

THE UNIQUE STYLE OF EDWARD ALBEE:
CREATIVE USES OF THE PAST

This Thesis for the Master of Arts Degree by

Carolyn Claydon Olin

B.A., University of Colorado, 1956

Department of
Speech and Drama

by



Albert H. Nadeau



Richard K. Knaub

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The Unique Style of Edward Albee: Creative Uses of the
Past

Thesis directed by Professor Albert H. Nadeau

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plays and two adaptations behind him, has become America's
most controversial playwright.

This Thesis for the Master of Arts Degree by

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years, swinging from a naturalistic style to an absurd
style and back again. His plays belong for the most part,
however, in the Naturalist-Symbolist school. In his
naturalistic plays, which include The Zoo Story, The Death

of Bessie Smith, Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, Tiny
Alice and A Delicate Balance, Albee uniquely combined
past literary styles. At times Albee shifts abruptly into

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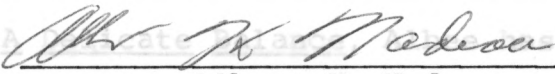
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Edward Albee, now thirty-nine years old, with seven plays and two adaptations behind him, has become America's most controversial major playwright.

His style has changed from time to time over the years, swinging from a naturalistic style to an absurd style and back again. His plays belong for the most part, however, in the Naturalist-Symbolist school. In his naturalistic plays, which include The Zoo Story, The Death of Bessie Smith, Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, Tiny Alice and A Delicate Balance, Albee has uniquely combined past literary styles. At times Albee shifts abruptly into a surrealist style, as in The Zoo Story and A Delicate Balance. In Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, Albee moves into a formal style. With The Death of Bessie Smith and Tiny Alice, Albee has attempted a complete fusion of styles.

In The American Dream and The Sandbox, Albee has used some of the superficial elements of the absurd tradition to make a penetrating statement about the American family and American values.

Throughout most of his one acts, it becomes obvious that Albee is searching for a style. As Albee writes his full-length plays, he seems to be consistently striving to

transcend the restrictions of the past. In rebelling against certain aspects of the conventional styles, Albee has created a style uniquely his own which suits his ideas and his use of the language. He has turned to the symbolists for new and dramatic ways in which to render his ideas.

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Faculty member in charge of thesis	
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²Richard Schechner, Tulane Drama Review, VII (Spring, 1963), 9.

Alan Schneider, in the same issue, states that he has great admiration for Albee's abilities.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

One of the most recognized and controversial young playwrights of the American theatre today is Edward Albee. It was not without some struggle, however, that Albee was produced in this country. The premiere performance of The Zoo Story was in Berlin in September of 1959, after it had been "politely refused by a number of New York producers."¹

Albee's Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? created tremendous controversy among the critics when it was performed in New York three years later. Richard Schechner of the Tulane Drama Review found the play and its playwright outrageous phonies:

The upsetting thing--the deeply upsetting thing--is that American theatre goers and their critics have welcomed this phony play and its writer as the harbinger of a new wave in the American theatre. The American theatre, our theatre, is so hungry, so voracious, so corrupt, so morally blind, so perverse that Virginia Woolf is a success. I am outraged at a theatre and an audience that accepts as a masterpiece an insufferably long play with great pretensions that lacks intellectual size, emotional insight, and dramatic electricity.²

³Alan Schneider, Tulane Drama Review, VII (Spring, 1963), 13.

¹Edward Albee, Preface to The Zoo Story (New York, 1963), p. 7.

²Richard Schechner, Tulane Drama Review, VII (Spring, 1963), 9.

Alan Schneider, in the same issue, states that he has great admiration for Albee's abilities.

Without attempting to enthrone Albee alongside anyone (though I personally admire him above all other Americans now writing for the stage), or to hail Virginia Woolf as a classic of the modern theatre (which I have no doubt it will become), I would only state that, in my own experience, a more honest or moral (in the true sense) playwright does not exist-- unless it be Samuel Beckett.³

The varying opinions that Albee's plays create is not unusual in the theatre, particularly when the play in question employs a new or unusual style. One of the problems that always face us when new techniques appear is that we have little foundation on which to make our judgment.

Most of the incomprehension with which plays of this type are still being received by critics and theatrical reviewers, most of the bewilderment they have caused and to which they still give rise, come from the fact that they are part of a new, still developing stage convention that has not yet been generally understood and has hardly ever been defined. Inevitably, plays written in this new convention will, when judged by the standards and criteria of another, be regarded as impertinent and outrageous imposters.⁴

From the very first, however, Albee was acknowledged as an impressive writer and a master of theatricality.

³Alan Schneider, Tulane Drama Review, VII (Spring, 1963), 13.

Robert Brustein, Season of Our Discontent (New York, 1965), p. 82.

⁴Martin Esslin, Theatre of the Absurd (New York: 1961), p. xvii.

Edward Albee, Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? (New York, 1963), p. 19.

Robert Brustein, one of the strongest critics of Albee, admires his technique: "Albee's technical dexterity has always been breathtaking--for sheer theatrical skill, no American, not even Williams, can match him."⁵ Some of the best examples of these theatrical techniques appear in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? The first entrance of Nick and Honey is carefully set for a comic effect and is extreme in its staginess:

George: All right, love . . . whatever love wants. Isn't it nice the way some people have manners, though, even in this day and age? Isn't it nice that some people won't just come breaking into other people's houses, even if they do hear some sub-human monster yowling at 'em from inside.

Martha: Screw you! you, come to Alice . . .

Julian: (Simultaneously with Martha's last remark, George flings open the front door. Honey and Nick are framed in the entrance. There is a brief silence.)⁶

After Martha begins to ridicule George in earnest, George leaves the stage in anger. He returns with a gun behind his back.

Julian: (George takes from behind his back a short-barreled shotgun and calmly aims it at the back of Martha's head. Honey screams . . . rises. Nick rises, and simultaneously, Martha turns her head to face George. George pulls the trigger.)

p. 57.

⁵Robert Brustein, Season of Our Discontent (New York, 1965), p. 82.

⁶Edward Albee, Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? (New York, 1963), p. 19.

George: POW!! (pop! From a barrel of the gun blossoms a large red and yellow Chinese parasol.)
You're dead! Pow! You're dead!⁷

Miss Alice: Come.

Tiny Alice requires a stage model of the castle in which the play takes place. It is described as a large "doll's-house model." There are lights on within it and at one point smoke pours out from one of the rooms. It is the dramatic focal point in the play and because of its function and its size it is an extremely theatrical device.⁸

Even more basic to Albee's style is his masterful comic climax to an intensely persuasive scene between Miss Alice and Julian in Tiny Alice. Miss Alice says, "Alice says she wants you, come to Alice. Alice tells me so. She wants you, come to Alice." Julian: "and no sacrifice in a sardonic,

Miss Alice: Alice tells me so, instructs me. Come to her.

Cardinal: We are pleased . . . we are pleased to be (Miss Alice has her back to the audience, Julian facing her, but at a distance; she takes her gown and, spreading her arms slowly, opens the gown wide; it is the

Lawyer: Ah unfurling of great wings.)

Julian: (Shaking, staring at her body) . . . and . . . sacrifice . . . on the altar of . . . And here we

Miss Alice: Come . . . (with come . . . at the cage) . . . you must forgive us . . . to cardinals as well.¹⁰

⁷Ibid., p. 57.

⁸When the elipses are within the quotes they are Albee's punctuation. When I have cut through a speech or dialogue, there will be elipses across the page.

Julian: Delicate Balance, Lord. a God of quiet in . . .
Heaven.

Miss Alice: Come.

autumn dusk: Tobias at his desk looks up from all those
(Julian utters a sort of dying cry and moves,
awful bills, his arms in front of him, to Miss Alice, the
When he reaches her, she enfolds him in her
ribbons on her great wings.)⁹

These are a few of a number of theatrical scenes
and devices in which Albee shows his imaginative skill in
creating unexpected, dramatic, moments. but put her in a
bin somewhere, sell the house, move to Tucson,

Even more basic to Albee's style is his masterful
comic sense. Most of his plays contain a great deal of
comedy. All of Albee's one-acts begin in comedy; many of
his full-length plays also do.

Tiny Alice opens with the Lawyer talking to birds
in a birdcage and then to the Cardinal in a sardonic,
comic scene:

Cardinal: We are pleased . . . we are pleased to be
your servant (trailing off) George if
we can be your servant. We addressed you
as Saint Francis.

and Lawyer: Ah, but surely . . . enthusiastically:

Cardinal: I'll kill as Saint Francis . . . who did talk
to the birds so, did he not. And here we
find you, who talk not only to the birds
but to (with a wave at the cage) . . . you

Nick: He must forgive us . . . to cardinals as
well.¹⁰

Honey: (Wildly) Violence! Violence!

Martha: It happened! To ME! To ME!

⁹Edward Albee, Tiny Alice (New York, 1966), p. 124.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 2.

In A Delicate Balance, after a page of quiet, introspective dialogue about insanity, Agnes says: "Some autumn dusk: Tobias at his desk looks up from all those awful bills, and sees Agnes, made as a hatter, chewing the ribbons on her dress. . . . Violence," which becomes, by Tobias: "Cognac? . . . Yet the scene plays for its

Agnes: "Yes; Agnes Sit-by-the-fire, her mouth full of ribbons, her mind aloft, adrift; nothing to do with the poor old thing but put her in a bin somewhere, sell the house, move to Tucson, say, and pine in the good sun, and live to be a hundred and four."¹¹

More important than merely beginning plays and acts about a baggage who "was sort of a simp in the long run in a comic spirit, Albee sees the potential in contrast. . . . " and who "tooted brandy immodestly and spent half of her time in the upchuck . . . " Honey murmurs, "This is a moment of comedy. Yet Albee's control is so certain familiar," "I've heard this story before," "I love familiar that he can bring the scene back to the serious moment in stories . . . they're the best."¹² The comedy of these an instant.

In Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? George attempts to strangle Martha while Nick attempts to break them apart and Honey stands by watching enthusiastically:

George: I'll kill you!
 (Grabs her by the throat. They struggle.)
 Nick: Hey!
 Nick: Stop it!
 Honey: (Wildly) Violence! Violence!
 George: Look at me . . . I'm all puffed up. Oh, my
 Martha: It happened! To ME! To ME!

¹¹Edward Albee, A Delicate Balance (New York, 1966), p. 4.

¹³ibid., pp. 142-144.

George: YOU SATANIC BITCH!ere married . . .

Nick: Stop that!so Stop that! married . . .

Honey: Violence! Violence!¹²

While an incredibly violent scene occurs, Honey is screaming joyously, "Violence, Violence," which becomes, by contrast, a comic line. Yet the scene plays for its violence and its comedy simultaneously. nt away . . . like magic . . . pouf!

In Act II, George tells his guests, under the guise of the story being his new novel, the story of Nick and Honey's courtship and marriage. As George tells the story about a baggage who "was sort of a simp in the long run appraisal of a psychotic whose exposure involves us all. . . ." and who "tooted brandy immodestly and spent half of her time in the upchuck . . ." Honey murmurs, "This is familiar," "I've heard this story before," "I love familiar stories . . . they're the best."¹³ The comedy of these lines lies in Honey's naivete and her brandy-muddled mind. She can't get anything in focus. The horror of it lies in the knowledge that Honey is gradually becoming more exposed, more vulnerable. Honey says, as George continues the story, "I know these people . . .," "I don't like this story . . .," "I . . . don't . . . like this."

Nick: Stop it!se; then with the greatest disbelief possible, tinged with hysteria) What did you

George: Look at me. I'm all puffed up. Oh, my goodness, said Blondie.

¹² Ibid., p. 146.

¹² Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, p. 137.

¹³ Ibid., pp. 142-144.

Honey: . . . (Pause and so they were married. with laughter)

George: . . . and so they were married . . .

Honey: . . . and then . . .

George: and then . . .

Honey: WHAT? . . . and then, WHAT?

Nick: NO! NO!

George: . . . and then the puff went away . . . like magic . . . pouf! very still . . .

Nick: Jesus. God. I can't move . . .

Honey: . . . the puff went away . . . I have a line here.

What began as a witty story, has become an agonizing appraisal of a psychotic whose exposure involves us all.

One of the most breathtaking lines which shows Albee's confidence in his ability to control an audience's response by pulling them sympathetically into a scene and then dashing an inappropriately shocking line in their faces, is George's line in response to Martha's desperate, hopeless demand, after George has told her he received a telegram which announced the death of their son: "Show it to me! Show me the telegram!"

George: (Long pause; then, with a straight face) I ate it.

Martha: (A pause; then with the greatest disbelief, possible, tinged with hysteria) What did you just say to me?

¹⁴Ibid., p. 146.

¹⁶Edward Albee, The Sandbox (New York, 1963), p. 19.

George: (Barely able to stop exploding with laughter)
I . . . ate . . . it.¹⁵

There is a moment in The Sandbox which combines this kind of shockingly inappropriate line in the middle of a serious scene. As Grandma dies, she says to the Young Man: ". . . I . . . I can't get up. I . . . I can't move . . . I . . . can't move . . ."

Young Man: Shhhh . . . be very still . . .

Grandma: I . . . I can't move . . .

Young Man: Uh . . . ma'am; I . . . I have a line here.

Grandma: Oh, I'm sorry, sweetie; you go right ahead.¹⁶

In all of these scenes the drama is merely interrupted by the comic lines; Albee always eventually resumes his serious purpose. The comic lines show Albee's perception, amusement, and even scorn of our "euphemisms." They are satirically irreverent. They give the audience an opportunity to be the same. In fact, in most cases, where Albee throws comic lines into dramatically tense and serious scenes, the result is a momentary objectivity for the audience. The comic line literally forces a withdrawal on the part of the viewers and they are better able to see the merits of the situation in all respects; it is, after all, very often easier to see the truth when one is

1962), p. 251.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 39.
¹⁵Ibid., p. 234.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 291.
¹⁶Edward Albee, The Sandbox (New York, 1963), p.

not involved. When these comic lines occur in the serious, and sometimes violent, scenes, we become uninvolved. The ingenuousness with which Albee uses the combination of comedy and seriousness lies in the rapid, incisive sureness with which he changes directions, and his insistence that the audience stay "a little alert."

J. L. Styan has written a book entitled The Dark Comedy in which he defines dark comedy or tragi-comedy as:

... drama which impels the spectator forward by stimulus to the mind or heart, then distracts him, muddles him, so that time and time again he must review his own activity in watching the play. In these submissive, humiliating spasms, the drama redoubles its energy, the play takes on other facets.¹⁷

The difficulties in muddling an audience into being moved by pity one moment and stimulated into laughter the next are enormous. "Dare the dramatist risk hearing us laugh when he would wish us to weep?"¹⁸

Many of our modern dramatists risk this and the successful ones are rewarded by enthusiastic, though oftentimes puzzled, audiences. But as Styan says:

The satisfaction of dark comedy, when it arises, lies in watching the playwright keep this balance; the significance of it lies in his finding it important to do so.¹⁹

¹⁷J. L. Styan, The Dark Comedy (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), p. 251.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 39.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 291.

Because of his ability to combine the comic and the serious with such skill, Albee has become one of the leading American playwrights of serious comedy. Albee's best example of this combination is Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, although The Zoo Story and A Delicate Balance have this serious comedy quality also.

Albee has, in all of his plays, devoted his talents to a basically naturalistic style. His plays are, nonetheless, a blending of many other movements of the past. He has used the techniques of the symbolists and the expressionists to a large degree in Tiny Alice and The Death of Bessie Smith; he imitated the absurdists in The American Dream and in The Sandbox. In Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, The Zoo Story, A Delicate Balance, Albee's style, although fundamentally naturalistic, veers from naturalism at certain moments.²⁰

Albee admits to influences of the past. In an interview published in The Paris Review, William Flanagan asks Albee: "Which contemporary playwrights do you particularly admire? Which do you think have influenced you especially, and in what ways?"

Albee: The one living playwright I admire without reservation whatsoever is Samuel Beckett.
 . . . But on the matter of influence, that

²⁰For the purposes of this paper, I am not including in the discussion, Albee's two adaptations, Malcolm and The Ballad of the Sad Cafe. I will devote the time to his original plays only.

question is difficult. . . . As a playwright I imagine that in one fashion or another I've been influenced by every single play I've ever experienced. Influence is a matter of selection--both acceptance and rejection.

CHAPTER II

Flanagan: In a number of articles, mention is made of the influence on you--either directly or by osmosis--of the theatre of cruelty. How do you feel about the theatre of cruelty, or the theories of Artaud generally?

1. Past Influences

Albee: Let me answer it this way. About four years ago I made a list, for my own amusement, of the playwrights, the contemporary playwrights, by whom critics said I'd been influenced. I listed twenty-five. It included five playwrights whose work I didn't know. . . . I've been influenced by Sophocles and Noel Coward.²¹

Even though Albee chooses to be non-committal, certain influences are immediately apparent. I shall present some of these past influences on Edward Albee's style and the qualities which make his style unique. could come about only through the "scientific spirit" of naturalism, "bringing with it the power of reality, the new life of modern art."² "Either the drama will die or the drama will be modern and realistic."³

[Zola had] a desire to help the theatre in its great movement toward truth and experimental knowledge which since the last century has grown and increased in all spheres of human intelligence. The movement was started by the new scientific methods. Because

¹Lawson A. Carter, Zola and the Theatre (Connecticut, 1963), pp. 3-5.

