



Research Article

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Homosexuality in Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story*: A Psychoanalytic Reading

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ABSTRACT

This paper sets out to examine parent-child relationship in Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story*. The paper is premised on the hypothesis that the absence of love between mother and son in the play under consideration leads to Jerry's isolation and makes him become a homosexual. Sigmund Freud's theories of the Oedipus and castration complex shall guide our analysis. The methodology adopted in this paper is a textual analysis and the points raised and discussed lead to the conclusion that Jerry's hatred of his mother and the love of his father give rise to his homosexual cravings.

Keywords: *Unconscious, Homosexual, Oedipus Complex, Castration.*

8.3.1. INTRODUCTION

One thing is certain in all human relations in life namely: love and hate. Writers of all ages underscore this ambivalence in the nature of man. As I see it, love and hate have different connotations for different writers.



We shall examine how Sigmund Freud sees the concept of love and hate in a nuclear family at the level of the unconscious mind. In a nuclear family, as Sigmund Freud emphasizes, the boy child loves his mother and hates his father while the girl child, on her part, hates her mother and loves her father. Freud's standpoint does not hold sway in all cases, as this study reveals. It should be borne in mind that this animosity of hatred, rivalry and jealousy between father and son for the mother as a love object, like the one pitting a girl child and her mother for the father as a love object, exists only at the unconscious mind or psyche where reason does not prevail. At this juncture, we can discuss the theories of Oedipus and castration complex.

8.3.2. THE THEORY OF THE OEDIPUS COMPLEX

In The Ego and the Id Freud lays bare his theory of the Oedipus complex when he says that

At a very early age the little boy develops an object-cathexis for his mother, which originally related to the mother's breast and is the prototype of an object-choice on the anaclitic model, the boy deals with his father by identifying himself with him. For a time these two relationships proceed side by side, until the boy's wishes in regard to his mother become more intense and his father is perceived as an obstacle to them; from this the Oedipus complex originates. His identification with his father then takes on a hostile colouring and changes into a wish to get rid of his father in order to take his place with his mother. Henceforward his relation to his father is ambivalent; it seems as if the ambivalence inherent in the identification from the beginning had become manifest. An ambivalent attitude to his father and an object-relation of a solely affectionate kind to his mother make up the content of the simple positive Oedipus complex in a boy (pp.26-7)

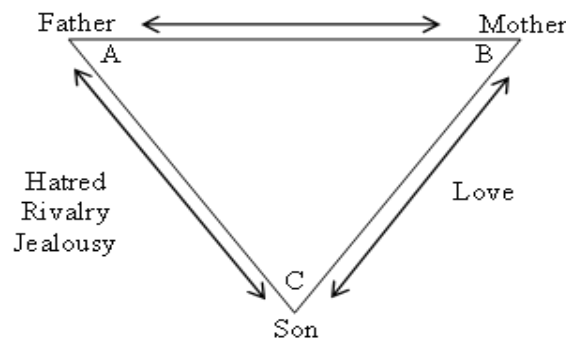
Brill sheds more light on the theory of the Oedipus complex when he says this of Oedipus in Sophocles' Oedipus Tyrannus:

His fate moves us only because it might have been our own, because the oracle laid upon us before our birth the very curse which rested upon him. It may be that we were all destined to direct our first sexual impulses toward our mothers, and our first impulses of hatred and violence toward

our fathers, our dreams convince us that we were. King Oedipus who slew his father Laius and wedded his mother Jocasta, is nothing more or less than a wish-fulfilment, the fulfilment of the wish of our childhood. (pp.308-9).

Sigmund Freud's theory of sociality, also fondly called the theory of the Oedipus complex underscores the triadic relationship of father, mother and son represented in this diagram thus:

Figure: 1



In the AB axis of the oedipal triangle, the father directs his libidinal or sexual impulses to the mother of his son because, as his wife, she is his legitimate love object. In the BC axis of the oedipal triangle, the son directs his sexual urges to his mother because he sees her as a love object in his psyche or unconscious mind. In the Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, Freud broadens our vision on the relationship of mother and son on the BC axis of the oedipal triangle when he states unequivocally that

The little boy may show the most undisguised sexual curiosity about his mother, he may insist upon sleeping beside her at night, he may force his presence on her while she is dressing or may even make actual attempts at seducing her, as his mother will often notice and report with amusement all of which puts beyond doubt the erotic nature of his tie with his mother. (p.376)



