

## Violence Triangle in Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story*

مثلث العنف في مسرحية «قصة حديقة الحيوان» لإدوارد ألبّي

شيرين محمدا مين صالح

قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، كلية التربية، جامعة كوية، قليم كردستان، العراق

البريد الإلكتروني Email : [shirin.muhammadamin@koyauniversity.org](mailto:shirin.muhammadamin@koyauniversity.org)

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** إدوارد ألبّي، قصة حديقة الحيوان، لجوهان غالتونغ، مثلث العنف، المجتمع الأمريكي.

### كيفية اقتباس البحث

صالح ، شيرين محمدا مين ، مثلث العنف في مسرحية «قصة حديقة الحيوان» لإدوارد ألبّي، مجلة مركز بابل للدراسات الانسانية، تشرين الأول 2026، المجلد: 16، العدد: 10.

هذا البحث من نوع الوصول المفتوح مرخص بموجب رخصة المشاع الإبداعي لحقوق التأليف والنشر ( Creative Commons Attribution ) تتيح فقط للآخرين تحميل البحث ومشاركته مع الآخرين بشرط نسب العمل الأصلي للمؤلف، ودون القيام بأي تعديل أو استخدامه لأغراض تجارية.

مسجلة في  
Registered  
**ROAD**

مفهرسة في  
Indexed  
**IASJ**



## Violence Triangle in Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story*

**Shireen Mohammed Ameen Saleh**

Department of English Language, Faculty of Education, Koya University,  
Kurdistan, Iraq.

**Keywords :** Edward Albee, The Zoo Story, Johan Galtung, Triangle of Violence, American Society.

### How To Cite This Article

Saleh, Shireen Mohammed Ameen, Violence Triangle in Edward Albee's The Zoo Story, Journal Of Babylon Center For Humanities Studies, October 2026, Volume:16, Issue10.



This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license  
(<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>)

**This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.**

### المخلص:

تجسد مسرحية إدوارد ألبّي "قصة حديقة الحيوان" (1958) أفراداً يعانون من شعور ساحق بالانفصال، والوحدة، والاستبعاد الاجتماعي، ونقص العلاقات الحميمة. ينتهي ببطل المسرحية المطاف في إلى الانغماس في أعمال عنف ويموت وذلك بسبب الألم الذي يعاني منه. تركز الدراسة على قضية العنف وتأثيره على الشخصيات. استناداً إلى نظرية مثلث العنف لجوهان غالتونغ، تحاول هذه الدراسة تحليل أشكال مختلفة من العنف. الإطار الأكثر سهولة لفهم العنف هو مثلث العنف، الذي اقترحه جالتونغ لأول مرة في مقاله "العنف، السلام، وبحوث السلام" (1969). بجانب الأذى الجسدي، ميز أيضاً بين الأشكال الهيكلية والثقافية للعنف في قصة حديقة الحيوان. تسمح هذه الفئة بالتحقيق في العديد من أشكال العدوان. وفقاً لجالتونغ، "العنف موجود عندما يتأثر البشر بحيث تكون إدراكاتهم الجسدية والعقلية الفعلية أقل من إدراكاتهم المحتملة" (جالتونغ 1969، ص. 168). يقول جالتونغ إن العلماء يجب أن يدرسوا كيف يُستخدم العنف لمنع الناس من العيش كما يرغبون، وليس فقط تأثيراته الجسدية. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل الأشكال العديدة للعنف في المسرحية قيد النظر وإظهار الأسباب وراء العنف

## Violence Triangle in Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story*

التي تؤدي إلى معاناة الشخصيات. يُعد إدوارد ألبّي (مواليد 1928) كاتباً مسرحياً أمريكياً معاصراً ومتميزاً، إذ تجسد أعماله ملامح المسرح الأمريكي في حقبة ما بعد الحرب، ولا سيما في أوائل ستينيات القرن العشرين. وقد نال ألبّي العديد من الجوائز المرموقة تقديراً لإسهاماته المسرحية، منها جائزة "توني" (Tony Award)، وجائزة "بوليتزر" (Pulitzer Prize)، وجائزة "دراما ديسك" (Drama Desk Award). لقد استلهم ألبّي أفكاره من "مسرح العبث" والحركة الوجودية لبيدع مسرحيات تستكشف تداعيات العيش في عالم يفتقر إلى الغاية والحوار الهادف (Rahman, R. S. 2014, p. 2). وتُظهر أعماله المبكرة براعته في تطوير "مسرح العبث" وإضفاء طابع أمريكي عليه؛ وهو اللون المسرحي الذي بلغ ذروته على يد كُتّاب مسرحيين أوروبيين أمثال جان جينيه، وصمويل بيكيت، ويوجين يونسكو، وهارولد بنتر

