

Univerzita Pardubice
Fakulta humanitních studií
Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky

**Philosophical and Psychological Aspects in Edward
Albee's Plays**

Diplomová práce

2002

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**Philosophical and Psychological Aspects in Edward Albee's
Plays**

Thesis

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Filosofické a psychologické aspekty v díle Edwarda Albeeho

Diplomová práce

Autor: Bc. Barbora Machalická
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2002

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Abstract

This thesis is a philosophical and psychological study about the search for a healthy and optimal way of living in the contemporary world of the West culture, where the value of each individual is lost in an anonymous and materialistically orientated society.

The introduction is devoted to a philosophical movement of Existentialism, which, through art, expresses feelings of man in such a society. Feelings of loneliness, fear, loss of past certainties, man's finitude or wasted life are also themes of the Theatre of the Absurd.

In his plays, Edward Albee, a prominent representative of this theatre in America, examines the influence of such a materialistic society on its basic unit--family and, consequently, on individual himself.

Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf? and A Delicate Balance are both detailed psychological analyses of man in a society which puts outer forms of living resolutely above inner ones. Thesis depicts interpersonal relations, firstly, on the general level, secondly, deals with human communication as expressed in Albee's plays.

In its conclusion, thesis reminds the first principle of Existentialism, responsibility of each individual for his life.

Souhrn

Diplomová práce je studii o hledání zdravé cesty životem v současném světě západní kultury, kde se význam jednotlivce jako člověka ztrácí v anonymní a materialisticky zaměřené společnosti druhé poloviny dvacátého století.

Úvod studie se věnuje filosofickému hnutí existencialismu, které prostřednictvím umění definuje pocity člověka právě v takovéto společnosti. Pocity osamění, nejistoty, strachu, ztráty původních jistot, vědomí konečnosti vlastní existence či špatně prožitého života jsou i témata Absurdního divadla.

Edward Albee, význačný představitel tohoto divadla v Americe analyzuje ve svém díle vliv materialistické společnosti na její základní jednotku--rodinu, a v konečné fázi na jednotlivce samotného.

Divadelní hry Kdo se bojí Virginie Woolfové a Křehká rovnováha tak představují detailní psychologicko-filosofickou analýzu člověka ve společnosti, která povyšuje vnější formy života nad vnitřní. Studie zobrazuje mezilidské vztahy obecně a dále pak pojednává o problémech mezilidské komunikace, jak je v Albeeho hrách zachycena.

Závěr studie pak připomíná jeden z nejdůležitějších principů filosofie Existencialismu: odpovědnost každého jednotlivce za vlastní život.

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Anotace	<p>Studie o hledání zdravé cesty životem v současném světě západní kultury, kde se význam jednotlivce jako člověka ztrácí v anonymní a materialisticky zaměřené společnosti druhé poloviny dvacátého století.</p> <p>Úvod studie vysvětluje souvislost vzniku absurdního divadla s filosofickým hnutím existencialismu.</p> <p>Vlastní práce analyzuje dvě hry Edwarda Albeeho, <u>Kdo se bojí Virginie Woolfové?</u> a <u>Křehkou rovnováhu</u> z hlediska mezilidské komunikace.</p> <p>Závěr práce poskytuje Albeeho pojetí života a smrti.</p>
Klíčová slova	Vnější - vnitřní forma života, anonymní jedinec - neosobní masová společnost, v domě - pod domem - ne v domě, život - smrt, iluze - realita, rozum - absurdno, řeč - komunikace, odpovědnost

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“We don’t have to live unless we wish to; the greatest sin in living is doing it badly . . . stupidly, or as if you weren’t alive” Understanding 9). For the first time, these words echoed on stage in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1977 (Kolin 27). Who wrote them and why?

The author of these words is “the most important contemporary American playwright,” Edward Albee (Stenz 2). In his plays, he is especially concerned with the ways how people get through life and with the ways how people waste their lives (129). One of his characters, Agnes from A Delicate Balance¹⁾ says, “Time happens, I suppose. To people. Everything becomes . . . too late, finally” (III. 90). So many people do not think about their life and when they start, it is usually late. Contemplation of life is, therefore, the main theme of this essay.

Albee focuses on the twisted human relationships, which can evolve within the society as the results of materialism and parasitism, and on the deceptive nature of ambition. Moreover, he demonstrates the consequences of such a society in which institutions become more important than their individual members. Secondly, he sees the institution of the family as his principal area of inquiry, since it is here where human relationships are most complex (Stenz 129). He analyses the society and its individuals; thus, he provides the spectator with a reflection of its contemporary ethical and moral problems. Albee himself says, “What I am interested most is how people exist in their society and how they deceive themselves there” (Divadlo na Vinohradech).

Thus, the first subject of this essay is how it happens that life of many people remains unfulfilled. A lot of people long for love and contentment; yet, what they

experience in their lives is indifference and bareness of their marriages or of their familial relationships. They experience rejection, fear, sense of wasted opportunities, and sense of aloneness. Albee supports his convictions by letting Harry, from A Delicate Balance say:

There is . . . so much . . . over the dam, so many . . . disappointments, evasions, I guess, lies maybe . . . so much we remember we wanted, once . . . so little that we've . . . settled for . . . we talk, sometimes, but mostly . . . no. (III. 86)

The second subject of this essay is the evaluation of the contemporary materialistic society, the explanation of the reasons for its values, and the impact of these values on individuals. In his essay "Hurting Signals of Edward Albee," Dr. Koukolik says:

Such is our age, our life, and our society. Nothing new. It can be survived and one can dash away from it. Wherever. Beyond the frontiers of the ordinary days. To the fleeting relationships. To work. To making money. To fight for power. To using power . . . How many times have already other authors spoken about it? So, nothing new. Yet, some people say that the situation is getting worse. (Divadlo U Hasièù)

Consequently, the third subject of this essay is how to find a real meaning of life, how to live one's life fully and responsibly, and how to escape from what Albee calls "a death-in-life manner of living" (Understanding 100).

Stenz says that Albee's plays, even though they "make enormous demands on his audience," (2) can offer solution to all these questions. As a legacy to The International Theatre's Day in January 1993, Albee declared:

We invented the art, or if you wish we developed it, in order to find the explanation of ourselves, in order to introduce the order and lucidity to our consciousness, and even to give direction to it. (Divadlo v Øeznické)

Albee's characters reflect the feeling of real people. Theatrical critic and theorist William Kerr says that Albee's characters do not say what ordinary people say, they even do not say what they would say if they dared to. They say everything what could be said if drain ducts of a personality burst (Divadlo v Øeznické). Therefore, the spectator could understand Albee's plays as a signal. It does not matter that it is hurting and painful, as it shows that the journey does not lead here, adds Koukolik (Divadlo u Hasièù).

American family psychotherapist, Robin Skynner also looked for a direction how to progress his life in a normal or healthy way. In the introduction to his book Families and How to Survive, he explained how he had concealed his problems, and how he had not understood himself. He could not find a solution to his problems in his family; therefore, he searched outside; yet, without success. Each time he had run into difficulties, he always came against himself.

In 1970, he decided to study medicine and psychiatry. However, doing a personal self-exploration, he found no useful writings on normality. Since then, he has done a lot of successful family therapies. At the same time, first studies of exceptional mental health--"optimal" health have been published as well. At the end of the introduction, Skynner wrote: "I was excited to find out how similar their findings were to my own conclusions based on clinical experience."

The words of a famous British actor, John Cleese, once Skynner's client well express the reason for using Skynner's work in this essay:

I think the group has helped me to empathize better with other people . . . to help friends more effectively . . . it's opened my mind up to a whole new way of looking at people's behavior . . . But the greatest benefit . . . is that any problems I now experience are much milder and more manageable . . . I feel a considerable debt of gratitude not only to Robin and Prue Skynner, but also towards all the ideas, attitudes and methods of modern Group and Family Therapy . . . I believe that these new way of thinking will fascinate a lot of people . . . I have never seen them satisfactorily expressed in a non-technical book. . . . Having just finished the book, I suddenly find myself wondering how new or startling these ideas are!

(Families "Introduction")

To summarize the first part of the introduction, the improvement of damaged relationships and communication can begin only with the understanding of the society, its individuals, and the principles how they both influence one another. William Barrett, the author of Irrational Man says that we have to characterize the age to the marrow in order to understand the society (9). On the same basis, George from Who Is Afraid of Virginia Woolf? says that "it is . . . the marrow . . . what you gotta get at" (III. 213) in order to understand the "self". Therefore, the essay starts with a detailed analysis of both: the society and the individual.

1. From Our Actual Situation to the Roots of Our Existence and Back

Husserl²⁾ says that a being who has become thoroughly questionable to himself must also find questionable his relation to the total past, which in a sense he represents (Barrett 36). However, before touching the roots of our existence, Barrett suggests that every effort at understanding should take off from our actual situation, the point at which we stand now (3).

1.1. The Western Society at the Age of Conscious “Self”

Firstly, Robert Johnson says in his book Contentment that Western society pushes people to become so independent, unique, and specialized as it is possible (23). Our present society has its elaborate subdividing of human functions and a profession has become the specialized social task. Paying one's livelihood requires expertness and know-how. Thus, the price one pays for having a profession is, on the one hand, the advancement of knowledge in one's field; on the other hand, it leads to a professional deformation, which means that people tend to see things from the viewpoint of their own specialty. As a result, the specialization leads man away from the ordinary and concrete acts of his day-to-day-life. In a modern society, man is assimilated more and more completely to his social function (Barrett 4-6).

Secondly, our society thinks highly of material things and, consequently, of outer experience. It teaches us that the reality is only what we can grasp firmly. Johnson says that Madison Avenue fully understands our hunger for contentment and uses it as the basis of modern advertisement. He says that we are in the wake of ardent wishes, and we are driven by fear that we will not have what others have. Then, according to this scheme, people in such an individual society look for happiness “outside” and live with the idea “only when.” Only when I earn a lot of money, I will be satisfied. Only when I have a better work, bigger house, new car, I will be happy. In the meantime, however, contentment in their lives flows through their fingers, as they are in a strong grip of the trends of the modern life (Johnson 14-15).

People play dominant role in the outer, material world. If they think, however, that life can be measured, understood, and controlled only through their conscious will, they get themselves into trouble. As a result, an isolated individual searches for contentment in new things, in exciting experiences, in power, in a high social position, and he does it in that way that he manipulates the outer world (Johnson 20).

To summarize the main distinctive feature of our modern age and its impact on people, Johnson says that man faces an utter dilemma when he has to choose between “unreal possibility or to stay alone” (21). It means that man, either, adapts himself to the circumstances, to the excesses of our modern age, or he risks that nobody will notice him, and that he will even be pushed aside (32).

To put it other way round, Johnson says that our age is the age of conscious “self”. The first who discovered that the modern life gives the “self” too big task was the Swiss psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung: “Western culture teaches us that every man is the unique, isolated ‘self’” (20). We have forgotten that there is a deeper layer of experience, which we share with the whole culture and with all beings. C.G. Jung called it the collective unconsciousness--the source of wisdom, purpose, and sense (20).

This collective unconsciousness consists of feelings, thoughts, abilities, ways of manner, mistakes and acts, which we identify with ourselves. Today, a lot of intelligent people refuse the idea of collective unconsciousness. In accordance with the society’s values, they claim they know what they want and why they do what they do. Yet, the collective unconsciousness is not so vague, says Johnson. It consists of all processes, which are around us and which appear in the background. C. G. Jung put an important question on modern man concerning to the nature of our real “self”. He reminded us what the earlier civilizations took for granted--our “self” lies much deeper than reason and intellect. When we say we have unconsciousness, it is, as we would say we are physically and spiritually part of nature (Johnson 19-20).

If we cut ourselves off from the collective unconsciousness, we are filled with fear, anxiety, and uncertainty, as our inner “self” is estranged from natural roots. The outer life in our modern, civilized society is interrelated and interdependent in all its forms. The same is valid for the inner world. Yet, the whole generation can live through a modern, civilized life without touching once its unconscious naturalness. If we want to reach contentment and happiness in life, we cannot ignore the powers of unconsciousness, summarizes Johnson (19-21).

Furthermore, the twentieth century showed what happened when humanity had aimed strongly its effort at rationality. Twentieth century produced two world wars. Therefore, Barrett asks what was involved in certain basic human moods in the postwar years (9).

1.2. The movement of Existentialism

The movement that developed in the middle of the twentieth century as a revolt against rationality was called Existentialism. The news about it came from France, where it was a kind of Bohemian ferment in Paris. Moreover, Existentialism was a literary movement. The important thing was that here the philosophy was able to cross the frontier from the Academy world into the world at large. The ordinary mankind was still interested in philosophy that seemed to have a connection with their lives (Barrett 8).

Thus, the very themes of Existentialism were themes of life itself: anxiety, the experience of death, the conflict between the false and the genuine self, the faceless man of the masses, the experience of the death of God:

People do die, people do struggle all their lives between the demands of real and counterfeit selves, and we do live in an age in which neurotic anxiety has mounted out of all proportion so that even minds inclined to believe that all human problems can be solved by physical techniques begin to label “mental health” as the first of our public problems.

(Barrett 8)

In modern civilization everywhere, there is the divorce of mind from life. There is the divorce between the outer and inner world. This divorce is one of the central themes of existential philosophy.

Existentialism was not only a European expression, but it was also the last philosophic legacy of Europe to America. It had to be a difficult time for America, as the somberness of Existentialism went against the grain of America's native youthfulness and optimism. When Existentialism entered the New World, America was still the country of the limitless human possibilities (Barrett 9, 13).

Therefore, the themes of Existentialism were something of a scandal to Anglo-American philosophy. Anglo-American philosophy is dominated by different mode of thought, which is called analytic philosophy, Logical Positivism, or sometimes merely scientific philosophy. Positivism takes science as the ultimate ruler of human life:

Positivist man is a curious creature who dwells in the tiny island of light composed of what he finds scientifically "meaningful," while the whole surrounding area in which ordinary men live from day to day and have their dealings with other men is consigned to the outer darkness of the "meaningless". (Barrett 19)

Positivism has simply accepted the fractured being of modern man and erected a philosophy to intensify it.

While the Positivist picture of man is thin and oversimplified³), existentialism has attempted to grasp the image of the whole man even when this involves bringing to consciousness all that is dark and questionable in his existence. Therefore, it is a much more authentic expression of our own contemporary experience than all those philosophies which put emphasis on rationalism and intellect only. Thus, Existentialism is the best in the way of a new and creative movement that has appeared in postwar years (Barrett 19).