Finally, in the AC axis of the oedipal triangle, the boy loves his father consciously in the sense that both of them have a phallus which Jacques Lacan refers to as a signifier of desire. Sigmund Freud, on his part, sees the male organ which father and son possess as a penis. The ambivalent nature of the boy's relationship with his father in the AC axis of the oedipal triangle, as Freud points out, is evident when "his identification with his father then takes on a hostile colouring and changes into a wish to get rid of his father in order to take his place with his mother" (The Ego and the Id, p.27). It is important to stress that the boy's hatred, rivalry and jealousy of his father, as the AC axis of the oedipal triangle reveals, occurs in his psyche where his mother appears to him as a love object. More adequately stated, it must be emphasized that the boy's hatred of his father as a rival for the hand of his mother as a love object is harboured in his unconscious mind and motivates his behaviour. In *Sexuality and Psychology of Love* Freud lends credence to the boy's unconscious belief that the mother is his love-object when he says that "The first love-object of the male is the mother, because it is she who feeds and tends him, and she remains his principal love-object until she is replaced by another which resembles her or is derived from her" (Freud. 1963:p.187). In the light of the aforementioned view, as Freud emphasizes, "... he begins to desire the mother herself and to hate the father anew for standing in his way ..." (p.45). Aware that his son is under the sway of the Oedipus complex, he threatens him with castration.

8.3.3. THE THEORY OF THE CASTRATION COMPLEX

In Sigmund Freud's theory of the castration complex, as Laplanche and Pontalis emphasize in *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, we are told that

The boy fears castration which he sees as the carrying out of a paternal threat made in reply to his sexual activities; the result for him is an intense castration anxiety'. In the girl, the absence of a penis is experienced as a wrong suffered which she attempts to deny, to compensate or to remedy. (p.56)

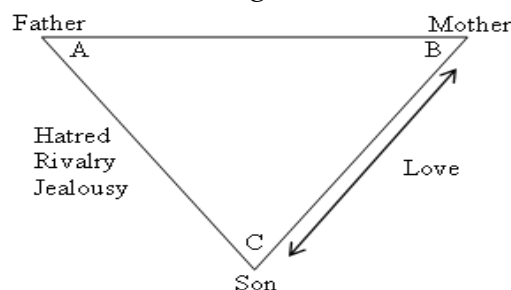
Furthermore, in *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* Juliet Mitchell observes that the castration complex was formulated by Freud because

... it explained all there was to know about the difference between the sexes; it defined the girl and made the boy abandon his incestuous wish for the mother. The girl felt totally inferior, because she lacked something, and the boy felt temporarily inferior to his more phallically powerful father. The castration complex ended the boy's Oedipus complex and therewith his infancy. It seemed to lie behind all neurosis, to dominate all dreams and perversions, to account for the social inferiorization of women because they were without a penis and for the glorification of men as proud possessors (pp.75-76)

Especially worthy of note in the theory of castration complex is that it underscores the anatomical difference between the sexes where the boy possesses a penis like his father and the girl lacks it and blames her mother for not giving her one. Like Juliet Mitchell, Otto Fenichel in *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis* submits that "castration anxiety leads to the renunciation of the boy's passionate Oedipus love for his mother, since its gratification could be attained only at the price of endangering the penis" (p.91). After this theoretical survey, attention can now be paid to the homosexual theme in Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story*.

3.1. Mother-son relationship on the BC axis of the oedipal triangle

Figure: 2



The son's attachment to his mother at infancy, as the BC axis of the above oedipal triangle reveals, opens an erotic door for him to reveal his sexual identity. Susan M. Shaw and Janet Lee in *Women's Voices, Feminist Visions: Classic and Contemporary Readings* shed more light on one's sexuality when they say that



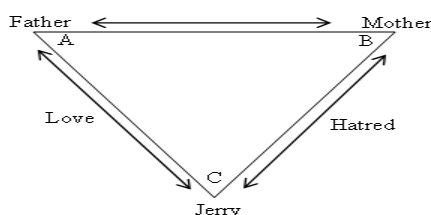
Sexual identity is a person's attraction to, or preference for, people of a given sex. It is an individual's romantic and/or sexual (also called erotic) identity and behavior toward other people. Note that sexual identity does not necessarily require sexual experience. Heterosexuality is a sexual identity where romantic attachments are between people of the opposite sex. Homosexuality is a sexual identity where romantic and/or sexual attachments are between people of the same sex. Because the term homosexual is stigmatized and because the term seems to emphasize sexual behavior, homosexual communities have preferred the term gay (p.169).

In the oedipal triangle, as the BC axis reveals, the boy's sexual identity is heterosexual in nature because his mother is his love object. As we had earlier pointed out "The first love-object of the male is the mother, because it is she who feeds and tends him, and she remains his principal love-object ..." (*Sexuality and Psychology of Love*, p.187). It should be borne in mind that the boy's desire to possess his mother as a love-object is motivated unconsciously by his sexual urges, as exemplified in the case of Oedipus and Jocasta in *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Those who consider the preceding point as a pipe dream should bear in mind that in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* Sigmund Freud "... was bringing to a close that epoch of cultural innocence in which infancy and childhood were regarded as themselves innocent, as special preserves of our lives untouched by desires, strivings after selfish pleasure, twinges of demonic perversity, drives toward carnal satisfaction" (pp.xx-xxi).