²Emile Zola, Preface to Therese Raquin in Theatre and Drama in the Making, ed. John Gassner and Ralph Allen (Boston, 1964), p. 555.

²¹William Flanagan, "The Art of the Theatre: Edward Albee. An Interview," Paris Review, X (1966), 107.

of them, naturalism has regenerated criticism and history by submitting man and his works to a precise analysis, taking into account circumstances, environment and organic causes.⁴

Zola recognized, CHAPTER II that truth in art and truth in science could not be precisely the same. He believed that, "It was not the absolute truth, but the highest degree of truth. Past Influences art which must be put forward as the goal of literature."⁵

Emile Zola began his literary career by writing idealistic, spiritualistic and completely unsuccessful romantic poetry. At the time, he expressed distaste for a realistic style.¹ Slowly Zola came to believe, through the influences of the new scientific movement, that truth could be taken as a literary standard.

Zola believed that a regeneration of the stage could come about only through the "scientific spirit" of naturalism, "bringing with it the power of reality, the analyses of human relationships and conduct. new life of modern art."² "Either the drama will die or the drama will be modern and realistic."³ [Zola had] a desire to help the theatre in its great movement toward truth and experimental knowledge which since the last century has grown and increased in all spheres of human intelligence. The movement was started by the new scientific methods. Because based on science, by writing novels. So convinced was he

¹Lawson A. Carter, Zola and the Theatre (Connecticut, 1963), pp. 3-5.

²Emile Zola, Preface to Therese Raquin in Theatre and Drama in the Making, ed. John Gassner and Ralph Allen (Boston, 1964), p. 555.

³Ibid., p. 557.

Then of them, naturalism has regenerated criticism and the history by submitting man and his works to a precise dram analysis, taking into account circumstances, environment and organic causes.⁴

According to Børge Gedsø Madsen, Zola felt that a Zola recognized, however, that truth in art and strict adherence to reality was the only way to a truthful truth in science could not be precisely the same. He rendering of a dramatic situation:

believed that, "It was not the absolute truth, but the

The naturalistic novelist and playwright must highest degree of truth compatible with art which must be documented way. In his portrayal of character the put forward as the goal of literature."⁵

It is clear from Zola's statement that he believed one gains insights into truth through the new discoveries

in the sciences, and scientific methods: biological the

science, the science of psychology, and biochemistry. the

These new discoveries enabled man to study human behavior

from more reliable scientific observations. Man was able

to maintain a detached scrutiny which would, hopefully, in,

lead to a more truthful, accurate, and more meaningful

analyses of human relationships and conduct. y, free from irrelevancies, a study going straight to the objective.

It was possible, he believed, to formulate laws of human conduct, based on the observation, analysis, and classification of facts, in the same way that a scientist proceeds to formulate laws of the natural sciences.⁶ the proposed problem.

Zola began his new experiment of portraying nature, based on science, by writing novels. So convinced was he that this method would regenerate art that he adapted

⁷Børge Gedsø Madsen, Strindberg's Naturalistic Theatre (Seattle, 1962), p. 13.

⁴Gassner and Allen, p. 555.

⁸Gassner and Allen, Preface to Therese Raquin, p. 557. ⁵Carter, p. 12.

⁶Ibid., p. 19.

Therese Raquin to the stage in an attempt to influence the priest of any sort. There is only life, an immense drama field where each can study and create as he likes.⁹

According to Børge Gedsø Madsen, Zola felt that a strict adherence to reality was the only way to a truthful rendering of a dramatic situation: have, according to

Zola, "The naturalistic novelist and playwright must observe reality closely and render it in a carefully documented way. In his portrayal of character the naturalist, using a scientific approach, should point out how character is determined by the forces of heredity and environment--to make his characterizations scientifically valid, he should utilize the results of physiological and psychological research."⁷

One playwright who was influenced by Zola's principles and who enlarged upon them to a significant degree was August Strindberg. One of his most important contributions to modernizing Zola's naturalism was his insistence on an intense struggle within the drama. For Strindberg the play, according to Zola, must move from the inner motivations of the characters, inevitably from the beginning sequence through the following sequences to its finish.

In speaking of his dramatization of Therese Raquin, Zola says:

It is very often a "desperate struggle against nature."¹⁰
I tried to create a purely human study, free from irrelevancies, a study going straight to the objective. The action was not to be found in a commonplace story, but in the inner struggles of the characters. There was no logic of facts, but a logic of feelings and sentiment, and the denouement became the mathematical result of the proposed problem.⁸

Zola, in his preface to Therese Raquin, makes a strong case for throwing off all constricting formulas. Because his characters were psychologically motivated, the battle against their own weaknesses and desires became paramount.

⁷Børge Gedsø Madsen, Strindberg's Naturalistic Theatre (Seattle, 1962), p. 13.

⁸Gassner and Allen, Preface to Therese Raquin, p. 557. and Drama in the Making, ed. John Gassner and Ralph Allen (Boston, 1964), pp. 560, 563.

Added: There should no longer be a school formula, nor high priest of any sort. There is only life, an immense char field where each can study and create as he likes.⁹

backgro Strangely enough, Zola, after insisting that there be no more formulas, created a new and rather complicated one. Naturalistic literature must have, according to Zola, psychological and physiological balance; it must have a simple plot; the conflict should be of great significance; and the drama should have naturalness of dialogue and action as well as a realistic decor.

Mordeca One playwright who was influenced by Zola's principles and who enlarged upon them to a significant degree was August Strindberg. One of his most important contributions to modernizing Zola's naturalism was his insistence on an intense struggle within the drama. For Strindberg this struggle, or battle, is a part of "the joy of life."

It is very often a "desperate struggle against nature."¹⁰ It became for him, and most naturalistic playwrights after him, the central concern.

A whole new introspective philosophy had arisen and those who were discontent with the restrictions and inadequacies of inner life than Strindberg. Because his characters were psychologically motivated, the battle against their own weaknesses and desires became paramount.

The symbolists, like the naturalists, hoped to bring a "convincing illusion of life" to the stage. Their

⁹ Ibid., p. 556.

¹⁰ August Strindberg, Preface to Miss Julie Bingham-
Theatre and Drama in the Making, ed. John Gassner and
Ralph Allen (Boston, 1964), pp. 560, 563.

¹² Ibid., p. 186.

Added to this were the forces of environment pulling the character into an abyss of his own heredity and social background.

Zola's naturalism and the naturalism developed by later playwrights had a lasting effect on our modern detail theatre, and certainly on Edward Albee. The drama critics, however, state that the nature of today's naturalism has been modified considerably by other theatrical movements which developed later as a protest to naturalism. This Mordecai Gorelik, in New Theatres for Old, called the dominant dramatic style in the American theatre of 1935, Naturalist-Symbolist. This is, according to him, a which "simplified, attenuated and Romanticized Naturalism combining the elements of the Naturalist and Symbolist style."¹¹

Scarcely was the Naturalistic form established at the Theatre-Libre, when subjective idealism also appeared on the stage, insisting that "poetic truth not reality" must be the object of drama.¹²

A whole new introspective philosophy had arisen and those who were discontent with the restrictions and inadequacies of naturalism grasped these philosophical trends. Psychology became the "science" of symbolism.

The symbolists, like the naturalists, hoped to bring a "convincing illusion of life" to the stage. Their

¹¹Mordecai Gorelik, New Theatres for Old (Binghamton, 1949), p. 486.

¹²Ibid., p. 186.

emphasis was on the inner truth, the essence or soul of man and his environment. The visible elements of life were unimportant. much of the symbolist drama became quietly One brings the soul of man and his environment to the stage "by bringing forward only some significant detail of the whole environment by using a part as a symbol for the whole."¹³ which he is faced."¹⁵

Symbolism became a means by which the subjective mind of the theatre's artists could be expressed. This style enabled the playwrights to create dream worlds: mystic allusions, symbolic figures, impressionistic images. It encouraged an extremely lyrical, poetic language which often created a mood of dream and reverie. It often became musical and intensely emotional. The style "carried mystical non-rational overtones,"¹⁴ very often developing into a bewildering fluctuation of the character's personality: a confusing alternating between the conscious and the subconscious. and other modes of intense subjective experience.¹⁷

The character in a symbolist play usually passes through a process of a subjective, self-torturing search before he reaches a new awareness of his own being, a justification of his own existence, and a recognition of his relationship to his world.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 227.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 252.
¹³Ibid., p. 197.

¹⁴Ibid. Haskell M. Block and Robert G. Shedd, Masters of Modern Drama (New York, 1965), p. 7.

The doctrines of Sigmund Freud encouraged more exploration and concentration on the inner conflicts of man. As a result, much of the symbolist drama became quietly introspective. But as Gorelik points out, "The Symbolist is inclined to finish the play at the moment when his protagonist recognizes more or less fully the issues with which he is faced."¹⁵

The later developments of symbolism became known as Expressionism and, later, Surrealism.¹⁸ These theatrical modes contain qualities of cynicism, hysteria, and even violence. Expressionism became a brutal, violently aggressive attempt to expose the world's inhumanities. According to Gorelik:²⁰ "The hysterical symbolism of the Expressionists was often drawn from Freudian psychoanalysis."¹⁶ It was a vivid, emotional, introspective drama. This play shows

[Expressionism] sought to reveal a new "dynamics of the inner man" through the presentation of fantasies, hallucinations, nightmares, and other modes of intense subjective experience.¹⁷

The dialogue of the expressionistic play became nervous and violent with frequent strained soliloquies.

Usually the expressionistic play was a social protest with the audience as a participant. In the New York production, the intermissions occurred and the audience began to clap, the actors remained staring at the audience, and finally they were forced to clap.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 227.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 252.

¹⁷Haskell M. Block and Robert G. Shedd, Masters of Modern Drama (New York, 1965), p. 7.

the individual made insignificant by the machine and person- alienated by social indifference. although there is no reason Surrealism, an extension of some of the psychological aspects of expressionism, exposed its audiences to all types of insanity. An example of the ultimate in surrealistic drama is Peter Weiss's modern play, The Persecution and Assassination of Jean Paul Morat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton Under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade.¹⁸

The surrealists, according to Gorelik, believed in the individual's "subjective freedom in an objectively hostile world."¹⁹

In order to create this completely subjective drama, in order to show the "pure psychic automatism,"²⁰ the art must be unpremeditated.

In 1957 a play entitled Act Without Words II by Samuel Beckett was produced in London. This play shows complete psychic automatism. The two characters, both long inside the gilt picture frame of the proscenium, men, never speak and are prodded into action by an offstage stick which moves on slowly, parallel to the stage, and

The Symbolists had merely established an "attenuated

¹⁸Not only are all of the characters in Weiss's play insane, but Weiss has indicated in the staging that the audience is a participant. In the New York production, as the intermissions occurred and the audience began to clap, the actors remained staring at the audience, and finally they too began to clap.

¹⁹Gorelik, p. 256.

²⁰Ibid., p. 255.

²²Ibid.

"goads" them into moving. Each man has a distinct personality expressed through movement, although there is no reason for their individualized behavior. Both behave even completely mechanically.

All of these attempts at expression were aimed at heightening the emotional impact of the drama. All made an effort to appeal to the spectator's unconscious mind, to assault his emotions and prejudices.

Naturalism and symbolism were both used to create an illusion of reality; the former by presenting man realistically in his total environment, the latter by presenting man suggestively in a selected environment.

Even with these differences the Naturalistic school and the Symbolistic school seemed to have joined hands on many basic dramatic elements:

They did not challenge Zola's premise that a life-like quality must be the aim of scenic art. They did not conceive of a type of scenery which did not belong inside the gilt picture frame of the proscenium. Their real aim was only to perfect that very illusion which the Naturalists believed in. And in that aim the Symbolists succeeded.²¹

The Symbolists had merely established an "attenuated Naturalism" which Gorelik calls "thinner, prettier and less cluttered."²²

It is this combination of naturalism and symbolism which Gorelik states was present on the American stage at the best-known American "Absurdists." Gelber's play, The Connection, was produced in 1960. Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mamma's Hung You in the Closet and I'm Feelin' So Sad both opened in 1960.

²¹Ibid., p. 284.

²²Ibid., von Dreele, "The Twentieth Century and All That," The National Review (1963), p. 35.

²²Ibid.

the time his book was published. The American drama since that time has not changed significantly. In fact, what Gorelik states as the dominant style then seems to be even more dominant in our theatre today. Virginia Woolf?, accurately. The truly new innovations in the theatre in recent years have been established by the absurd theatre, but that convention has never completely caught the imagination of our American playwrights.²³

2. The Basic Naturalism of The Zoo Story, Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? and A Delicate Balance on your own distortions²⁷

Edward Albee has a strong feeling for the naturalistic style. It suits his use of the language better than any other form. Because of Albee's genius to imitate the American idiom, the syntactical, grammatical and structural habits of the various "communities" of our culture, the realistic mode is obviously the most suitable.

W. H. Von Dreele praises Albee's sense of language in an article in The National Review. "When it comes to a good ear, Edward Albee stands alone. There is not one false verbal note in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?"²⁴ on, III (September, 1961), p. 79.

²³Jack Gelber, Jack Richardson and Arthur Kopet are the best-known American "Absurdistists." Gelber's play, The Connection, was produced in 1959; Richardson's The Prodigal, and Kopet's Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mamma's Hung You in the Closet and I'm Feelin' So Sad both opened in 1960.

²⁴W. H. Von Dreele, "The Twentieth Century and All That," The National Review (1963), p. 35.

Geri Trotta admires Albee's dialogue: "He is a master at using trivial dialogue, deliberately riddled with clichés to achieve a scathing penetration of character."²⁵

Martha, in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, accurately describes Nick in three brief sentences:

Martha: "...and you don't see anything, do you? You see everything but the goddamn mind; you see all the specks and crap, but you don't see what goes on, do you?"²⁶

George defines Martha's problems just as briefly: "...but you've moved bag and baggage into your own fantasy world now, and you've started playing variations on your own distortions . . ."²⁷

Marya Mannes finds Albee's dialogue extremely powerful:

Jerry: You have TV, haven't you?

Peter: Why yes, we have two; one for the children.

Jerry: You're married!

[There is a] sharp perception of human diversity, a strong sense of emotional focus, and uncanny power of dialogue that can range, as it does in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? from savage humor to terrible sadness. There is nothing sloppy or vague about Albee: his aim devastates.²⁸

The Zoo Story, Albee's first play, is from the beginning basically naturalistic. This drama is based on

Peter: No, girls . . . both girls.

²⁵Geri Trotta, "On Stage Edward Albee," Horizon, III (September, 1961), p. 79.

²⁶Edward Albee, Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? (New York, 1963), p. 192.

Peter: I wasn't going to say that.

²⁷Ibid., p. 155.

²⁸Marya Mannes, "The Half World of American Drama," Reporter, XLVIII (April 25, 1963), 49.

a sudden and surprising relationship between Peter, a businessman, and Jerry, a misfit.

Through Peter's behavior and dialogue, Albee painstakingly establishes Peter as a representative man, the average, commonplace, middle-aged conservative, "neither fat, nor gaunt, neither handsome nor homely." He is an executive in a publishing house and is completely ruled by comfortable habits, according to Albee, like all conservative, middle-aged Americans. Peter has not faced anything unpleasant for most of his life.

Jerry questions Peter about his life and habits.

Jerry: You have TV, haven't you?

Peter: Why yes, we have two; one for the children.

Jerry: You're married!

Peter: Why, certainly.

Jerry: I'll tell you why I do it; I don't talk to

Jerry: And you have children.

Peter: Yes; two.

Jerry: Boys?

Peter: No, girls . . . both girls.

Jerry: But you wanted boys.

Peter: Well . . . naturally every man wants a son.

Jerry: But that's the way the cookie crumbles?

16. Peter: I wasn't going to say that.

Jerry: And you're not going to have anymore kids, are you?

³¹Ibid., p. 17.

Peter: No. No more.²⁹

Later, as Jerry's questioning continues, Peter shows his conservative indecisiveness.

Jerry: All right. Who are your favorite writers?
Baudelaire and J. P. Marquand?

Peter: Well, I like a great many writers; I have a considerable . . . catholicity of taste, if I may say so. Those two men are fine, each in his way. Baudelaire, of course . . . uh . . . is by far the finer of the two, but Marquand has a place . . . in our . . . uh . . . national . . .³⁰

Jerry, his opposite, is a nervous truth-seeker, eager to ferret out all of the important, revealing facts. His desire for understanding and love, his thirst for comprehension of the indifferent and cruel world, seem uncomfortably intense and unusual by comparison.

Jerry: Do you mind if I ask you questions?

Peter: No, not really.

Jerry: I'll tell you why I do it; I don't talk to many people--except to say like: give me a beer, or where's the john, or what time does the feature go on, or keep your hands to yourself, buddy. You know--things like that.

Peter: I must say I don't . . .