1.3. Sources of Existentialism

Yet, Existentialism is only a small branch of a large tree. Its roots reach down into the remotest depths of the Western tradition, to the time of ancient Greeks and Hebrews. "Our world," explains Barrett, "has always moved between the influence of the forces of Hellenism and Hebraism" (63).

The distinction arises from the difference between knowing and doing. While the Greeks gave the world theoretical science, intelligence, philosophy, universe, and eternity in the form of timeless essences and Ideas, the Biblical man had his knowledge from living through trust, anger, confusion, love and fear. Moreover, the Hebrew, unlike the Greek, saw man in his feebleness and finiteness. He saw man “of his blood, his bones, and his bowels.” He saw man in his wholeness. He did not permit any separation of soul from body, any separation of reason⁴⁾ from man’s irrational other half. Thus, the features of Hebraic man are those which existential philosophy has attempted to exhume and bring to the reflective consciousness of our time (Barrett 63-70).

Barrett maintains that we in our days have to come back to those old questions of the Greeks and the Hebrews from a different angle. Nietzsche⁵⁾ was the first to do it: “Who is the highest - the theoretical or the practical man?” (80). The West has thought and lived in the shadow of the Greeks.

1.4. Causes of the Development of an Individualistic Society

Thus, science became the spirit of the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, Protestantism, and Capitalism. Renaissance man was enthralled by a new and powerful vision of mastery over the whole earth. Protestantism, on the one hand, declared that the nature had to be conquered by puritan zeal and industry. On the other hand, advocating science, Protestantism led to the despiritualization of nature (Barrett 23-24):

Protestantism could produce only a pallid replica of the simplicity, vigor, and wholeness of this original Biblical faith. Protestant man had thrown off the husk of his body. He was a creature of spirit and inwardness, but no longer the man of flesh and belly, bones and blood, that we find in the Bible. (Barrett 67)

Protestantism was much in accord with the spirit of capitalism, where the idea of progress was announced as a law of history. Capitalism with a rationally planned enterprise, with a favorable balance of profits over costs, is abstract, calculating in spirit, and severs man from the earth. In capitalism, there is the collectivization of labor in factories with the consequent subdivision of human

function; the accumulation of masses of the population in cities is followed by the inevitable technical control of life (Barrett 239).

The last gigantic step forward in the spread of technologism has been the development of mass art and mass media of communication: the machine no longer produces only material products, but it also makes minds. Firstly, material goods become actual needs for great numbers of people and it makes an extraordinary externalization of life. Secondly, the people's mind is influenced by the machinery of communication, which makes possible the instantaneous conveying of news from one point on the globe to another. Moreover, journalism enables people to deal with life at second hand. Information usually consists of half-truths, and "knowledgeability" becomes a substitute for a real knowledge (Barrett 28).

As a result, it becomes more and more difficult to distinguish the second hand from the real thing. Most people end by forgetting there is such a distinction. Moreover, in his book Existenzphilosophie, Wolfgang Janke says that the biggest danger does not come from modern technology itself, but from the complete omission of our "being," which technology causes and spreads around. What Janke means is that in our age, man sees preferably the marvels of modern technology, and his capacity for any kind of human reality is fast disappearing. What lies behind those technical externals, the human person in its uniqueness and its totality, dwindles to a shadow (214, 221).

Suddenly, man sees himself faced with a universe that is both frightening and illogical, in a word, absurd. Moreover, the lack of concrete feeling has been intensified in the midst of a bureaucratized, impersonal, mass society. Barrett explains that man is trebly alienated: a stranger to God, to nature, and to the gigantic social apparatus that supplies his material wants (27).

Yet, the worst and final form of alienation is man's alienation from his own "self". Søren Kierkegaard⁶⁾, the nineteenth century philosopher said that science itself is highly suspicious, as it enables to explain the whole nature without being able to explain the train of thoughts which would lead to the

understanding of the “self” (11). In a society that requires of man only that he perform his own particular social function, man becomes identified with this function. The rest of his being is usually dropped below the surface of consciousness and forgotten. Thus, the result is, on the one hand, the outwardly prosperous and affluent societies of Western Europe and the United States, on the other hand, the spiritual emptiness of man (Barrett 31).

In conclusion, the whole problematic of Existentialism unfolds from the historical situation. What the Greeks achieved, the living of reason culminated in the twentieth century. The limitless horizons into which man looked at the time of the Renaissance have collapsed. Protestant man was the beginning of the West’s fateful encounter with Nothingness, which is, perhaps, only now in the twentieth century reaching its culmination. Previously held certainties have dissolved, the firmest foundations for hope and optimism have collapsed. For many intelligent and sensitive human beings, the world of the mid twentieth century has lost its meaning and has simply ceased to make sense (Barrett 25-32).

2. Art as a Reflection of Time

André Malraux⁷⁾ said that every age projects its own image of man in its art. In the twentieth century, it is just existential philosophy that exhibits numerous points of contact with modern art; yet, while existential philosophy has appeared as an intellectual expression of the time, modern art is an expression of the time in terms of image⁸⁾ and intuition⁹⁾. Barrett wrote that even if existential philosophy had not been formulated, we would know from modern art that a new and radical conception of man was at work in this period (56, 260).

Existential philosophy and modern art treat similar themes; they both start off from the sense of crisis and break in the Western tradition:

This breakdown with Western tradition is not simply an external and quantitative change in the number of forms the artist can assimilate; it is also, and more profoundly, an internal and qualitative change in the spirit with which the artist appropriates these forms. (Barrett 42)

Many years ago, Husserl set forth the motto, "To the things themselves," as an appeal to philosophers to bring themselves closer to the sources of experience. Barrett states: "Artists are better at it. It is, after all, what the artist is paid to do--to be attentive to experience "(253).

2.1. Postwar Art--Shift from Outward into Inward Feeling

Thus, in the postwar years, there was the move from the outward into inward feeling. As a result, painting, literature, and drama introduce new techniques¹⁰⁾ raised from that shift. At first, modern art gave rise to irritation. It seemed too bare and bleak, too negative and nihilistic, too shocking and scandalous. Psychologists say that irritation usually arises not only when something touches a sore spot in the ordinary citizen, which, many times, he would like desperately to hide, but also when it touches several sore spots of which he is totally unaware. However, modern art is nothing more nor less than the art of this time, "there is no other art today," says Barrett and adds: "if we could have a different art, or a better, we would have it" (38-39).

Yet, unconventional art gradually made room for itself in a crowded tradition and became more and more manifest. Martin Esslin comments on it:

It is just as senseless to condemn an abstract painting because it lacks perspective or a recognizable subject-matter as it is to reject Waiting for Godot because it has no plot to speak of . . . Beckett did not want the audience to go home satisfied that they knew the solution to problem posed in the play. Therefore, there is no point in reproaching him with not doing what he never sought to do; the only reasonable course is to try and find out what it was that he did intend (8).

Both, the painters and the writers no longer believed in the traditional forms.

2.2. The Theatre of the Absurd

The being of man in his time is also the main interest of the Theatre of the Absurd¹¹⁾. The plays under this label express a sense of shock at the loss of any clear and well-defined systems of beliefs or values (Esslin 9). Beckett's Waiting for Godot¹²⁾ was, actually, in Heidegger's¹³⁾ phrase, "waiting for God"

(Barrett 55). To put it another way, it was waiting for order in the world which has lost its meaning.

The term itself derives from the philosophical use of the word “absurd” by existentialist thinkers as Albert Camus¹⁴⁾, Jean Paul Sartre¹⁵⁾, Karl Jaspers¹⁶⁾, and Gabriel Marcel¹⁷⁾. The root “absurd” connotes something that does not follow the roots of logic. Camus, particularly, argued that humanity had to resign itself into recognizing that a fully satisfying rational explanation of the universe was beyond its reach (<http://honors.montana>). Henri Sosnowski cites Ionesco who called “man as lost in the world and all his actions senseless, absurd, and useless” (<http://honors.unr>). Thus, themes of existentialism are also reflected in the Theatre of the Absurd, and the style of this theatre takes on the existentialist view of the world.

All first performances classified as the Theatre of the Absurd took place in Paris: Genet’s¹⁸⁾ The Maids had its first performance in 1947; Ionesco’s¹⁹⁾ Bald Primadonna in 1950; and Beckett’s Waiting for Godot in 1952. Moreover, the playwrights themselves, largely exiled from other countries, domiciled in Paris: Beckett, of Irish origin, Ionesco, half-French and half-Rumanian, and Adamov, of Russo-Armenian origin. Only Jean Genet is a Frenchman born and educated in his native country. He, however, is an exile in a different sense: he is exiled from society itself, as he is a child abandoned by his mother and brought up by foster-parents. On balance, the feeling of exile, either from a country or a society, is the main theme of these plays (Esslin 17-18).

Even though all plays have a complex pattern of similarities in approach, method, and convention of shared philosophical and artistic premises, the Theatre of the Absurd expresses the playwrights’ own personal vision of the world (Esslin 9). Thus, Genet writes about the falseness of human pretension in society and about the contrast between appearance and reality. Beckett’s main concern was the mystery of human personality and identity. Fernando Arrabal is preoccupied with the absurdity of ethical and moral rules, while Arthur Adamov started out by projecting his oppressions and anxieties on to the stage, as he

was unable to face the reality of the outside world. In Britain, Harold Pinter, and, in America, Edward Albee reveal the corruption of conventional patterns of friendship, love, and family allegiance and the terrifying process, in which language becomes a barrier rather than an aid to communication (Esslin 19-21; <http://honors.unr>).

As a result of such an inexplicably problematic world, the plays flout all the standards by which drama has been judged for many centuries. Firstly, unlike a well-made play, plays of absurd drama often contain hardly any recognizable human beings. There are figures of the faceless and anonymous hero, who is at once everyman and nobody. Characters often present completely unmotivated actions and are forced to move in an incomprehensible, void-like realm (Esslin 7; <http://honors.unr>).

Secondly, a well-made play is expected to entertain by logically built-up dialogue, which, in some of absurd plays, seems to have degenerated into meaningless babble. Language is reduced to a game where words are used to confuse rather than elucidate the truth. Thirdly, a well-made play is expected to have the beginning, the middle, and the end. Absurd plays often start at an arbitrary point and seem to end just as arbitrarily (Esslin 7; <http://honors.unr>).

To convey their sense of bewilderment and anxiety, absurdist minimize the sense of place. Thus, the play is often staged within limited space and with some object of uncertain meaning. This object produces fear which keeps growing larger. It grows worse with time and, ultimately, it is so large that it is threatening to drive people out of their home. The object, as in Ionesco's Amédee the corpse, might evoke the growing power of past mistakes or past guilt, perhaps the waning of love or the death of affection (Esslin 10-11; <http://honors.unr>).

In accordance with the philosophy of existentialism, playwrights heavily rely on projecting outward their innermost states of mind. Therefore, plays are wildly fantastic, full of nightmares, and dreams. Dreams do not develop logically; they develop by association. Moreover, dreams do not communicate ideas; they

communicate images. Esslin says that it is in the nature of dreams and poetic imagery that they are ambiguous and carry a multitude of meanings at one and the same time. Therefore, the image can stand for any idea (10-11; <http://honors.montana>).

The plays of the Theatre of the Absurd are primarily intended to convey a poetic image or a complex pattern of poetic images. Narrative thought proceeds in a dialectical manner and must lead to a result or final message; therefore, it moves along a definite line of development. Poetry, however, is above all concerned to convey its central idea, or atmosphere, or mode of being and is essentially static.

Thus, seemingly, there is no real progress in life on the stage. The movement is the unfolding of the poetic image. The more ambiguous and complex that image is, the more intricate and intriguing will be the process of revealing it.

Esslin explains:

In the traditional play, we constantly ask, 'what's going to happen next?'. In the absurd drama we have an action that consists in the gradual unfolding of a complex pattern and instead we ask, 'what is it that we are seeing?'. (11)

Thus, the theme can be the exploration of a complex image of the mother-son relationship as is in Arrabal's The Two Executioners or in Edward Albee's Three Tall Women. In Albee's Zoo Story, the complex image is the difficulty of communication between human beings in our world (12).

Theatre of the Absurd is to a very considerable extent concerned with a critique of language, which has become devoid of meaning. In the absurd world, everything seems to be just empty chatter or obscure babble of voices in a foreign language. What made sense at one moment, at the next becomes a nonsensical illusion:

The conversation at the party which at one moment seemed to be an exchange of information about the weather, or new books, is suddenly revealed as an exchange of mere meaningless banalities. People do not exchange meaningful information in the subject; they merely use language to fill the emptiness between them, to conceal the fact that they had no

desire to tell each other anything at all. In other words, from being a noble instrument of genuine communication, language has become a kind of ballast filling empty spaces. (Esslin 13-14)

On the other hand, Janke adds that in our age, computer technology substitutes language by the system of mathematical symbols, which leads to a language asceticism and, finally, to taciturnity (225).

Henri Sosnowski says that the twentieth century's most popular non-realistic genre is absurdism (<http://www.honors.unr.>). Yet, it is just at this point that the Theatre of the Absurd can actually coincide with the highest degree of realism. For if the real conversation of human beings is absurd and nonsensical; then, it is the well-made play with its polished logical dialogue that is unrealistic. To put it another way, in a world that has become absurd, the Theatre of the Absurd is the most realistic comment on, the most accurate reproduction of reality (Esslin 14). Václav Èerný, professor at the Charles' University in the postwar years wrote that Existentialism is realism, but realism of a new type: in his new time, man is an isolated, lonely, and split personality (29).

To summarize, the plays of the Theatre of the Absurd present a disillusioned, harsh, and stark picture of the world. Though they often appear in the form of extravagant fantasies, they are, nevertheless, essentially realistic. They never shirk the realities of the human mind with its despair, fear, and loneliness in an alien and hostile universe. Therefore, unlike the Greek philosophy of strict rationalism or American philosophy of Logical Positivism, they depict a whole man. The realism of these plays is a psychological and inner realism; the plays explore the human subconscious in depth rather than trying to describe the outward appearance of human existence (Esslin 22-23).

2.3. Edward Albee as Absurdist

The playwright who provides insights into the dark side of the human mind is one of the few American exponents of the Theatre of the Absurd, Edward Albee.

He comes into the category of the Theatre of the Absurd precisely because his work attacks the very foundations of American optimism. In the essay "Albee and World Theatre," Esslin says:

His work attacks the ideals of progress, optimism, and faith in the national mission, and pours scorn on the sentimental ideals of family life, togetherness, and physical fitness; the euphemistic language and unwillingness to face the ultimate facts of the human condition that in America, even more than in Europe, represent the essence of bourgeois assumptions and attitudes. (Kolin 63)

Rubby Cohn maintains that Albee's America is a representative of contemporary Western civilization (25).