### Abstract:

Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story* (1958) portrays individuals who suffer from an overwhelming sensation of detachment, loneliness, social exclusion, and lack of intimate relationships. Because of all the pain he goes through, the protagonist eventually succumbs to violent acts and dies. The study focuses on the issue of violence and its impact on personalities. Based on Johan Galtung's Violence Triangle theory, this research attempts to analyze various forms of violence. The most accessible framework for understanding violence is the Violence Triangle, first proposed by Galtung in his article 'Violence, Peace, and Peace Research' (1969). Aside from physical harm, he also distinguished between structural and cultural forms of violence in *The Zoo Story*. This categorization allows for the investigation of many forms of aggression. According to Galtung, "violence is present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations" (Galtung 1969, p. 168). Galtung says scholars should study how violence is used to stop people from living as they wish, not just its physical effects. This research aims to analyze the many forms of violence in the play under consideration and to demonstrate the reasons for violence that lead characters to suffer.

### Introduction:

Edward Albee (1928-) is a distinguished contemporary American playwright whose works encapsulate post-war American theatre, particularly in the early 1960s. Albee has received numerous accolades for his dramatic contributions, including the Tony Award, Pulitzer Prize,



## Violence Triangle in Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story*



Journal of Babylon Center for Humanities Studies: 2026, Volume: 16, Issue: 10



and Drama Desk Award. The Theatre of the Absurd and the existentialist movement inspired Albee to create plays that explore the consequences of a world devoid of purpose and meaningful dialogue (Rahman, R. S. 2014, p. 2). Albee's early works demonstrate his mastery and Americanization of the Theatre of the Absurd, which reached its peak in the works of European playwrights such as Jean Genet, Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, and Harold Pinter (Roudane 1987, pp. 2–3).

In the years following WWII, when America was experiencing its early phase of worldwide hegemony as a prosperous global power, Albee grew of age as a writer. During that era, the American media were at their peak, and the white middle class enjoyed significant prosperity. In the decades between World War II and the 1960s, the United States experienced relative economic growth, and its pervasive consumer culture encouraged citizens to acquire and flaunt a wealth of material goods. Popular television shows during that era showcased an idealized representation of suburban wealth. Television series typically depicted white middle-class family units, where the father held a more administrative role while the mother stayed at home to raise the children and maintain the household. At this period, Albee made his stage debut in 1959 with the groundbreaking drama *The Zoo Story*, in which he harshly criticized the society of his day. His criticisms are directed at the prevailing culture of his period, of which Peter is a symbol (Ibid.).

For the last half-century, Albee has been a significant contributor to the world stage of theatre, and his plays explore complex political, social, psychological, and household themes. Albee's plays began to raise concerns about sexuality, familial relationships, women, male and female identities, human interaction, and power conflicts across gender and class against the backdrop of postwar America, which was marked by social, political, and economic upheavals and disputes. These ideas have not only been the backbone of gender studies that emerged alongside second-wave feminism in the 1960s but have also had a strong presence in the dominant fields of study of the contemporary era. Around the time that major political groups like the Black Civil Rights Movement, Second Wave Feminism, and the Queer Movement were taking root in the United States, Edward Albee's writings began to gain attention. It began to alter American society by raising concerns regarding the background, development, and destiny of the identities being upheld, which were based on claims about infractions done against particular communities (Shams and Pourgiv 2013, PP. 1-11).



Albee became known as a playwright devoted to social comment, to the use of new narrative styles, and to the probing of existential issues in depth. His plays have influenced American theatre in significant ways and have also gotten people to contemplate universal themes such as humanity, social norms, and individuality. Albee's *The Zoo Story* is a classic example of the American theatrical tradition, which has always been a forum for the exploration of complex psychological and social issues. The drama, first seen in 1958, is about two men, Jerry and Peter, who meet in Central Park. Their talk about isolation, self and intimacy is intense and stimulating.

The *Zoo Story* is a beneficial illustration of Albee's particular style, which combines absurdism and stark reality to highlight some of the important social problems of the time, especially the sense of isolation and alienation characteristic of modern urban life. An assertive environment the limited dialogue and the basic atmosphere of the play create an assertive environment that emphasizes the loneliness of both protagonists. The play's basic atmosphere and sparse dialogue highlight the isolation of both protagonists. Albee uses the conflict between the protagonists to illustrate how individuals engage in destructive behavior to fill their inner emptiness. The play explores issues of estrangement, solitude, and "dehumanization in a commercial world," which are the roots of violence under the umbrella of structural violence (Abrams, 1999, p. 20).

The original title of the play was "Peter and Jerry," but it was rejected by its New York creators. Subsequently, in 1958, it was released under the title *The Zoo Story*. Albee produced *The Zoo Story* just over a month before he turned thirty. As he explains, the playwriting practice was a life-altering experience for him and marked the beginning of Albee's prolific and outstanding career as a playwright:

Something very, very interesting happened with the writing of that play. I didn't discover suddenly that I was a playwright; I discovered that I had been a playwright all my life, but I didn't know it because I hadn't written plays..... . And so when I wrote *The Zoo Story*, I was able to start practicing my 'nature' fully." I finished the play *The Zoo Story* in three weeks .... Everything in my life had led to this moment; the writing seemed to flow some inner need and conviction (Bailey 1967, p.42).