Jerry: But every once in a while I like to talk to somebody, really talk; like to get to know somebody, know all about him.³¹

Albee indicates that men will create a neurosis

when they are forced to suppress their desires to live

²⁹Edward Albee, The Zoo Story (New York, 1963), p. 16.

³⁰Ibid., p. 21.

³¹Ibid., p. 17.

Jerry, continually "heart-shatteringly anxious," is aggressively suspicious when he encounters Peter who remains, until the very last, pleasant but habitually vague and evasive. The two characters in this play represent two significant ailments in our American culture. Both Peter and Jerry are clearly products of their environments. Peter, secure in his world of conservative affluence, rebels only one day a week when he leaves his house to be alone on a park bench. But even this becomes a habit, blocking thought. Jerry is constantly in a state of struggle and rebellion in his world of misfits and loneliness. He nonetheless continues to search for a meaningful existence within the society which ostracizes him. Jerry constantly asks the questions and Peter forever evades them.

The play is an extremely careful psychological study of the behavior of a frustrated neurotic. Jerry cannot "make sense out of things." He has found no place for himself, no pigeonhole, no order. His resentment of his society is clear from the opening lines in the play.

Albee indicates that men will create a neurosis when they are forced to suppress their desires to live together in a society. Albee also believes that a sensitive man in an indifferent, detached society will become desperate and strike out against that society. Jerry, in

his desperation and with diabolical perverseness, involves Peter in his final rejection.

Although both characters are a representation of the results of a society too enormous to respond to human needs, each character is given sufficient psychological background to be individuals with distinguishable personalities. Every line reveals more of the personal characteristics.

The plot of The Zoo Story is extremely simple. In fact, although the events follow a clear, logical pattern, there is almost no plot at all. The play becomes a shining example of Zola's principle of faire simple.

Albee has compared his first full-length play, Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, to a musical composition:

I've been involved in one way or another with serious music ever since childhood. And I do think, or rather sense that there is a relationship--at least in my own work--between a dramatic structure, the form and sound and shape of a play, and the equivalent structure in music. Both deal with sound, of course, and also with idea, theme. I find that when my plays are going well, they seem to resemble pieces of music. But if I had to go into specifics about it, I wouldn't be able to. It's merely something that I feel.³²

This could not be said as accurately of any of Albee's plays to this point, as it can be said of Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? So integrated are the ideas, that the four characters seem to play out the action with the Woolf becomes a more impassioned plea for reason than his

³²William Flanagan, "The Art of the Theatre IV: Edward Albee. An Interview," The Paris Review (1966), p. 105.

George and Martha are bound by an intellectual vitality

harmony of a string quartet, reaching intense comic and pathetic heights. Both are sensitive and imaginative. Albee has, with more care than ever before, given the characters in Virginia Woolf a physiological and psychological validity which makes them extremely realistic.³³

Every line reveals more of the personal characteristics of these four personalities; each character has an inner momentum which justifies each line and every action Albee has given him. The play is carried to its conclusion by the interaction, the convictions and impulses, of four individuals who behave as they must and as only they can behave. It is Albee's most naturalistic play.

Aside from the careful character development, there are the other obvious naturalistic qualities; there is, as usual, Albee's simple, anti-plot--the play reveals personalities, not situations; the dialogue is natural, although almost unnaturally logical at times; the struggle between two beings becomes fiercely animalistic; there is, in Virginia Woolf, a more detached scrutiny than Albee has managed to attain before. His fondness for Grandma was, from the beginning, evident; his sympathy for Jerry made The Zoo Story a personal statement at times, but Virginia Woolf becomes a more impassioned plea for reason than his other plays.

From the opening of the play, it is clear that George and Martha are bound by an intellectual vitality

and wit, which amuses, angers, interests, and drives them into constant extremes. Both are sensitive and imaginative people, sometimes behaving as mature adults while at

other times they are like "children, with their oh-so-sad games, hopscotching their way through life, etcetera,

etcetera."³³

The opening gambit between the four characters shows Albee's genius at establishing, through realistic comic dialogue, certain basic qualities of each character and the relationship of one to the other.

Honey: Dear, you're being joshed.

Nick: I told you we shouldn't have come.

Nick: I'm aware of that.

Martha: I said c'mon in! Now c'mon!

George: I am sorry. What it is, actually, is it's a

Honey: Oh, dear (giggling).

George: (imitating Honey's giggle) Hee, hee, hee,

Honey hee. always cover the unpleasant aspects of

Martha: Look, muckmouth--you cut that out!

George: Martha! Martha's a devil with the language; she really is.

Martha: Hey, kids . . . sit down.

Honey: Oh, isn't this lovely!

Nick: Yes indeed . . . very handsome.

Martha: Well, thanks.

Nick: Who . . . who did the . . . (indicating a

painting). what's left of our wits. Don't pay

any Martha: That? Oh, that's by . . .

Nick: Still . . .

³³Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, p. 197.

³⁴Ibid., pp. 20-22.

George: . . . some Greek with a moustache Martha attacked one night in . . .

Nick: It's just that I don't like to . . . become
Honey: Oh, ha, ha, ha, ha. . . in other people's

Nick: It's got a . . . a . . .

George: A quiet intensity?

Nick: Well . . . no . . . a . . .

George: Oh. Well, then, a certain noisy, relaxed games. . . . quality, maybe?

Nick: No. What I meant was . . . quickly. She admits

George: How about . . . uh . . . a quietly noisy, relaxed intensity?

Honey: Dear, you're being joshed.

Nick: I'm aware of that.

George: I am sorry. What it is, actually, is it's a pictorial representation of the order of Martha's mind.³⁴

Honey must always cover the unpleasant aspects of reality; Nick will forever remain a feeble foil for

George; while George will usually be in control of the

Martha: So, anyway, I married the S.O.B., and I had situation.

Albee takes Martha and Honey out of the room and a revealing scene between Nick and George occurs. George tells Nick, "Martha and I are having . . . nothing. Martha and I are merely . . . exercising . . . that's all . . . we're merely walking what's left of our wits. Don't pay any attention to it."

Nick: Still . . .

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 33-34.

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 20-22.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 212.

George: Well, now . . . let's sit down and talk, huh?

Nick: It's just that I don't like to . . . become involved . . . uh . . . in other people's affairs.³⁵

From this beginning, everyone, in a sense, sits down and talks. As George later puts it, "We've sat around, and got to know each other, and had fun and games. . . ." ³⁶

We learn about Martha very quickly. She admits that she is loud and vulgar and she says she wears the pants in the household "because somebody has to." She is the daughter of the president of the college at which, for George teaches. She had decided years ago to find "an heir-apparent," one who could take over when Daddy retired, and George seemed a likely prospect. Albee makes it clear throughout the play that Martha is motivated by a strong desire to find a man like Daddy.

Martha: So, anyway, I married the S.O.B., and I had it all planned out . . . He was the groom her happy. . . . he was going to be groomed. He'd take over the History Department and then, when Daddy retired, he'd take over the college and . . . you know? That's the way it was supposed to be.

George: That's the way it was supposed to be. Very simple. And Daddy seemed to think it was a laugh, a pretty good idea, too. For a while, until he watched for a couple of years! Until he watched for a couple of years and started having thoughts maybe it wasn't such a good idea said: Yes, this will do; who has made the hideous,

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 33-34.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 83-85.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 212.

the hurt after all... that maybe Georgie-boy didn't
 must be have the stuff... that he didn't have it,
 sad.³⁸ in him!

...
 Against You see, George didn't have much... push
 ... he wasn't particularly aggressive. In
 gradually became fact he was sort of a... a... The FLOP! A
 strong possibility that George's inability to rise within
 his department I mean, he'd be... no good... at
 trustees' dinners, fund raising. He didn't
 from two horri have any... personality. You know what I
 father, altho mean? Which was disappointing to Daddy, as
 this flop may be fiction also. In any case,
 37

George Daddy's name rises out of Martha's subconscious
 over and over again. Albee may be implying that Martha
 has an incestuous desire for her father. She insists, for
 example, that her eyes "are green as her father's are; she
 tells with longing of being hostess to Daddy, of her
 "fondness" for him, of how she "worshipped" and "admired"

him. She constantly uses Daddy as a club against George.

But even though Martha constantly attacks George,
 she admits to Nick that George is the only one who makes

her happy. In a long speech about their relationship,
 Martha states that it is George's novel and that it really
 happened to him.
 insecurity:

Martha: Truth and illusion, George; you don't know
 George who is good to me, and whom I revile, who
 understands me, and whom I push off; who can make me
 laugh, and I choke it back in my throat; who can hold
 me at night, so that it's warm, and whom I will bite
 so there's blood... whom I will not forgive for
 having come to rest; for having seen me and having
 said: Yes, this will do; who has made the hideous,

³⁸Ibid., pp. 190-191.

³⁹Ibid., p. 96.

³⁷Ibid., pp. 83-85.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 202.

the hurting, the insulting mistake of loving me and he must be punished for it. George and Martha: sad, sad, sad.³⁸

Against this guilt-ridden, insecure woman, George gradually becomes the stronger personality. There is a strong possibility that George's inability to rise within his department and eventually the college stems in part from two horrifying accidents which killed his mother and father, although this may be fiction also. In any case, George identifies with the story of a boy who shot his mother, "accidentally, completely accidentally, without even an unconscious motivation . . ." and who later killed his father because he "swerved the car to avoid a porcupine and drove straight into a large tree."

And when he was recovered from his injuries enough so that he could be moved without damage should he struggle, he was put in an asylum. That was thirty years ago. . . . And I'm told that for these thirty years he has . . . not . . . uttered . . . one . . . sound.³⁹

Later in the act in which George tells this story, Martha states that it is George's novel and that it really happened to him.

Martha: Truth and illusion, George; you don't know the difference.

And George answers: No; but you must carry on as though we did.⁴⁰

teaching emotions for those who cannot face reality.

³⁸Ibid., pp. 190-191.

³⁹Ibid., p. 96.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 202. Virginia Woolf?, p. 155.

It is at this point that George slowly reveals the imaginary son.

In answer to the critics who questioned the credibility of George and Martha having invented an imaginary son, Albee says:

George: . . . it has always struck me very odd that an audience would be unwilling to believe that a highly educated, sensitive and intelligent couple, who were terribly good at playing reality and fantasy games, wouldn't have the education, the sensitivity, and the intelligence to create a realistic symbol for themselves. To use as they saw fit. . . . recognizing the fact that it was a symbol. And only occasionally being confused, when the awful loss and lack that made the creation of the symbol essential becomes overwhelming--like when they're drunk, for example. Or time when they're terribly tired.⁴¹

Martha, while off-stage, tells Honey about their son's twenty-first birthday tomorrow. When George discovers that Martha has revealed their secret son, he eventually determines to kill the child. For him, Martha has "moved bag and baggage" into her own "fantasy world."⁴²

George can, at least, function without some of the illusions he and Martha have created and he forces Martha to exorcise the illusion of this son which has now begun to have destructive powers. George comes to be a purveyor of truth, an insistent, compulsively honest hero, and, as with Jerry in The Zoo Story, kindness and cruelty are the teaching emotions for those who cannot face reality.

George: Oh, come on, Martha!

⁴¹Flanagan, p. 111.

⁴²Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, p. 155.

Martha, in an unusually poetic series of speeches, tells about their son while George keeps her "honest and accurate": being an unwanted and unfit father. He finally

Martha: . . . the cane which he wore through . . . telegram finally . . . with his little hands . . . in which announce his . . . sleep their son.

George: YOU CAN NIGHTMARES THESE THINGS.

Martha: . . . sleep Martha. He was a restless child got . . . telegram; there was a car accident, and he's dead. POUF! Just like that! Now, how

George: (soft chuckle, head-shaking of disbelief) . . . Oh . . . Lord.

Martha: . . . sleep . . . and a croup tent . . . a the previous pale green croup tent, and the shining kettle hissing in the one light of the room that time well that even he was sick . . . those four days . . . and animal crackers, and the bow and arrow he kept realistically under his bed . . .

George: . . . the arrows with rubber cups at their tip . . .

Martha: At their tip which he kept beneath his bed behavior when faced with fearful uncertainty, adjustment,

and George: Why? Why, Martha? any of Albee's plays, a

Martha: study . . . for fear psycho for fear of the neuroses

of a George: For fear. Just that; for fear.⁴³ Of its

members As Martha slowly progresses from the son's infancy into manhood, she becomes increasingly distressed and finally breaks off saying: series of quiet, introspective

Martha: . . . he grew . . . our son grew . . . up; he is grown up; he is away at school, college. He is fine, everything is fine.

George: Oh, come on, Martha!

⁴³Ibid., pp. 232-233.

⁴³Ibid., p. 219.

Martha: No; that's all.⁴⁴ But George is unrelenting and goads her into accusing George of being an unwanted and unfit father. He finally announces to all that "Crazy Billy" brought a telegram which announced the death of their son.

Martha: YOU CAN'T DECIDE THESE THINGS.

George: Now listen, Martha; listen carefully. We got a telegram; there was a car accident, and he's dead. POUF! Just like that! Now, how do you like it!⁴⁵

The brutality of the scene is shocking, yet through the previous acts we have come to know these characters so well that even the death of the symbolic child remains realistically acceptable.

The opening scene becomes a statement of what Albee's latest play, A Delicate Balance, is another obviously considers a national psychosis, and the characters of Agnes, Tobias, Julia, and Claire are scrutinized behavior when faced with fearful uncertainty, adjustment, and decision. It is, more than any of Albee's plays, a character study: a careful psychoanalysis of the neuroses of an affluent society and the unwillingness of its members to become involved in life.

Agnes, in the opening scene, states the case for withdrawal from life in a series of quiet, introspective speeches:

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 224.

⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 232-233.

⁴⁶Edward Albee, A Delicate Balance (New York, 1966), pp. 3-10.

What I find most astonishing--aside from that belief of mine which never ceases to surprise me by the very fact of its surprising lack of unpleasantness, the belief that I might easily--as they say--lose my mind one day, not that I suspect I am about to, or am even . . . nearby

for I'm not that sort; merely that it is beyond . . . happening: some gentle loosening of the moorings sending the balloon adrift--and I think that is the only outweighing thing: adrift; the . . . becoming a stranger in . . . the world, quite . . . uninvolved, for I never see it as violent, only a drifting.

It won't be simple paranoia, though, I know that.

Schizophrenia, on the other hand, is far more likely--even given the unlikelihood. I believe it can be chemically induced . . . if all else should fail; if insanity, such as it is, should become too much. There are times when I think it would be so . . . proper, if one could take a pill--or even inject--rest . . . remove.⁴⁶

The opening scene becomes a statement of what Albee obviously considers a national psychosis, and the characters of Agnes, Tobias, Julia, and Claire are scrutinized as their identities are put under strain by an unexpected event which causes an imbalance in their lives.

Claire is "a alcoholic," despised by her sister Agnes because of her willful selfishness. Claire is drinking herself to death.

Agnes: Oh, God, I wouldn't mind for a moment if you filled your bathtub with it, lowered yourself in it, DROWNED! I rather wish you would. It would give me peace of mind to know you could do something well, thoroughly. If you want to kill yourself--then do it right!

Tobias: Please, Agnes . . .

⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 28.
⁴⁷ Edward Albee, A Delicate Balance (New York, 1966), pp. 3-10.

Claire Agnes: What I cannot stand is the selfishness! Those of you who want to die . . . and take your whole lives doing it.⁴⁷

It becomes clear that although Claire's mind is frequently "muddy," and that she compulsively escapes involvement through alcohol, she is the perceptive member of the family. She is less of an escapist; she is closer to reality and does indeed comprehend and understand the necessity of life's commitments. Claire resembles Albee's favorite characters, those who perceive the essentials of living. Jerry in The Zoo Story and George in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? have many of the same sharp insights. Unlike Jerry and George, however, Claire is continually sardonically detached. She has, probably mainly through her experiences with Alcoholics Anonymous, recognized the illusion and childishness of a false commitment, found herself superior to it, and become a spectator, an "objective observer," as she puts it. She functions surprisingly like a chorus, constantly anticipating, analyzing, and commenting on the events.

Tobias, Agnes' husband, for most of the play remains uncommitted. He does, however, feel a strong attraction to Claire. He has a "reflex defense of everything that Claire . . ." does. For the uncertain, the wavering, man--one who has a conviction such as Claire's--

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 28.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 15.

Claire becomes a dynamic attraction. And Claire constantly urges him into a conscious analysis of himself in relation to others.

Claire: Is Julia having another divorce?

Tobias: Hell, I don't know.

Claire: It's only your daughter. I should imagine-- from all that I have . . . watched, that it is come-home time. Why don't you kill Agnes?

Tobias: Oh, no, I couldn't do that.

Claire: Better still, why don't you wait till Julia separates and comes back here, all sullen and confused, and take a gun and blow all our heads off? . . . Agnes first. . . through respect, of course, then poor Julia, and finally--if you have the kindness for it--me?

Tobias: Do you really want me to shoot you?

Claire: I want you to shoot Agnes first. Then I'll think about it.⁴⁸

Later in this scene between them, Claire attempts to force Tobias into an analysis of his friendship with Harry and Edna.