In any text with an Oedipal colouring, as described above, the little boy in his infancy directs, as it were, his unconscious sexual drives to his mother who is his love-object. Does this standpoint where the boy loves his mother and hates his father hold sway or take root in Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story*? In other words, is Jerry in Albee's play entangled in an oedipal bind like Oedipus in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* or like Stanley in Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party* or furthermore, like Hamlet in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*? Guided by these questions, we can now examine the triadic relationship of father, mother and son in this diagram below.

3.2. The relationship of Jerry and his mother on the BC axis of the oedipal triangle

Figure: 3



In the BC axis of the oedipal triangle Jerry, as Edward Albee reveals in *The Zoo Story*, hates his mother instead of loving her. Describing his relationship with his mother to Peter, Jerry states:

... to be pointed about it, 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. We'd received the news between Christmas and New year, you see, that good old mom had parted with the ghost in some dump in Alabama. (p.8)

Jerry's unconscious hatred of his mother is evident in the above excerpt. The mother-son relationship in an oedipal situation is usually anchored on love. The Stanley-Meg relationship in Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party*, as Martin Esslin emphasizes in *Pinter the Playwright* is an illuminating example. Esslin's submission is underscored in these words:

On another plain again, that of psychological archetypes, *The Birthday Party* might also be seen as an image, a metaphor for the process of growing up, of expulsion from the warm, cosy world of childhood. That Meg, with her crushing combination of motherliness and senile eroticism, is a mother-image seen from the view point of an Oedipus complex needs no particular stress. (p.88)

It is evident that Stanley, unlike Jerry in *The Zoo Story*, enjoys "the warm, cosy world of childhood" with Meg, his mother figure. As the oedipal triangle reveals, Jerry hates his mother because she abandoned him and



his father and went to the south to try her hand at harlotry thus preventing him from enjoying “the cosy, warm world of childhood”. An inquisitive reader may ask this question: Is it possible for Jerry who is ten and a half years old to be haunted by oedipal cravings at this age? The example of Stanley in Harold Pinter’s *The Birthday Party* will shed a flood of light on Jerry’s case in *The Zoo Story*. As C.G. Jung observes in *Psyche and Symbol*, Stanley is an adult who regresses into the world of childhood and enjoys the comfort of Meg, his mother figure. Put simply, Jung emphasizes that Stanley “... is a man living regressively, seeking his childhood and his mother, fleeing from a cold cruel world which denies him understanding” (p.10).

Stanley’s lamentation in the passage below, as Jung stresses, constitutes the loud cry of a child looking for love from a mother because “a cold world ... denies him understanding”.

... They carved me up. It was all arranged, it was all worked out. My next concert, somewhere else it was. In winter, I went down there to play. Then, when I got there, the hall was closed, the place was shuttered up, not even a caretaker. They’d locked it up ... A fast one. They pulled a fast one. I’d like to know who was responsible for that ... They want me to crawl on my bended knees ... (Pinter, 1958:p.23)

Calvin S. Hall in *A Primer of Freudian Psychology* also sheds light on Jerry’s regression from a grown up position of ten and a half years old to the Oedipal level when he says that

A young married woman who becomes anxious after her first quarrel with her husband may return to the security of her parents’ home. A person who has been hurt by the world may shut himself up in the private dream world (p.95).

In the light of this argument, it is evident that when Jerry tells Peter that his mother “embarked on an adulterous turn of our Southern States, a journey of a year’s duration” (*The Zoo Story*, p.8), he gives vent to his anger that he did not enjoy the warm, cosy world of childhood with his mother. This, I dare say, explains Jerry’s hatred of his mother on the BC axis of the

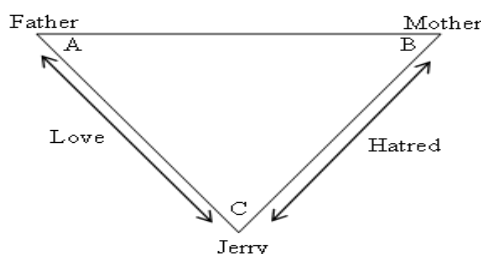
Oedipal triangle. Having said this, we can now examine the relationship of Jerry and his father on the oedipal triangle.

Jerry's mother abandoned him when he "was ten and a half years old" (p.8). The preceding statement reveals that Jerry's hatred of his mother is buried in his psyche because he states that "... there was mom's sister, who was given neither to sin nor the consolation of the bottle. I move in on her" (p.9). It was obvious that Jerry's mother is given to the sin of the flesh and this explains why she went to the south and died there. Furthermore, like peter who is married and becomes a homosexual, the absence of a mother, evident in Jerry's case, can make him hate the female gender. In this vein, Jerry's case, like that of peter cannot be given a universal aura.