## Violence Triangle in Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story*



Albee revised and extended *The Zoo Story* into a two-act drama not long ago (2004). With the 1959 premiere of his one-act play *The Zoo Story*, Albee solidified his status as a Broadway theatrical legend and cemented his position in the world of theatre. According to MacNicholas, Albee was the most "successful", "prolific", and "controversial" among the new writers who were often praised and critiqued in the early 1960s (MacNicholas 1981, pp. 3–22). Many consider *The Zoo Story*, with its prominent Absurdist elements, to be Albee's masterpiece. Thoughts of absurdity in Albee's plays show how technological progress has acted as a barrier to human connection rather than a facilitator of improved communication. The distancing effects of contemporary technology have caused individuals to grow emotionally distant. As Bottoms has pointed out, the play "[attacks] the cherished myths of his country and theatre" (Bottoms 2005, p. 16).

The zoo story centers around a solitary guy seeking social interaction. He strikes up a discussion with a man seated on a park bench in Central Park who, at first, was reluctant to speak but was coerced into joining in. During a 1974 dialogue with Albee, Roudané maintained that "he got the idea for *The Zoo Story* while working for the Western Union: I was always delivering telegrams to people in rooming houses. The models for all those people in the play in rooming houses. Jerry, the hero, is still around" (Roudané 196).

*The Zoo Story* is a short play, but it tackles important issues such as social inequality, detachment, and the dangers of modern America. The play features only two characters. The first is a 40-year-old man called Peter, who is sitting on a bench puffing on a pipe and devouring a book. Jerry, another primary character, is a skinny man in his late thirties with a shabby wardrobe. Jerry impresses as being a disinterested and uncaring man, in stark opposition to Peter, whose clothes give the impression that he is a wealthy man.

The play opens in Central Park, New York City, on a Sunday afternoon. Jerry starts talking and states that he had just returned from the zoo. Despite repeated requests, Peter remains silent. In his ongoing monologue, Jerry expresses his need to talk to someone since he feels alone and overwhelmed. As Peter shows little interest in what Jerry has to say, Jerry becomes irritated and keeps talking, even warning Peter that smoking causes cancer. And Jerry gets Peter to open up by asking him a few private concerns; ultimately, Peter joins in. Jerry explains that he

resides in an inexpensive and cramped flat. He goes on to describe his tiny, useless belongings, which include two photo frames that are empty. Curious, Peter presses Jerry for an explanation of the empty photographs; Jerry reveals that he was sent to live with his morally reprehensible aunt following the deaths of his parents when he was a child. Additionally, Jerry mentions his only love affair he has ever had, even though it was meaningless to him. From then on, his tale becomes a diversion as he begins to recount his zoo journey.

Besides, he recounts his landlady's struggles with alcoholism, her attempts at seduction, and the numerous occasions when her dog attacked him, as well as his unsuccessful attempts to engage in conversation with it. As a result, Jerry poisons the animal's hamburger and murders it. Peter is perplexed about why Jerry shares such stories with him. Jerry attempts to prevent Peter from leaving. When Jerry sees Peter sitting on the bench, he attacks him with a barrage of obscenities and fists. Even though Jerry has grown hostile, he insists on maintaining his bench position, as Peter has noticed. The situation escalates as Jerry draws a knife and demands Peter fight. Peter resists Jerry's demands, amazed by his abrupt shift in behavior. Peter refuses when Jerry places the knife in his hand and begs him to kill him. Peter is holding a knife when Jerry unexpectedly loses control and stabs himself. As Jerry drifts off to sleep, he expresses gratitude to Peter for dedicating his time to listen to his story. He then examines the knife for fingerprints and asks Peter to leave the area before the police arrive there. After Jerry passes away, Peter reflects on his life and resolves to make some changes. (Rose 1962, pp. 10-17).

### Literature Review:

This section provides a review of the literature about the studies that are concerned with violence in Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story*. It looks at some journal articles that investigate violence in the play. One of the studies is by Susan Raheem and Zhang Zaihong entitled "Social Detachment: A Cause of Alienation in Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story*" (2014). It looks at the concept of alienation in the modern age. The writers believe that new cultural ideas dominate today's society, isolating the contemporary tragic hero from his or her homeland. This study seeks to offer a comprehensive understanding of alienation and the potential consequences of social separation. Jerry experiences prejudice and estrangement from society due, in part, to his sexual orientation in this play. Because of its role in his demise, the issue of estrangement should



not be taken lightly. The matter of estrangement should not be treated lightly, as it played a significant role in his demise. Destituteness was the result of his alienation. In this article it is explained why Albee created such an estranged protagonist in *The Zoo Story*. It also provides some background on the idea of alienation. It also tries to show how the character's alienation is both a result and a cause of certain problems.