Someone . . . our lives seem empty and meaningless. . . . when you used to spend all your time in town . . . with your business friends, your indistinguishable if not necessarily similar friends . . . what did you have in common with them?

life as "a rolling, pleasant land . . . verdant."⁵⁰

Tobias: Well, uh . . . well, everything. (Maybe slightly on the defensive, but more vague) Our business; we all mixed well, were friends away from the office, too. . . . clubs, our . . . an, an environment, I guess.

Claire: Uh-huh. But what did you have in common with them? Even Harry: your very best friend

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 19-21.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 15.

She conceives . . . in all the world--as far as you know; I mean, you haven't met everybody.

"To keep in shape." Have you heard the expression? Most people would give Harry the shirt off your back, when it comes to maintenance. When we keep something in shape, we maintain its shape--whether we

Tobias: I suppose I would. He is my best friend.

Claire: How sad does that make you?

Tobias: Not much; some; not much. . . . after all, though the rest of you teeter, unconcerned, or uncaring,

Claire: No one to listen to Bruckner with you; no one to tell you're sick of golf; no one to admit to that--now and then--you're suddenly frightened and you don't know why?

Tobias: Frightened? No.⁴⁹

Teddy, Tobias is sympathetic and defensive of Claire because he sees her desperation, and he is the only other person in the play who is basically concerned with human lives. He also finds a strength in Claire which makes him extremely conscious of her because of his longing for concrete, meaningful, relationships. As Tobias says: "I don't want another child, another loss. . . . never have loved someone . . . , 'our lives seem empty and meaningless."

Tobias: Oh, Agnes! Please!

Agnes, the wife, is, as her opening speech indicates, forever removed from the world. She describes her life as "a rolling, pleasant land . . . verdant."⁵⁰

There are no mountains in my life . . . nor chasms. . . . and I find that both joy and sorrow work their . . . wonders on me more . . . evenly, slowly, within, than most: a suntan rather than a scalding.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 80-82.

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 19-21.

⁵² Ibid., pp. 137-138.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 9.

She conceives of herself as the fulcrum. Her function is:

"To keep in shape." Have you heard the expression? Most people misunderstand it, assume it means alteration, when it does not. Maintenance. When we keep something in shape, we maintain its shape--whether we are proud of that shape, or not, is another matter . . . we keep it from falling apart. We do not attempt the impossible. We maintain. We hold.

There is a balance to be maintained, after all, though the rest of you teeter, unconcerned, or uncaring, assuming you're on level ground. . . by divine right, I gather, though that is hardly so.⁵¹

The marital relationship between Tobias and Agnes had become, partly because of the death of their son, Teddy, another withdrawal.

Agnes: We could have had another son, we could have tried. But no. . . those months--or was it a year--?

Tobias: No more of this!

Agnes: . . . I think it was a year, when you spilled yourself on my belly, sir? "Please? Please, Tobias?" No, you wouldn't even say it out: I don't want another child, another loss.

Harry: trying to hold you in? and so we came here. You're our very best friends.⁵⁴

Tobias: Oh, Agnes! Please!

Agnes: "Don't leave me then, like that. Not again, Tobias. Please? I can take care of it: we won't have another child, but please don't . . . leave me like that." Such . . . silent . . . sad, disgusted . . . love.⁵²

Julia, the daughter and only remaining child, has uncertainty and terror initially forces each character to gone through four husbands to this point and is returning retreat automatically and with greater determination into

⁵¹Ibid., pp. 80-82.

⁵³Ibid., p. 72.

⁵²Ibid., pp. 137-138.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 47.

to the "womb," hopeful of escape and of finding a more meaningful relationship with Agnes and Tobias. There has been, however, no real communication between them of previously and when she returns there remains the same awkwardness and hostility that had been between them, before. ingly alert and perceptive. Each in his own secure identity Julia has left her last husband, Doug, because, as she puts it, "He is against everything." Claire, her ge aunt, however, swears that, "Ef I din't love muh sister so, Ah'd say she got yuh hitched fur the pleasure uh their gettin' yuh back."⁵³ everything into Agnes' and Tobias' house; Into the lives of these four people come Edna and Harry, the unexpected, uninvited intruders. They are, they say, frightened and they became "terrified" while sitting at home, although there was nothing there. It was a nameless fear. Tobias: An action? Is that what you want? O.K., how out pressed against a corner of the upstairs hall, arms wide, palms back? Eyes darting?

Harry: We couldn't stay there, and so we came here. You're our very best friends.⁵⁴ clothes from the closets, hangers and all on the floor? The

They are taken to Julia's room and they remain there, locked in, for twenty-four hours, until the following evening. Although Tobias insists that Harry and Edna are "just . . . passing through," a sense of foreboding, work."⁵⁶ uncertainty and terror initially forces each character to retreat automatically and with greater determination into

⁵³ Ibid., p. 72.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 47.

his habitual behavioral pattern: Tobias reverts grimly into evasiveness and neutrality; Agnes maintains her status quo, keeps up the appearances and the sense of well-being; Julia becomes completely hysterical and finally loses all touch with reality; and Claire waits, increasingly alert and perceptive. Each in his own secure identity, they seem to become quite still, none able to make the necessary move to force a decision or a change in the slightly tipped delicate balance.

Then Edna and Harry make the decision to pack their belongings and bring everything into Agnes' and Tobias' house; Julia loses control. Tobias describes her condition to the remaining characters: "She's in hysterics!"

Agnes: That is a condition. I inquired about an action.

Tobias: An action? Is that what you want? O.K., how about pressed against a corner of the upstairs hall, arms wide, palms back? Eyes darting? Wide? How about tearing into Harry and Edna's room. . . ripping the clothes from the closets, hangers and all on the floor? The same for the bureaus?⁵⁵

This is, in Tobias' life, a turning point. Although he refuses to "judge," he is forced to make a decision and Agnes says, "Whatever you decide . . . I'll make it work."⁵⁶

Julia insists that Edna and Harry are intruders and Nonetheless, Tobias asks Harry and Edna to stay, but as that because of this they have no rights. Claire says suddenly as they enter, Harry and Edna leave.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 107.

⁵⁷Ibid., pp. 151-152.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 132.

that they're just like the family and consequently have all the rights any member of the family has. Tobias and Agnes reach the crux of the problem.

Tobias: These are people! Harry and Edna! These are our friends, God damn it!

Agnes: Yes, but they've brought the plague with them, and that's another matter. Let me tell you something about disease . . . mortal illness; you either are immuned to it . . . or you fight it. If you are immuned, you wade right in, you treat the patient until he either lives, or dies of it. But if you are not immuned, you risk infection.

.
with modern medicine, we merely isolate; we quarantine, we ostracize--if we are not immuned ourselves, or unless we are saints.

.
It is not Harry and Edna who have come to us--our friends--it is a disease.

Tobias: Oh, for God's sake, Agnes! It is our friends! What am I supposed to do? Say, "Look, you can't stay here, you two, you've got trouble. You're friends, and all, but you come in here clean."

.
. . . then what about us? When we talk to each other . . . what have we meant? Anything? When we touch, when we promise, and say . . . yes, or please . . . with ourselves? . . . have we meant, yes, but only if . . . if there's any condition, Agnes! Then its . . . all been empty.

Agnes: I am merely saying that there is a disease here! And I ask you: who in this family is immune?⁵⁷

Nonetheless, Tobias asks Harry and Edna to stay, but as I suddenly as they enter, Harry and Edna leave.

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 151-152.

The play is rooted in the naturalistic principles of psychologically motivated characters behaving within a realistically logical sequence of events, but the introduction of the event which causes the major conflict resembles the Greek deus ex machina as it is lowered into the play. Albee chooses not to explain the appearance of Harry and Edna intelligibly; their entrance is similar to an experiment in which a scientist injects a foreign matter into cells and then takes copious notes on their reactions. In this sense, these two characters become an "intrusion" and Agnes, Tobias, Julia and Claire revert to type.

The dialogue is a combination of two styles. It is, for the most part, rational and authentically representative of American speech. Yet there is an element of the "stream-of-consciousness" within speeches such as Agnes' opening speech and Tobias' final speech which reminds one of T. S. Eliot. It becomes extremely subjective, bringing the subconscious mind to the foreground from time to time for a penetrating glance into the psyche. Because of the "stream-of-consciousness" technique, Albee's dialogue, for the first time becomes consistently lyrical. Agnes says:

All the centuries, millenniums--all the history--I wonder if that's why we sleep at night, because the darkness still . . . frightens us? They say we sleep to let the demons out--to let the mind go raving mad, our dreams and nightmares all our logic gone awry,

Edward Albee, The Zoo Story (New York, 1963),

the dark side of our reason. And when the daylight comes again . . . comes order with it.⁵⁸

Albee's dialogue has always been articulate, but A Delicate Balance reveals a poetic richness which Albee has not shown before.

The comparison between the two men is quickly established, and 3. Abrupt Changes of Style at Moments of quite naturalistic. Play's Climax begins, however, and

Jerry exposes his own life and frustrations, the dialogue becomes more bizarre, distorted and brutal. As we have seen in The Zoo Story, Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? and A Delicate Balance, Albee works within the principles of naturalism.

In these three plays, however, Albee uses an unusual technique at the climaxes of his plays which make his style unique. In all three plays, Albee introduces a style somewhat different toward the final climax which creates an uneasiness, uncertainty and a heightened intensity.

For a week and a half when I was fifteen . . . and hang my head in shame that puberty was late . . . I was a homosexual. I mean, I was queer . . . queer, queer. In The Zoo Story, Albee prepares us for this change of style more carefully than in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? and A Delicate Balance.

Finally Jerry tells Peter of his attempts to make friends with the landlady's dog. The play opens on a disturbing note:

Jerry: I've been to the Zoo. I said, I've been to the Zoo. MISTER, I've been to the Zoo.⁵⁹

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 170.

⁵⁹Edward Albee, The Zoo Story (New York, 1963), p. 12.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 25.

The sense of uneasiness continues and is gradually intensified by Jerry's continual questioning. Jerry has, as Albee's protagonists often have, an astonishing ability to perceive the closely guarded secrets of others.

The comparison between the two men is quickly established, and the play's dialogue and Peter's manner remain quite naturalistic. As the climax begins, however, and Jerry exposes his own life and frustrations, the dialogue becomes more bizarre, distorted and brutal.

He begins quite rationally by telling Peter about the deaths of his mother, father and aunt and finishes the story with a cryptic, "which sort of cleaned things out family-wise."⁶⁰

His next step is to tell Peter some of the more unusual aspects of his childhood:

For a week and a half when I was fifteen . . . and I hang my head in shame that puberty was late . . . I was a homosexual. I mean, I was queer . . . 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.⁶¹

Finally Jerry tells Peter of his attempts to make friends with the landlady's dog.

I worried about that animal the very first minute I met him. Now animals don't take to me like Saint Francis had birds hanging off him all the time. What I mean is: animals are indifferent to me . . . like

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 24.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 25.

people . . . most of the time. But this dog wasn't indifferent. From the very beginning he'd snarl and it, then go for me, to get one of my legs. h God. How . . . about that? . . . WITH GOD WHO IS A COLORED QUEEN WHO WARS Well, I thought about it up in my room one day, none of the times I'd bolted upstairs, and I made up my mind. ⁶⁴ I decided: First, I'll kill the dog with kindness, and if that doesn't work . . . I'll just kill him. ⁶²

Failing to kill the dog with kindness, Jerry has a poisons him, but even that is unsuccessful: at the dog and the merely becomes sick. Jerry explains his reaction over the dog's illness to Peter.

I'm afraid that I must tell you I wanted the dog to live so that I could see what our new relationship might come to. Please understand, Peter, this sort of thing is important. You must believe me; it is important. We have to know the effect of our actions. ⁶³

Jerry describes his first encounter with the dog after its illness, explaining to Peter that he was "heart-shatteringly anxious to confront my friend again."ough we become The stage direction describes Jerry in this next speech as "abnormally tense":

It's just . . . it's just that . . . it's just that if you can't deal with people, you have to make a start somewhere. WITH ANIMALS! Don't you see? A person has to have some way of dealing with SOMETHING. If not with people. Jerry . . . if not with people. . . . SOMETHING.

teaching . . . tormenting . . . and goading Peter . . . begins to . . . With a street corner and too many lights, all colors reflecting on the oily-wet streets . . . with a wisp of smoke, a wisp . . . of smoke . . . with . . . with pornographic playing cards, with a strongbox . . . WITHOUT A LOCK . . . with love, with vomiting, with crying with fury because the pretty little ladies anger

⁶²Ibid., p. 32.

⁶³Ibid., p. 33.

and aren't pretty little ladies, with making money with
 up your body which is an act of love and I could prove it,
 with howling because you're alive; with God. How
 about that? WITH GOD WHO IS A COLORED QUEEN WHO WEARS
 A KIMONA AND PLUCKS HIS EYEBROWS, WHO IS A WOMAN WHO
 CRIES WITH DETERMINATION BEHIND HER CLOSED DOOR. . . . 64

The speech, by now, has become almost totally subjective,
 revealing a tormented mind out of control. It also has a
 quality of mechanical action, strangely unnatural, and the
 dialogue, like the surrealistic manner, is shrill and
 irrational.

As the speech concludes, Jerry returns to Peter and
 his previously detached, sardonic manner and the play
 settles into a more naturalistic style.

We have felt something both victorious and vengeful
 in this speech. Its emotional impact lies in its combin-
 ation of cruelty, violence and self-torture. Although we
 become sympathetic toward Jerry, we are uncomfortably
 aware of his derangement.

Peter's reaction toward the story is "disturbed,"
 and Albee describes him as being "numb." He insists he
 does not understand and Jerry finally, as a means of
 "teaching," tormenting, and goading Peter, begins to
 tickle him.

The tableau which Albee indicates after the knife
 is in Jerry can only be described as diabolical:
 attacks in which Jerry drives Peter into confusion, anger
 For just a moment, complete silence, Jerry impaled
 on the knife at the end of Peter's still firm arm.
 Then Peter screams, pulls away, leaving the knife in

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 35.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 41.

and finally action. Jerry finally demands that Peter give up his bench:

Peter: 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, so I have it all to myself.

... ..
 Jerry: You don't even know what you're saying, do you? This is probably the first time in your life you've had anything more trying to face than changing your cats' toilet box. Stupid! Don't you have any idea, not even the slightest, what people need?

Peter: Oh, boy, listen to you; well, you don't need this bench. That's for sure.

Jerry: Yes, yes, I do.

Peter: I've come here for years; I have hours of great pleasure, great satisfaction, right here. And that's important to a man. I'm a responsible person, and I'm a GROWN-UP! This is my bench, and you have no right to take it away from me.

Jerry: Fight for it then. Defend yourself; defend your bench.

Peter: You've pushed me to it. Get up and fight.⁶⁵
 Peter, in desperation, finally grabs the knife which Jerry has thrown him and attempts to defend himself. Jerry, sighing with relief, impales himself upon the knife.

The tableau which Albee indicates after the knife is in Jerry can only be described as diabolical:

For just a moment, complete silence, Jerry impaled on the knife at the end of Peter's still firm arm. Then Peter screams, pulls away, leaving the knife in

⁶⁸Robert Brustein, The Theatre of Revolt (Boston, 1964), p. 370.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 41.

Jerry. Jerry is motionless, on point. Then he, too, screams, and it must be the sound of an infuriated and fatally wounded animal. With the knife in him, he stumbles back to the bench that Peter has vacated. He crumbles there, sitting, facing Peter, his eyes wide in agony, his mouth open.⁶⁶

Peter runs, finally, screaming, "Oh, my God! Oh, my God! Oh, my God!"⁶⁷

The shock of Jerry's suicide action, even though we sensed earlier in the play the underlying madness of the dog story, is a technique used to free one's mind, so to speak, so there can be an "exorcism of fantasies."⁶⁸

The anti-bourgeois sentiment and the nihilistic philosophy of the surrealists is apparent from Jerry's final rejection of the world. There is also the vehemence and cruelty of this earlier tradition in Jerry's actions against Peter and himself. The "dark humor" of the surrealists that Albee uses in The Zoo Story becomes a trademark in Albee's later plays.

A Delicate Balance has a number of striking similarities to The Zoo Story in its stylistic changes and there are also similarities between Jerry and Tobias. Tobias has a series of speeches which show his desperate relationship with a cat, which has echoes of Jerry's dog story. It is, in the same sense as Jerry's, seemingly unmotivated,

though completely revealing.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 47.

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸A Delicate Balance, pp. 34-36.

⁶⁸Robert Brustein, The Theatre of Revolt (Boston, 1964), p. 370.

fact, The play, with the exception of the cat speech, has been basically naturalistic in its approach to the subject of human relationships and values. But, typically, the final climax moves away from this style for a brief, but intense, speech which Tobias delivers to Harry in answer to Harry's question, "You see. . . you don't want us, do you, Toby? You don't want us here?" Albee, in his stage direction, says:

(It must have in its performance all the horror and exuberance of a man who has kept his emotions under control too long.)