Therefore, even though Virginia Woolf is outwardly realistic in form, following almost Aristotelian structure of a play, it exist on, at least, two levels apart from the realistic one ("An Interview" 37). Firstly, it is an allegory of American society; it is a poetic image of its emptiness and sterility. Secondly, it is a complex ritual on the pattern of Genet²⁰). It is an attempt of a couple to face life in its reality, without false illusions. Virginia Woolf together with Albee's next play, A Delicate Balance provides an image of man's loneliness and inability to make contact with other people in the contemporary world (Esslin 22).

Thus, the main part of this essay is devoted to a psychological analysis of marriage in American conditions, which is one of the main themes in Virginia Woolf. Secondly, it will analyze relationships between members of a family in A Delicate Balance. At the same time, it will endeavor to explain the causes of individuals' behavior and its consequences on the behavior of other characters in both plays. Anita Stenz says:

Edward Albee is concerned about the nature of the bond between husband and wife and he explores the potentially destructive forces which can operate on all the members of a family, whether male or female. His main areas of inquiry are failures in human relationships in whatever combination they occur. (3)

For Albee, the central subject is the individual human personality struggling for self-realization in the world full of illusions.

3. Psychological Analysis of Relationships

3.1. Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf

3.1.1. American Society as a Substitution of Fantasy for Reality

“Truth or illusion, you don't know the difference?” (Virginia Woolf²¹) II. 201). In accordance with American drama of the twentieth century, Albee sees the illusion as one of the biggest American weaknesses.

From the very start of the play, Albee is precise and apt in describing truth and illusion. On the one hand, Lee Baxandall describes the appearance of the stage as “tasteful home with fitted recessed bookshelves, hi-fi, curtains, fireplace, early American period furniture, wrought iron colonial eagle, an American flag queerly reversed, an impressionist painting over the mantel - the comforts of modern living . . .” (Stenz 38). Yet, on the other hand, Alan Schneider, the first director of the play, points out that the set isn't real. It has all kinds of angles and planes that you wouldn't ordinarily have. What Albee wanted was the image of “a womb or a cave“ (39), some confinement--a room that is a hole the characters had to stay within, but a hole they, actually, do not want to live in. Thus, the perceptive spectator starts to anticipate very early in the play that there is a big difference between the ideal setting of that home and the way characters behave.

The play is an elaborate metaphor for what Albee sees as the substitution of fantasy for reality. The action takes place in a town called New Carthage²²). In act two, George reads a book by Spengler²³) about the decline of the West. Selerie says that there is an allegorical significance, as there is a clear parallel between Carthage and modern America (46). In both, power and money provided the main principles for behavior. In Spengler's cyclical view of history, both periods marked the age where the victory of money power over culture played the leading part (Bloom 142).

The consequence of a materialistic society based on power and money was a sterile intellectualism. It is a society, in which “children do not happen, because

intelligence at the peak of intensity can no longer find any reason for their existence” (Bloom 142). Therefore, in protest, George reads out the Spenglerian prophecy that “the west must . . . eventually . . . fall” (ll. 174). He voices what is the central thesis of the plot. Moreover, he underlines this thesis when he likens New Carthage to Gomorrah, the evil city in Palestine, and Penguin Island when he suggests a parallel with Illyria--Shakespeare’s fictional world (Bloom 142). Contemporary America is different from the “New World” in the sixteen-century, called a betrothed “terra incognita”.

Thus, the play is “an examination of the principles of the American Revolution.” George and Martha, named after the first President and his wife, embody the fate of the American dream, which has moved progressively further away from the supposed liberal idealism of those revolutionary principles (Bloom 142).

The play shows, on examples of George, Martha, Nick, and Honey that the liberal values of the past have been surrendered. George has been compromised and Martha is in danger of moving “ a bean bag” (ll. 98) into her own fantasy world. The process of the play is, therefore, a slow and relentless stripping of illusion, a steady move towards the moment when their myth will collapse of its own weight. Albee leaves George and Martha to confront reality without benefit of their fantasies or the protective articulateness, which has been their main defense (Bloom 142).

Thus, the second main plane Albee looks into is the impact of a materialistically orientated society on its individuals. He has said that Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf? is “about the ways people get through life” and that the title means “who’s afraid to live without illusions” (Stenz 39). Edward Albee has aimed all his sharpest thrusts at self-delusion and at the materialism and opportunism that were built into the institution of marriage.

3.1.2. American Materialistic Society as an Impact on Individual

Who is Martha and what is her position in the play? John Kenneth Galbraith, the Harvard economist and drama critic makes a statement which is useful as a

starting point in an attempt to understand this character: he says that every member of a university or college faculty knows this woman as assertive, rowdy, and rough-talking (Stenz 39). She is not a pleasant person, but Albee portrays her with a sympathetic detail. Her mother died when she was still quite young and her father, the director of the college remarried and sent her off to a convent school. In effect, she was a rejected child (39-40).

Even though she was well educated, Martha's intelligence and imagination remained undirected. Society and university establishment kept women out of classrooms and faculty meetings. Thus, her great energy dissipated in vein; she tried to find sort of a substitute living. She could only hope to find a husband who would take over his own department and then the college itself. So, she sought her identity and self-esteem in the person she married and in the career she planned for him. Martha has been punishing George for twenty odd years; yet, this plan failed: "You didn't do anything; you never do anything; you never mix. You just sit around and talk" (I. 7). George stubbornly remained himself and refused to become the fulfillment of her ambitions (Stenz 39-41).

Moreover, George's refusal was not the only plan that failed in Martha's life. They were unable to have a child together. So, all that Martha really does is go shopping. She is "a housewife; she buys things" (I. 6); however, there is little evidence that she ever took pride in homemaking. Her behavior of frequent infidelities makes plain that she is not interested in her husband's personal needs.

Without any sense of how she can contribute to improve the quality of her life, expecting all things great and beautiful to come from outside herself, she lives in self-pity and disillusionment. With nothing to do that interests her and nothing to live for, she spends her nights with half-filled glasses of gin around the house and her days sleeping off her drunkenness. Martha is a woman who lived at home and daydreamed about her future instead of creating it herself, says Stenz (41).

The characterization of Martha as a deeply unhappy woman who has wasted her life has a more universal application. In a reflection of this cultural climate, she is a type of “a faculty wife” (ll. 114), whose behavior stems from frustration. Albee shows what happens when family, education, and society discourage a potentially powerful human being from having personal goals. He attacks the cruel and self-destructive consequences of an education for conformity, which does not take into consideration the needs of the individual (Stenz 42, 52).

Thus, Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? is a sharp critique of a society obsessed with the mystiques of success or the appearance of it. Thomas E. Porter observes that the ultimate convention which is being attacked in this play is the notion that salvation comes from some agent outside the individual. Truth is that the ultimate happiness of every human being does not rest in his social or academic rank or in his pay-envelope (Stenz 44).

3.1.3. Psychological Analysis of Martha and George

Martha is the victim of not only shallow materialistic values of American society, but also of her own family. Therefore, there is much more about her than a spectator is willing to see beyond the raw language, the emotional and physical violence, and the adultery games. Martha suffers from a strong lack of self-confidence; she does not have the capacity to face a real life situation. Thus, the main thesis, truth or illusion, is back again (Stenz 52).

In the introduction to Families, Robert Skynner says that many of our problems are really childhood difficulties that we failed to resolve when we were young and, consequently, carry around with us in our adult lives. He says that his parents could not understand how they had produced a child who was full of fears, unable to cope with reality, who escaped into dreams and solitary interests.

Thus, the first point in understanding Martha's present behaviour is an analysis of her unhappy childhood. As a rejected child, she experienced little love and hardly any emotional support from her father, absolutely necessary for a right

development of a child (Families 71). The lack of love has marked not only her childhood but also her adult life. She has longed for a sort of esteem; therefore, later, her major concern was an association with a husband who would make her appear interesting and important in the eyes of other people - particularly her father (Stenz 40).

Yet, the spectator has to wait nearly to the end of the play before George brings the truth out into the open. He tells Nick and Honey that Martha's father "really doesn't give a damn whether she lives or dies, and couldn't care less what happens to his only daughter" (III. 225). Stenz says that although her father remains an off-stage character, the consequences of the unsuccessful father-daughter relationship are treated in great depth (41).

Her idealization of the college president brought the first form of self-delusion when he annulled her marriage to the gardener's boy. Thus, Martha understood she had to "marry into the college" (I. 79). When she came back home as a big, bright, energetic girl from "Miss Muff's Academy for Young Ladies" and "sort of sat around for a while" (I. 78), the only thing she could do was to act as a hostess for the college president and waited. Her liberal arts education at a fancy ladies' finishing school did not prepare her for anything more practical than to be able to distinguish the correct usage of words like "abstruse" and "abstract" and toss foul language around in French (Stenz 71).

When George finally "came along" (I. 80) unmarried, Martha, almost thirty years old "fell for him" (I. 81). He seemed to be the groom who would take over his own department and then eventually the college itself. George, however, has had his own vision of life, which was not in accordance with Martha's wishes (Stenz 41).

Just as Martha exemplifies a certain kind of college personality, George typifies another. He is a teacher who is more interested in his subject than in the business of administration. In other words, George is an intellectual who prefers not to wrestle with the shallow satisfaction of student-management or the

questionable rules of running a university department (Selerie 37). Seemingly different in their attitude to life and seemingly keeping different values, George and Martha have stayed in a relationship which has not satisfied them at all. Yet, a strong need for being loved united them.

Skygger says that the basic prerequisite of the successful marriage is the lesson about the opposite sex. Children who miss out on that experience, like a girl with no father or brothers, or children who spend their adolescence in all-boys or all-girls boarding schools will be unsure how to deal with the opposite sex later on. The lack of contact with the opposite sex while growing up not only makes people anxious and awkward, but it can also give them unrealistic expectations, so they get disappointed a lot when they embark on relationships (25). This is what happened to Martha.

Therefore, the core of Martha's problem lies much deeper than in her decision to marry into the college. Skygger explains that we are attracted to someone at a very deep, psychological level, as, basically, they are like us. What really draws people together are their similarities in one of the most fundamental aspects of all--their family backgrounds (16). People who choose each other often find they have experienced, at the same kind of age, the same kind of event, for example an absent father or a death in the family. It is a trouble at a certain stage of development, which everyone has to pass through successfully in order to pass on properly to the next stage of the development (22-23).

George fell for Martha and came to stay in New Carthage. His parents were dead, and he was ready to start his adult life on his own terms (Stenz 45). Whatever the truth about his past really is, George worked it out creatively in the form of a novel. It is the tragic story of a boy who accidentally shot his mother and then a year later, while trying to avoid hitting a porcupine on the road, swerved the car and drove his father into a tree. Selerie says that we do not know anything concrete about George's childhood; yet, by saying the tragic story, we know that he had a sad upbringing (47).

George and Martha missed the stage when a child gets from his parents love, support, and confidence to be able to express his emotions freely. Then, according to Skynner, many people pretend that they have not missed the stage, as they are embarrassed about it. They are ashamed about something that would make them feel silly and childish if it was revealed. So, at first, they try to hide it from other people, later from themselves. As a result of such behavior, they cannot look for a substitute experience to solve the problem out (Families 28-29).

The habit of avoiding becomes so firmly established, so instinctive, that we hardly know we are doing it. The American psychiatrist Harry Stack Sullivan called it “selective inattention” (Families 29). The next step is that we pull a blind down inside our heads to screen off the emotion that we do not want to look at, and that is exactly what happened to George and Martha. They are a couple of little truces and moments of affection when they laugh together, but most of the time they are trying to wipe each other out:

Martha: Phrasemaker! Hey, put some more ice in my drink, will you? You never put any ice in my drink. What is that, hunh?
George: I always put ice in your drink. You eat it, that’s all. It’s that habit you have . . . chewing your ice cubes . . . like a cocker spaniel. You’ll crack your big teeth.
M: THEY’ RE MY BIG TEETH!
G: Some of them . . . some of them.
M: I’ve got more teeth than you’ve got.
G: Two more.
M: Well, two more’s a lot more.
G: I suppose it is. I suppose it’s pretty remarkable . . . considering how old you are.
M: YOU CUT THAT OUT! You ‘re not so young yourself.
G: I’m six years younger than you are. . . . I always have been and I always will be.
M: Well . . . you’re going bald.
G: So are you. (Pause . . . They both laugh) Hello, honey.
(l. 14-15)

What is actually going on between them?

George and Martha are both enormously vulnerable. Each of them has an almost child-like longing for affection, but they have put that longing behind the

screen. They deny it completely; they are quite unaware of it now, and they have covered it up with a sophisticated facade (Families 45).

Skygger says that this is very brittle, as their child-like sides never get the affection they crave. So, the child part of themselves is always frustrated, angry, and resentful. As a result, they spend half their lives in infantile rages with each other, because they never realise what the cause of their rage is--they are not getting the love they desperately need. One reason they never get that love is that they deny their need for it. They can never ask for that love in a simple, open way. Martha has to say, "Give your Mommy a big sloppy kiss" (l. 15), as saying, "Give me a kiss" would make her too vulnerable. George and Martha, in between the fighting, have moments of a very sentimental, baby-talk behavior (Families 48).

George and Martha behave in the way their families taught them. They cannot ask openly for love, as love was a blind spot in their families. Yet, when they both grew up, this need appeared again. When they started living together, it began to burst out more and more and couldn't be ignored. However, this need for love looks like "a devil" to other partner (Families 46).

To put it another way, "a devil" is a desperately unhappy child having a tantrum, longing for love. So, when one devil appears, the partner becomes horrified and attacks that devil furiously. Showing the need for love has been a taboo in both families; therefore, the terrible fighting when one of them sees the other's "devil"-- the need for love (Families 46).

Thus, Skygger says, what attracted them to each other was "the similarity of the stuff in front of their screens--the goods in the shop window" (45). On the one hand, they would have seen each other as sophisticated, intelligent, witty, very grown up, competent, and worldly people. On the other hand, they would also have sensed intuitively what was behind each other's screens: the desperate, violent child; in a sense of word, they are both adult children (45-46).

With this couple, there is so much behind the screen, and the fear of it is so great that no compromise, which makes for a vicious circle of increasing hate

and bitterness, is possible between them. Martha, specially, has no tolerance at all for George. Firstly, she mentions the fantasy child. Secondly, she tries to humiliate George by calling him a “bookworm” and a “contemplative”. For the third time, she betrays George when she mentions the failure of his first novel.

