother's was passive, as he did not show any feeling of honor or jealousy toward her infidelity. It is highly likely that the parental education that Jerry received had an innocuous effect on his behavior, he did not have anybody to care about him at a very sensitive age. He neither received parental care nor had a lover in

his youth to fill his emotional gaps. These acute and painful factors created in him an ulterior motive to turn his attention to what is called pornographic playing cards. However, as an abandoned child, he feels that he is desperately in need of a person even to sate emotional and physical needs. But he does not have to have the courage to have someone in his life. Unlike Petter whose upper-class position has helped him build a family and lead a luxurious life. Jerry is often aware of the class distinction between himself and Petter therefore he mockingly tells Petter that he could steal all his possession, to be equally rich, like another person whose wealth could gain the social position and respect "I'm not going to rob you, and I'm not going to kidnap your parakeets, your cats, or your daughters"(63). Jerry is liable to do anything evil that is why stealing is also an evil act as it would strip someone of their material things. But Jerry does not still have the opportunity to commit such a heinous deed. He is a complete failure; he has not achieved anything worthwhile in his life and he has not achieved any success to be proud of. Probably his failure is merely the result of his low social class that led him achieve nothing.

4. Jerry's Sexual Perversion

With Jerry's constant longing to unleash his thoughts he proclaims that he has a homosexual proclivity, whether homosexuality is psychological illness or not, he candidly and shamelessly confesses that he is a queer:

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. And for those eleven days, I met at least twice a day with the park superintendent's son ... a Greek boy, whose birthday was the same as mine, except he was a year older. I think I was very much in love ... maybe just with sex...(67 Albee, *Zoo*).

He asserts that men who feel attracted to men are called inverts, thus to characterize them, he gives them various personal traits. Such inverted men could not perform a normal sexual intercourse with women because they will not regale themselves in the sexual act at all. This is due to the fact of their sexual attraction toward people of the same sex. Moreover, some inverts do accept their sexual impulse based on their own conviction that what they feel is quite normal and natural while other inverts rebel against their sexual libido believing that it is totally abnormal (59). Furthermore, Freud assures that homosexuality is not a psychological disorder whereby a person has to be treated by a psychiatrist over a period of time, he rather affirms that inverted tendency has even nothing to do with a person's individual achievements and goals as this very sexual inclination has existed in ancient civilizations. In addition to that, he believes that homosexuality is one of the many types of human sexuality and viewing it as immoral is based on the contexts and cultures that regard it in various ways (19).

By contrast, Michael Levin comments that homosexual acts are utterly detrimental as it involves in misusing the parts of the body in an improper manner. His view is evidently stated in the following speech:

Homosexuality is abnormal and hence undesirable - not because it is immoral or sinful, or because it weakens society or hampers evolutionary development, but for a purely mechanical reason. It is a misuse of bodily parts. Clear empirical sense attaches to the idea of *the use* of such bodily parts as genitals, the idea that they are for something, and consequently to the idea of their misuse (Albee, *Zoo* 233).

Levin further explicates that homosexuality is unnatural, and people who engage in relationships with the members of the same sex tend to be miserable (236). Jerry's unhappiness is detected in his life-style, he does not share happy moments with anybody. He lives on his own in his poor apartment. More interestingly, to his bad luck, his landlord is a woman who is highly repressed. Whenever Jerry comes back home, she tries to sexually abuse him, Jerry feels that he is being sexually harassed by his landlord:

JERRY: Let me tell you about why I went ... well, let me tell you some things. I've told you about the fourth floor of the rooming house where I live...But the landlady is a fat, ugly, mean, stupid, unwashed, misanthropic, cheap, drunken bag of garbage. And you may have noticed that I very seldom we profanity, so I can't describe her as well as I might.

PETER: You describe her ... vividly.

JERRY: ...she always stops me in the hall, and grabs a hold of my coat or my arm, and she press a her disgusting body up against me to keep me in a corner so she can talk to me. The smell of her body and her breath ... you can't imagine it ... and somewhere, somewhere in the back of that pea-sized brain of hers, an organ developed just enough to let her eat, drink and emit, she has some foul parody of sexual desire. And

I, Peter, I am the object of her sweaty lust.

PETER: That's disgusting. That's ... horrible (Albee, *Zoo* 68-69).

The landlord is trying to do something against Jerry's will. The lady's immorality is depicted through her sexual advances toward Jerry. She is eccentric and often drunk. She is also bewildered and unable to differentiate between reality and fantasy. Jerry tries to get rid of her by confounding her as he tells her that he has already approached her sexually. While in fact Jerry uses such verbal tactics to keep her distanced from him. Jerry's most horrifying and cruel behavior is shown when he confronts the landlord's dog. Whenever Jerry comes home in the evenings, the dog stands on his way and it begins to attack him, Jerry's description of the dog is utterly frightening "The dog... a black monster of a beast: an oversized head, tiny, tiny ears, and eyes ... bloodshot, infected, maybe; and a body you can see the ribs through the skin. The dog is black, all black; all black except for the bloodshot eyes" (70).