Liang Jianhua and Zhuang Qing in "A Probe into Absurdism in Edward Albee's Play *The Zoo Story*" (2022) examine the unique characteristics distinguishing playwright Edward Albee from his contemporaries, such as the disturbing depiction of violence in his plays, his difficult position between realism and absurdism, and his criticism of the hopeful aspects of the American Dream.

The second part of the article provides a detailed analysis of Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story*, dealing with the devaluation of language, the existential choice, violent scenes, and simulation in the development of the characters according to the Theatre of Cruelty, the Theatre of the Absurd, and the philosophy of Existentialism. The study's overarching goal is to argue that the play is absurdist in nature, which would mean that Albee contributes to the tradition of absurdist theater by bringing its tenets and practices to American theater.

Another study is by Mahmoud Gaber Abdelfadeel, "*Breaking Off the Fetters of Ideology: Edward Albee's The Zoo Story as a Critique of the American Dream*" (2015). This study examines how the ideology of the American dream influences the consciousness of Americans, creating an artificial bond that ties together an artificial bond that ties misleading concepts. Gaber believes that Albee offers a harsh critique of the American dream in the *Zoo Story*. It's a false bond, the American dream, not a real bond, that ties people to where they live. The American Dream makes people think that they are absolutely independent of their social and economic situation, happy with life and able to make their own decisions. Albee's main criticism of the American Dream is that it leads to physical and spiritual death. The *Zoo Story* characters have two poor choices. They can assimilate into American culture and find fulfillment, because they think they have achieved their goals, or they can reject assimilation and risk physical death from spiritual emptiness. So, they are confronted with the stark choices of either succumbing to delusion or finding their maker.

Most previous studies about violence in *The Zoo Story* have followed thematic or stylistic approaches, as revealed by a survey of the existing literature. Many studies examine characters' experiences of suffering, their challenges in fitting into society, and issues of alienation and absurdism; however, they do not address violence, which arises from specific factors and leads to particular forms of suffering and pain for these characters in the text. The present study, therefore, explores how violence becomes an inevitable American culture, which manifests itself through social, economic, and political aspects. It brings damage at an individual and community level as well. Albee, according to this study, shows that violence is the source of people's suffering and pain and dramatizes it to display the destructive consequences that it brings. Some of Galtung's findings from his various research are applied to the plays analyzed in this thesis. Galtung believes that violence is not a mere act of physical harm one causes to another, but that there are other factors that do contribute greatly to violence.

### Methodology:

This study utilizes a qualitative research method based on textual analysis violence in Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story* (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative textual analysis is best as it leaves a space for exploration of characterization, dramatic language, symbolism and interactions between characters deeply in the play. In this context, violence is studied not just as bodily harm but rather as a force working invisibly within the institutions of the society.

Johan Galtung, a prominent scholar in violence studies, defines violence in his essay "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research" (1969) as encompassing three types: direct, structural, and cultural violence. He argues that violence is not limited to physical harm but includes constraints on human potential, preventing individuals from fulfilling their needs and desires. Galtung critiques simplistic views that equate violence with physical injury, advocating for a broader understanding that incorporates psychological and social dimensions. Violence serves as a framework for analyzing these various forms and their effects on characters in the play, *The Zoo Story*. He highlights the gap between actual and potential realizations in human lives as a key aspect of violence, tying it to societal issues like poverty and inequality. His work emphasizes the need to recognize both intentional and unintentional acts



of violence, necessitating a comprehensive analysis of the complexities of violence to inform discussions about peace.

. Overall, violence is a complex social phenomenon related to power imbalances and can manifest through actions or inactions hindering individual potential. Galtung's theory on violence serves as a framework to analyze these various forms and their effects on characters in play, emphasizing the long-term implications of violence.

Thus, Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story* is used as a primary source (Albee, 1958). The research is based on critical analyses of Edward Albee's plays and violence triangle as well as academic publications and journal articles. This research relies on these sources to both analyze the play and show how this study fills a gap in the literature. The study has focused on analyzing character interactions, conversations, and symbols. Throughout the study, character interactions, dialogues, symbols have been closely examined. The main focused points are social and cultural norms, power and marginalization, as well as the characters' struggles to question and change these norms. The researcher interprets those features of the text according to violence triangle theory to demonstrate that the play depicts violence as a social construct that society creates through its institutions and culture legitimization. Consequently, the study's overarching goal is to reimagine the play in a way that sheds light on various forms of violence and its consequences.