What? DO I what? DO I WANT? DO I WANT YOU HERE! You come in here, you come in here with your wife, and with your terror and you ask me if I want you here! YES! OF COURSE! I WANT YOU HERE! I HAVE BUILT THIS HOUSE! I WANT YOU IN IT! I WANT YOUR PLAGUE! YOU'VE GOT SOME TERROR WITH YOU? BRING IT IN! BRING IT IN!! YOU'VE GOT THE ENTREE; BUDDY, YOU DON'T NEED A KEY! YOU'VE GOT THE ENTREE, BUDDY! FORTY YEARS!

I like you, Harry, yes, I really do, I don't like Edna, but that's not half the point, I like you fine. I find my liking you has limits. . . BUT THOSE ARE MY LIMITS!! NOT YOURS!⁷⁰

Agnes: What I find most astonishing--aside from my mind--but when? Never, I begin to think, as Jerry's dog story: it becomes extremely mechanical-- it happens, or maybe even has-- psychically automatic, and unrealistic because its hysteria is shockingly sudden and unmotivated. Tobias has been, to this point, too much in control for this speech to seem anything other than a performance. In

⁷¹Ibid., p. 159.

⁷⁰Ibid., pp. 159-161.

⁷²Ibid., p. 170.

fact, Albee, concluding his description of the manner of performing this speech, says, "All in all, it is genuine and bravura at the same time, one prolonging the other."⁷¹ It would have been accurate for Albee to describe Jerry's dog story and his final, climactic death, Tobias' cat story and this frantic speech in the same way, for all have an aura of surrealistic hysteria and madness.

This speech, as with the abrupt changes in The Zoo Story, has the same shocking impact. Each time the prevailing style is changed, the power of the speech becomes greater. Within a controlled style such as naturalism, the effect of an explosive, grotesque display of emotion, barely controlled, creates a horrifying but fascinating scene.

The play returns quickly to its former realism. The characters, as Edna and Harry leave, return to their former balance--tenuous though it is.

Agnes: What I find most astonishing--aside from my belief that I will, one day . . . lose my mind--but when? Never, I begin to think, as the years go by, or that I'll not know if it happens, or maybe even has--

And finally, with a great sense of relief, Well, they're safely gone . . . and we'll all forget . . . quite soon. Come now; we can begin the day.⁷²

⁷¹Ibid., p. 159.

⁷²Ibid., p. 170.

⁷³Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, p. 220.

The style change in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? is far more subtle than the others. It is unlike the others because it does not employ surrealistic techniques.

The change begins slowly as Martha's recitation about their son takes on a formal, lyric style:

Martha:
and his eyes were green . . . green with . . .
if you peered so deep into them . . . so deep
. . . bronze . . . bronze parentheses around
the irises . . . such green eyes.

George: . . . blue . . . green . . . brown . . .

Martha: . . . and he loved the sun! . . . He was tan
before and after everyone . . . and in the
sun his hair . . . became . . . fleece.

George: . . . fleece . . .

Martha: . . . beautiful, beautiful boy.

George: Absolve Domine, animas omnium fidelium
defunctorum ab omni vincula delictorum.⁷³

With the Latin, Albee introduces a ritualistic, symbolic style which carries through the death of the son.

Simultaneous English and Latin bring the life of the child

in this marriage to a climax.

Martha

George

<p>I have tried, oh God, I have tried; the one thing I've tried to carry pure and unscathed through the sewer of this marriage; through the sick nights, and the pathetic, stupid days, through the derision and the laughter, . . . God,</p>	<p>Libera me, Domine, de morte aeterna, in die illa tremenda: Quando caeli movendi sunt et terra: Dum veneris judicare saeculum per ignem. Tremens factus sum ego, et timeo, dum dis- cussio venerit, atque ventura ira. Quando caeli mouendi sunt et terra.</p>
---	--

⁷³Ibid., p. 231.
⁷³Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, p. 220.

the laughter, through one failure compounding another failure, each attempt more sickening, more numbing than the one before; the one thing, the one person I have tried to protect, to raise above the mire of this vile, crushing marriage; the one light in all this hopeless darkness . . . our son.

Honey: STOP IT! STOP IT!

George: Kyrie, eleison. Christe eleison. Kyrie eleison.⁷⁴

And finally George announces the son's death in a cold, indifferent, reporting style:

George: He was killed . . . late in the afternoon . . . on a country road, with his learner's permit in his pocket, he swerved to avoid a porcupine, and drove straight into a . . .

Martha: YOU . . . CAN'T . . . DO . . . THAT!

George: . . . large tree.⁷⁵

The interesting style which Albee introduces with the Latin pronouncements creates an unnatural scene, the climax of the whole play. There can be no question that Albee is constantly introducing a symbol whenever the child is mentioned--a symbol of an evasion of reality and that, as he puts it, "You must expect the audience's mind

⁷⁶William Planagan, "The Art of the Theatre: Edward Albee. An Interview," The Paris Review (Fall, 1966), ⁷⁴Ibid., p. 227. p. 110.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 231.

to work on both levels, symbolically and realistically."⁷⁶ But a play in which the characters have been given all the necessary psychological and physiological motivations, a play in which the action and dialogue are so thoroughly realistic, becomes surprisingly and shockingly unfamiliar with the introduction of the formal Latin. As Albee indicates points out, "We're trained so much in pure, realistic theatre that it's difficult for us to handle things on two levels at the same time."⁷⁷ Nonetheless, Albee essentially asks us to handle two different, separate, styles for, although the underlying symbolism is always present, we are allowed to view it realistically until the actual exorcism. The play then swings abruptly from a fast-paced natural movement into a solemn, methodical one. The emotional intensity is rapidly increased as the Latin begins and it enables the play to reach a heightened sensitivity. This technique tends to make Albee's conflicts and resolutions in these three plays of more epic proportions; his characters become more monumental and his themes more significant. Albee has created an island of ceremonial death in which his "exorcism" is expressed. Nick and Honey become simple. George was, of course, driven to top Martha's

⁷⁶William Flanagan, "The Art of the Theatre: Edward Albee. An Interview," The Paris Review (Fall, 1966), Vol. 10, No. 39, p. 110.

⁷⁷Ibid. Martha drove George by tantalizing him with his failure and Daddy's power. George realizes he

a part of this scene of George's and Martha's, exactly as the audience does: first with incredulity, then with resignation, then with involvement, and finally with horror and recognition. Martha remains throughout the scene until the death almost as though she were in a dream, "from far away," as Albee's stage direction indicates, only reacting to her prompter, George, as he throws her the cues. George is the omniscient power, the mover, who indicates the direction (the game), with wit, skill, and intelligence. The scene is significant for many reasons. It is, of course, Albee's final point: the fantasy, the dream-world, the crutch, must be exorcised and only the strongest are capable of such a violent tearing away of a vital organ. The dream is beautiful and lyrical and provides hours of far greater pleasure than reality, perhaps, but one can, at a point in one's life, become sick with the fantasy and begin to play "variation on your distortions," and this is when the mind develops blocks; this is when the stronger must rip the dream away. This is not to imply that George is motivated only from a sense of scientific detachment as a psychiatrist would be; Albee is never that simple. George was, of course, driven to top Martha's tussle in bed with Nick, he was driven to destroy Martha because she "broke the rule," she "mentioned him [the son] to someone else." Martha drove George by tantalizing him with his failure and Daddy's power. George realizes he

must win the "total war" if there is to be anything left for them. when he said it was a "split between a private drama a The scene is also significant because it is a nearly accurate recapitulation of the relationships of these people, not just from the moment the play began, but from the moment they met each other. It is also an established point from which all four can begin again, perhaps behaving in somewhat the same way, but at least with a new knowledge of themselves and their fantasies. Even Nick, the one individual whom Albee seems to dislike, the one character without a sense of guilt and with no moral strength, is affected. ber of stylistic problems inherent in this: The technique of veering from naturalism into a new style is not only an interesting idea but seems to be unfailingly dramatic. At least these three plays received more rave reviews than did The Death of Bessie Smith and Tiny Alice. When Albee attempts to fuse two styles as he did in these two plays, his audiences generally react the negatively from confusion, frustration and even boredom.

sick; there is little understanding between them; each ridicules the things that make life interesting for the other. The Death of Bessie Smith, Albee's second one-act play, was met with general disinterest compared to the reaction of the critics to The Zoo Story and his other full-length plays.

Harold Clurman called it "a sharp piece of
Massachusetts Review, VI (Autumn-Winter, 1964-1965), 196.

writing,"⁷⁸ but Charles Samuels reflected the general criticism when he said it was a "split between a private drama and a public one."⁷⁹ The play, while combining a naturalistic and a quasi-expressionistic style, falls short of Albee's later attempt at a complete fusion of symbolism and naturalism which he employed in Tiny Alice. The Death of Bessie Smith has none of the careful structure and unity of Albee's other works. Its characters are scarcely motivated, its dialogue is trite and its combination of styles is ineffective.

There are a number of stylistic problems inherent in this play. Albee has given us almost no individual psychological reasons for the behavior of these characters, yet he seems to imply that each speaks from an inner motive.

The scene between the Nurse and her father establishes a number of superficial environmental factors: the Nurse has a father who is prejudiced, lazy, phony and sick; there is little understanding between them; each ridicules the things that make life interesting for the other. We are told the Intern is a liberal, a knight in

⁷⁸Harold Clurman, "Death of Bessie Smith," The Nation, CXCII (March 18, 1961), 242.

⁷⁹Charles Samuels, "The Theatre of Edward Albee," Massachusetts Review, VI (Autumn-Winter, 1964-1965), 196.

white armor, and we know he wants to marry the Nurse. With only this much background, Albee shows us an incredibly embittered woman who rips into a negro, an intern and anyone else who appears on stage.

Nurse: Now it's true that the poor man lying up there with his guts coming out could be a nigger for all the attention he'd get if His Honor should start shouting for something . . . he could be on the operating table . . . and they'd drop his insides right on the floor and come running if the mayor should want his cigar lit . . . But that is the way things ARE. Those are the facts. You had better acquaint yourself with some realities.⁸⁰

Later, attacking the negro orderly on his racial characteristics and involvements with the Intern, the Nurse says contemptuously:

Nurse: You try to keep yourself on the good side of everybody, don't you, boy? You stand there and you nod your kinky little head and say Yes'm, Yes'm, at everything I say, and then when he's here you go off in a corner and you get him and you sympathize with him . . . you get him to tell you about . . . promises! . . . and . . . and . . . action! . . . I'll tell you right now, he's going to get himself into trouble . . . and you're helping him right along.

Orderly: No, now. I don't . . .

Nurse: All that talk of his! Action! I know all about what he talks about . . . like about that bunch of radicals came through here last spring . . . causing the rioting . . . that arson! Stuff like that.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Edward Albee, The Death of Bessie Smith (New York, 1963), p. 41.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 44.

negro. Finally, ridiculing him thoroughly, she sends him off for a pack of cigarettes, yelling after his "Yes'm" line: "Yes'm . . . Yes'm . . . ha, ha, ha! You white niggers kill me."⁸²

Discontent and bored, the Nurse's speeches at times resemble expressionistic dialogue which often employs the use of emotionally loaded words spilled forth with long-concealed compulsive hatred and loathing.

Nurse: I am sick. I am sick of everything in this hot, stupid, fly-ridden world. I am sick of the disparity between things as they are, and as they should be! I am sick of this desk . . . this uniform . . . it scratches . . . I am sick of the sight of you . . . the thought of you makes me . . . itch. I am sick of him. (Soft now; a chant) I am sick of talking to people on the phone in this damn stupid hospital . . . I am sick of the smell of the goddam Lysol . . . I could die of it . . . I am sick of going to bed and I am sick of waking up . . . I . . . I am tired . . . I am tired of the truth said. W.k. . . and I am tired of lying about the truth . . . I am tired of my skin . . . I WANT OUT!⁸³

Yet even with this awareness of some of her problems, the Nurse makes no effort to change the lot of the equally desperate negro when she is given the opportunity. She reverts into her "skin" and denies him any compassion or understanding.

There are a number of violently projected scenes revealing the prejudice and hatred of the white for the

⁸²Ibid., p. 47.

⁸³Ibid., p. 65.

negro. Jack, the negro who was driving the car in which the accident occurred which critically injured Bessie Smith, desperately attempts to get her admitted into a white hospital for emergency treatment. The Second Nurse says coolly: "YOU WAIT! You just sit down and wait!"

Jack: The woman is badly hurt . . .

2nd Nurse: YOU COOL YOUR HEELS!

Jack: Ma'am . . . I got Bessie Smith out in that car there.

2nd Nurse: I DON'T CARE WHO YOU GOT OUT THERE, NIGGER. YOU COOL YOUR HEELS!⁸⁴

Most of the scenes are short and fast with nervous dialogue. The negro, Jack, has many of these speeches.

Hey . . . Bessie! C'mon, now. Hey . . . honey? Get your butt out of bed . . . wake up. C'mon; the goddam afternoon's half gone; we gotta get movin'. Hey . . . I called that son-of-a-bitch in New York . . . I told him, all right. I told him what you said. Wake up, baby, we gotta get out of this dump.⁸⁵

Later, after Jack has come to the second hospital where the nurse is on duty, his speech becomes increas-

ingly shrill. I said . . . this is an emergency . . . there has been an accident . . . YOU WAIT! You just sit down and wait. . . . I told them . . . I told them it was an emergency . . . I said . . . this woman is badly hurt . . . YOU COOL YOUR HEELS! . . . I said, Ma'am, I got Bessie Smith out in that care there . . . I DON'T CARE WHO YOU GOT OUT THERE, NIGGER . . . YOU COOL YOUR HEELS! . . . I couldn't wait there . . . her in the car . . . so I left there . . . I drove on

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 65.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 37.

the other. I stopped on the road and I was told where to come . . . and I came here.⁸⁶

The short, violent scenes depicting social injustice is more in the naturalistic tradition. He has not combined these two styles successfully.

Two years later Albee wrote Tiny Alice in which he use of words which we consider taboo or which are so successfully combined naturalism and symbolism that it descriptively vivid and shockingly violent. The play is extremely difficult to separate the symbolic qualities develops the theme of unjust treatment of the negro in the from the realistic ones.

South, which, although the expressionists were never concerned with negro injustices, nonetheless demonstrates the problems of alienation and frustration against the estab-

lishments which plagued them. Tiny Alice, didn't have anywhere near the amount of trouble understanding what

The problem with The Death of Bessie Smith is that critics told them it was too difficult to understand.⁸⁷

Albee does not juggle his combination of styles effectively. Every character, save the Nurse, is a representation of a Southern type, and each short scene is a symbol of a whole problem which creates a quasi-expressionistic Tiny Alice in this manner. At the same time that we watch image.

Julian's progress from his initial uncertainty into a genuine fear that his religious commitments are in error, takes on a significance which makes her overpowering, even though her motivations are never clearly established. The schizophrenic personality.

results are confusing: is Albee speaking generally about In its metaphysical sense, Tiny Alice is a play of Southern racial problems, or is he trying to develop a Julian's final search for a faith which had left him. It Tennessee Williams southern heroine? Neither the theme becomes a test of Julian's faith and he eventually becomes nor the Nurse is fully developed and neither compliments

⁸⁷ Flanagan, p. 108.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 77.

the other. As Albee develops his theme, his style resembles expressionism and as he develops the Nurse, he is more in the naturalistic tradition. He has not combined these two styles successfully. Two years later Albee wrote Tiny Alice in which he so successfully combined naturalism and symbolism that it is extremely difficult to separate the symbolic qualities from the realistic ones.

Of the critics who reviewed Tiny Alice, Albee has this to say: Oh.

I keep remembering that the preview audiences, before the critics went to Tiny Alice, didn't have anywhere near the amount of trouble understanding what the play was about; that didn't happen until the critics told them it was too difficult to understand.⁸⁷

Albee has said that as a playwright he expects the audience's mind to work simultaneously on a realistic and a symbolic level. It becomes necessary for us to view Tiny Alice in this manner. At the same time that we watch Julian's progress from his initial uncertainty into a genuine fear that his religious commitments are in error, we are forced to recognize the behavioral pattern of a schizophrenic personality.

In its metaphysical sense, Tiny Alice is a play of Julian's final search for a faith which had left him. It becomes a test of Julian's faith and he eventually becomes

⁸⁷ Flanagan, p. 108.

the necessary sacrifice with the Church, the Establishment,
 and the economic forces fighting against his renewed
 religious fervor. Julian is a purist who must have his
 God as he sees him. His faith cannot be reconciled with
 the conventional religions; this is one of the major
 conflicts of the play.

Julian tells Butler of his problems of reconcilia-
 tion and faith:

Julian: Oh . . . I . . . I lost my faith. In God.

Butler: Oh.

Julian: Is there more?

Butler: Is there more?

Julian: Well, nothing . . . of matter. I . . .
 declined. I . . . shriveled into myself; a
 glass dome . . . descended, and it seemed I
 was out of reach, unreachable, finally un-
 reaching, in this . . . paralysis of sorts.
 I . . . put myself in a mental home.

Butler: Oh, Cardinal.

Julian: I could not reconcile myself to the chasm
 between the nature of God and the use to
 which men put . . . God.

Lawyer: Your Eminence was not . . . beloved of

Butler: Between your God and others', your view and
 theirs.