3.3. The relationship of Jerry and his father on the AC axis of the Oedipal triangle

The relationship between Jerry and his father in *The Zoo Story*, as this diagram reveals, is centred on love, unlike the one between him and his mother on the BC axis of the triangle which focuses on hatred.

Figure: 4



As the AC axis of the diagram reveals, Jerry loves his father and hates his mother. The above diagram, as it were, has a homosexual colouring. In this vein, the triadic relationship between father, mother and son in *The Zoo Story*, as the above diagram reveals, stands in sharp contrast to a similar relationship between Stanley and his parents in Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party* or Oedipus and his parents in *Oedipus Tyrannus* or like Hamlet in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. These two diagrams will shed light on the

triadic relationship of father, mother and son in *The Zoo Story* and *The Birthday Party*.

Figure: 5

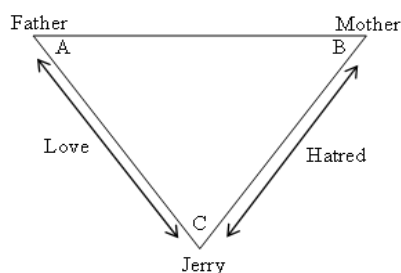
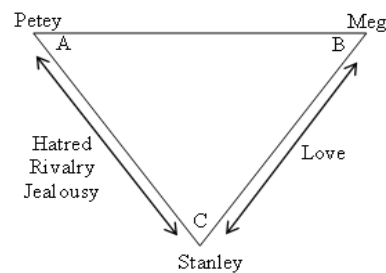


Figure: 6



In diagram 2 on the BC axis of the Oedipal diagram, as we had earlier pointed out, Stanley regresses into the warm, cosy world of childhood where Meg, his mother figure, becomes his love object. On the AC axis of the diagram, the relationship between Petey and Stanley hinges on hatred, rivalry and jealousy because they compete to possess Meg as a love object. Finally, McCann and Goldberg castrate or punish him for his oedipal crime of directing his libidinal impulses to his mother figure. Furthermore, unlike diagram 2 which presents an Oedipus complex situation, diagram 1 presents a homosexual scenario where Jerry hates his mother on the BC axis of the diagram and loves his father on the AC axis. It should be borne in mind that in a homosexual situation, as the AC axis of diagram 1 reveals, Jerry unconsciously directs his libidinal impulses of love towards his father. Put simply, in a homosexual relationship, as diagram 1 reveals, Jerry suffers no threat of castration as Stanley does in diagram 2 because in his psyche his father is his love object and does not see him as a rival.

From the preceding discussion, the relationship between Jerry and his father on the AC axis of the Oedipal triangle in diagram 1 necessitates a further comment. It is important to stress that in discussing the love relationship between Jerry and his father on the AC axis of the oedipal triangle in diagram 1, we must consider at two levels namely: conscious and unconscious.

At the conscious level, the love between father and son on the AC axis of diagram 1 is filial in nature. This means that the son cannot choose his father as his homosexual partner in this phase of the oedipal triangle where reason or rationality prevails. In this phase of the oedipal triangle, as it were, Jerry loves his father filially, so does his father. In the BC axis of the triangle in diagram 1 where Jerry's mother is absent, he loves his father unconsciously and sees him as a love object. In this phase of the oedipal triangle where reason does not prevail, Jerry directs his homosexual urges or impulses to his father. In other words, in Jerry's psyche where reason does not prevail, his father appears to him as a homosexual partner. Jerry's internalised love of his father as a homosexual partner or love object in his psyche eventually guides his choice of a homosexual when he becomes an adult controlled by reason. His choice of the superintendent's son as a homosexual partner when he is fourteen years old, is a case in point. It should be borne in mind that in societies where homosexuality prevails, a son does not consciously choose his father as his love object or partner because of the filial bond that unites or binds them in a nuclear family milieu. Edward Albee emphasises this view with greater firmness in *The Zoo Story* where Jerry chooses the superintendent's son as a homosexual partner and not his father.

Furthermore, in a bid to shed more light on father-son and mother-son relationship on the AC and BC axes of the oedipal diagram respectively, we should bear in mind that the child's sexual life, as Sigmund Freud lays bare in his theory of the Oedipus complex, begins at childhood as diagrams 1 and 2 reveal. When the child becomes an adult or a speaking subject, to borrow Jacques Lacan's words, he resolves or represses his oedipal urges and chooses a love object out of his nuclear family. As I had earlier pointed out, Jerry chooses the superintendent's son as his homosexual partner when he becomes an adult out of his nuclear family.

In the preceding argument, Jerry cannot consciously choose his father as his homosexual partner because of the filial bond that binds them together in society. In other words, since psychoanalysis deals with unconscious motives, we cannot see instances in the play where Jerry



makes romantic contacts to his father as we see in the case of Peter. Jerry's love of his father as a homosexual partner is buried in his psyche or unconscious mind where reason does not prevail.