### **Violence Triangle in Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story*: Direct Violence:**

American culture, economics, and social structures all have a role in explaining the prevalence of violence in the country today. Violence pervades American society. This phenomenon is mainly because Americans come from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds. This can lead to friction when people fail to respect each other's values and practices. Moreover, economic disparity and poverty also cause prejudice, marginalization, and competitiveness, leading to an increase in criminal activity. Violence increases as weak welfare structures and unjust organizations fail to relieve these stresses. People fail to communicate well with each other within or between social groups. And simple misunderstandings result in conflicts.



Violence persists in modern American culture due to cultural influences that normalize violent behavior and promote individuality (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010). In the play, violence appears in multiple forms, both direct and indirect, encompassing structural and cultural violence as described in Galtung's theory of violence. While the play opens without any overt acts of violence, the unusual point is that by the play's conclusion, several types of direct violence, including bodily and psychological harm, have shown themselves. This scene provides more evidence that the stresses of the social and economic systems are additional causes of violent acts. While Jerry and Peter are the only play characters to resort to physical violence, Jerry and Peter's stories reflect the struggles of many Americans.

The first violent incident in the play occurs when Jerry breaks into Peter's stable, which is indeed a violent act. An invasion, Galtung explains, might be considered a type of psychological aggression (Galtung 1969). Jerry starts interrogating Peter relentlessly, probing him about his profession, loved ones, money, pets, and way of life:

JERRY: I've been to the zoo. [PETER doesn't notice.] I said, I've been to the zoo. MISTER, I'VE BEEN TO THE ZOO!

This is an example of physical violence. Jerry's violent insistence, "MISTER, I'VE BEEN TO THE ZOO!" (ZS, p. 3), is a form of psychological and verbal violence. No physical harm, but his yelling, irritation, and need for attention seep into Peter's subconscious. Jerry's outbursts and his craving for attention eat further into Peter's mind. According to Galtung's definition of direct violence, Jerry is unequivocally the aggressor, and the violence is mental. As a result, Peter starts to feel unstable, anxious, and bewildered. Jerry's relentless questioning about Peter's education, job, wife, and children further dehumanize him, reducing him to a collection of social labels.

The use of threatening language is another kind of direct violence. Jerry verbally threatens Peter with bodily harm:

Jerry (furiously): "You don't even know how to act when you're attacked. That's it, you don't even know how to defend yourself. That's it. You're helpless. That's it. And you're going to learn. You're going to learn."





## Violence Triangle in Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story*

(He pulls his knife and throws it at Peter's feet.)  
Jerry: "Pick it up" (ZS, PP. 48-49).

In line with Galtung's notion of direct aggression, Jerry committed an act of bodily aggression when he threatened Peter and threw the knife at his feet. Peter is not actually hurt, but the act puts him in real danger and creates an atmosphere of fear. At the same time, the incident is also a case of psychological aggression. Jerry threatens Peter's sense of security and mastery by forcing him to confront the possibility of sudden physical pain. Peter is worried and in emotional anguish. Because it is unpredictable, he reacts aggressively. By using intimidation and terror to force Peter to comply, this psychological pressure is just as harmful as physical violence. This shows how direct violence often effectively works on both Peter's mind and his body at the same time.

Furthermore, Jerry's escalating hostility in *The Zoo Story* serves as a pivotal moment, revealing the fundamental logical and psychological conflicts within his identity. As Klein (2013) insightfully notes:

Jerry's act of aggression is not simply a spontaneous outburst of anger; it is an expression of his frustration with the inability of human beings to connect on a deeper level. It is also a final, dramatic assertion of Jerry's existence in a world that offers no easy answers. In a play that focuses on the failures of communication, Jerry's violent act symbolizes the breakdown of all attempts to reach a meaningful understanding, emphasizing the absurdity of human existence and the emotional cost of isolation (Klein, 2013). As Klein (2013) explains, Jerry's violence is not only physical but also mental and emotional, as a result of years of estrangement and broken dialogue. This suggests that miscommunication represents a type of structural violence.

### Structural Violence and Cultural violence:

Society and its culture also have a role in the escalation of violent acts. Using the anguish and hardships endured by his characters, Albee, a contemporary playwright, seeks to expose socioeconomic and cultural problems inside the United States. Both structural and cultural forms of violence encompass these factors. Unlike direct violence, these two forms of violence are deeply embedded in our society's institutions and operate covertly and gradually (Galtung, 1969, p. 171). Both forms of violence work quietly on the victims and are known as the most destructive types

of violence. Structural violence manifests in the play through societal and economic institutions, including poverty, social inequality, and psychological issues that lead to estrangement, isolation, and a failure to communicate. Consequently, financial strain, social exclusion, and psychological harm resulting from class division are among the most significant effects of structural violence on the characters.

Because of cultural and structural violence, the last act of direct violence in *The Zoo Story* by Edward Albee is unavoidable. Jerry represents systemic violence in the drama, which manifests as economic disparity and loneliness. As mentioned previously, Peter is a middle-aged, prosperous guy, and Jerry is a messy, disturbed man. They start a conversation that ends in an argument. Jerry begins to open up about his disturbing personal events, but the conversation quickly escalates into violence, which shocks and changes Peter in a significant way.