Their behaviour only supports Skynner’s analysis of such relationship, which often ends in quite serious physical violence too. When Martha disparages the book George wrote, she denies not only George himself but also a vital part of his human experience. This had to be particularly painful experience for George, as the novel, which Martha’s father refused to publish, was his first attempt to get out painful experiences from childhood. Therefore, George grabs Martha by the throat. Fortunately, the escalating violence stops, as they become exhausted. Then, after some time, the pressure builds up and it starts all over again (Families 47).

One might ask if there is so much conflict, why do not they get divorced. Martha herself says, “I swear . . . if you existed I’d divorce you . . .” (I. 16). A couple like this finds it very difficult to separate, because as long as they are fighting “the devil” in their partner, they are distracted from noticing “the devil” in themselves. That lets them feel better about themselves. Each one can say it was the other’s fault, because they started it. They can believe their own devil is only a reaction to the partner’s. As a result, they are justified in not offering the partner love and affection. They stay where they are and neither of them has to acknowledge what is behind their screen. George and Martha’s marriage is out of control, as they are so out of touch with reality (Families 47).

George is kind and tolerant of Martha; he knows what her problems are and is sorry for her. Yet, as Mass Halpern points out, George, “by complicity and acquiescence---has helped created her until she has become precisely what he calls her: ‘spoiled, self-indulgent, willful, dirty-minded, liquor ridden . . .’” (II. 157; Stenz 46). He has tolerated her selfishness and participated in her fantasy (Selerie 38). George realizes it, as during the “Walpurgisnacht” he mutters, “I’ve been trying for years to clean up the mess I made” (II. 102). He, however,

could not manage and has withdrawn into his own world of history, teaching, writing, and drink:

I'm numbed enough . . . to be able to take you when we're alone. I don't listen to you . . . or when I do listen to you, I sift everything, I bring everything down to reflex response, so I don't really hear you which is the only way I manage it. (ll. 155)

When Martha relentlessly betrays their most private conflicts and deepest grief, George knows that the time to be "burdened with a morality too rigid to accommodate itself to the swing of events" has come to an end:

You've taken a new tack, Martha, . . . that makes it just too much . . . too much. I don't mind your dirty underthings in public . . . well, I do mind, but I've reconciled myself to that . . . but you've moved bag and baggage into your own fantasy world now, and you've started playing variations on your own distortions . . . (ll. 155)

Martha has been losing her grip on the distinction between reality and illusion, and George has reached the limit of his capacity for suffering. From the very beginning of the play, George, in his struggle for survival, has tried the final stripping away of all illusions to the ultimate naked confrontation at the very end of the play. This is exactly the same process as Johnson suggests: "We have to go back to the roots to understand ourselves and to find out the best for our "self" (21). George knows that the situation has reached the point where it must change if they are to endure the future (Stenz 47-48).

Therefore, he decided to apply to Martha the lesson of Jerry in The Zoo Story:

I have learned that neither kindness nor cruelty by themselves, independent of each other, create any effect beyond themselves; and I have learned that the two combined, together, at the same time, are the teaching emotion. (Stenz 46)

Skyner's psychological observation can only support Jerry's speech:

If we miss out a stage, we can still pick up the lessons later on by seeking out a substitute experience. That will enable us to get back on schedule, as it were . . . But if we miss out a stage and don't go through a substitute experience, the emotions that we haven't learned to handle will feel very awkward to us. (Families 32-33)

George decides to teach Martha a lesson so that she will be able to handle her emotions once for ever. When, in act two, Martha says, "IT'S NOT WHAT I'VE WANTED!," George asks, "Why baby," and answers "I did it all for you" (152-153).

George feels he has to find some way to get at her very soon. In the middle of act two, he does not know exactly which way: "I've got to figure out some new way to fight you, Martha. Guerilla tactics, maybe . . . internal subversion . . . I don't know. Something" (125). At the end of this act, the idea comes from Honey: "I'VE GOT IT! I'VE GOT IT, MARTHA . . .! Somebody with message . . ." (180). To save them both, he guides Martha to the point from which no escape or evasion is possible. After "Hump the Hostess," he comes back into the house with a bouquet of snapdragons and starts throwing them at her, stem first, chanting: "Snap... Snap". He is excited, for he has made up his mind about how to free them both from the vicious cycle of their "vile, crushing marriage" (Stenz 47).

The fantasy child has to be destroyed and with it the unpublished book about which he has been so resentful. Martha will no longer be able to use the child as a weapon when she does not get her way, and George will no longer be able to blame her for her father's refusal to support him in his creative work:

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 . . . large tree. (III. 231)

By using exactly the same words as he used while describing the accident during his studies, George decides to bury, apart from all other illusions, the unhappy memories of his unhappy childhood.

The characterization of Martha and George is certainly a proof of the author's understanding of the problems of unfulfilled people. The social conditioning encouraged Martha's thwarted expectations, as well as George's idealism. All together with her childlessness, these are all realities which contributed to Martha's disappointment and sorrow. Moreover, in spite of the material

advantages with which she grew up, Martha, given her loveless childhood entered adult life as an emotional cripple who doubted her worth as a human being. She did nothing constructive to make life bearable for George or for herself (Stenz 42).

It would, however, be sentimental to think that the enormous personal sadness in the marriage of George and Martha springs from their failure to have a child, as the presence of one would not have guaranteed them a harmonious life together. Stenz only supports Skynner when she says:

The childlessness of George and Martha is a blessing in disguise; a real infant born into their marriage would have been born into the unholy cauldron of his mother's and his father's unresolved personal and emotional problems. (51)

Martha did not know how to come to terms with her unsatisfactory past and live positively in the present with the man who loved her. Stenz adds that there is no evidence she would have found peace if she had borne six children, or if George had become head of the History Department, president of the college or president of the country (52).

After the "Exorcism," after Nick and Honey have learned about the difference between truth and illusion and gone home, the struggle between the man who would not violate his personal integrity and the woman who could not believe in her own worth comes to rest. The play ends with a radically simplified language. The whole scene of this closing section provides an audible and visual confirmation of the simple and uncomplicated state to which their relationship has returned (Kolin 82):

Martha: . . . You had to?
George: . . . Yes
Martha: I don't know.
George: It was . . . time.
Martha: Was it?
George: Yes. (III. 240-241)

Even though Albee does not offer a ready-made solution at the end of the play, he gives his characters a chance to live in a state of emotional honesty, to have a different kind of relationship, as they enter the second stage of their lives

together (Stenz 52). In conclusion, it was Skynner who said, "When you learn the truth, you do not mind so much the length of time you have been mistaken" (Life 255).

3.2. Structure of the Play within the Theatre of the Absurd Standards

3.2.1. Language as a Means of Communication in Virginia Woolf

Albee's plays tend to rely more on dialogue than action. Thus, an examination of Albee's linguistic procedures in Virginia Woolf is particularly necessary for an understanding of the play (Selerie 58).

Julian N. Wasserman says in his essay "The Idea of Language in the Plays of Edward Albee" that for Albee, language is a meeting ground which exists between the interior and exterior worlds of the speaker and the listener (Bloom 97). People judge a situation according to their own life experience, according to their sense of word associations. Therefore, language and semantics form a major theme in Virginia Woolf.

People do not talk the same language, Harold Bloom explains. People use language to establish a communal bond between themselves and somebody else and, at the same time, they want to separate someone from that community of people. Thus, language is used both to include as well as to exclude (100).

The same linguistic exclusion is apparent in Virginia Woolf. When asked if he and Martha have any children, George replies to Nick, "That's for me to know and you to find out" (l. 39). It is "finding out" or the solving of the riddle²⁴ that could be regarded as a main definition for the understanding of the whole play. It is only when Nick discovers that the child whom he assumed to be real is, in fact, the product of his hosts' imaginations that even a rudimentary understanding of the dialogue can begin. Only now the previous language is given its real meaning (Bloom 104). Before this final revelation, Martha has already berated Nick for his limited understanding:

You always deal in appearances? . . . you don't see anything, do you? You see everything but the goddamn mind; you see all the little specks and crap, but you don't see what goes on, do you? (III. 190, 192)

Nick is the main loser. He cannot follow George's wordplay or abstract terminology, and later he fails to follow Martha's signals (Selerie 49).

Throughout the play, Nick deals only in the concrete while George and Martha speak the language of abstraction. True communication between Nick and his hosts is impossible despite the fact that Nick tells George, "I'll play the charades like you've got 'em set up . . . I'll play in your language . . . I'll be what you say I am" (II. 150). Nick is doomed to failure not merely because he is not as skillful as George is at word play, but because he has no understanding of either the vocabulary or the rules by which the linguistic game is played (Bloom 104).

In act three, Martha asks Nick: "You're ambitious, aren't you, boy?" (194). Nick is the opposite to George. He is a representative of "modern man" who knows exactly what he wants--to rise to the top in the academic world and gain the necessary status symbols, and he has devised an appropriate strategy for getting there. He has cool, pragmatic manners, which conceal his selfish intentions until George, finally, stripped it away. The attentive listener gradually comes to see the younger man's values for what they are: shallow, ruthless, and conformist. Nick has shrewdly calculated the moves which will benefit his career-making: the right contacts at one institution, reaping the rewards, and then passing on to another (Selerie 40).

Selerie says that as a biologist he is supposed to typify a mechanical attitude to human behavior. His habits of objective classification have led him to a disintegrated view of nature. He sees life in black and white, and he only takes risks which are carefully weighed to produce a result. His goals are simple and realizable: material comforts, prestige, and power. In fact, his subject, biology is merely a means to other practical ends (41).

Thus, it is little wonder that no real communication takes place between the two couples in the course of the night's action. George and Martha have

between themselves mutually exclusive meanings, which they assign to events in their lives as well as a mutually agreed vocabulary and set of rules for its implementation. Through their speech, we learn the semantic and lexical rules of their private tongue. Their speech is the source of their togetherness, their apparent unity. In contrast, there exists no such bond between them and either of their guests. When Nick attempts to converse with George, George is aware of the fact that they talk in two mutually exclusive tongues and refuses to explain (Bloom 104-105).

Thus, Bigsby says that the watch-word of such a “success-society” Nick belongs to becomes “non-involvement” (83-84). Honey does not “remember anything” (III. 211), while her husband preserves his “scientific detachment in the face of . . . life” (II. 100). Attempts at establishing contact are scornfully rejected:

George: I've tried to . . . tried to reach you . . . to . . .

Nick: . . . make contact?

George: Yes.

Nick: . . . communicate?

George: Yes. Exactly.

Nick: Aw . . . that is touching . . . that is . . . downright moving . . . that's what it is. UP YOURS! (II. 116)

Language, then, can serve as a bridge or medium between speaker and listener, but only when both parties are fully aware of its rules and nature. When either half of the equation is missing, the result, from the linguist's point of view, is not really true language. So, Nick and Honey are the objects of manipulation in the play. They are unconscious participants who know neither the rules nor the vocabulary (Bloom 104-106).

People hide themselves behind words to recoil from reality. Even though there is an apparent unity between George and Martha, they inhabit a city of words as well. They construct an alternative world; they elaborate their illusions in an apparently concrete language. They provide their fantasy child with an entire history; they transpose supposed genuine emotions onto language that must do the work for them. Their elaborate language games are a substitute for a real contact (Bloom 143).

Nevertheless, there is a kind of truth in language: the subconscious perception breaks through into the conscious world. George's observation that "Martha's a devil with language" (l. 21) and Martha's calling George "phrasemaker"(l. 14) is a joke containing an element of psychological insight. Moreover, the humor in which George and Martha excel is not only a protective device, it is also evidence of a perception of alienation or disproportion (Bloom 145).

While they speak lies, they are in a real risk that the crust of language will eventually collapse of its own weight and leave them with the silence. It is silence they both fear because it may reduce them to what Pirandello²⁵⁾ once called "naked figures". Their verbalization is a response to their terror of a silence in which the real questions will assert themselves. Therefore, George and Martha play like children, as they are terrified of real being. Their baby talk, their games, their arrested development, has infantilised them (Bloom 144-146).

Despite appearances, George was making sense all along. From early in act one onward, most of George's social and psychological strategies centre on one goal: to exorcise the son-illusion, which has been perverting their lives for about twenty years. Within the context, then, George and Martha's brutalizing language, which escalates with each act, becomes a necessary social and psychological dynamic (Roundané 70). Bloom says that the ultimate "finding out" as George puts it, is a linguistic rather than an ontological matter (105). Roundané, on the other hand, says that it is an ontological operation. To restore the spiritual health and accept their lives as they are, George has to get to the marrow to demythologize the child (81). However, George does even more: in the course of the play, he rids the whole company of its problems.

3.2.2. Games as an Emphasis of Childish Behavior

In other words, the exorcism of illusion and the final reconciliation between them is made by externalizing the lies governing their and Nick and Honey's relationship through four games: 'Humiliate the Host,' 'Hump the Hostess,' 'Get the Guests,' and finally 'Bringing Up Baby' (Roundané 70). Game is the main

structural device; “play”, in fact, becomes a central metaphor of the whole play. Therefore, the first act is called “Fun and Games” (Bloom 146).

Each game has its own rules, which are liable to change without notice. During each phase, somebody’s inner world or past experience is investigated. Thus, in the first game, George’s stagnation in the academic world is emphasized; then, his aspiration to be a novelist is ridiculed; finally, his novel is found to be autobiographical. In the second game, George repays by narrating a fable which brings out the darker secrets of Nick’s and Honey’s marriage. In the third game, Martha tries to dispossess George by having sexual intercourse with Nick; consequently, the Nick’s limitations are revealed. In the fourth game, finally, Martha’s inner secret is unraveled and her fantasy destroyed. The first victim, George is now the victor. He turned the child game full-circle. Martha has no chance to re-create the myth (Selerie 53).

These games which adults play do reflect the codes and devices of childhood. Thus, Albee, by the structure of the play, emphasizes the childish behavior of his characters. He formalizes the process by which adults entertain and compete with one another. It is the same system which can be observed in purer form among children. Gavin Selerie comments on it:

Iona and Peter Opie, in Children’s Games in Street and Playground (1969), divide games into the following categories: chasing; catching; seeking, hunting; racing; duelling; exerting; daring’ guessing; acting; and pretending. (53)

Albee chooses words very carefully. He knows how to evoke the impression of game. Martha calls on George: “What are you doing: Hiding, or something?” (III. 185). George, on the other hand, uses nursery rhyme which survived in children’s games: “Here we go round the mulberry bush” (III. 203). Using the structure of game, Albee strengthens the arrested development of his characters and their childish behavior.

Albee goes through the full range of game structures from satirical and nonsense rhymes to information or naming contests and, ultimately, physical combat. Much of the games activity could be described as a battle for

knowledge, as a battle for intellectual superiority. There are riddles, truth tests, and all manner of tricks and traps. Among the strategies adopted are: insults and ambiguous answers; parody and impropriety; conspiracy; flattery and flirtation; deceit; intimidation; evasion; retreat and open attack (Selerie 54).