Finally, we can conclude that in diagram 1, Jerry's love of his father and hatred of his mother at infancy pave his entry into a homosexual space. In the case of Stanley, as diagram 2 of the Oedipus triangle reveals, the hatred of his father and the love of his mother at infancy pave his entry into a heterosexual space. Having said this, we can now examine *The Zoo Story* to see how Jerry's homosexual identity is revealed.

Jerry's cosy and warm relationship with his father comes to an end after the burial of his "good old mom" who "had parted with the ghost in some dump in Alabama" (p.8). This is what Jerry tells Peter about his father.

At any rate, good old pop celebrated the New Year for an even two weeks and then slopped into the front of a somewhat moving city omnibus, which sort of cleaned things out family-wise. Well, no; then there was mom's sister, who was given neither to sin nor the consolation of the bottle. I moved in on her, and my memory of her is slight, excepting I remember still that she did all things hourly: sleeping, eating, working, praying. She dropped dead on the stairs to her apartment, my apartment then, too, on the afternoon of my high school graduation (p.9).

Although Jerry regrets the departure of his father "which sort of cleaned things out family-wise", the cosy and warm relationship which he enjoyed with him after his mother had abandoned him unconsciously aroused his homosexual desire. This dialogue between Jerry and Peter lends credence to this point.

Jerry. And let's see now; what's the point of having a girl's picture, especially in the two frames? I have two picture frames, you remember? I never see the pretty little ladies more than once, and most of them wouldn't be caught in the same room with a camera. It's odd, and I wonder if it's sad.

Peter. The girls?



Jerry. 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-al. I mean I was, (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 (pp.9-10).

As Jerry emphasizes in the preceding dialogue, his sexual partner is a Greek boy. His refusal to put the picture of girls in the empty picture frames of his father and mother indicates that he hates women. This dialogue between Jerry and Peter further sheds light on the former's fondness for a boy as his love object.

Jerry. You're married!

Peter. (with pleased emphasis) Why, certainly.

Jerry. It isn't a law, for God's sake.

Peter. No – no, of course not.

Jerry. And you have a wife.

Peter. (bewildered by the seemingly lack of communication) Yes.

Jerry. And you have children.

Peter. Yes; two.

Jerry. Boys?

Peter. No, girls, both girls.

Jerry. But you wanted boys. (p.3)

From a psychoanalytic standpoint, Jerry's wish that Peter's children be boys is motivated by his unconscious desire for a homosexual partner, like the superintendent's son, since he is gay. Jerry's landlady and her dog in the rooming-house where he lives necessitates our attention.

3.4. Jerry's relationship with his landlady and her dog

When we read *The Zoo Story* some questions necessitate answers namely: 1. Who is the landlady and her dog? 2. Why is the landlady and her dog gate-keepers of Jerry's dwelling? This is how Jerry describes his landlady to Peter:



... the landlady is a fat, ugly, mean, stupid, unwashed, misanthropic, cheap, drunken bag of garbage ... Anyway, she has a dog and I will tell you about the dog, and she and her dog are gate-keepers of my dwelling. The woman is bad enough; she leans around in the entrance hall, spying to see that I don't bring in things or people, and when she's had her mid-afternoon pint of lemon-flavoured gin she always stops me in the hall, and grabs ahold of my coat or arm, and she presses her disgusting body up against me in a corner so she can talk to me. The smell of her body and her breath, you can 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 (p.11).

As stated in the aforementioned excerpt, if the landlady sees Jerry as "the object of her sweaty lust", then it is clear that she is head over heels in love with him. Jerry's reply to her advances is of psychoanalytic relevance. This is what Jerry tells Peter when his landlady's sexual urge for him reaches a climax.

But I have found a way to keep her off. When she mumbles about her room and how I should come there, I merely say: 'But, love; wasn't yesterday enough for you, and the day before?' Then she puzzles, she makes slits of her tiny eyes, she sways a little, and then, Peter – and it is at this moment that I think I might be doing some good in that tormented house – a simple-minded smile begins to form on her unthinkable face, and she giggles and groans as she thinks about yesterday and the day before; as she believes and relives what never happened (pp.11-12).

In psychoanalytic terms, Jerry's landlady is the reincarnation of his dead mother who returns to him as a love object to compensate for what he did not enjoy in the BC axis of the oedipal triangle cited earlier. It is evident that the landlady is Jerry's mother who has returned as the proprietress of the rooming-house. In Jerry's reply to the landlady (his mother): "But, love; wasn't yesterday enough for you, and the day before?" he reminds her of her adulterous trip to Alabama which should have given her sexual satisfaction.