In fact, the play's main conflict between Jerry and Peter is a direct assault on the emotional distance that exists in today's society. Their dialogues enable Albee to critique the existential issues confronting people in a society that is growing more fractured. Albee's play shows the condition of present life where people are detached and have no real personal relationships. People feel isolated even when they are around others and in an era of rapid technological and social change. by others in times of rapid technological and social change. Albee paints a picture of a society where true happiness and meaningful relationships are becoming more elusive. Jerry personifies the anguish of someone who feels unwelcome and unappreciated by a culture that rejects him and his unique contributions. His extreme isolation is a direct outcome of his breakdown in genuine communication, which in turn causes him to withdraw from society. His dissatisfaction in the play leads him to irrational actions, which are a symbol of the existential crisis that many people face today. In *The Zoo Story*, Peter chooses to ignore Jerry's deep need for approval and companionship. Peter represents many people who keep an emotional distance from others in the play, talking about surface-level things. According to Albee, the superficial social structures of modern society do not allow people to build genuine relationships, so they are lonely and bewildered (Azad A., 2025).

JERRY: The very thing! A prosthesis. You're an educated man, aren't you? Are you a doctor?



## Violence Triangle in Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story*

JERRY: And you have a wife. PETER: [bewildered by the seeming lack of communication] Yes! JERRY: And you have children.

PETER: Yes; two..... (ZS, p.3).

The above conversation between Jerry and Peter also demonstrates structural violence. Jerry's questions reveal the lopsided social arrangements that structure their interaction. Jerry stands for the veneer of these institutions, while Peter stands for security, privileged ease, educational attainment, and household life. Galtung argues that social injustice—the operation of social structures that privilege some communities over others—is a form of structural violence (Galtung 1969, p. 171). Jerry's violence reflects an undercurrent similar to the societal system that previously placed him in a position of financial hardship, depriving him of safety, identity, and acceptance; his violent tone may be a response to these experiences.

Galtung says that the characters are emotionally distant, and the play shows that they are unable to communicate eloquently, which is a reflection of structural violence rather than neutral circumstances. Albee implies that modern society is so constructed that it is impossible for people to experience the basic human needs of self-worth, acknowledgement and real relationships. There is no real force, but the social system does harm individuals, isolating them and depriving them of psychological and existential satisfaction. Jerry's social exclusion and alienation are forms of systemic violence; the community does not afford him respect, empathy, or accessibility.

Thus, In Galtung's framework, it could be called "cultural violence" as well: "those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science (logic, mathematics)—that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence" (Galtung 1990, p. 291). In his view, societal standards normalize inequity by making certain lifestyles, like Jerry's, seem abnormal or unimportant in comparison to the norm. Jerry's animosity and Peter's neutral power are both upheld by these cultural values, as shown in his insults at Peter. Another effect of cultural violence is social isolation, as it generates a sense of disconnection and does not encourage genuine participation. It conceals the effects of social institutions by depicting Jerry's alienation as a personal failing rather than as a consequence of social problems.





Many think that Jerry's violent outbursts are a direct result of the psychological abuse. Many believe that Jerry's past psychological abuse directly causes his violent outbursts. In his past, Peter continues to ignore his urgent need for connection and acknowledgement, and this results in physical and emotional hostility. Structural and cultural violence may lead to more overt forms of violence in Galtung's triangle of violence. Jerry's behavior is in no way accidental; it is the result of the cumulative damage caused by the alienation, ignorance, and emotional neglect of contemporary civilization. Jerry tells Peter:

I live on the top floor; rear; west. It's a laughably small room, and one of my walls is made of beaverboard; this beaverboard separates my room from another laughably small room, so I assume that the two rooms were once one room, a small room, but not necessarily laughable. The room beyond my beaver board wall is occupied by a coloured queen who always keeps his door open; well, not always but always when he's plucking his eyebrows, which he does with Buddhist concentration (658-659).

According to the playwright, John Guare, "Zoo Story is the work that spawned a whole generation of park bench plays..... To show you were avant garde, you needed no more than a dark room and a park bench" (12). In his comment on *The Zoo Story*, Guare paints the reality of Americans, confined in small dwellings, suffocated by darkness, and unwilling to talk to one another. It is a dimly lit room, and they are clearly unable to hear one another.

Harith Ismail (2009), in his article, states that the setting of the play is very important. Parallel to the caged animals in the zoo is the caged man who is no longer free. The restraints and complexities of the modern age incarcerate him and alienate him from his fellow people... He loses contact even with animals. Jerry's visit to the zoo shows his desperate attempt to find contact with other human beings (Turki 2009, p.3).