To avoid the attacks of the dog, Jerry poisons the dog ``On my way back to the rooming-house, I kneaded the hamburger and the rat poison together between my hands`` (72). Jerry fails to murder the dog. However, there is no justification for his cruelty and it is true that the environment he lives in is aggressive and threatening that is why his act of cruelty toward the dog is morally unacceptable. It becomes apparently clear that this very heinous crime stems from his feeling of frustration and isolation. Jerry's story with the dog is a sheer example of his own life, he is even unable to communicate neither with animals nor with human beings. In such a frustrating situation, assuming that Jerry intrinsically loathes his surroundings for this reason he does his hardest to destroy whatever is threatening and unpleasant. 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" (Ismail 9). The modern American society has established certain values and norms for people to lead their lives in accordance with established beliefs. Anybody who does not follow the social norms is an outcast and he is not easily being accepted to be a member of the society, especially someone who is eccentric or sexually perverted. Thus, Albee is showing this aspect of the American society where Jerry's presence is taken for granted due to his sexual tendency. Jerry has to repress his sexual inclination, this very suppressing act, in his opinion would in some ways let him be accepted by Petter who is the embodiment of the straight society. Nonetheless, in so doing, he is burdening himself with a psychological pressure that lets him appear like a total stranger (Küçük 44-45).

5 The Moral Philosophy of Suicide

The most surviving and compelling mythical story about suicide is the story of Sisyphus, whether it is worth it to commit suicide or not is a highly controversial and philosophical question that still makes philosophers question the validity of suicide. Albert Camus, throughout the story of Sisyphus brings forth such philosophical concept of suicide (3). Sisyphus victoriously endures the torments of the inferno as he ceaselessly lifts a huge rock over his shoulders and climbs over a mountain and once he is at the peak of it, he throws the rock to the bottom of the mountain. As if what he tolerated was in vain. Repeatedly, he descends from the mountain to hold the rock again to ascend to the mountain again. Gods have punished him to dwell damned in the pits of hell because he has stolen the secrets of the gods. (3.19-23). Unlike Sisyphus, Jerry is intolerant, it is true that both lead an absurd life, but the former accepts his futile life, while the latter is in struggle with his absurd life. He seems unable to be in good terms with his brutal environment and fate. Jerry does not find a true meaning in his life. Throughout the series of stories he narrated to Petter, including the story of his parents, the story with the landlord, and the story of the dog, none of the stories conveyed any sense of meaning for him. Moreover, Jerry divulges his genuine character when he uses a gutter language with Petter, at the same time he keeps pinching and punching Petter in an unpleasant manner. He does not even stop it even knowing that Petter is feeling vexed by his demoralizing manner:

PETER: [very annoyed] I can't move over any more, and stop hitting me. What's the matter with you?

JERRY: Do you want to hear the story? [Punches Peter's arm again.]

PETER: [flabbergasted] I'm not so sure! I certainly don't want to be punched in the arm.

JERRY: [punches Peter's arm again] Like that?

PETER: Stop it. What's the matter with you?

JERRY: I'm crazy, you bastard.

PETER: That isn't funny (Albee, *Zoo* 70-80).

Petter's high morality is dedicated in this very last scene as he even does not reply to Jerry in the same manner. He is keeping his composure as he wanders what was wrong with Jerry. Petter is unable to stop him from his unpleasant advances; he is totally being under his control like putty in his hands. Though with a cold communication Petter allowed Jerry to speak up from the very start of the play, for this reason Jerry has gained enough control over him. Consequently, he has come to the realization that he is meek and submissive to a great extent. The educated Petter is still trying to behave in the most moral way. Yet, it is not within Jerry's capacities to grasp how morally Petter is behaving, he is being nasty, unruly and of no moral values.

They both fight over the bench. Petter seems resistant and he believes that he possesses the bench as everyday he sits on it reading books. It gives him a sense of comfort and social stance. On the contrary, Jerry wants to destroy the peace Petter has built for himself. He longs to be given what Petter has. Jerry is being profoundly devoured by the feeling of covetousness hence, he anticipates that the bench would give him a similar social position. His misconception of the life of Petter makes him fight with Petter. To have a life like his makes him appear morally evil. Petter eschews the quarrel with him, because he believes that quabbling could bring about unexpected and harmful consequences. Jerry resumes using swearing language with Petter, he also slaps and spits on his face to bring him down to his low moral standards. In this very climatic scene Petter is shown as a weak person who is unable rid himself of the most embarrassing situation. He is also incapable of perpetuating physical violence like Jerry. He believes that everybody is understanding and open-minded like him. On the contrary his view on others is apparently unreasonable as the outside world he encounters is brutish and threatening. Therefore, his meek and submissive attitude is evidently shown in the following dialogue:

JERRY: [slaps Peter on each "fight"] You fight, you miserable bastard; fight for that bench; fight for your parakeets; 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.