Thus, in act one, Martha calls George “a blank, a cipher, or a zero” (17). On the other hand, George, in act two, calls Martha “Bête²⁶” and “Putain²⁷” (101). There is plenty of baby-talk from funnier expressions such as, “firsty, barie-poo, gweat big dwing” to a more serious ones: “Daddy? Daddy? Martha is abandoned” (III. 185). Rhymes are used to strengthen the atmosphere of games: “Georgie-Porgie,” “kid-bit,” or, in act three, George summarizes a dialog between Nick and Honey: “Honey funny bunny!” (210). Moreover, Albee makes fun of using luxurious words by an intellectual society when he lets George say, “Martha, won’t you show her [Honey] where we keep the . . . euphemism?” (I. 29).

A battle for intellectual superiority includes allusions to some writers, poets, philosophers, their work, or some events. Well-known personalities mentioned are, for example, Bette Davis²⁸, “Dylan Thomas-y,” (I. 12) or Oswald Spengler. Allusions are made to Lawrence’s Lady Chatterley’s Lover, Williams’ A Streetcar Named Desire, or to Browning’s ‘Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came’. The latter appears in the play as “Blondie and his frau out of the plain states came” (II. 143) and is, actually, a parody on the Browning’s poem. It describes a quest through a barren landscape for mysterious dark tower, which symbolizes the recognition of “self” or, possibly, death, thus having a clear link with the theme of Albee’s play (Selerie 23).

Selerie’s words well summarize this part about games:

Since American culture places great value on success in games and sport, Albee’s play becomes an ironic commentary upon the means by which people gain approval in society. Behind the facade of absolute rules in a game, there is no standard against which behavior can be judged. (54, 60)

Martha, by breaking the unwritten laws of the game, unwittingly forces a definitive confrontation regarding their grasp on objective reality (Roundané 69).

George comments on her behaviour:

It's perfectly all right for you. . . . I mean, you can make your own rules . . . you can go around like a hopped-up Arab, slashing away at everything in sight, scarring up half the world if you want to. (II. 152)

"All truth being relative," says George (III. 222).

3.2.3. Perception and Description of Truth and Illusion in Virginia Woolf

Harold Bloom explains that the change in perception between illusion and truth takes place when the audience ceases to be excluded from and instead becomes a part of the speech community of George and Martha (105). Roundané supports this by saying that Albee's theatrical strategy ideally minimizes the actor/audience barrier (13), and Paolucci emphasizes Albee's insistence on "slowly pulling away the scaffolding that separates us from the core of the experience, casting us as participants in the drama" (14). How does Albee do it?

Already in act one, Albee prepares the spectator for the main theme of the play: truth or illusion. When Martha apologizes for bringing it up, George corrects her, "HIM up . . . not IT" (70). When they have a discussion about their son, Martha speaks about green eyes, while George speaks about blue eyes. The spectator starts to perceive that there is something unusual going on.

From that moment to the end of the play, Albee draws the spectator deeper and deeper into the play. In act two, George brings into the light an incredible 'Bergin story'²⁹. "May be it isn't true," "May be it is," "Might be . . . Might not" (110). In that way, Nick and George finish their dialog about Martha's stepmother. Thus, Albee creates an atmosphere of uncertainty. He does not let the spectator have a rest; he makes him listen very carefully. So far, everyone has heard about George's first novel; yet, in the middle of act three, he announces: ". . . but I didn't tell you about the second novel" (141).

Albee's search for truth and illusion culminates in act three. He unfolds another game with words, which only stimulates further uncertainty. George starts a story about his trip to Mediterranean, but Martha insists he has never been there. If Nick, at the beginning of the play, says that he will play in George's language, at the end of the play, he is very confused: "Hell, I don't know when you people are lying or what" (200).

Bloom says that the change in perception between illusion and truth is a change in the perception of the reality, not in the reality itself (105). As active participants within the play, the audience contributes to the ritualized forms of confrontation and penance that characterize much of the playwright's work. By writing such plays, Albee hopes to make the spectator think about his life:

If one approaches the theater in a state of innocence, sober, without preconceptions, and willing to participate; if they are willing to have the status quo assaulted; if they're willing to have their consciousness raised, their values questioned - or reaffirmed; if they are willing to understand that the theater is a live and dangerous experience--and therefore a life-giving force--then perhaps they are approaching the theater in an ideal state and that's the audience I wish I were writing for. (Understanding 14)

Albee believes that people are able to pay attention and if they do pay attention, they will learn from it and possibly change what they do not like ("An Interview 43").

3.2.4. Symbolism in Virginia Woolf as a Means to Wake up the Spectator

Albee speaks of "hallucination," which provides a middle ground between idea and event for those who find the "Ideal" unrealizable and the present unbearable (Bloom 111). In Virginia Woolf, George makes a similar observation when he notes:

It's very simple. . . . When people can't abide things as they are, when they can't abide the present, they do one of two things . . . either they . . . either they turn to a contemplation of the past, as I have done, or they set about to . . . alter the future. (ll. 178)

The main instigator of psychological changes in lives of four characters on stage is George. He feels that the only "life-giving force" for him and Martha is

the symbolic death of their son. To express the process of life purification, Albee uses the old structure of drama--ritual activity³⁰). Ritual itself lies behind the whole play, as it symbolizes the movement from destruction to recreation.

Thus, apart from language, the first visual device on stage, which alludes to the process of purification is a gun. All together with snapdragons, which George throws at Nick and Martha, it is an expressionistic device used as an active projection of inner concerns. George does not know if Martha had or did not have a sexual intercourse with Nick. Thus, the throwing of snapdragons accompanied with an audible "snap," which also alludes to Martha's snappish behavior, is a ritualized act of aggression. When George, in act one, points a gun at Martha, he also, for the first time, brings death into the play.

The meaning of words in the play is immediately supported by the acts of ritual. When, at the beginning of act two, Nick calls Martha's stepmother "a witch" (109), there is a deliberate intention in it. Albee prepares the spectator for the ritual Mass on stage. In the past, Mass was supposed to be at witches' sabbath, and fat of murdered infants was used as an ointment to confer a special power "to fly". Thus, apart from George's final liberating speech *Libera me*, this "to fly" means to drive an evil out. It means to drive out spirits which are not so much personages as subconscious forces. It means to drive out false illusions, jealousy, and pride which poison the marriage relations (Selerie 26).

Therefore, Albee calls the second act "Walpurgisnacht," which means the eve of May Day, but also the period of year when witches are most powerful. To expulse evil powers, ceremonials used to include burning of bundles of twigs, ringing of bells, and shouting of special chants. So, in accordance with his unity of words, content, structure, and style, Albee lets fires kindle to drive orgies away. George and Martha declare a total war: "You wish you'd die in automobile accident" (ll. 154). "And you'd never mentioned our son" (154).

Purification rituals used to take place in spring, and Albee deliberately supports this with a carefully chosen vocabulary. He refers to Easters by

already mentioned “Honey, bunny”; he creates spring atmosphere when Martha gives a detailed description of their son: “. . . and he loved the sun! . . . He was tan before and after everyone . . . and in the sun his hair . . . became . . . fleece . . . I carried the poor lamb” (III. 220-221). George’s allusion, “Martha’s going to put on some rhythm she understands . . . Sacre du Printemps, may be,” (II. 129) has a double meaning as well. It alludes to Stravinsky’s “The Rite of Spring”, which is a composition portraying fertility and sacrificial ritual (Selerie 22).

To summarize, George, step by step, tears the fantasy apart. He shoots a gun, breaks a bottle, puts on records, tries to strangle his wife, hurls a book at the chimes, and appears with snapdragons. Honey’s reference to peeling of bottles sets him off on a long account of progressive truth finding. In act three, he gets down the marrow. Throughout the play, he leads the four characters and particularly Martha to a new self-awareness. It is George who comes as the agent of changes (Selerie 52).

Each game in Virginia Woolf has plenty of other symbols and engenders a cluster of bigger or lesser images. They are all united by the door-chimes, which ring when the guests arrive, when Martha touches them, or when George hurls his book across the room. In a general sense, the chimes mark the phases of a ritual. More specifically, they are connected with the removal of the child, since in the Mass, bells are rung to indicate that the Host who represents the body of the Son is about to be lifted up. Thus, the third act is about a symbolic death and is called “Exorcism”. For, the four characters, and particularly for George and Martha, the last act is a possible resurrection. The end is in accord with Albee’s vision of life: “death is, paradoxically, life-giving” (Selerie 46).

The mysterious title “Who is Afraid of Virginia Wolf?³¹⁾” presents a binding unity for the whole play.

3.2.5. Psychological Change--Change in Communication

In act three, braying, coarse Martha is warm-hearted, her barbed manner a

measure of her vulnerability. Her language gains a new lyricism and warmth (Selerie 59). When she drops her mask, she says:

George; my husband George who is out somewhere there is the dark 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; who keeps learning the games we play as quickly as I can change the rules, who can make me happy and I do not wish to be happy; and yes I do wish to be happy. George and Martha: sad, sad, sad.

(III. 190-191)

The process of Virginia Woolf tends to be a progressive stripping not only of illusions but also of language. If much of the play seems to be about failed or imprisoned communication, at the end of the last act, neither illusion nor language comes between them. Torrent of language has slowed down. As they moved away from jokes and bitterness of the previous acts, there is a new softness and slowness of sound at the end of act three. George and Martha are left only with one another; they acknowledge the responsibility which they had previously evaded. They accept their joint failure: "We couldn't [have any children]" (III. 238; Bloom 147).

To conclude, it is evident that the themes of Virginia Woolf are rooted in its linguistic structure. As in all great literature, form and content are intertwined. Roundané says that Albee animates his "life-giving" theatre through language. In fact, language stands as the most conspicuous feature of Albee's dramaturgy as well as his major contribution to American drama (Understanding 112).

3.2.6. The Importance of Individual in a Society of a Frustrated Mass Man

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? is a protest against what Albee saw as a growing conformity, a retreat from individuality and moral responsibility. It stands as an assertion of the absolute need to accept responsibility for one's actions and to close the gap between individuals, to end private and public alienation. In this, Albee is, in many ways, close to the conviction expressed by C.G. Jung in the Undiscovered Self:

Nothing has a more divisive and alienating effect upon society than this moral complacency and lack of responsibility . . . There can be no doubt that in the democracies too the great distance between man and man is much greater than is conducive to public welfare or beneficial to our psychic needs. (Bloom 148)

Even though the play is regarded as a comedy, beneath the humor, there is a serious fear of a fatal collapse of liberal individualism. It is again C.G. Jung who had suggested in The Plight of the Individual in Modern Society that:

Under the influence of scientific assumptions, not only the psyche but the individual man and, indeed, all individual events whatsoever suffer a levelling down and a process of blurring that distorts the picture of reality . . . The goal and meaning of individual life (which is the only real life) no longer lies in individual development but in the policy of the state, which is thrust upon the individual from outside and consists in the execution of an abstract idea which ultimately tends to attract all life to itself. The individual is increasingly deprived of the moral decision as to how he should live his own life. (Bloom 145)

Thus, the question of human relationship and of the inner cohesion of our society is an urgent one in view of the atomization of the frustrated mass man. The free society needs “a bond of an affective nature, a principle of a kind like caritas, and the Christian love of neighbor” (Bloom 148).

Thus, making a circle, this part ends at the starting point of this essay. Albee reacts to the needs of the contemporary American society. He wants to wake people up from lethargy. He wants to show that George and Martha have experienced a change--a purgation of ills and the promise of a more meaningful existence. He wants to show that marriage is not necessarily a prison of emotional sterility; it can be the cutting edge where honesty begins (Selerie 50). After all, Virginia Woolf is an act of public exorcism and it is, according to Albee, the main function of art (Bloom 143-144).

4. A Delicate Balance – Analysis of Family Relationships

4.1. Circularity as the Main Strategy of the Play

In his next play, A Delicate Balance, six characters long for love, warmth, and a sense of belonging; yet, the emptiness and developed existential nothingness

are basic to the play's strength. While Martha and George have lived twenty-one years in illusion, Agnes and Tobias have spent at least thirty-seven years on living through their lives in sort of an inner despair. Nothingness, embodied in the lives of the characters, has resulted from the exhaustion of commitment leading to the loss of love, to a death-in-life pattern. Gilbert Potter, in his essay "Toby's Last Stand" says that the static nature of the characters is thus thematically functional (Kolin 167). Albee explores that older people get fewer choices when it comes to changing the pattern of their lives (Stenz 71).

The integrating dramatic principle is a strategy of circularity in characterization, situation, and language. The circular strategy reflects the play's cycle of emptiness, beginning in the "Nothing" that compels Harry and Edna to the home of Tobias and Agnes and culminating in the loveless void that engulfs them all in the final scene. The central figure is not Agnes but Tobias, whose gradual self-awareness occurs as he sees himself in the lives of the other characters. Potter says that his dawning recognition of his own emptiness provides the dramatic tension in the play and renders him the hub, around which the play's circularity revolves (Kolin 168).

The play offers Tobias as the most crucial character because his confrontation with his flawed self is starker than the similar confrontations of the others. Like George, he gains the sympathy of the audience because, despite his weak will and anxious judgement, he wishes to be better than he is. Potter says:

To use Tobias as the critical focus of the play is not to ignore or distort the other characters, but simply to see them as satellites moving around him, sharing the same space, the same light and darkness, for their various failures are counterparts to his own. (Kolin 167)

Discussion in the play is, therefore, organized around Tobias. His relationship with each character in the play reveals a dimension of their weaknesses or failures. He learns from each of them about his own shortcomings (Kolin 168). Therefore, the main aim of the following part of the essay is the analysis of relationships between the members of this family and their closest friends Edna and Harry.

4.2. Truth and Illusion in A Delicate Balance

As in Virginia Woolf, Tobias is a man who has been an excellent provider for his wife in their lives. After a busy and remunerative career in the city, Tobias has retired to the suburbs to enjoy his life. He employs a gardener and several other servants and belongs to a country club, where he plays golf. There is a conservatory with potted palms in his well-appointed home. His living room is adorned with crystal chandeliers and shelves filled with leather-bound books. He is “proud of his wines” (II. ii. 47) and reads Horizon magazine (Stenz 71). On the first glance, one might exclaim, “How successful his life has been.”

Yet, there has been a deep and private sorrow between Tobias and his wife Agnes, an emotional estrangement of many years. Stenz says that the false air of the superficial harmony between this husband and wife who practice concealment of emotion are close to disruption at the moment the curtain rises (73). In the course of a weekend, which is also the exact duration of the play itself, Tobias will be compelled to face the truth about himself as a husband, as a father, and as a friend.