Furthermore, Jerry's remark that the landlady and "her dog are the gate-keepers of my dwelling" (p.11) underscores the connection between



the dog and herself. Again, Jerry highlights the close relationship between the landlady and her dog when he poisons it with hamburgers. This is Jerry's submission:

... he tore into them. It was as if he had never eaten anything in his life before, except garbage which might very well have been the truth. I don't think the landlady ever eats anything but garbage. But he ate all the hamburgers, almost all at once, making sounds in his throat like a woman (p.14).

Jerry's preceding statement about the dog's meal: "it was as if he had never eaten anything in his life before, except garbage" is likened to what the landlady also eats when he says: "I don't think the landlady ever eats anything but garbage". Apart from eating garbage like the landlady, the dog also makes "sounds in his throat like a woman". What, we may ask, is the significance of this crushing parallel or similarity between the landlady and her dog as the gate-keepers of Jerry's dwelling in the rooming house? The answer is not far to seek. In Freudian terms, the dog is an externalisation or a projection of the landlady's vaulting sexual desire for Jerry as her love object. In the nature of things, what Jerry tells Peter about his landlady is of psychoanalytic relevance. Hear him:

She stopped me in the hall the same evening of the attempted murder and confided the information that God had struck her puppy-dog a surely fatal blow. She had forgotten her bewildered lust, and her eyes were wide open for the first time. They looked like the dog's eyes. (p.15)

If the dog, as we had earlier pointed out, is an externalisation of the landlady's vaulting sexual cravings for Jerry, then the poisoned hamburgers repress her excessive lust. This explains why, as hinted above, "she had forgotten her bewildered lust, and her eyes were wide open for first time. They looked like the dog's eyes". Elaborating our argument further on the repressed sexual desire of the landlady Jerry states:

When I came home from a movie that was playing on forty-second street, a movie I'd seen, or one that was very much like one or several I'd seen, after the landlady told me her puppykins was better, I was so hoping for the dog to be waiting for me. I was ... heart-shatteringly anxious to



confront my friend again ... I came to the door and advanced unafraid, to the centre of the entrance hall. The beast was there, looking at me (p.16).

As stated above, the dog's inability to attack Jerry means that the landlady's crushing sexual urge for him has been repressed. This, there is no doubt, explains why Jerry says: "I came in the door and advanced unafraid, to the centre of the entrance hall". Having rejected the advances of the landlady who reincarnates his dead mother, Jerry turns to Peter for sexual gratification.

3.5. The relationship of Jerry and Peter

The play begins with Jerry walking to the North in search of a gay or homosexual partner. The dialogue between Jerry and Peter is an illuminating example.

Jerry. I went to the zoo, and then I walked until I came here. Have I been walking North?

Peter. (puzzled) North? Why – I – I think so. Let me see ...

Jerry. (pointing out front) Is that Fifth Avenue?

Peter. Why yes, yes, it is.

Jerry. And what is that cross street there; that one to the right?

Peter. That? Oh, that's seventy-fourth street.

Jerry. And the zoo is around sixty-fifth street so, I've been walking north (p.1).

Jerry's repeated story of his landlady and her dog and his unending story of his going to the zoo arouses Peter's anger. When Peter says: "I don't want to hear any more. I don't understand you, or your landlady, or her dog ...", we know that the cup of his anger overflows. Peter's anger notwithstanding, a reconciliatory note is struck by this dialogue:

Jerry. Peter, do I annoy you, or confuse you?

Peter. (lightly) well, I must confess that this wasn't the kind of afternoon I'd anticipated.

Jerry. You mean, I'm not the gentleman you were expecting.

Peter. I wasn't expecting anybody.

Jerry. No, I don't imagine you were. But I'm here, and I'm not leaving.

Peter. (consulting his watch) Well, you may not be, but I must be going home soon.



Jerry. Oh, come on, stay a little while longer.

Peter. I really should get home, you see ...

(Jerry tickles Peter's ribs with his fingers)

Jerry. Oh, come on.

(Peter is very ticklish. As Jerry continues to tickle him his voice becomes falsetto)

Peter. No, I ... ohhhhh! Don't do that. Stop ohhh, no, no.

Jerry. Oh, come on. (He continues tickling Peter)

Peter. Oh, hee, hee, hee. I must go. I ... Hee, hee, hee (pp.19-20)

This game initiated by Jerry is intended to arouse Peter sexually. Peter's laughter: "Oh, hee hee, hee ... hee, hee hee ... hee, hee, hee" suggests that he is enjoying the game. This game, as hinted earlier, is intended to arouse Peter's libidinal impulses because in the seconds that follow Jerry tells Peter that "I'm crazy, you bastard" (p.21).

Further, the battle waged by Jerry to win Peter over as his homosexual love object is revealed in this dialogue.

Jerry. Listen to me, Peter. I want this bench. You go sit on the bench over there, and if you're good I'll tell you the rest of the story.