Cardinal: Ah, no; a bit out of place; out of step.

Julian: I said what I intended: It is God The mover,

Lawyer: not God the puppet; God the Creator, not the
 God created by man.

Cardinal: And WE you.

Butler: Six years in a loony bin for semantics?

Lawyer: Do you ever slip?

Julian: It is not semantics! Men create a false God
 in their own image, it is easier for them!

88 Edward Albee, *Tiny Alice* (New York, 1966), pp.
 43-44.

89 *Ibid.*, pp. 7-9.

Cardinal: My faith and my sanity . . . they are one and the same.⁸⁸

Lawyer: Mightn't you--if you're not careful--lapse
Within this conflict of Julian's, between his own belief and the established, conservative, religious conventions, there are four characters, each representing a powerful, conservative opposing force. The cards are stacked against Julian's unorthodoxy.

The Cardinal, Julian's superior, is described by the Lawyer as an "overstuffed, arrogant, pompous son of a profiteer. And a whore." He is the "Prince of the Church." The Lawyer is described by the Cardinal as a "hyena," "a most resourceful scavenger," who devours "the wounded and the dead."⁸⁹

Albee displays his brilliant dialogue and unique manner of revealing personal characteristics and relationships in a carefully written opening scene between the Lawyer and the Cardinal.

Cardinal: It's not charitable of us to say so, but
Lawyer: when we were in school we did loathe you so.

Lawyer: Your Eminence was not . . . beloved of everyone himself.

Cardinal: Ah, no; a bit out of place; out of step.

Lawyer: A swine, I thought.

Cardinal: And WE you.

Lawyer: Do you ever slip?

⁸⁸Edward Albee, Tiny Alice (New York, 1966), pp. 43-44.

⁹⁰Ibid., pp. 5-6.

⁸⁹Ibid., pp. 7-9.

We reserve the first-person singular, do we not, for intimates, equals, or superiors.⁹¹ The play remains on a highly articulate, intensely emotional level. Each of the four "powers" shows the same passionate hatred for the other, although the Butler is more contained in his dislike, and becomes somewhat sympathetic toward Julian. The Butler is the servant, the wage-earner, a part of the Proletarian society. He and the Lawyer are the bed-fellows of Miss Alice, who is symbolic of the capitalist establishment.

Miss Alice: In the dining room, of course, there is no question--I sit at the head of the table. But, in the drawing rooms, or in the library, or whatever room you wish to mention, I have a chair that I consider my possession.

Julian: But you possess the entire establishment.

Miss Alice: Of course, but it is such a large establishment that one needs the feel of specific possession in every area.⁹²

Aside from their obvious symbolic representation of the Church and the economic forces, these four characters present the conventional, metaphysical idea of a power greater than all pulling the strings: They obey but do not understand. The Lawyer states the case for this metaphysical philosophy:

Julian: Use me then . . . for the triumph.

⁹¹Ibid., pp. 15-17.

⁹²Ibid., p. 154.
Ibid., pp. 52-53.

Miss Alice: we all serve, do we not? Each of us his own priesthood; publicly, some, others . . . within only; but we all do--what's-his-name's special trumpet, or clear lonely bell. Predestination, fate, the will of God, accident . . . All swirled up in it, no matter what the name. And being man, we have invented choice, and have, indeed, gone further, and have catalogued the underpinnings of choice. But we do not know. Anything.⁹³

Miss Alice, driven as the Lawyer, the Cardinal and the Butler, by the necessity of serving "what's-his-name" convinces Julian that he can best serve through his marriage to her.

Julian: Miss Alice . . . Just . . . let me do my service, and let me go.

Miss Alice: But you're doing great service. Not many people have been put in the position you've been graced by--not many. Who knows--had some lesser man than you come. . . . who knows? Perhaps the whole deal would have gone out the window.

Julian: Surely, Miss Alice, you haven't been playing games with . . . so monumental a matter.

Miss Alice: The rich are said to be quixotic, the very wealthy cruel, overbearing; who is to say--might not vast wealth, the insulation of it, make one quite mad?

Julian: But Games? Oh, no, my little Julian, there are no games played here; this is for keeps, and in dead earnest. There are cruelties, for the insultation breeds a strange kind of voyeurism; and there is impatience, too, over the need to accomplish what should not be explained; and, at the end of it, a madness of sorts . . . but a triumph.

Julian: Use me then . . . for the triumph.

⁹³Ibid., p. 154.

Miss Alice: You are being used, my little Julian. I
am being used . . . my little Julian.

Lawyer: An . . . You want to be . . . employed, do you
not? Sacrificed, even?

Julian: An . . . act . . . Of . . . faith!

Julian: I have . . . there are no secrets from you,

Lawyer: Miss Alice . . . I have . . . dreamed of
sacrifice.⁹⁴

Cardinal: Oh . . . yes, Julian, an . . . act of

Julian, the purist, the fanatic, eager for "martyr-
dom, to be that. To be able . . . to be that," marries
Miss Alice and falls from innocence. He has, in fact,
married an illusion because, according to Miss Alice, she
is the illusion and Julian has married Tiny Alice who
lives in the monstrous model, the identical replica of the
castle which they are in.

Miss Alice: Julian, I have tried to be . . . her.

Cardinal: Yes . . . No; I have tried to be . . . what I
thought she might be, what might make
you happy, what you might use, as a . . .
what?

Julian says:

Butler: Play God, go on.

Miss Alice: We must . . . represent, draw pictures,
reduce or enlarge to . . . to what we can
understand.

Julian: But I have fought against it . . . all my
life. When they said, "Bring the wonders
down to me, closer; I cannot see them, touch;
nor can I believe!" I have fought against it
. . . all my life.

Miss Alice: . . . All my life. In and out of . . . confine-
ment, fought against the symbol.⁹⁵

All four forces beg him to "accept."

⁹⁰Ibid., pp. 158-159.

⁹⁴Ibid., pp. 119-120.

⁹⁷Ibid., p. 161.

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 155.

Julian: WHAT AM I TO ACCEPT? accept the "faith," cannot

Lawyer: An act of faith.ve body of beliefs. This is

Julian: An . . . act. . . of . . . faith! existing

Lawyer: Buddy? Julian is one of those familiar

Cardinal: Uh . . . yes, Julian, an . . . act of faith, indeed. It is . . . believed.

remain adamant even when he is threatened with death; he

Lawyer: Yes, it is . . . believed. It is what we believe, therefore what we know. Is that not right? Faith is knowledge?

that he has found spiritual reality.

Cardinal: An act of faith, Julian, however, we must

The irony . . . Julian's fate, the symbolic impact, is

Julian: FAITH!ents of life, he becomes completely

Cardinal: . . . in God's will . . .

Julian: GOD'S! WILL! (resembling) Alice? ALICE? MY GOD, WHY HAST THOU FORSAKEN ME? The bridegroom waits

Cardinal: Yes, Julian, you see, we must accept, and awaited thee . . . be glad, yes, be glad Our

(His arms . . . ecstasy.⁹⁶ should resemble a crucifixion.

With his hands on the model, he will raise his body

Julian says: . . . full up against it.) Alice? . . . God?

I accept thee, Alice, for thou art come to me. God,

Alice . . . I have . . . have . . .⁹⁸ given up everything to gain everything, for the sake of my faith

Couple and my peace; I have allowed and followed, and sworn and cherished, but I have not, have not . . . search for truth and peace in a

Miss Alice: Be with her. Please. . . . principles is a careful

Julian: For hallucination? I HAVE DONE WITH HALLUCINATION.

becomes an integrated combination of naturalism and

Miss Alice: Then have done with forgery, Julian; accept what's real. I am the . . . view on illusion.⁹⁷

both levels simultaneously.

⁹⁶Ibid., pp. 158-159.

⁹⁸Ibid., pp. 183-184.

⁹⁷Ibid., p. 161.

Julian, because he cannot accept the "faith," cannot be assimilated into the massive body of beliefs. This is often the result once a man has insisted upon resisting of the stronger will. Julian is one of those familiar of the religious fanatics: he will not accept defeat; he will remain adamant even when he is threatened with death; he prefers to die with his own God, secure in the belief that he has found spiritual reality. The irony of Julian's fate, the symbolic impact, is that in the last moments of life, he becomes completely confused: body and mind. As Julian enters the room for the

Alice? (Fear and trembling) ALICE? MY GOD, WHY HAST THOU FORSAKEN ME? The bridegroom waits thee, my Alice. . . . O Lord, my God, I have awaited thee, have served thee in thy . . . Alice? (His arms are wide, should resemble a crucifixion. With his hands on the model, he will raise his body some, backed full up against it.) Alice? . . . God? I accept thee, Alice, for thou art come to me. God, Alice . . . I accept thy will.⁹⁸

Butler: That someone would do it.

Coupled with Julian's metaphysical search which becomes symbolic of man's search for truth and peace in a world devoted to set, established principles is a careful study of a schizophrenic personality. The play, then, becomes an integrated combination of naturalism and symbolism, a play which the audience must indeed view on both levels simultaneously.

Butler: This place was . . . in England.

⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 183-184.

⁹⁹ Ibid., pp. 23-24.

Miss Tiny Alice is one of the few plays in which Albee shipped.

takes the trouble to describe his stage setting. His

directions become important because of the description of

a model onstage. It is "a huge doll's-house model of the

building of which the present room is a part." In a

symbolic sense, the model probably represents the universe.

It becomes an infinite refraction quandary in which all

events take place in increasing diminishing size, since

within this model, there is another model and so on.

The model also represents Julian's dilemma, perhaps

even his body and mind. As Julian enters the room for the

first time, he and the Butler discuss the model:

Julian: Extraordinary.

Butler: I never cease to wonder at the . . . the fact

of it, I suppose.

Julian: The workmanship . . . save Miss Alice, off-

stage. Butler: That someone would do it.

As Julian peers into it, the Butler says: "Is there any-
one there? Are we there?"

Julian: Uh . . . no. It seems to be quite empty.⁹⁹

In a discussion of the model and the castle, there

is confusion over which is the reality and which the

illusion:

Butler: This place was . . . in England.

increasingly hallucinatory. As with Julian, it finally

⁹⁹Ibid., pp. 23-24.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 83-84.

Miss Alice: Yes, it was! Every stone, marked and shipped.¹⁰¹

Julian: Oh; I had thought it was a replica.

Lawyer: Oh no; that would have been too simple. Though it is a replica . . . in its way.

Julian: Of?

Lawyer: (pointing to model) Of that. Alice he

Julian: Did your . . . did your father have it . . . put up?

Miss Alice: . . . well, should we say that? That my father put it up? No. Let us not say that.

Butler: Do you mean the model . . . or the replica?

Julian: I mean the . . . I mean . . . what we are in.

Butler: Ah-ha. And which is that?¹⁰⁰

Julian, at one point in the play, notices smoke pouring out of the model. It is determined that the fire is in the model's chapel. All run, save Miss Alice, off-stage and return having put out the fire in the chapel of the castle. What happens in the model is a reflection of what happens in the world of the play.

As Julian dies, the various lights which have been on in the model, go out, starting from the upstairs bedroom, descending the stairs and finally going out in the room in which Julian dies.

The play, through this use of the model, becomes increasingly hallucinatory. As with Julian, it finally

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 132.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., pp. 83-84.

becomes impossible to be sure of a "grasp on reality."¹⁰¹ Julian is, after all, "dedicated to the reality of things, rather than their appearance,"¹⁰² but in the final analysis, according to Tiny Alice, such a grasp is not possible.

On Julian's first meeting with Miss Alice he describes his hallucinations in the asylum. He believes these hallucinations were brought on by the "departure" of his faith, which was in turn "brought on by the manner in which people mock God."

There was a period during my stay, however, when I began to . . . hallucinate, and to withdraw, to a point where I was not entirely certain when my mind was tricking me, or when it was not. I believe one would say--how is it said?--that my grasp on reality was . . . tenuous--occasionally.

My hallucinations . . . were saddening to me. I was confused . . . and intimidated . . . by the world about me, and let slip contact with it . . . with my faith. So I was saddened.

The periods of hallucination would be announced by a ringing in the ears, which produced, or was accompanied by, a loss of hearing. I would hear people's voices from a great distance and through the roaring of . . . surf. And my body would feel light, and not mine, and I would float--no glide--

. . . and when I was away from myself--never far enough, you know, to . . . blank, just to . . . fog over--when I was away from myself I could not sort out my imagination from what was real.

I imagined so many things, or . . . did so many things

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 132.

¹⁰²Ibid., pp. 58-60.

I thought I had imagined. The uncertainty . . . you know?

Miss Alice: Are you sure you're not describing what passes for sanity?¹⁰³

Julian's speech is a description of the symptoms of schizophrenia. His behavior throughout the play is a manifestation of these symptoms. The four forces of evil for Julian, the Cardinal, the Lawyer, the Butler and Miss Alice, conflict with his desire to regain a knowledge of his faith. Equally powerful in frustrating this drive is his imbalanced mental state. As Julian has said earlier to the Butler, "My faith and my sanity . . . they are one and the same." Once the hallucinatory problem is stated, the play also becomes a study of Julian's fight for sanity. The world is against him, however, and he is forever making the wrong choices. He chooses to serve the wrong God; his compulsive martyrdom makes him reckless; his inability to distinguish the real from the appearance of it throws him into disastrous uncertainties; his withdrawal from his environment creates an isolation which prevents him from acting rationally.

Albee has deliberately confused us. We don't know whether all of the events are real or whether they are another one of Julian's hallucinations. The model provides us with the mirror but we don't know whether the reflection is our appearance or our reality. As Martha

¹⁰²Ibid., pp. 182-184.

¹⁰³Ibid., pp. 58-60.

says in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, "Truth and illusion. George, you don't know the difference." Is the action we are seeing ontology or on stage?

CHAPTER III

The play's power lies in its success in making Julian a victim of our hallucinations. Julian's heartbeat which starts "so faintly at first it is subliminal," and which goes louder until it is "enormous,"¹⁰⁴ becomes, as its intensity increases, finally our own. It is a school that precedes Tiny Alice's union of the naturalistic analysis of man's behavior in his cultural and economic world and the symbolic representation of ideas makes it one of the best examples of the modern Naturalist-Symbolist school. amus and Jean-Paul Sartre.

Antonin Artaud was originally a part of the Dadaist and surrealist movement but his feelings of alienation and nihilism were much stronger than most of the movement's writers. He wrote a number of essays on the liberation of the theatre from its former restrictions. These essays were first published in 1938 under the title of The Theatre and Its Double. In this book he compares his ideal theatre to the plague. The plague, in its destructiveness, collapses authority and anarchy prevails. Man can then express, without suppression, his primitive impulses; he can be freed of restrictions and consequently be revitalized. The theatre, according to Artaud, can and must do this for its audiences.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., pp. 182-184.

For if the theatre is like the plague, it is not only because it effects important collectivities and upsets them in an identical way. In the theatres as in the plague there is something both victorious and vengeful. We are aware that the spontaneous conflagration which the plague, whenever it passes is nothing else than an immense liquidation.¹

CHAPTER III

THE ABSURD TRADITION IN TWO PLAYS OF EDWARD ALBEE

revealing great frenzies. The playwrights must use

1. Past Influences

violence, cruelty, derangement and crime as methods for

shock. The rebellion against the naturalistic school that

preceded the absurdists began very shortly after natural-

ism was firmly established. Three writers, however,

directly contributed a great deal to the absurd technique

and philosophy. They were Antonin Artaud, Albert Camus

and Jean-Paul Sartre.

Antonin Artaud was originally a part of the Dadaist

and surrealist movement but his feelings of alienation and

nihilism were much stronger than most of the movement's

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express, without suppression, his primitive impulses; he

can be freed of restrictions and consequently be revital-

ized. The theatre, according to Artaud, can and must do

this for its audiences.

² Ibid., pp. 31-32.

and sin. For if the theatre is like the plague, it is not only because it effects important collectivities and upsets them in an identical way. In the theatres as in the plague there is something both victorious and vengeful. We are aware that the spontaneous conflagration which the plague lights whenever it passes is or nothing else than an immense liquidation.¹

As the plague, the theatre must liberate men into revealing great frenzies. The playwrights must use violence, cruelty, derangement and crime as methods for shocking the audience into an awakening of the problems of civilization. Ideal contemporary theatre must have a

feeling. It invites the mind to share a dilerium which exalts energies, and we can see, to conclude, that from the human point of view, the action of theatre, like that of the plague, is beneficial, for, impelling men to see themselves as they are it causes the mask to fall, reveals the lie, the slackness, baseness and hypocrisy of our world; it shakes off the asphyxiating inertia of matter which invades even the clearest testimony of the senses.²

The world, according to Artaud, is a dangerous place. It is moving toward destruction and suicide. Many of these theories were adopted by the absurdist and Albee, as we shall see, was influenced by them.⁵ Life is constantly cruel and a cruelty of theatre will enable man to evacuate his repressed revenge. The theatre must also teach us to recognize the hypocrisy of our world.³

Artaud questions the naturalists' theatre of dialogue and production. He feels that everything that is theatrical is pushed into the background in such styles. Theatre is not a place for realistic dialogue,

¹Antonin Artaud, The Theatre and Its Double (New York, 1958), p. 27.