Ismail illustrates the true condition of the American people within the context of Albee's *The Zoo Story*. In this narrative, individuals are trapped not just physically, but also psychologically and spiritually. They lack meaningful connections with animals. In his desperate search for a means of communication, Jerry makes many attempts to establish physical touch with the dog that lives with his landlady. Lisa M. Siekfer mentions in her article, "Jerry wants to give voice to the people of his



stratum whose bypassed histories seem lost in the fast-paced tumult of society" (33).

Jerry thinks his life is going nowhere and lacks meaning. He seems mentally and physically like a creature that is trapped in an incredibly small world of dissatisfied people who live indifferently and carelessly. He wants to get out of the zoo and impress the Landlady's dog because he has a tremendous need to communicate, or rather, to be heard. Jerry says to Peter: Jerry – I loved the dog now, ..... It's just that .... It's just that if you can't deal with people, you have to make a start somewhere. WITH ANIMALS.... (ZS, P.67) Despite Jerry's best efforts, the dog does not love him, and neither do most people.

The zoo had been selected by Albee as the backdrop of his play since he wished to convey the message that such landscapes were constructed by humans to house animals and that humans are not really that different from animals. Through their discourse, viewers are able to feel the presence of the characters. For instance, there's a situation where Jerry calls Peter an animal. Jerry "wakes up" like a wounded animal after getting hit and starts screaming. Albee condemned the United States' post-WWII approach to treating individuals in this play. Albee emphasized the necessity for individuals in society to interact with one another, uphold fundamental ideals, depart from a world of materialism created by man's brutality, and view life from a different angle through Jerry's death and Peter's sadness (Kaibr 2018, p. 107).

Rose Zimbardo points out the relationship between Jerry and the Dog: "a perfect model of most human relationships" (1965, p. 56). He feels alone, alienated, and unfamiliar to everyone else in his immediate vicinity. Jerry's inability to interact and establish friendships with others is a reflection of both human and animal communication breakdowns. In his play, Albee offers commentary on the Dog narrative: The Zoo Story, "I suppose the dog story in The Zoo story, to a certain extent, is a microcosm of the play by the fact that people do not communicate, ultimately failing and trying and failing" (67). Jerry's admission is clear in The Zoo Story. , "animals are indifferent to me.... (he smiles slightly). like people.... most of the time" (P.46). The purpose of Jerry's futile efforts is to expose an individual's dilemma in a postmodern and postwar American society. According to Ismail, "All in all, The Zoo Story enacts the story of the caged isolation of the modern man whose real essence has

been lost in a world where people do not consider human values but materialistic ones" (P.72).

Albee employed dramatic characters in *The Zoo Story* to illustrate the isolation of individuals from their communities and their lack of communication with one another. In his review he employed a photograph from the zoo to illustrate "a horrifying image of a society where furious activity serves only to mask an essential inertia and sociality" (Mishra 28). Albee's play did a remarkable job of showing the planet and its inhabitants, comparing humans to the confined animals in a zoo. Differences in social class, indulgence, apathy, loneliness, alienation, and poor communication are some of the challenges that prevent people from interacting with each other (Mishra 2014, p. 28).

According to studies, social exclusion and loneliness contribute to the structural violence in the play. Social anxiety developed into a national issue in the US by the mid-century, and *The Zoo Story* makes an effort to portray the problem. As a figure from the middle of the twentieth century, Jerry exemplifies the problem of isolation that plagues contemporary life. *The Zoo Story* portrays him as a tramp. He is homeless and without a stable living situation (Sharma, 2021 p. 44). He describes his home: Jerry: I live in a four-story brownstone rooming house on the Upper West Side... It is a laughably small room and one of my walls is made of beaver board; this beaver board separates my room from another laughably small room (Albee, 21). Jerry finds himself isolated in this "laughably tiny chamber." The cramped space makes him feel uncomfortable, as he does not quite fit in. He describes himself as "a permanent transient," indicating a sense of disconnection from others.

As Johan Galtung says: "Violence is when social structures or social institutions prevent people from reaching their full potential." This concern is apparent in Jerry's need for conversation in *The Zoo Story*. The failure of Jerry and Peter to communicate is a reflection of a basic human need for recognition and companionship. Peter's compliance with social expectations of politeness and emotional boundaries thwarts this longing and results in emotional neglect. The drama shows that modern language is not a strong connection with people. Jerry's slow speech attempts to breach Peter's emotional defenses, but the cold politeness of Peter indicates he is not interested in serious conversation.



Others, like Robert A. Schanke, have had the feeling that Albee's portrait of Peter is a direct critique of the values of the American middle class. Schanke saw Peter as the personification of the city's safe life, where order and predictability mattered more than self-reflection and deep emotions. This life appears fulfilling, but it is empty. That is why Peter is emotionally distant and cannot connect with Jerry on a deep level. Schanke suggests that Peter is avoiding the basic realities of his life because his life is "grounded in the pursuit of material success" (Schanke, 2004). Although it appears appealing, this lifestyle actually promotes feelings of loneliness by glorifying material success over personal growth across all levels. In this passage, Albee implies that the modern world's obsession with material success results in a type of social alienation that prevents people from communicating with each other.