PETER: [breaks away, enraged] It's a matter of genetics, not manhood, you ... you monster (Albee, *Zoo* 85).

The last thing Jerry can do is to put an end to his absurd life. According to Richard Brant "...suicide is always irrational and immoral in some way" (315). As Petters is about to leave Jerry takes out a knife to wrestle with him. Petter is loaded with fright; he feels that Jerry is going to murder him:

JERRY: [rises lazily]: Very well, Peter, we'll battle for the bench, but we're not evenly matched. [He takes out and clicks open an ugly-looking knife.]

PETER: [suddenly awakening to the reality of the situation] You are mad! You're stark raving mad! YOU'RE GOING TO KILL ME! (Albee, *Zoo* 84)

Jerry is dramatizing a conflicting and terrifying scene, throwing the knife at the feet of Petter. The latter is unprepared to act in such a play-within a play, whereas Jerry is able to control the entire situation as he is forcing him to perform an act even if it is against his will. Jerry has to hold the knife in order to start fighting over the bench. Symbolically, the bench stands for Petter's aristocracy and it is an excuse for Jerry to start a fight with Petter. Jerry's sense of abject dejection and miserably paved the way for deciding to take his own life. Like many absurdist advocates Jerry is timid to take his own life, thus, to avoid the responsibility for himself, he chooses Petter to be the culpable. He gives Petter the knife, while he tries to use it to defend himself; Jerry impales himself upon the knife and murders himself. The very culminating event creeps a sense of horror on the side of Petter:

PETER: [breaks away, enraged] It's a matter of genetics, not manhood, you ... you monster. [He darts down, picks up the knife and backs of a little; breathing heavily.] I'll give you one last chance; get out of here and leave me alone! [He holds the knife with a firm arm, but far in front of him, not to attack, but to defend]

JERRY: [sighs heavily] So be it ! [With a rush he charges Peter and impales himself on the knife (Albee, *Zoo* 85).

Jerry's suicide is regarded as an act of self-destruction. To Jerry, committing suicide is a protesting attitude against his society that is governed by social rules. He could not be integrated into it easily as he repeatedly tried to build various social relationships. Each time he did not succeed. Thus, for him the easiest way to end his misery and despair is to revenge himself upon his own society that has made him feel isolated and alienated (Kaibr and Jingjing 109). As far as Jerry's suicide is concerned, it is obvious that he has done an evil act, making the other person guilty, and ruining his own life is but an immoral deed. Jerry does not have any religious beliefs to have helped him tolerate his unbearable and miserable life, the absence of God and having no faith in the hereafter is what makes him impatient and suicidal, probably, with religious conviction or faith he could not have ended his life.

Conclusion

Throughout the research it has been evidenced that *The Zoo Story* by Edward Albee showed the lives of specific characters who find themselves ensnared as victims in their society. Jerry, in particular, struggles with the burden of his low social status. Being lonely and in despair he had

nothing to be concerned with, thus he led an absurd life. What is more difficult for him in terms of morality, his mother engaged in prostitution without providing a clear reason for her immoral act. Jerry's mother had a devastating effect on him, every thought of her made him plunge into misery. As a result of his poor living conditions, and lack of parental care and love, he turns to be an aggressive person as he poisons the dog he encounters everyday he goes back home. The research has cast light on the decline of modern man's morality as far as Jerry and his mother are concerned. It is apparent that what has Jerry undergone stemmed from the fact of not living in a safe and secured family and environment he used to envision personally. The other reason for his downfall as a modern man to earn a decent life was that he had no violation or will power to improve his life, thus, his poor psychological state hindered him to feel and to be a normal person. Falling into the abyss of penury and bereavement made him commit unethical deeds without being able to better his life or to mend his mistakes. Whereas, Petter, who hails from the Aristocratic class, has never led a life of debauchery and misery. He lived a peaceful life with his children and wife; his luxurious life contracted with Jerry's, thus; Jerry could not stand a moment to accept his absurd life. Consequently, he took his own life. He came to the realization that his immoral acts, like poisoning the dog, having no loving partner, loneliness, poverty, and lack of respect and no sense of communal made his life worth nothing; thus; for him, suicide was the only solution.