Tobias and Agnes had two children, but Julia’s brother, Teddy, died when Julia was still a child. This event severely altered the relation between the couple. Since then, Tobias decided to sleep in a separate room, as he was frightened and emotionally scarred by Teddy’s death; thus, he has protected himself from any further pain connected with being father again. Potter says that his sexual withdrawal from Agnes became therefore emblematic of his withdrawal from any of life’s risks (Kolin 169). As Honey says “Never mix--never worry” (V.W. I. 23), Tobias chooses the way of his life: “nothing ventured, nothing lost” (Kolin 169).

Agnes would like to round things out with her husband before it is all over. Protesting in vain, she devoted herself to preserving the outward forms of stability. Moreover, she would like to clear the mentally and physically unlivable situation with her sister Claire, who is a parasite and a burden. She would also

like to live without hangers-on--her daughter Julia, who is coming back home repeatedly, as her marriages have always failed. Furthermore, Agnes and Tobias' s friends, Edna and Harry arrived at their household looking for the warmth and the sense of belonging, which they have failed to create between themselves in their marriage (Stenz 72-74).

Even though the emotional relationships are improved by Sunday morning, the patterns of their lives have not been radically altered. It is too late for that. Unlike in Virginia Woolf, in A Delicate Balance the illusion that there is freedom of choice after a certain time is destroyed. Albee comments on it:

The point of the play is that we lose . . . we develop a kind of arthritis of the mind, of the morality and change becomes impossible finally--not whether we live up to our responsibilities of friendship. (Stenz 74)

In his discussion of this play, Bigsby recognizes that A Delicate Balance is another "calling for . . . a courageous determination to face the world as it is (Stenz 74).

Unlike Martha, Agnes accepted the male role as primary. She let her destiny be controlled by Tobias. Stenz says that Agnes loved sincerely; she did not marry for what this man would make her in the eyes of others. Yet, as she approaches sixty, she realizes that her life is full of hollowness. Agnes' s fault is different to the fault of George in Virginia Woolf. Agnes would be too kind and understanding too long (75). When Tobias says, "You who make all the decisions," Agnes points out, "That is an illusion you have"(III. 74). Earlier in the play, she says:

The reins we hold! It's a team of twenty horses, and we sit there, and we watch the road and check the leather But there are things we do not do . . . we don't decide the route We follow. We let our . . . men decide the moral issues. (III. 72)

4.3. Lack of Open Communication in One's Family - Basis of Life-long Problems

The spectator gradually learns that something in the past was concealed between this husband and wife, which has a ruinous effect on the present. The unreal time of their relationship started some thirty years ago, when their second child, Toby died. Tobias gradually estranged himself from Agnes. He deeply shook her self-confidence with an infidelity about which she learned something, but nothing specific. Agnes suspects that her own sister betrayed her. Without discussion or explanation, Tobias slept apart from her in another room, and Agnes bent her will to his wishes. The unresolved events of that period concerned the four members of the extant family, complicated and compromised their relationships and affected their lives right up to the first evening of the play's action (Stenz 76-77).

Stenz says that if in real life the springs of motivation remain obscure, the dramatist locates the moment between two people where the descent began. As Tobias puts it, "Once you drop . . . you can come back up part of the way . . . but never . . . really back again" (l. 19). In Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, Martha describes the boxing match, the way she impulsively and insensitively punched George in the chin, knocked him down and humiliated him in front of her father. "I hadn't meant it . . . honestly" (l. 56), she explains and then adds ruefully, "I think it's colored our whole life" (l. 57).

For Tobias, the emotional pain was so intolerable that he could not face the possibility of another child, another loss. Unable to cope with the ultimate implication of this double vulnerability, he terminated intimacy with his wife. Tobias is shy at home, not normally given to outbursts of temper or impulsive behaviour. He does not talk about deeply personal matters (Stenz 77).

Agnes remained "an honest woman" and found her refuge and defense against the emotional emptiness of her life by playing martinet--ordering,

planning, organizing--assuring for Tobias a life that was the way he wanted it. Agnes presided over her family, preserving as best she could a delicate balance. She has devoted her vital energy to externals - to form (Stenz 77).

Agnes and Tobias's failure to confront their passions and feelings disrupted not only the development of their relationship, but it had also sad consequences on the emotional growth of their daughter, Julia. Stenz says that it is impossible to discuss the effect of the death of Teddy on Julia without examining Julia's relationship with her parents (76).

To begin with, on the one hand, the child needs to develop some independence and willpower; on the other hand, the child needs to feel loving firmness and control from his parents to learn self-discipline (Families 24). Yet, when Julia was in need of such support, neither Tobias nor Agnes was able to provide it. Agnes recalls "how she felt unwanted, tricked" (II. ii. 62). After her younger brother died, the girl regularly appeared at the door with scraped knees, causing her mother to wonder whether she was just clumsy, or if she was doing penance for feeling more relief than loss (Stenz 79).

To cope with a change or stress, all people need to be given reassurance, courage, and emotional support. Skynner explains that the child looks instinctively for love and protection at his mother, as from six months up to about two or three years age, the child is very strongly attached to her. If, during this time, the mother cannot give this support and is separated from her child, he is likely to go through a very difficult time (Families 115-116). As a result, the baby has to try to make massive adjustment to her instead of the other way round; thus, he feels frustrated (87).

It is exactly what Julia did. Tobias taught Agnes to deny her own needs for nurture. She put her feelings behind the screen. Then, she felt unhappy about any kind of clinging, whether hers or Julia's. She tried to deny their needs and tended to push Julia away whenever she did try to cling. So, to support

Skygger's analysis, Julia remained stuck, very tied to Agnes's apron strings. Not having found the security at home, she could not find it outside:

The pattern of her failed marriages is a continuation of the succession of failures at different schools during her adolescence, and unbroken series of escapes from a kind of guilt which at the same time was a search for love. (Stenz 79)

From a psychological point of view, it makes sense. Skygger explains such kind of behaviour: "You cannot start to enjoy school until you can give up some of the delights of staying at home. You cannot move on to something new unless you let go of something old" (Families 150). Therefore, Julia was coming back home repeatedly to look for security, as, in her family, she has scarcely experienced it.

The other thing Agnes did not realize is that her daughter cannot start to enjoy Dad unless she has got a little freer from Mum. The kind of men Julia married could not make up for what she missed from her father at home. Ironically, and here the spectator can see again the destroying effect of Agnes's approach to her daughter, Julia strongly implies that all the choices were not her own, but that her well-meaning mother had a hand in them too:

Do I pick 'em? I thought it was fifteen hundred and six, or so, where daughter went with whatever man her parents thought would hold the fief together best, or something. 'Love will come after.' (II. i. 39)

Thus, Agnes is far from guiltless herself. Later, she reflects on the various losses that come to a woman, as when her child becomes "an adult stranger instead of a growing one" (III. 72).

The other confrontation that should have taken place years before is confrontation between Julia and Tobias. He never came to grips with being a father. When Julia tried to find a position as a central child, her father failed to give his daughter the reassurance that she was still loved after the second child

was born.

Here, the spectator can again see a pattern of Tobias's life. Firstly, he failed in his life when he gave away his story about a cat that he had put to sleep, because it stopped responding to him the way he wanted it to. Secondly, he failed when he did not find the strength to support Agnes after their son died. Thirdly, he betrayed his daughter Julia. Always, rather than risk loss or pain, Tobias retreated: "If I thought I might . . . break through to her and say, 'Julia . . .,' but then what would I say? " 'Julia . . .,' Then nothing." (I. 24).

Seeking the father, an unworthy model, Julia chooses unsatisfactory husbands. She loves him as her father and for the good qualities he once had. However, at the same time, she resents him for what he has become and for what, therefore, she feels he has passed on to her (Kolin 172):

When I was a very little girl . . . I thought you were a marvel-saint, sage, daddy, everything. And then, as the years turned . . . poor old man--you sank to cipher, and you've stayed there, I'm afraid--very nice but ineffectual, essential, but not-really-thought-of, gray . . . non-eminence. . . . And now you've changed again, sea monster, ram! Nasty, violent, absolutely human man! (II. 38)

Like her mother, Julia wants to shift the responsibility for her unhappiness to Tobias.

Tobias takes tedious attitude toward Julia's verbal tantrums. Yet, her taunts are not simply outpourings of hostility; they are forms of engagement, the closest thing to affection Julia will allow herself to show for her father. She loves her father, she only, according to Skynner's family code, does not know how to show it. Potter says that her appeal to Tobias for protection against Harry and Edna reveals her childish dependency, as the love scene she enacts with Agnes's bed linens just prior to the gun scene suggests her confused post-pubescent affection for Tobias (Kolin 171).

When Julia makes Tobias acknowledge his selfishness to her, Agnes also points out how every time Julia came back from a marriage, he failed to assert himself as a father. He did not show any interest or active concern in the girl's problems, but chose rather to remain uninvolved. In the crisis precipitated by Harry and Edna's invasion, Julia's desperate cry for recognition and acceptance helps to open an avenue of contact between father and daughter (Stenz 80). As Agnes observes, "I do believe that's the first time she's called on her father in . . . since her childhood" (II. ii. 58).

Thus, what Skynner analysed from the psychological point of view and Stenz proved on the example of characters from Albee's plays is the truth: if parents do not make an attempt to clear up their own difficulties, there is little use helping a problem their child has. Julia is the product and the victim of the unresolved emotional conflict between her parents, particularly of her father's problems (Stenz 80).

4.4. When Truth in One's Life Recognised and Chance for a Change Not Used

There is one more member of the family, also involved with Tobias. It is Claire, Agnes's sister. Claire indulged herself long in alcoholic self-pity and a promiscuous search for love. She recalls her condition in the year that Teddy died:

You hate with the same green stinking sickness you feel your bowels have turned into . . . yourself, and *everybody*. Hate, and oh, God!! you want love, l-o-v-e, so badly--comfort and snuggling is what you really mean, of course--but you hate, and you notice--with a sort of detachment that amuses you, you think--that you're more like an animal every day . . . you snarl, and *grab* for things, and hide things . . . like not very-bright dogs, and wash less, prefer to *be* washed, and once or twice you've actually soiled you bed and laid in it because you can't get up . . . (I. 18)

Potter says that somehow the touch of Tobias--and, perhaps, fatigue--cured Claire of her promiscuity and gave focus to her quest for love. Claire recognized well in time that the meaning of life was love; she, however, met only Tobias's passiveness and waited passively.

The new Claire became a wise fool who both entertains and criticises the family. She tells amusing stories about shopping trips for topless bathing suits, she plays the accordion, yodels, affects regional dialects, and provides captions for the deadly Beckettian waiting game their lives have become: "Waiting. The room; the doctor's office; beautiful unconcern; intensive study of the dreadful curtains; waiting for the Bi-opsee" (II. ii. 51). In act one, when Edna and Harry came to Tobias's household, Claire said, "I was wondering when it would begin . . . when it would start" (32). Thus, she gave away another wisdom: life in pretension could not last forever. When Tobias asked, "START? WHAT?," Claire responded: "Don't you know yet? You will." (I. 32).

In act three, Agnes confirms that Claire is the strongest of them all (83); yet, neither Claire is able to help herself in life. Roundané says that even though Claire has never missed a chance to participate in watching, she seldom benefits from her "disinterested interest" (Understanding 107). She sees everything; yet, she does nothing to change the pattern of her life.

Even though Tobias rises to Claire's defence every time there is an outspoken conflict between two sisters, Claire is the third person in his household who accuses him of living an unhappy life (Kolin 170).

4.5. Fear: Evasion of Responsibility for One's Life in A Delicate Balance

Finally, a weakened Tobias learns about a superficiality and hollowness of friendship between him and his lifelong friends Harry and Edna. It serves as a

climax of the play. Tobias is placed at the center of a circle formed by his family and friends, each one appealing to him for something which he finds himself inadequate to provide.

Firstly, Julia wants her womb-like room back, her shelter from maturity, and appeals to Tobias to eject Harry and Edna. Secondly, Agnes desires to maintain the quasi-stability she has managed to establish in her household over the years; therefore, she appeals to Tobias to discipline Claire, to restore Julia to Douglas, and to send Harry and Edna home. Next, Claire appeals to Tobias for a rekindling of the love they once shared, which would require him to divorce Agnes. Finally, Harry and Edna also appeal to Tobias for sanctuary, or as Claire puts it, "Succor, Comfort" (II. ii. 53), for they are afraid and without inner resources to combat their fear (Kolin 173).

Fear is the main problem of them all, which is, in the play, defined by Claire. Julia's fear of maturity, Agnes's fear of insanity, old age, and death, Harry's and Edna's fear of nothingness, and Tobias's fear of risk, pain, responsibility, and life. What they all share is their common silent conspiracy to do nothing, to defer decisions and avoid commitment (Kolin 170). "The helpless are the cruelest lot of all," says Agnes, "they shift their burdens so" (II. ii. 62). Here, all burdens fall on Tobias, who is himself helpless to deal with them.

4.6. "Balloon Image" in A Delicate Balance--Cause of Spiraling Exploration of the Quest for Love

When crisis breaks out, including family friends, all of them are circling around Tobias, which forms the play's basic structural pattern. The issue is love. Claire, Agnes, Tobias, Edna, and Harry long for love. They all look to Tobias, but Tobias only repeats a line said by Agnes that serves as a refrain to their collective searches: "If we do not love someone . . . never have loved someone . . ." (I. 27).

It is again Claire who points up the circular nature that love takes in their relationships: "You love Agnes and Agnes loves Julia and Julia loves me and I love you. We all love each other; yes we do" (I. 27). Love goes around, but it is unreciprocated, and it goes, as Claire explains, only to "the depths of our self-pity and our greed" (I. 27; Kolin 174).

Circular love has its counterpart in circular space in the house. Tobias underlines the shifting of locations when he explains his confusion to Agnes: "I almost went into *my* room . . . by habit . . . by mistake, rather, but then I realized that your room is my room because my room is Julia's because Julia's room is . . ." (III. 69).

The circularity in the play is carried out further by a series of role reversals, one character becoming another and then returning to his original role. Agnes begins these alternations when she tells Julia that "one of the thirty million psychiatrists practicing in this land of ours . . . opines that the sexes are reversing" (II. i. 35), a report that characterizes the marriages of both Agnes and Edna. Agnes then demonstrates the validity of the opinion by becoming Tobias, assuming a "male prerogative," (II. i. 35) and telling Julia, as Tobias enters, "Your mother has arrived. Talk to *him!*" (II. ii. 36).