### Conclusion

Overall, Albee's *The Zoo Story* is a tremendous indictment of American culture because it shows how systemic violence is everywhere. Individuals experience social exclusion, feeling alone, and irritation as a result of this violence. The impact of economic structures, societal standards, and social institutions on people's lives is another topic Albee explores. Consequently, the play encompasses everyone who has endured such brutality, not just Jerry and Peter. In actuality, the majority of the effects of violence are psychological and affective, which leads to Jerry's death at the play's conclusion. Albee strives to illustrate the impact of violence on people's lives. In reality, violence has always been a part of human history.

Here, Albee's main point is that people suffered greatly as a result of the cultural clash and way of life in the United States. It is now among the countries with the highest rates of violent crime. Since Albee's violent dramatizations and Galtung's violent results are comparable, this research provides a favorable basis for applying some of Galtung's concepts to violence. The use of Galtung's principles enriches the study's comprehension of violence and brings a social component that is in harmony with the playwright's depiction of violence.

As the play demonstrates, there are many forms of violence outside the intentional infliction of bodily injury. Poverty, inequality, social alienation, misunderstanding, and unequal life opportunities are all forms of structural and cultural violence that Albee often depicts. These forms of violence have proven to be the most destructive. These subtle forms of

aggression culminate in the overt physical aggression that killed Jerry, proving that contemporary society is to blame for personal tragedies.

The three types of violence are interconnected: one leads to the other. Structural violence creates Jerry's suffering. Cultural violence makes that suffering invisible and acceptable. Together, they lead to direct physical violence at the end of the play. This study also aims to change the audience's views on violence.

### References:

- Abrams, M.H. (1999) *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.
- Albee, E. (1981) *The plays*. New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan.
- Albee, E. (1958) *The Zoo Story*. New York City, NY: Dramatists Play Service.
- Attack, I. (2005) *Peace Studies and Social Change: The Role of the Ethics and Human Agency*. Dublin: Edinburgh University Press, pp. 1-13.
- Bailey, L.M.S. (2003) 'Absurdly American: Rediscovering the Representation of Violence in *The Zoo Story*' Edward Albee: A Casebook. Ed. Bruce J. Mann. London: Routledge, Pp. 33-45
- Bottoms, Stephen. Ed. (2005). *The Cambridge Companion to Edward Albee* (Cambridge Companions to Literature). Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 16.
- Galtung, J. (1969) Violence, Peace and Peace Research, *Journal of Peace Research*, 6(3), pp. 167-191.
- Galtung, J. (1990) 'Cultural Violence', *Journal of Peace Research*, 27(3), pp.291-305.
- Galtung, J. (1990) 'Cultural Violence', *Journal of Peace Research*, 27(3), pp.291-305.
- Galtung, J. Hoivik, T. (1971) 'Structural and Direct Violence: A Note on Operationalization', *Journal of Peace Research*, 8(1), pp. 73-76.
- Ismail, H. (2009) "The Caged Soul: A Study of Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story*", *Al-fatih Journal*, 5(40), pp.168-176.
- Kaibr, H.K. Jingjing, G. (2018) 'Search for Self in Albee's the Zoo Story', *International Journal of Language and Literature*, American Research Institute for Policy Development. Vol. 6, No. 1, pp. 103-110 URL: <https://doi.org/10.15640/ijll.v6n1a14>
- Klein, M. (2013) 'The Structure of isolation in Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story*: A dramatic approach to existential crisis', *Journal of American Drama*, 39(2), 87-103. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org>.
- MacNicholas, John (1981) "Edward Albee." *Twentieth Century American Dramatists Part I: A-J*. A Brucoli Clark Book: Detroit, pp. 3-22, 4, 5.
- Mishra, P. (2004) *The Art of Edward Albee*. Nagpur: Dattsons
- Rahman R.S. (2014) 'Social Detachment: A Cause of Alienation in Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story*', *Journal of International Academic Research for*, 2(9), P.2
- Roundane, M. (1987) *Understanding Edward Albee*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press
- Shams, P., Pourgiv, F. (2013) 'Power Struggle in *The Zoo Story*: A Performance of Subjectivity', *Fe Journal: Feminist Critique/Fe Dergi: Feminist Elestiri*, p.13.



## Violence Triangle in Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story*

- Sharma, S. (2021) 'Edward Albee's Plays: A Psychological Centrum of Alienation and Estrangement', *A Global Journal of Humanities*, (IV), III
- Wilkinson, R. and Pickett, K. (2010) 'The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger', *Poverty and Race*, (3), 19.
- Zimbardo, R. A. (1962) "Symbolism and Naturalism in Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story*. Hofstra: University press

