

The zoo story and myth-symbolism



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

“ Sin-penalty-penance-salvation” is an important archetype in the BIBLE. This archetype in the BIBLE provides an excellent frame for THE ZOO STORY.

Edward Albee’s employment of archetypes from Greek myth and allusions from the BIBLE serve as a catalyst in the expansion of his narratives, binding the old with the new and adding depth to his plots and characters. Jerry, when we meet him, has lived for a short time in a rooming house on the west side.

The inhabitants of the rooming house are, infact, the outcasts, the doomed, ‘ the least of there’. The gate-keeper (in jerry’s word) are a foul woman and the dog, “ a black monster of a beast: an overseized head, tiny ears and eyes. The dog is black, all black except the bloodshot eyes. ” The description immediately identifies the dog as Cerberus, the monster, all black with flaming eyes, who guards Hell. The drunken, lewd woman adds a further dimension to the allusion for we recognize the pair as Milton’s Sin and Death.

The symbol is again when Jerry throws poisoned meat to the dog to gain safe passage for this is unmistakable allusion to the myth in which Theseus throws drugged honey-cake to Cerberus to gain entrance to gain entrance to Underworld. The West side rooming house, then, is Hell and Jerry’s adventurous with the dog symbolize mythical heroes or God’s descent into Hell. In the death scene Albee again makes his allusions so broad that it becomes ironic. Peter’s calling “ oh, my God” operates so well on both symbolic and and materialistic level that the one level becomes an ironic commentary upon the other.