Peter. (flustered) But – whatever for? What is the matter with you? Besides, I see no reason why I should give up this bench. I sit on this bench almost every Sunday afternoon, in good weather. It's secluded here; there's never anyone sitting here, so I have it all to myself.

Jerry (softly) Get off this bench, Peter; I want it.

Peter. (almost whining) No.

Jerry. I said I want this bench, and I'm going to have it. Now, get over there.

Peter. People can't have everything they want ...

(Jerry laughs)

Jerry. Imbecile! You are slow-witted!

Peter. Stop that!

Jerry. You're a vegetable. Go lie down on the ground (pp.21-22).

It is evident that the bench being fought for by Jerry and Peter is a fight for coitus because Sigmund Freud in the *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, sees "tables and wood as ... female symbols (Freud, 1973:p.191). Jerry tells Peter that "you are slow-witted" and "you're a vegetable" because he fails to understand what he (Jerry) wants. In this



dialogue below, Jerry and Peter fight for the possession of the bench which, in Freudian terms, is a fight for Jerry to make love with Peter.

Jerry. (rising lazily) Very well, Peter; we'll battle for the bench, but we're not evenly matched. (He takes out an old ugly-looking knife and flicks it open).

Peter. (suddenly awakening to the reality of the situation) You are mad! You're stark raving mad! You're going to kill me!
(Before Peter has time to think what to do, Jerry tosses a knife at Peter's feet)

Jerry. There you go. Pick it up. You have the knife and we'll be more evenly matched.

Peter. (horrified) No!

(Jerry grabs Peter by the collar. Peter rises. Their faces almost touch)

Jerry. Now, you pick up that knife and you fight with me. You fight for your self-respect; you fight for that god-damned bench (pp.24-25).

Like "tables and wood" which, as we had earlier indicated, are seen as female symbols, the knife in the aforementioned dialogue is a Freudian phallic symbol. Listen to Freud:

... the male finds symbolic substitutes; in the first instance in things that resemble it in shape – things, accordingly, that are long and up-standing such as sticks, umbrellas, posts, trees and so on; further in objects which share with the thing they represent the characteristic of penetrating into the body and injuring – thus, sharp weapons of every kind, knives, daggers, spears, sabres, but also fire-arms, rifles, pistols and revolvers (*Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, p.188).

If the knife is a phallic symbol, as Freud observes in the above dialogue, then Peter has quenched Jerry's overriding sexual thirst. This dialogue attests that Jerry and Peter have made love.

Peter. (breaking away; enraged) It's a matter of genetics, not manhood, you – you monster. (He darts down, picks up the knife and barks away 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. (sighing heavily) So be it! (With a rush he charges Peter and impales himself on the knife. For just a moment there is complete silence. Jerry



impaled on the knife at the end of Peter's still firm arm. Then Peter screams and pulls away, leaving the knife in Jerry. Jerry is motionless for a moment, then he, too, screams, sounding like an infuriated and fatally wounded animal. With the knife in him, he stumbles back to the bench they vacated. He crumbles there, sitting facing Peter, his eyes wide in agony, his mouth open.

Peter. (whispering) Oh, my God; oh, my God; oh, my God ... (He repeats these words many times, very rapidly. Jerry is dying, but now his expression seems to change. His features relax, and while his voice varies, sometimes wrenched with pain, for the most part he seems removed from his dying).

Jerry. (smiling) Thank you, Peter. I mean that, now; thank you very much. (Peter's mouth drops open. He cannot move, he is transfixed). Oh, Peter, I was so afraid I'd drive you away. (He laughs as best he can) You don't know how afraid I was you'd go away and leave me. And now I'll tell you what happened at the zoo. I think – I think this is what happened at the zoo ... Peter – Peter? Peter – thank you. I came unto you – (he laughs) so faintly) and you have comforted me. Dear Peter.

Peter. (almost fainting) oh, my God!

Jerry. You'd better go now. Somebody might come by, and you don't want to be here when anyone comes. (Peter does not move and begins to weep)

Peter. Oh, my God; oh, my God! Jerry (most faintly now, he is very near death) You won't be coming back here anymore, Peter; you've been dispossessed. You've lost your bench, but you've defended your honour. And, Peter, I'll tell you something now; you're not really a vegetable; it's alright, you're an animal. You're an animal too. But you'd better hurry now, Peter. Hurry, you'd better go – see? (He takes out his handkerchief and with great effort and pain wipes the knife handle clean of fingerprints.) Hurry away Peter (pp.25-6).