Occupying Julia's room, Harry and Edna become Julia--the frightened child. They need, as Claire explains to Julia, "a special room with a night light, or the door ajar so [they] can look down the hall from the bed and see that Mommy's door is open" (II. ii. 53). As they settle in, however, Harry and Edna also become Tobias and Agnes. When Harry takes over at the bar, Tobias feels displaced. Edna responds to Julia's outburst by assuming Agnes's role, punishing the daughter and, in the rhythms of Agnes's speech, admonishing Julia in the name of order: "You return to your nest from your latest disaster . . ." (II. ii. 65). By "Have you come to take my place?" (II. ii. 54), Claire hints that Julia is maybe ready to pull Claire (Kolin 175).

As they move in and out of one another's roles, the characters not only reinforce the circularity of the play, but they also continue to look to Tobias to resolve their difficulties through any of his several functions: Husband, Father, Lover, Best Friend, Head of the House. As the characters have revolved around him, they have recalled painful memories: Teddy's death, Tobias's sexual qualms, his fainthearted infidelity, his progressive impotence with wife and former mistress, his ineptitude with Julia (Kolin 175-176).

The form of circularity is the main aim of Edward Albee. In her initial speech, Agnes describes her hypothetical insanity as "sending the balloon adrift" (I. 7), thus becoming placidly "uninvolved" (I. 7) in the world. This "uninvolvement" has emerged as a central theme in the play, as it is the reason why Albee's characters are not happy in their search for love. The "balloon image" appropriately captures the shape and character of the "family circle" (Kolin 177).

Skygger sets an example when he says, "Imagine a box and a number of balloons in that box. The balloons represent the family members or, rather, their unrealistic maps of themselves, and the box is the world. If each balloon-family member believes it is omnipotent, it tries to fill the whole box. And it cannot do that without squeezing all the other balloons out of existence. So, all the balloons--all the family members are tending to wipe the others out. Therefore, there is an endless struggle, punctuated sometimes by periods of very uneasy truce" (Families 94).

Being all stuck at this stage, they are all, at the same time, aware that they cannot stand on their own. Each one needs the others desperately. So, they are in this impossible dilemma of wanting love from the others, yet finding themselves constantly in danger of getting into a terrible struggle with them (Families 94). That is the reason why Albee's characters live in a constant love-hate relationship.

Only when they face reality, they may have a chance for a better inner life.

They may talk more again, touch more, be a little less lonely. Tobias tries to make up for his failures--with his wife, and with his daughter. If things turned out the way they did, it was because of his own limitations. He does not blame anybody. He tries to be honest. Finally, he apologizes to his family: "THOSE ARE MY LIMITS! NOT YOURS! . . . well, that's my poverty" (III. 88). His family has asked for more than he was able to provide them with.

Although Claire remains an adolescent, she knows in her heart that in order to cease to be a child, each individual must detach himself from his parents. Thus, Julia has the biggest chance to change her life. She may go back to her husband. She has finally been given the background to her life, and now she may be able to form a lasting relationship with a partner and as a mature woman start a family of her own (Stenz 85-86).

To summarize, an open communication between all members of a family and, consequently, the knowledge of one's background is highly important for a happy life. It is a prerequisite of one's psychological maturity. In "An Interview" with M. Roundané, Albee says, "we have to release the primordial demons" (41). Does not Agnes say, "that's why we sleep at night? To let the demons out?" (III. 92-3).

Gilbert Potter ends his essay "Toby's Last Stand" in the following words:

A Delicate Balance is a spiraling exploration of the quest for love and the various forms of insularity available to disguise the absence of love in contemporary society of wealth, clubs, . . . [and other outer forms of life]. (Kolin 177)

Death as a Life-giving Factor

5.1. Significance of Death

Even though Albee sets his plays in an immediately recognizable, well-ordered realistic setting, his characters balance between order and chaos. They are vulnerable to reality; they are afraid of life without illusion. Even though Virginia Woolf and A Delicate Balance end at dawn, dawn's meaning is problematical (Hirsch 2-3). Ruby Cohn says that in spite of exorcism, Martha continues to fear "Virginia Woolf" and that the delicate balance might not last through a morning that Tobias implies is "very late at night" (43).

Their inner drama, which takes place beneath surface, arises from fear (Cohn 44). They know they have lived in illusion, in a death-in-life manner; they know they have little time to put things together. Many, in fact, have already given up any thought of making a change, they have settled in (Hirsh 49). "Everything becomes too late, finally," notices Agnes over the coffee in A Delicate Balance (III. 90). Camus says that people die and are not happy (Divadlo na Palmovce). Thus, the subject of both plays is man's mortality, either on a symbolic level as in Virginia Woolf or on a real level as in A Delicate Balance. Edward Albee's characters are afraid not only of life on the Earth, but also of the world out there.

Mathew Roundané in "An Interview" with Edward Albee asks: "Death pervades your theater. Why your preoccupation with death?" Albee responds: There are only a few significant things to write about: life and death. I am very interested in the cleansing consciousness of death; and the fact that people avoid thinking about death--and about living. I think we should always live with the consciousness of death. How else can we possibly participate in living life fully? (Kolin 195)

In the chapter about Christianity, William Barrett says, "the man who is not afraid to die is not really alive" (83). Skynner supports this statement: "People who are afraid of death, are afraid of a full life. As a result, unconsciously, they

choose 'life in death' as a way of their being" (Life 250-251). What is, then, the place of death in one's life?

5.2. Contemplation of Death and Life in Three Tall Women

The contemplation of death and life is also the main theme in Albee's play Three Tall Women. At the beginning of the act two, the character A, the oldest, lies in a coma in bed. B, in her early fifties, says grimly, "Something to look forward to," and C, twenty-six years old, responds, "I don't want to talk about it; I don't want to think about it." Yet, B recommends, "It's worth thinking about--even at your age" (ll. 65).

Elizabeth Kübler-Ross says in her book On Death and Dying that death has always been distasteful to man (2). Yet, unlike societies where death was regarded as natural process, our society views death as taboo and discussion of it is regarded as morbid. She says that the more we are making advancements in science, the more we seem to fear and deny the reality of death (7). Thus, her book only confirms what William Barrett said in Irrational Man: we live in a modern society of science and technology and in the age of an impersonal and anonymous mass man (17).

Consequently, the change of focus from the individual to the impersonal masses has been the most dramatic in areas of human interaction. Kübler-Ross says that physicians have more people in their waiting rooms with emotional problems than in the past; they have more elderly patients who not only try to live with their physical limitations, but who also face loneliness and isolation with all its pains and anguish (2, 7). Death is lonely, mechanic, and dehumanised process. Yet, not computers but each of us will have to solve dying one day.

Pavel Trenskey says in his article "Resurrection of Edward Albee" that Three Tall Women is a free continuation of Virginia Woolf (255). Unlike the personal exorcism of a devil in the former play, the latter is the exorcism on a far more

general level; it is the exorcism of man's existence itself. The play is not about life of one concrete person, but about life as such. Therefore, Albee gives his characters abstract names A, B, C, as the main theme of the play, the contemplation of death and life, concerns each of us.

Albee is not a transcendentalist; he says that the absurdity of death is an ironic proof of the absurdity of life ("Resurrection" 156). In "An Interview" with M. Roundané, Albee says, "we gain wisdom just in time to lose everything. I guess that it is one of the awful ironies of the human condition" (197). Yet, when it happens that one stands before the fact of living one's life, it is very important not to do it "badly . . . stupidly, or as if you were not alive" (Understanding 9).

Therefore, Albee speaks of the cleansing consciousness of death. He read upon Kübler-Ross' book and agrees with her view of life and death:

If all of us could make a start by contemplating the possibility of our own personal death, we may effect many things, most important of all the welfare of our patients, our families, and finally perhaps our nation. (17)

Death is a key to human nature. If not, why else could C deny that she would ever become the old woman. She could not wonder about the happy times in her life. "I haven't had them, yet have I? All done at twenty six?" (II. 107).

There are three principal characters in the play, identified only as A, an old woman; B, her secretary and caregiver; and C, a young lawyer, trying to straighten out her accounts. The play begins with a fact from life. One character plays upon the other, revealing the embitterment behind the mask. We learn that life of A has gone wrong; her life has not fulfilled her expectations at all. Mell Gussow, the author of Albee's biography A Singular Journey asks, "Ways back then, were things always the same?" (355).

At the end of the first act, A has a stroke. The second act begins with A in bed, apparently in a coma. Yet, the figure in bed turns out to be a dummy. A herself

enters and converses with B and C, who now become A at earlier stages of her life. There are three faces of the same woman which is why the characters have no full names and are called A, B, and C. They play a game of ages: Who knew what and when will the youngest of the three find out about events that will shape her life? Three aspects of a woman carry us through her life and the burden of her memories (A Singular Journey 355).

Thus, we learn that A was married to “the little one-eyed man” (ll. 79) who “has the morals of a sewer rat” (ll. 93). We get a full picture of a woman devoted to herself and to her way of life, to her horses more than to her husband and son. She marries for money and for security--and she suffers for it. Around her are the indulgent and philandering husband, the alcoholic sister, and the prodigal son. Looking back in time, we learn that C did not marry “a man of her dreams,” but a “man she dreamt about” (ll. 78). She thought that at the age of twenty-eight she should have already been married; therefore, the sentence “And you suddenly realize you love short men” (ll. 88), where the word ‘suddenly’ expresses inevitability and urgency. She has lived in dreams, in illusions and she lost, apart from her jewelry and money, the most priceless treasure--her life.

6. Conclusion

6.1. Summary of Characters’ Analysis--Connection between Society and Individual

Children ask more from parents than parents are able to give; best friends of a lifetime can offer only so much help, and no more. No one cares deeply about anyone else; all of them, however, recognize their distance from each other. Albee’s family is a divided, emotionally incomplete, and isolating social group (Hirsh 52). To put it another way, such is the basic unit of the contemporary American society, which supports accumulation of material goods and which

holds a noticeable working success in the highest possible regards (Life 155).

Albee's heroes have all failed in some fundamental way. They have betrayed the values to which, even now, they are capable of pledging an allegiance. They are human beings who became detached from a reality, as it disturbed them. They have sold out themselves not only for wealth or success, but for an untroubled existence; they wanted to preserve their own innocence. They were unwilling to recognize that pain is a natural result of a free existence. Instead, they have drowned their moral convictions in alcohol and a sterile intellectualism, as George has done in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, or they have simply permitted the slow disintegration of human responsibilities, as Tobias has done in A Delicate Balance. Albee shows the connection between a collapse of social structure and the failure on an individual level (Bigby 7).

If people are to survive as autonomous individuals in our contemporary, impersonal mass society and accept their responsibility toward their life and other people, they must strip themselves of all pretenses. Albee attacks our sophisticated society, which tries to evade the pain of real communication. "Words are used to sustain illusion, laughter to distract and to wound" (Bigby 8). Therefore, so many of Albee's characters deal with the refusal or the inability to communicate honestly . . . because communication is dangerous. It may open people up, which is terrifying to many (Kolin 198). Yet, Wolfgang Janke says that, first and foremost, it is speech which brings "being" into openness. "Where is speech, there is the world" (223).

Albee's plays are about raising one's consciousness. He himself celebrates Albert Camus's views concerning self-awareness:

Weariness comes at the end of the acts of a mechanical life, but at the same time it inaugurates the impulse to consciousness. It awakens consciousness and provokes what follows Everything begins with consciousness and nothing is worth anything except through it.

(The Myth of Sisyphus 10)

To raise one's consciousness, Albee is going resolutely against the O' Neill's "pipe-dreams". Albee believes that human imperfections and weaknesses must be freely confessed if the individual is ever to make a genuine attempt to establish a necessary relationship with those around him. If these truths are painful, they are also the only basis on which one can credibly begin the reconstruction of personal and social meaning (Bigby 8).

It does not mean that in Albee's drama, illusion would not be present. The action, however, often dramatizes the process of collapse. So, the attentive audience arrives at recognition of the reality behind illusion (Cohn 6). In other words, Albee says, "Have your pipe-dreams if you want to, but realize you are kidding yourself" ("An Interview" 38). Like European Absurdist, Albee has tried to dramatize the reality of man's condition, but whereas Sartre, Camus, Beckett, Genet, Ionesco, and Pinter present that reality in all its alogical absurdity, Albee has been preoccupied with illusions that screen man from reality (Cohn 6).

6.2. The Happiest Time of Life--Always Now

When is, then, the happiest time in one's life? A, the oldest says that the happiest moment is "coming to the end of it" where you can think "about yourself in the third person without being crazy . . . When it's all done. When we stop" (ll. 110). Taking this into consideration, Trenskey comes to the conclusion that while the first act is seemingly based on the cruel pagan ritual scheme of death and renewal, the second is based on the Jewish-Christian tradition. A, the weakest figure from the first act becomes the strongest; the strongest person of the first act, the most confident C becomes the weakest in the second act ("Resurrection" 154).

This essay started with a Greek-Jewish comparison of the attitude to life and will finish with a Jewish-Christian contemplation of life. A was the strongest, as

she, at the end of her life, understood the old truth of a Biblical man: he was bound to the dust, he was bound to death, and he was a creature of time, whose being was temporal (Irrational man 57). A understood that knowledge in her life could come only through living.

Unlike A, C is only at the beginning of her way through life. She makes a mistake and has to wait for some twenty years to reach the first real recognition. Jesus Christ said that we usually live in a state, which is like a kind of death, a state, in which we are only half-way awake. We live in our imaginations till the moment when something in our life rouses us from sleep. Only then, we perceive things far more objectively (Life 242-243).

When C finally reaches the age of fifty-two and becomes B, she says that the happiest time is now. She is old enough “to be a little wise, past being really dumb” (II. 108). In fact, it is Edward Albee who speaks: “You have to learn how to make sense of what you receive and go on educating yourself. I like to think I’m always educating myself--every day” (A Singular Journey 346). Thus, not to live in a death-in-life manner, Skynner suggests that we should not cling to the past. Instead, we should try to go with the main stream, accept everything what will come, make maximum out of our experience, live in a full play and cherish every minute of our life (Life 251). “What is, [then], the Edward Albee’s importance?” asks Bigsby and answers, “His importance is that he speaks and feels for the American moment that is now . . . “(75).