²Ibid., pp. 31-32.

and since the stage is a "concrete physical place," it must be filled with its own concrete theatrical language. Language should not be used for communicating social or psychological concepts, but for its potential emotional impact. Shock value is the essential function of words. According to Artaud, the theatre is intended for the impact on the senses. "Poetical language can reach the senses far quicker and more effectively than speech language."³ Artaud's ideal contemporary theatre must have a feeling for the skillful combination of the serious and the comic. It must have a sense of humor to keep touch with humanity. Finally, he insists that:

Without an element of cruelty at the root of every spectacle, the theatre is not possible. In our present state of degeneration, it is through the skin that metaphysics must be made to re-enter our minds.⁴

Many of these theories were adopted by the absurdists and Albee, as we shall see, was influenced by them.⁵

³Ibid., pp. 39-40.

⁴Ibid., p. 99.

⁵The absurdists took Artaud's theories seriously but Sean O'Casey has this bit of satire on such ideas ("The Bold Premaquera," Atlantic [1965], p. 69):

Artaud! Artaud!
Pounding a play to a wordless thesis,
Beating up life into bloody pieces,
An' the birds of Swan Lake to a gaggle of geeses.
So into Artaud!
Cut down the ivy, hack down the holly,
Life is sure gruesome, death is most jolly,

⁶Robert Brustein, The Theatre of Revolt (Boston, 1965), p. 363.

Robert Brustein says of Antonin Artaud's book, The Theatre and Its Double: " . . . this work continues to be one of the most influential, as well as one of the most inflammatory, documents of our time."⁶

Before Jean-Paul Sartre had developed the philosophy of existentialism which was to have tremendous impact on the absurdists, an important playwright was already beginning to explore the meaning of existence in a Godless world which places total responsibility on man. Luigi Pirandello, writing in the twenties, repeatedly finds the life of man absurd. He questions the whole existence of reality and identity.

In Six Characters In Search of An Author, the Father in Act III states the problem of bewilderment, and of knowledge repeating itself unendingly with no possible assistance. This puts the responsibility clearly upon the individual's shoulders, giving man no excuses and no

But only in order to know if you, as you really are now, see yourself as you once were with all the illusions that were yours then, with all the things both to Sartre, nothing until he begins to act, and then his

contributions begin to accumulate through his acts. As man grows through actions, he becomes aware of his original writers, and the anguish that grips him And a kicking to hell for the sane, singing blighters.

Artaud! Artaud!
For man is a louse and woman's a folly,
An' the way to the grave's the way that is jolly,
So hack down the ivy and burn up the holly,
So into black urns with each Mick and his Molly,
An' keep the axe poised over Pineapple Polly.

Artaud! (John Gassner ed.), Treasury of the Theatre (New York, 1951), p. 386.

⁶Robert Brustein, The Theatre of Revolt (Boston, 1965), p. 363.

inside and outside of you as they seemed to you--as they were then indeed for you. Well, sir, if you think of all those illusions that mean nothing to you now, of all those things which don't even seem to you to exist any more, while once they were for you, don't you feel that--I won't say these boards--but the very earth under your feet is sinking away from you when you reflect that in the same way this you as you feel it today--all this present reality of yours--is fated to seem a mere illusion to you tomorrow?⁷

John Gassner says of the play: "When the play is over, Pirandello has shattered our complacent belief that we can really know and understand people."⁸

Sartre and Camus, two of the outstanding existentialist writers, went much further in exploring man's ontological search.

Both men believed that man, being self-created, must develop, grow, and function within himself with no help from the outside and with no expectation of any such assistance. This puts the responsibility clearly upon the individual's shoulders, giving man no excuses and no escape from the results of his acts. Man is, according to Sartre, nothing until he begins to act, and then his contributions begin to accumulate through his acts. As man grows through his actions, he becomes aware of his original nothingness and the anguish that grips him

⁷ Luigi Pirandello, Six Characters in Search of an Author in Treasury of the Theatre, ed. John Gassner (New York, 1951), p. 404.

⁸ John Gassner (ed.), Treasury of the Theatre. (New York, 1951), p. 386.

is provoked by that nothingness, that absence of justification. The existentialists believed, then, that all meaning and significance in this world comes from man, not a higher being. But man's struggle to gather his acts and make some meaning of them and his existence only brings despair. The mere fact that man is free and needs answer to no one of a higher order condemns him to an endless search for truth and meaning in a silent world full of absurdities.

Sartre defines the human being as one who is aware of a lack in his being and a predominant theme in Sartre's writings is of the awareness of the self as existing without any reason for it. Accompanying the sense of deficiency there is an awareness of being somehow cut off from other existing things. Thus, in self-consciousness, the self is aware not only of what is lacking to the self as such but also of what is lacking to the self in its relation to other existing things.⁹

The existentialist playwright attempted, as the Symbolists did, to appeal to the subconscious mind to compel the spectator into a stronger union with the character. But the existentialist was also seeking for an intellectual recognition of the ontological search of the characters.

The existentialist believed, however, that communication was at best difficult, and at worst, impossible:

⁹F. Temple Kingston, French Existentialism, A Christian Critique (Toronto, 1961), p. 114.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 71.

For Sartre and his followers, communication is necessarily ambiguous. An expression of immediate sense experience and of emotion is only possible in an artistic work and even then sense experience and emotion are necessarily individual in the participation of the existing object. A rational imparting of meaning in language is only possible by a conventional agreement about the meaning of words and even then there is no completely adequate communication since the meaning is particularized in the particular act of expression. Communion is impossible.¹⁰

The influence of this theory on the absurdists is immediately apparent when one reads Ionesco's Rhinoceros, or any of Beckett's plays. Albee, in his absurdist imitations, also employs the technique of deliberately masking the language and destroying a logical pattern of thought.

Another technique used by Sartre and his followers was a method of circling the dialogue and the ideas without resolution. Words and sentences are constantly repeated and thoughts are unresolved. The characters seem to be constantly turning in on themselves, confused and misled, unable to stop the motion of senseless redundancy and inconclusive ideas.

Albert Camus in The Myth of Sisyphus expresses the existentialist and absurdist philosophy in these terms:

I realize that if through science I can seize phenomena and enumerate them, I cannot, for all that, apprehend the world. Were I to trace its entire relief with my finger, I should not know any more. And you give me the choice between a description that is sure but that teaches me nothing and hypotheses that claim to teach me but that are not sure. A stranger to myself and to the world, armed solely with

Camus, Myth of Sisyphus (New York, 1955), p. 20.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 71.

Ibid., p. 28.

a thought that negates itself as soon as it asserts, what is this condition in which I can have peace only by refusing to know and to live, in which the appetite for conquest bumps into walls that defy its assault?¹¹

It is at the point where one begins to think that one becomes tortured because one will then run headlong into life's absurdities. The world is unreasonable and man, with his deep desire to set it right, makes his very existence absurd:

He feels within him his longing for happiness and for reason. The absurd is born of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world.¹²

When the dramatists appeared, they, using the existentialist background, expressed this philosophy in dramatic terms.

Encouraged by Artaud's theories, the absurdists began to explore new ways of communication: they conceived of ways to use cruelty and violence as a method for communication and they invented new ways in which to use the "concrete stage."

There are few other playwrights who so skillfully combine Artaud's theories for a union of the comic and the serious as the absurdists do.

Man examines himself as a peculiar, suffering animal in the zoological garden of the world, and the result is often amusing. But when he turns to the infinities that surround him, the result is disquieting.

¹¹Leonard Pronko, *Avante-Garde* (Berkeley, 1962), p. 205. ¹¹Albert Camus, *Myth of Sisyphus* (New York, 1955), p. 20.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 19.
¹²*Ibid.*, p. 28.

Precisely because dramatists of the avante garde usually see man not only in a horizontal position, but in a vertical one as well, they blend the amusing with the disquieting.¹³

Leonard Pronko in Avante-Garde lists four principles of existentialism which the absurdist writers use:

(1) Absurdity is the underlying fabric of man's existence. Man, in his moments of honesty and lucidity, is aware that his life has absolutely no meaning, that he must live as in a void. Non-existence constantly threatens him.

(2) Man may become bogged down in his physical being, attached to a pattern, a fixed idea of good, a conception of himself, which denies his humanity. He ceases to change to become, is turned into a thing. The over-abundance of things is nauseating, for it limits freedom.

(3) Just as man and his values may congeal through habit, so may language become dead and inoperative, paralyzing our thoughts. With such an instrument no communication is possible. Each man is a solitude.

(4) There is no human nature. Man is only what he makes of himself; therefore there is no such thing as a fixed character in the usual sense. Man is an existent in a situation.¹⁴

From the existentialist philosopher the absurdist took the idea of the importance of a single act. Man's actions bring the only meaning there is to the world, so the absurd playwright usually ignored a complicated series of events and sometimes had no plot at all. One small act, because of its tremendous significance to man, can bring all the dramatic tension needed. The absurdist were

¹³Leonard Pronko, Avante-Garde (Berkeley, 1962), p. 205.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 19.

indifferent to the justification of the act. They began to explore the events of man after he acts and what effect this behavior has on man's capabilities of acting, if he is able to act at all.

What really counts are not the reasons for an act but the act itself, its present significance, and the significance it gives to the characters and the world. In other words, the search for psychological causality of an act is either shown to be vain or replaced by an investigation of the act's significance.¹⁵

To indicate instability in an unpredictable world, objects in absurd plays often threaten to get out of hand. Frequently the characters fear objects will overwhelm them. Those things we count on to remain in the same state betray us and what we expect suddenly goes out of focus.

The change and reversals become surprises and express the vision of an unstable world where new situations are brutally imposed from the outside and man's only recourse is to adapt himself as best he can and somehow continue to live.¹⁶

The absurdists display an overwhelming humanistic concern for man. The very thing that makes their characters so appealing, so deeply human, is that same awareness of this absurd world of which Camus speaks.

¹⁵Jacques Guicharnaud, Modern French Theatre from Giraudoux to Beckett (New Haven, 1961), p. 162.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 174.

¹⁷Richard Kostelanetz, The New American Arts (New York, 1964), pp. 60-61.

2. The Use of Some Absurd Techniques in

imitate the The American Dream and The Sandbox. But

rather than show through language, as Ionesco does, that Albee differs from the absurdists primarily in his words are meaningless and communication hopeless, Albee indifference to an ontological study or search. Richard uses the standard plot, in logical sequence, to say and Kostelanetz contrasts Albee and the absurdists in this way:

communicate man's inability to relate to man. Absurd plays depict man's predicament before meta-physical absurdity (i.e., unfathomable mysteries of ultimate truth)--In contrast, Albee is concerned with man's physical predicament--the need to mask deficiency and to seek human contact, the causes of motivation.¹⁷

There is never any question of man's existence in an Albee play, nor is there any sense of an unreasonable universe to which man must somehow adjust. Albee often indicates that society and mankind can be unreasonable; they can be shallow or just simply cantankerous, but the delicate balance man must maintain is between man and other men or man and society rather than between man and infinity. Rather than look to the world's deficiencies, one must instead look to man's weaknesses. Man's mask must fall to "reveal the lie" of men rather than, as Artaud puts it, "to reveal the slackness, baseness and hypocrisy of our world."

The absurdity in The American Dream and The Sandbox lies merely in its incongruity and that which is incongruous is man and his behavior, not the world and its silent response to man's tortured searching.

¹⁷Edward Albee, The American Dream (New York, 1963), pp. 59-61; Richard Kostelanetz, The New American Arts (New York, 1964), pp. 60-61.

In The American Dream, Albee has attempted to imitate the absurdist's unique balance of language. But rather than show through language, as Ionesco does, that words are meaningless and communication hopeless, Albee uses the standard plot, in logical sequence, to say and communicate man's inability to relate to man.

Mommy's story about the beige hat has this element of absurdity, yet it lacks the absurdist's genuine conviction that man cannot satisfactorily communicate.

Mommy: . . . I'll take this hat; oh my, it's lovely. What color is it? And they say, "Why this is beige; isn't it a lovely little beige hat?" And I said, "Oh, it's just lovely." And so I bought it.

Daddy: And so you bought it.

Mommy: And so I bought it, and I walked out of the store with the hat right on my head, and I ran spang into the chairman of our woman's club and she said, "Oh, my dear, isn't that a lovely little hat? Where did you get that lovely little hat? It's the loveliest little hat; I've always wanted a wheat-colored hat myself," and I said, "Why, no, my dear; this hat is beige; beige," and she laughed and said, "Why no, my dear, that's a wheat-colored hat . . . wheat. I know beige from wheat."¹⁸

Mommy finally goes back into the hat store and accuses them of selling her a wheat-colored hat for a beige one.

Mommy: And I made an absolutely terrible scene: and they became frightened, and they said, "Oh, madam; Oh, madam!" But I kept right on, and

¹⁸Edward Albee, The American Dream (New York, 1963), pp. 59-60.

have a There is throughout the play, a great deal of often repetition which develops the comedy. The play begins to hats, deafness, family life, masculinity and others. Lines

and "Berenger: (to Jean) Solitude seems to oppress me. And so does the company of other people.

scene:

"Jean: (to Berenger) You contradict yourself. What oppresses you--solitude or the company of others? You consider yourself a thinker, yet you're devoid of logic.

"Old Gentleman: (to Logician) Logic is a very beautiful thing.

"Logician: (to Old Gentleman) As long as it is not absurd.

Mommy: You're quite right.

"Berenger: (to Jean) Life is an abnormal business.

"Logician: (to Old Gentleman) Logic involves mental arithmetic, you see.

"Old Gentleman: (to Logician) It certainly has many aspects.

"Berenger: (to Jean) Where can I find the weapons?

"Logician: (to Old Gentleman) There are no limits to logic.

"Jean: (to Berenger) Within yourself. Through your own will.

"Berenger: What weapons?

"Logician: (to Old Gentleman) I'm going to show for you . . .

"Jean: (to Berenger) The weapons of patience and culture, the weapons of the mind. (Berenger yawns) Turn yourself into a keen and brilliant

"Logician: Get yourself up to the mark. your mind. Concentrate.

"Berenger: How do I get myself to the mark?

"Jean: (to Berenger) Come on, exercise your will.

"Logician: (to Old Gentleman) If I take two paws away from these cats--how many does each have left?

20-24.

"Berenger: (to Jean) That's not so easy.

have a mood of absurdity because of this. Ideas are often repeated: the "leaking johnny, gift-wrapped boxes, beige hats, deafness, family life, masculinity and others. Lines and words are repeated again and again in the opening scene:

Mommy: I don't know what can be keeping them.

Daddy: They're late, naturally.

Mommy: Of course they're late; it never fails.

Daddy: That's the way things are today, and there's nothing you can do about it.

Mommy: You're quite right.

Daddy: When we took this apartment, they were quick enough to have me sign the lease, they were quick enough to take my check for two months rent in advance . . .

Mommy: And one month's security . . .

Daddy: . . . and one month's security. They were quick enough about all that. But now! But now, try to get the icebox fixed, try to get

"Old Gentleman: That's not so easy.

"Logician: On the contrary, it's simple.

"Old Gentleman: It may be simple for you, but not for me.

"Berenger: (to Jean) It may be simple for you, but not for me.

"Logician: (to Old Gentleman) Come on, exercise your mind. Concentrate.

"Jean: (to Berenger) Come on, exercise your will, concentrate."

Eugene Ionesco, Rhinoceros (New York, 1960), pp. 20-24.

²¹ The American Dream, pp. 57-58.

Mrs. Barker: the doorbell fixed, try to get the leak in the johnny fixed! Just try it . . . they aren't so quick about that.²¹

Grandma: . . . resentful bumble. Why one day it called its Mommy a dirty name.

The "absurdity" of the whole play lies in Mommy's and Daddy's desire to get "satisfaction" from the Bye Bye Adoption Service for a baby they adopted who didn't turn out quite right. Grandma, in a long scene with Mrs. Barker of the Bye Bye Adoption Service, tells the whole story:

Grandma: . . . this bumble didn't look like either one of its parents. That was enough of a blow, but things got worse. One night it cried its heart out, if you can imagine such a thing. Then it turned out it only had eyes for its Daddy.

Mrs. Barker: Well, for the last straw, it finally up and died; and you can imagine for its Daddy! Why any self-respecting woman would have gouged its eyes right out of its head.

Grandma: Well, she did. That's exactly what she did. But then it kept its nose up in the air.

Mrs. Barker: Ufghh! How disgusting!

Grandma: Mommy's and Daddy's bumble didn't develop as they would have liked. That's what they thought. But then, it began to develop an interest in its you-know-what.

Mrs. Barker: Unable to make him into their own image, Mommy and Daddy destroyed him. In its you-know-what! Well! I hope they cut its hands off at the wrists!

Grandma: Grandma: Well, yes, they did that eventually. But first, they cut off its you-know-what.

Mrs. Barker: Mrs. Barker: A much better idea!

Grandma: Grandma: That's what they thought. But after they cut off its you-know-what, it still put its hands under the covers, looking for its you-know-what. So finally, they had to cut off its hands at the wrists.