I have quoted this dialogue at length because it has significant evidence that Jerry has initiated Peter into homosexual love. This excerpt from the dialogue under consideration necessitates a comment: "Jerry (smiling) Thank you, Peter. I mean that, now; thank you very much. (Peter's mouth drops open. He cannot move, he is transfixed) Oh, Peter, I was so afraid



I'd drive you away. (He laughs as best as he can). You don't know how afraid I was you'd go away and leave ... Peter – thank you. I came unto you – (he laughs so, faintly) and you have comforted me. Dear Peter". In this excerpt, Jerry thanks Peter because, like the superintendent's son, he has comforted him sexually. Further, his fear that Peter would go away is allayed because he lured him into his homosexual net and caught him.

A second point which attracts our attention in this lengthy dialogue under study is this: "Peter's mouth drops open. He cannot move, he is transfixed". It is evident from Peter's behaviour that his enjoyment of the sexual act with Jerry is overwhelming. This view cannot be dismissed in an off-hand manner because when one enjoys a sexual act, one's mouth drops open. In effect, this is a significant ingredient in a heterosexual or homosexual love relationship. With the foregoing analysis in mind, we can examine the second excerpt which reads:

Jerry. You'd better go now. Somebody might come by, and you don't want to be here when anyone comes. (Peter does not move and begins to weep)

Peter. Oh, my God; oh, my God! Jerry (most faintly now, he is very near death). You won't be coming back here anymore, Peter; you've been dispossessed. You've lost your bench, but you've defended your honour. And, Peter, I'll tell you something now, you're not really a vegetable.

This excerpt culled from the dialogue under consideration gives rise to these questions: Why does Peter weep? And why is he overwhelmed by surprise? The answers to these questions are visible at a glance. It is evident that Peter weeps because he has lost his innocence having been initiated into homosexuality by Jerry. Again, as a married man, Peter's pendulumic swing from a heterosexual to a homosexual or gay identity gnaws his mind, hence the exclamation "oh, my God; oh my God!"

The third excerpt from the dialogue which attracts our attention is Jerry's advice to Peter.

... You've lost your bench, but you've defended your honour. And, Peter, I'll tell you something now; you're not really a vegetable; it's alright, you're an animal. You're an animal too. But you'd better hurry now, Peter.



Hurry, you'd better go – see? (He takes out his handkerchief and with great effort and pain wipes the knife handle clean of fingerprints.) Hurry away Peter. (p.26)

In this excerpt, Peter defends his honour because he has been initiated into homosexuality, hence he is no longer a vegetable. Those who see the knife as a weapon of destruction are right in their standpoint that wiping “the knife handle clean of fingerprints” is necessary to hide evidence in tracing the murderer of Jerry. A Freudian reading, on the contrary, sees wiping the knife clean of fingerprints in a different light. In *Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*, Sigmund Freud tells us that “Love ... makes things wet” (Freud, 1993:p.64). In the light of Freud’s statement, wiping the knife is, to say the least, wiping the penis which is the last act in sexual intercourse.

4. CONCLUSION

The interpretation that Jerry dies at the end of *The Zoo Story* agitates my sleep. The words of Jerry at the end of the play: “Peter – Peter? Peter – thank you. I came unto you – (he laughs, so faintly) and you have comforted me. Dear Peter” (p.26) necessitate a comment. I think that Jerry is appreciative that Peter has quenched his vaulting sexual thirst. Can a man who has been stabbed thank his assailant or murderer when he is dying? This dialogue throws light on Jerry’s lot at the end of the play:

Peter. (breaking away; enraged) It’s a matter of genetics, not manhood, you – you monster. (He darts down, picks up the knife and barks away 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. (sighing heavily) So be it! (With a rush he charges Peter and impales himself on the knife. For just a moment there is complete silence. Jerry impaled on the knife at the end of Peter’s still firm arm. Then Peter screams and pulls away, leaving the knife in Jerry. Jerry is motionless for a moment, then he, too, screams, sounding like an infuriated and fatally wounded animal. With the knife in him, he stumbles back to the bench they vacated. He crumbles there, sitting facing Peter, his eyes wide in agony, his mouth open (p.25).



The knife, as we have pointed out repeatedly in this paper is the phallus or male sexual organ. If Jerry is "... impaled on the knife at the end of Peter's still firm arm" then it is Peter who penetrates Jerry, to use the amorous jargon of heterosexuals and homosexuals. Jerry, as the stage directions reveal, "... crumbles there, sitting facing Peter, his eyes wide in agony, his mouth open" because he is in pains inflicted by Peter's big phallus or penis. Jerry's mouth is open, as I had earlier pointed out, because he is in the spasm of sexual ecstasy and can he die in a state of enjoyment?

Finally, our study of the text under examination reveals that the absence of love between Jerry and his mother leads to his isolation and fosters his homosexual cravings or impulses. In the light of the above statement, the superintendent's son and Peter become Jerry's gay or homosexual partners. In other words, in this study we can conclude that the superintendent's son and Peter are Jerry's homosexual partners who constitute the gay community in Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story*.

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