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خراپبوونی نهخلاقى له شانۆنامهى چيروكى باخچهى نازه لانی نینوارى نهلبى

پۆخته:

نهف فهكولینه باس ل چهمكن فلهسهفمیا تیکچوونا نهخلاقى دکهت، ب تاییهت د شانۆگهريین مودیرنن نهمریکى دا مینا(چیرۆکا باخچى نازه ل.....). یا نهفیسەر نینوارى نهلبى.....، دقئ شانۆگهريی دا روناهى دکهفیهت ل سهر چهوانیا لادان و چوونا هندهک ژ نهکتهريین وئ بهرهف ستاندهريین نهخلاقیین نزم، زیدهبارى دروستکرنا کاریهگهريهکا نهباش ل سهر نهوان کاریکتهريین دنافا شانۆگهريی دا بهشار. دههماندهمدا فهكولين بهرهف وهرگرنتا چهمكن نهستوى دجیت نهوین دهینه گریدان ب نهخلاقى فه، نهو چهمكن گریکیان ددانان ب نهخلاقى و نهخلاقى دنیك چوارچوفا، دیسان بوچوونین نهمانویل کانتى بهرچاف هاتینه وهرگرنت لهور پیههريی رفتهريین کهسایهنيین شانۆگهريی، کو ب شانۆگهريهکا ههبوونی دهینه دانان (existentialism). ههروسا ههول هاتیهدان روناهى بکهفیهت سهر زورینهیا کیشین جفاکى، بو نمونه ههزارى، نهخویندهوارى، لهشفروشى و تیکچوونا نهخلاقى، زیدهبارى نهوان کاریکتهريین ل سهر تهخا نزم و ههزارا د کوملهگهها نهمریکیدا ل دوماهیا سالین پینجبا دسهدهين بیستیدا، ژ ههژى گوتنى یه دنهفئ شانۆگهريینا ههردوو کاریکتهري جبرى و پینه بهرجستهیا راستهفینهیا جفاکى نهمریکى دکرن، ژ بهر کو ههز نیک ژ نهوان سهر به تهخهکا جودانه دناف نهوى جفاکیدا. ژ بهر نهفئ بهکئ فهكولینى ههولدايه کار تیکرنا کیشین کومه لایهتئ ل سهر گوهرینا ناراستین ههردوو کاریکتهريین پینستر باس لئ هاتیهکرنا دیاربهکته، نهوژى گریکیان ب پلهیا نیکئ ل سهر رفتهرو سهرمهريا جبرى؛ کو سهرنجر اکیشترین کارهکتهر دنافا شانۆگهريی دا.

پهيفین سهههکى: بئ رهوشنى، رهوشنى، جیاوازیین تهخان، لادانا سیکسى، بئ رامانى، خوهکوشتن.

الانحطاط الأخلاقي في مسرحية The Zoo Story لإدوارد ألبی

المخلص

تناولت هذه الدراسة المفهوم الفلسفي للانحلال الأخلاقي في المسرحية الأمريكية الحديثة (*The Zoo Story*) للمخرج إدوارد ألبى، وركزت على كيفية انحراف بعض الشخصيات وانزلاقها نحو المعايير الأخلاقية المتدنية، وعلى الآثار السيئة الناتجة من فسادهم الذي أثر في الناس من حولهم. وقد اعتمدت الدراسة مفهوم أرسطو الفلسفي للأخلاق، الذي اعتبرته الإغريق شيئاً أخلاقياً وغير أخلاقى في آن واحد، وكذا أخذت آراء إيمانويل كانط بعين الاعتبار في قياس سلوك الشخصيات المنحرفة، وتعد هذه المسرحية من المسرحيات الوجودية. وألقت الدراسة كذلك الضوء على العديد من المشكلات الاجتماعية، كالفقر ونقص التعليم والدعارة والانحلال الأخلاقى، فضلاً عن الفواجع الأخرى التي كانت لها أثراً كبيراً على الطبقة الدنيا والفقيرة في المجتمع الأمريكي أواخر خمسينيات القرن الماضي، ومما يجدر الإشارة إليه أن شخصيتي جيرى وبيتر اللتان في هذه المسرحية تشكلان تجسيداً حقيقياً للمجتمع الأمريكي آنذاك، إذ ينتمي كل منهما إلى طبقة اجتماعية متغايرة؛ لذا أرادت هذه الدراسة أن تبين مدى استطاعة مثل هذه المشاكل الاجتماعية في تغيير اتجاه سلوك كل واحد من الشخصيات المذكورة؛ وذلك من خلال التركيز بشكل أساسي على سلوك شخصية جيرى؛ كونها الشخصية الأكثر إثارة وغرابة في هذه المسرحية.

الكلمات الدالة: اللاأخلاقية، الأخلاقية، تميز الطبقات، الانحراف الجنسي، العبثية، الانتحار.