²¹Ibid., pp. 99-101.
²¹The American Dream, pp. 57-58.

Mrs. Barker: Naturally!

Grandma: And it was such a resentful bumble. Why one day it called its Mommy a dirty name.

Mrs. Barker: Well, I hope they cut its tongue out.

Grandma: Of course, and then, as it got bigger, they found out all sorts of terrible things about it, like: it didn't have a head on its shoulders, it had no guts, it was spineless, its feet were made of clay... just dreadful things.

Mrs. Barker: Dreadful!

Grandma: So you can understand how they became dis-

Grandma: couraged. I told them everything was hidden.

Mrs. Barker: I certainly can! And what did they do?

Mrs. Barker: Did you hide the water, too?

Grandma: What did they do? Well, for the last straw, it finally up and died; and you can imagine how that made them feel, their having paid for it, and all.

Daddy: (Casting about) So, they called up the lady who sold them the bumble in the first place and told her to come right over to

Grandma: their apartment. They wanted satisfaction; they wanted their money back. That's what they wanted.²²

Mrs. Barker: I certainly did hide things, didn't you?

Mommy's and Daddy's bumble didn't develop as they would

Grandma: Sure, kid, sure.

have liked. The baby turned into a spineless, dull coward.

Mommy: (Sticking her head into the room) Did you

Unable to make him into their own image, Mommy and Daddy destroyed him.

Grandma: I hid everything.²³

Albee very cleverly takes a shocking tale, intro-

duces an inane euphemism, "its you-know-what," puts two characters on stage who take the whole story seriously

Later we discover where almost everything has disappeared. Grandma, when leaving, has the Young Man carry out all of and naturally, as if this were normal conversation and her neatly wrapped boxes:

these were usual people, and creates a comic scene.

²²Ibid., p. 102.

²³Ibid., pp. 99-101.

In an attempt to imitate the absurd sense of objects getting out-of-hand or out of control, Albee introduces a scene in which the characters lose each other, the dog, Grandma's room, Mrs. Barker, and the kitchen sink.

Daddy: (Offstage) Mommy! I can't find Grandma's television, and I can't find the Pekinese either.

Mommy: (Offstage) Isn't that funny! And I can't find the water.

Grandma: Heh, heh, heh. I told them everything was hidden.

Mrs. Barker: Did you hide the water, too?

Grandma: (Puzzled) No. No, I didn't do that.

Daddy: (Offstage) The truth of the matter is, I can't even find Grandma's room.

Grandma: Heh, heh, heh.

Mrs. Barker: My! You certainly did hide things, didn't you?

Grandma: Sure, kid, sure.

Mommy: (Sticking her head into the room) Did you ever hear of such a thing, Grandma? Daddy can't find your television, and he can't find the Pekinese, and the truth of the matter is he can't find your room.

Grandma: I told you. I hid everything.²³

Later we discover where almost everything has disappeared. Grandma, when leaving, has the Young Man carry out all of her neatly wrapped boxes:

²³Ibid., p. 102.

²⁵Ibid., p. 115.

(A little sadly) I don't know why I bother to take them with me. They don't have much in them . . . some old letters, a couple of regrets . . . Pekinese . . . blind at that . . . the television . . . my Sunday teeth . . . eighty-six years of living . . . some sounds . . . a few images, a little garbled by now . . . and, well . . . (she shrugs) . . . you know . . . the things one accumulates.²⁴

All the things one saves when one is old, Grandma has put in the boxes. All of these objects give Grandma a sense of security in an uncertain world. This scene has more of the pathetic grasping for stability than any other scene in The American Dream.

Albee makes a statement for loneliness and alienation in the Young Man's speech. He is the twin of Mommy's and Daddy's bumble and he expresses emptiness in a detached, indifferent tone.

. . . I no longer have the capacity to feel anything. I have no emotions. I have been drained, torn asunder . . . disemboweled. I have now, only my person . . . my body, my face. I use what I have . . . I let people love me . . . I accept the syntax around me, for while I know I cannot relate . . . I know I must be related to.²⁵

The two alienated characters are Grandma and the Bumble, one young, one old. The Young Man represents the results of the alienation.

Grandma expresses her inability to relate to others and their inability to relate to her in a series of speeches about age:

dump her in the sandbox.

²⁴Ibid., p. 120.

²⁵Ibid., p. 115.

When you get old, you can't talk to people because people snap at you. When you get so old, people talk to you that way. That's why you become deaf, so you won't be able to hear people talking to you that way. And that's why you go and hide under the covers in the big soft bed, so you won't feel the house shaking from people talking to you that way. That's why old people die, eventually. People talk to them that way.

Old people make all sorts of noises, half of them they can't help. Old people whimper, and cry, and belch, and make great hollow rumbling sounds at the table; old people wake up in the middle of the night screaming, and they find they haven't been asleep; and when old people are asleep, they try to wake up, and they can't . . . not for the longest time.²⁶

The Sandbox expresses the same despair and insecurity of the aging member of the society and the family's indifference to their agonies.

This play, written for the Festival of Two Worlds in Spaleto, Italy, is only thirteen pages long. It was extracted from The American Dream and has the same characters in it except for Mrs. Barker. The Young Man has become the Angel of Death, flexing his "American" muscles beside a sandbox. The Sandbox shows Grandma stuck in a sandbox, which is Albee's "absurd" presentation of a burial ground. Albee, in a few short pages, shows us our inhumanity, absurdity and insincerity toward our aged and also in our burials.

Mommy and Daddy, with a "live musician playing," bring on a rapidly stiffening Grandma and unceremoniously dump her in the sandbox.

²⁶Ibid., pp. 65-66.

(After a moment, Mommy and Daddy re-enter, carrying Grandma. She is borne in by their hands under her armpits; she is quite rigid; her legs are drawn up; her feet do not touch the ground; the expression on her ancient face is that of puzzlement and fear.)

Daddy: Where do we put her?

Mommy: (With a little laugh) Wherever I say, of course. Let me see . . . well . . . all right, over there . . . in the sandbox. (Pause) Well, what are you waiting for, Daddy? . . . The sandbox!

(Together they carry Grandma over to the sandbox and more or less dump her into it.)

Mommy and Daddy sit together to wait, completely ignoring Grandma's cries:

Grandma: GRAAA!

Mommy: Don't look at her. Just sit . . . here . . .

Mommy: be very still . . . and wait. (To the musician) You . . . ah . . . you go ahead and do whatever it is you do.

Grandma: AH HAAAA! GRAAA! (Looks for a reaction and gets none. Says directly to audience)

Honestly! What a way to treat an old woman! Drag her out of the house . . . stick her in a car . . . bring her out here from the city

Mommy: (Before dump her in a pile of sand . . . and leave her here to set. I'm eighty-six years old! I was married when I was seventeen. To a farmer. He died when I was thirty.

(To the musician) Will you stop that please? I'm a feeble old woman . . . how do you expect anybody to hear me over that peep! peep! peep! There's no respect around here. (To the Young Man) There's no respect around here!

Young Man: (With an endearing smile) Hi!

Grandma: (After a pause, a mild double take, continues to the audience) My husband died when I was thirty (indicates Mommy) and I had to raise that big cow over there all by my

Grandma: lonesome. You can imagine what that was like. Lordy! (To the Young Man) Where'd they get you?²⁷

Grandma, after being put in her "grave" can talk not only about her early life but can wander from the subject enough to find an attraction for the opposite sex. The bitter satire of youth against age becomes increasingly painful as Mommy and Daddy remain indifferent to Grandma's complaints. While Grandma, lying on her side and propped up on an elbow busily shovels sand over herself, she remarks, "I don't know how I'm supposed to do anything with this goddamn toy shovel."

Daddy: Mommy! It's daylight!

Mommy: So it is! Well! Our long night is over. We must put away our tears, take off our mourning and face the future. It's our duty.

Grandma: (Still shoveling) . . . take off our mourning . . . face the future . . . Lordy!

Young Man: Hi.

Mommy: (Before the sandbox, shaking her head) Lovely! It's . . . it's hard to be sad . . . she looks . . . so happy. It pays to do things well. (To the musician) All right, you can stop now, if you want to. I mean, stay around for a swim, or something; it's all right with us. Well, Daddy . . . off we go.

Daddy: Brave Mommy!

Mommy: Brave Daddy!

(They exit)

²⁷Edward Albee, The Sandbox (New York, 1963), pp. 13-14.

Grandma: (Lying quite still) It pays to do things well . . . Boy, oh, Boy! (She tries to sit up) Well . . . kids. (But she finds she can't) I . . . I can't get up. I . . . I can't move.

(Young Man stops his calisthenics, goes to Grandma.)

Young Man: SHHHHH . . . be very still.

Grandma: I . . . I can't move.

Young Man: Uh . . . ma'am; I . . . I have a line here.

Grandma: Oh, I'm sorry, sweetie; you go right ahead.²⁸

Suddenly, quite surprisingly, Grandma is no longer funny. Albee has always had the ability to combine the serious with the comic. Grandma has the humor and perception to see herself in proper relationship to her small world, as Albee's other sympathetic characters can. She is detached enough to find the humor of her predicament, as Jerry in The Zoo Story does. Their situations are basically pathetic and we identify with their inability to change their indifferent surroundings.

The Sandbox is a superficially absurd situation, with an old woman literally burying herself in a sandbox while her daughter and son-in-law patiently sit by and wait. But one of the basic qualities of this play and The American Dream is the specific criticism of the American culture. Albee has a target: the American family. His two absurd imitations become regional; he

²⁸Ibid., p. 18.

never goes beyond that; he never gets to man's essence and the absurdities of his world. A social satire, yes: a philosophical analysis, no.

The characters in the absurd play project a feeling of humanitarian concern for all of man's predicaments. There is a kindness, a gentleness and a quiet desperation within Berenger, Vladimir, Estragon, Krapp, and many of the other characters within the absurd play which is an essential part of the absurd philosophy. The absurdist is concerned with the total man in his total environment. That total environment is illusive and confusing because of its size. There is nothing small enough to fight against and if there were, one could not touch it in any effective or meaningful way. To express this disparity between man and the universe, the absurdist uses the dramatic elements in a totally different way.

Quite clearly, Albee does not project these essential elements. Rather, he lays upon a basically naturalistic style the technical absurdities of plot, character and dialogue without carrying the philosophical analysis to the roots of his drama.

Martin Esslin captured the similarities and the differences of Albee's absurd dramas quite well when he said that "Albee went from the near pastiche of Ionesco to a style outwardly more realistic but charged with all the

²⁹Martin Esslin, Tulane Drama Review (Spring, 1963), p. 51.

obsessive and grotesque overtones of the absurd."²⁹ These techniques, however, without the foundation, create a style that, by comparison, becomes an affectation. One must have the absurd philosophy before the overtones become sufficiently effective.

Albee has made only these two attempts at imitating some of the absurd style. As absurd plays, they fall short of other absurd drama. As plays, they fall short of Albee's creative ability. Fortunately, he went on to create a new style, uniquely his own. In his later plays, as we have seen, he used only that from the past which suited his own purposes, rather than attempting to adopt the superficial techniques of what for him was an unsuitable style.

Albee remains a naturalist because his ideas are basically naturalistic; he emphasizes the influence of social forces and their exculpating pity of the poor and the maimed; he attempts to justify his characters' actions by giving them psychological and physiological validity; his dialogue has the quality of realism because of his ability to imitate the American idiom; his plots continually remain simple, uncomplicated events realistically rendered, allowing the character development to carry the drama.

Albee's dramas are, in other words, essentially a presentation of a true-to-life picture, implying an illusion of an actual happening with characters who appear real.

²⁹Martin Esslin, Tulane Drama Review (Spring, 1963), p. 51.

[the symbolists] discovered that their plays had to create what is a verisimilitude rather than an exact replica of life."¹

CHAPTER IV

Albee, particularly in Tiny Alice, uses an appearance of truth, a probability rather than the "slice of

life" technique--although, as we have seen, viewed as a psychological study, the play may be a realistic analysis he has become one of the leading American playwrights and of schizophrenia. In this play, Albee also veils meaning he continues to write controversial plays. His style has become unique because of its combinations of the past and and social ideas and so the play becomes a symbolic the inventiveness of its techniques.

Albee remains a naturalist because his ideas are basically naturalistic: he emphasizes the influence of social forces and their exculpating pity of the poor and interesting case for establishing that Jerry and Peter are the maimed; he attempts to justify his characters' actions by giving them psychological and physiological validity; his dialogue has the quality of realism because of his ability to imitate the American idiom; his plots continually remain simple, uncomplicated events realistically rendered, allowing the character development to carry the drama.

Albee's dramas are, in other words, essentially a presentation of a true-to-life picture, implying an

illusion of an actual happening with characters who appear real.

Albee has, however, adopted many of the techniques of the symbolists as an aid to greater expression. "They

¹ J. L. Styan, The Dark Comedy (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), p. 83.

Rose Zimbaro states that the symbols in The Zoo are stripped of his materialism and led to a revelation of Jerry, or Jesus. She compares Jerry's dog story to Christ's descent into Hell and final resurrection.

Albee has, however, adopted many of the techniques of the symbolists as an aid to greater expression. "They

ture, VIII (April, 1962-January, 1963), 10-18.

[the symbolists] discovered that their plays had to create what is a verisimilitude rather than an exact replica of life."¹

The influence of the absurd techniques is also Albee, particularly in Tiny Alice, uses an appearance of truth, a probability, rather than the "slice of life" technique--although, as we have seen, viewed as a psychological study, the play may be a realistic analysis of schizophrenia. In this play, Albee also veils meaning and uses characters to represent metaphysical, economical and social ideas and so the play becomes a symbolic presentation of a modern conflict of life. An article in

Twentieth Century Literature, entitled "Symbolism and Naturalism in Edward Albee's The Zoo Story," makes an interesting case for establishing that Jerry and Peter are symbolic of Jesus and Peter.²

The Death of Bessie Smith has an air of expressionism surrounding it while most of Albee's plays, particu-

larly The Zoo Story, Tiny Alice and A Delicate Balance have many surrealistic qualities.

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, into a formal, ritualistic method, indicates a strong desire to throw off the

¹J. L. Styan, The Dark Comedy (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), p. 65.

²Rose Zimbardo states that the symbols in The Zoo Story are christian symbols. Peter is Saint Peter who is stripped of his materialism and led to a revelation of truth by Jerry, or Jesus. She compares Jerry's dog story to Christ's descent into Hell and final resurrection. Albee has, according to Zimbardo, written a modern morality play. Rose A. Zimbardo, "Symbolism and Naturalism in Edward Albee's The Zoo Story," Twentieth Century Literature, VIII (April, 1962-January, 1963), 10-18.

Albee's American brand of surrealism, the result of curiously incongruous action coupled with familiar idiomatic language, has a grotesque, almost macabre effect.³

The influence of the absurd techniques is also apparent. The American Dream and The Sandbox were attempts at imitations but Albee used only the superficial mannerisms of absurdism, never exploring the illusive qualities of man's existence in a world which has no meaning. The influence of absurdism can be found in all of Albee's plays. Artaud's "theatre of cruelty" Albee has created a style uniquely his own. Albee is also has had a great impact on all of Albee's plays.

All of these styles are blended into Albee's drama. Gorelik calls this blending the Naturalist-Symbolist style. Yet with all of these past theatrical styles and an intelligence which create a burning, devastatingly dramatic, consistent attempt to transcend the influences of the past and create a new form more appropriate for his talents. Albee's technique of swinging abruptly out of naturalism into a surrealistic style, or in the case of Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, into a formal, ritualistic method, indicates a strong desire to throw off the naturalistic restrictions in order to gain a rapid emotional rise in the climaxes of his plays.

His future, however, remains uncertain. His two adaptations, Malcolm and The Ballad of the Sad Cafe, were met with generally bad reviews. His two latest original full-length plays, Indecent and A Delicate Balance, were not well received. Nonetheless, the American theatre was

³Geri Trotta, "On Stage: Edward Albee," Horizon, III (September, 1961), 79.

Albee's insistent combination of the comic and the serious, forcing the audience into detachment and sympathy alternately and at times simultaneously, gives his drama a unique quality. His use of language has become a trademark. It is an amazing replica of American speech habits and usually is well conceived to reveal essential insights into characters and society.

Albee's drama is exciting theatre. Few are indifferent to his plays. It is exciting not just because Albee has created a style uniquely his own. Albee is also a master of theatricality which all great dramatists must be. He judges his audiences accurately. His aim is usually swift and sure. His good plays have a precision and an intelligence which create a burning tempo, devastatingly dramatic.

Albee remains the leading young playwright in the American theatre today. He is rapidly becoming a prolific playwright since he is only thirty-nine, has written seven plays and two adaptations, and regularly--once a year at least--writes a play which opens on Broadway.

His future, however, remains uncertain. His two adaptations, Malcolm and The Ballad of the Sad Cafe, were met with generally bad reviews. His two latest original full-length plays, Tiny Alice and A Delicate Balance, were not well received. Nonetheless, the American theatre was

revitalized by Albian drama in 1959 when The Zoo Story was produced and continues to depend upon Albee for exciting, controversial plays.

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