6.3. Albee’s Plays--Equipment for Living

Living is, naturally, never easy, says Camus (5). We have to accept the fact that to become a little wiser in life, one has to go through many different pieces of experience, and when the last piece is put into the imaginary mosaic, only then one can move a step forward in a psychological development. To support Skynner’s psychological statement, here is one of the oldest philosophical

truths, by which Albert Camus ended his book The Myth of Sisyphus:

But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the goods and raises rocks. He too concludes that all is well . . . Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night-filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy. (91)

This is the reason why Bigsby sees Edward Albee's work as a prophecy and a warning (8). In his plays, Albee leads the audience through a progression from Ignorance to Awareness. At least, one character in each of his plays experiences what Camus called a "definitive awakening". His plays have painful elements, but along with the pain there are positive statements concerning human experience. Albee says that if people pay attention, they will learn from it and possibly change ("An Interview" 42-43):

I don't write reassuring plays . . . I'm not interested in the kind of problems that can be tied in a bundle at the end of the third-act curtain. You walk out of that sort of play and all you can think about is where you parked your car. (Selerie 9)

Albee's work is a reflection of a sentimental view of ourselves and his characters are probably too close to our imagined picture of ourselves says Richard Schechner (Bigsby 62). Albee's characters, like the playwright himself, suffer from arrested development; they are the people who have had to create a "beanbag," who have had to hide their own insufficiencies and failures and now they are left to find their own way (Bigsby 67). In finding their own way of living, Albee's characters draw blood, but, as Bigsby says, "out of the ruins, presumably, new strength comes" (21). Therefore, according to Mathew Roundané, Edward Albee's plays may become "equipment for living" (Understanding 9).

Albee's plays aim to shock the audience out of complacency; his plays are a challenge to accept the human condition as it is, in all its mystery and absurdity. Therefore, even his most negative portrayals are handled with sympathetic

insight into the complex totality of human motivation, says Paolucci (10). He challenges his heroes to bear life with dignity, nobly, responsibly, simply because there are no easy solutions to the mysteries of existence. In short, Albee believes in the value and dignity of man. His heroes suffer, dwell in an absurd world, but realize the opportunity for growth and change (Understanding 4).

On the other hand, Albee offers no guarantee of order, comprehension, survival, or love. Whether each character takes advantage of powers of consciousness varies from play to play, but the point remains fixed: Albee's theatre consistently stages the possibility that his heroes, and perhaps the audience, through the process of engagement can become more honest with both their inner and outer worlds (Understanding 22).

Skygger explains that man's happiness depends on his ability to orient himself towards the reality and his own experience. He even says that the ability to face reality is the most important indicator of our mental health (Life 191). The healthier man is, the better he accepts the reality. In Albee's plays, the shedding of comforting illusions and of easy solutions may be painful, but once it is over, it leaves behind it a sense of freedom and relief (Understanding 24).

6.4. To Exist Means To Co-exist

In Life and How to Survive in It, Skygger explains the contemporary state of American society and says that the great success in life is to reach happiness in such an individualistic, yet impersonal and materialistically orientated society (181).

In the fifth chapter of Existenzphilosophie, "Existence and Love," Wolfgang Janke comes out of Gabriel Marcel. Janke says that who we are and what we are like is reflected in particular modes of our co-existence. What he wants to

say is that existence means, in fact, coexistence. He says that the original meaning of the word “coexisting” is based on the secret of love: “The real meaning of the word ‘exist’ is to be together with some ‘You’ on the remote origins of love” (151). Moreover, ex-istence is an ability to open one “self” up to other beings (Èerný 19). In our damaged world, this “coexistence” has, however, grown stiffen. Kùbler-Ross thinks hard about it:

If we could teach our students the value of science and technology simultaneously with the art and science of inter-human relationships, of total human care, it would be real progress. If science and technology are not to be misused to increase destructiveness, prolonging life rather than making it more human, if they could go hand in hand with freeing more rather than less for individual person-to-person contacts, then we could really speak of a great society. (On Death and Dying 18)

Èerný says that our fate is our lot. In other words, our fate was granted to us without asking for it. We are here, in the world, purely by chance; yet, we have a possibility of a choice: we can either compromise with our fate or we can put ourselves in the matter of life and death (51). In other words, we can choose a seemingly easier way of life, that a “death-in-life-manner” of living, or we can decide to participate in our life fully, deeply, and responsibly. In Existentialism and Human Emotions, J.P. Sartre explains the first principle of Existentialism: “man is nothing else but what he makes of himself. . . . Therefore, I am responsible for myself and everyone else” (<http://www.anselm.com>).

In conclusion, a great many people waste their life, as they do not think seriously about its finitude. A great many people do not realize that personal experience and acting on one’s own convictions are essential in arriving at the truth. In one of his innumerable aphorisms, Kierkegaard wrote that a lot of people are reaching the end of their lives like messy or confused school-boys: they cheat their teacher by cribbing results from the textbook instead of doing homework themselves (10). The meaning of Kierkegaard’s aphorism is exactly what thematically engages Edward Albee’s imagination:

I am very concerned with the fact that so many people turn off because it

is easier; they don't stay fully aware during the course of their lives, in all the choices they make: social, economic, political, aesthetic. They turn off because it's easier. But I find that anything less than absolutely full, dangerous participation is an absolute waste of some rather valuable time. . . . I am concerned with being as self-aware, and open to all kinds of experience on its own terms--I think those conditions, given half a chance, will produce better self-government, a better society, a better everything else. ("An Interview" 41)

¹⁾ A Delicate Balance – further referred as D.B.

²⁾ Edmund Husserl (1859 – 1938) was a German philosopher who founded Phenomenology (principal purpose is to study the phenomena of human experience). Like Heidegger, Pascal, and Kierkegaard, he reacted against an attempt to put philosophy on a conclusive rationalistic basis (<http://www.conect>). He proposed the methodological suspension of all judgements about the character and even about the existence of the objects of consciousness, in order to describe experience from the inside (<http://acnet.Husserl>).

³⁾ Positivist man and Existentialist man are offspring of the same parent epoch. Unlike Existentialism, Positivism together with Marxism are relics of the 18th century Enlightenment that have not yet come to terms with the shadow side of human life as grasped even by some of the 19th century thinkers themselves (Barrett 19).

⁴⁾ German philosopher, Martin Heidegger (1889 – 1976) stressed the decadence of the modern world, arguing that humanity "has fallen out of being." He traced this fall back to Greek philosophy. In the thought of the pre-Socratics, he found the only real understanding of being. By the time of Aristotle, that understanding was lost in the emphasis on human beings as rational creatures (<http://acnet.Heidegger>).

⁵⁾ Friedrich Nietzsche (1844 – 1889) was educated in theology and classical philology. Despite supposed influence on Nazism, Nietzsche has been the focal point in recent times of a new

departure in thought, one which refuses to accept the necessity of a relatively stable subject-object relation (<http://acnet.Nietzsche>).

⁶⁾ Søren Kierkegaard (1813 – 1855) was a Danish philosopher regarded as the founder of modern existentialism. He reacted against the systematic absolute idealism of the nineteenth century German philosopher G.W.F. Hegel, who claimed to have worked out a total rational understanding of humanity and history. Kierkegaard, on the contrary, stressed the ambiguity and absurdity of the human situation. The individual's response to this situation must be to live a totally committed life. Only the individual can understand this commitment; therefore, the individual must always be prepared to defy the norms of society for the sake of the higher authority of a personally valid way of life (<http://www.connect>).

⁷⁾ André Malraux (1901-1976) was a French writer of novels and letters. He was also active in politics and an enthusiastic traveller. His outstanding novels, which reflect the tumult of his time, are Man's Fate and Man's Hope. Amid violence and political chaos, Malraux's heroes struggle to maintain their dignity and humanity (<http://www.infoplease>).

⁸⁾ Barrett says that whenever a civilization has lived in terms of a certain image of man, we can see this image in its art. A Greek figure is not just a shape in stone but the image of man in the light of which the Greeks lived. The Roman head shows the face of the power and empire. The Christian face shows the humility of the earthly transfigured by the Divine. If we knew nothing at all about Taoism, we could still reconstruct from "Chinese Sung painting" what the Taoist felt about man and nature. And so it goes, he adds. What can be constructed from an image of our modern man?: "he is laid bare and cut up into bits" (53).

⁹⁾ Henri Bergson (1859 -1941) was a French philosopher and Nobel laureate, who advanced a theory of evolution, based on the spiritual dimension of human life. He emphasized the importance of intuition over intellect. His doctrine of intuition opened the way to personal experience. He was the first to insist on the insufficiency of the abstract intelligence to grasp the richness of experience and on the inner depth of the psychic life, which cannot be measured by the quantitative methods of the physical sciences (Barrett 13).

¹⁰⁾ In literature, one of the main features of the new techniques was the flattening of time, when past and present were represented as occurring simultaneously upon a singly plane of time. Secondly, it was the flattening of climax, and, finally, time became a reality. The temporal is the horizon of modern man, as the eternal was the horizon of the man of the Middle Ages. For example, the movement in Joyce's Ulysses is always horizontal, never ascending toward any crisis. In Faulkner's Sounds and Fury, Quentin Compson cannot escape time he is in. It is the time of his fate and his decision. Time is inescapable presence (Barrett 42-48).

In painting, new techniques brought the flattening of space, when near and far were pushed together. Next, large and small objects were treated as of equal value. The hierarchical scheme of the West has been abolished altogether. For example, following Cezanne, the Cubists took as subjects for their most monumental paintings ordinary objects like tables, bottles, glasses, and guitars. Later on, the painter dispenses with objects altogether: the colored shape on his canvas is itself an absolute reality: it can depict more than the imaginary scene, it can depict the great battle. Thus, Barrett writes that we arrive at last at "l'art brut" (raw, crude, or brute art). It seeks to abolish not only the distinction between the sublime and the banal but that between the beautiful and the ugly as well (Barrett 50).

¹¹⁾ There are several ancient traditions, which are combined in a new form in the Theatre of the Absurd. Firstly, it is the tradition of miming and clowning that goes back to the mimus of Greece and Rome, the Italian commedia dell'arte, and other popular forms of theatre, such as the pantomime or the music-hall in Britain. Secondly, there is the equally ancient tradition of nonsense poetry, the tradition of dream and nightmare literature that also goes back to Greek and Roman times, and to allegorical and symbolic drama, such as we find in medieval morality plays. Thirdly, there is the ancient tradition of fools and mad scenes in drama, of which

Shakespeare provides a multitude of examples, and even more ancient tradition of ritual drama that goes back to the very origins of the theatre where religion and drama were still one (Esslin 15).

Moreover, a form of drama concerned with dream-like imagery and the failure of language was bound to find inspiration also in the silent cinema, with its dream-like quality and cruel, sometimes nightmare humor. Charlie Chaplin's little man and Buster Keaton's stone-faced stoic are among the openly acknowledged influences of writers like Beckett and Ionesco. These comedians, after all, derive from the most ancient tradition of clowning, as do in the talking cinema Laurel and Hardy, all clearly part of the tradition which leads to the Theatre of the Absurd (Esslin 16).

Another direct and acknowledged influence is that of the Dadaists, the surrealists, and the Parisian avant-garde that derives from writers like Alfred Jarry and Guillaume Apollinaire. In France, the two leading exponents of surrealism in drama were Antonin Artaud and Roger Vitrac. Artaud coined the slogan "Theatre of Cruelty" for his conception of a theatre designed to shock its audience into a full awareness of the horror of the human condition (Esslin 17).

¹²⁾ Waiting for Godot – the play became the benchmark for Absurdist Theatre. Samuel Beckett's theatrical work explored "the self" that cannot know itself: it was the essence of the Theatre of the Absurd (<http://www.honors.unr.>).

¹³⁾ Martin Heidegger (1889 – 1976), like many existentialists, reacted against an attempt to put philosophy on a conclusive rationalistic basis. He argued that humanity finds itself in an incomprehensible, indifferent world. Human beings can never hope to understand why they are here; instead, each individual must choose a goal and follow it with passionate conviction, aware of certainty of death and the ultimate meaninglessness of one's life (<http://www.connect>). His most important work, Being and Time emphasises anguish and death; yet, Heidegger was concerned with these negative aspects of human existence because they shed light on the nature of being. He said that the prospect of death gives authenticity to human being (<http://acnet.pratt.Heidegger>).

¹⁴⁾ Albert Camus (1913-1960) was a journalist, novelist, and playwright. The themes of poverty, sport, and the horror of human mortality all figure prominently in his Algerian essays. During the Second World War, he published the main works associated with his doctrine of the absurd with his view that human life is rendered ultimately meaningless by the fact of death, and that the individual cannot make rational sense of his experience. He dealt with the themes of the alienated stranger or outsider. His work also includes ideas on moral responsibility (<http://www.sccs>).

¹⁵⁾ Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980) first gave the term existentialism general currency by using it for his own philosophy and by becoming the leading figure of a distinct movement in France that became internationally influential after the Second World War. His philosophy is atheistic and pessimistic; he declared that human beings require a rational basis for their lives but are unable to achieve one; thus, human life is a "futile passion." Nevertheless, he insisted that his existentialism is a form of humanism, and he strongly emphasised human freedom, choice, and responsibility. He, eventually, tried to reconcile these existentialist concepts with a Marxist analysis of society and history (<http://www.connect>).

¹⁶⁾ Karl Jaspers (1883-1969) was a German philosopher, one of the originators of existentialism, whose work influenced modern theology and psychiatry as well as philosophy. His philosophy is an effort to explore and describe the margins and limits of experience. He used the term "das Umgreifende," "the encompassing," to refer to the ultimate limits of being, the indefinite horizon in which all subjective and objective experience is possible, but which can never be rationally apprehended. Jaspers also wrote extensively on the threat to human freedom posed by modern science and modern economic and political institutions (<http://encarta>).

¹⁷⁾ Gabriel Marcel (1889 – 1973) was a French philosopher, dramatist, and critic. He was also a Roman Catholic theologian. Marcel's existentialism developed out of purely personal experience. The intimacy and concreteness of personal feeling taught Marcel the incompleteness of all philosophies that deal purely in intellectual abstractions. He saw philosophy not as formulation of a system but rather as a personal reflection on the human situation. He held that the philosopher must be engaged, or personally involved, because existence and the human person are more significant than any abstraction. Involvement must be with other persons. Marcel spoke of the development of the individual in person-to-person-dialogue (<http://www.factmonster>).

¹⁸⁾ Jean Genet (1910-1986) was a French writer, one of the leading figures in the avant-garde theatre. J.P. Sartre discovered his literary abilities. Genet was a social outcast, and spent most of his youth in prison. There he developed his personal credo: to harden himself against pain. Themes treated in his novels are conflicts between illusion and reality, life and death, good and evil, the strong and the weak, the old and the young, the conscious and the unconscious (<http://www.imagi>).

¹⁹⁾ Eugene Ionesco (1912-1994), father of "Theatre of the Absurd" was born in Romania. He was a fervent believer in human rights and a long-time foe of political tyranny. He had long campaigned from exile against the authoritarian regime of Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceausescu, who banned his plays (<http://cpcug>).

²⁰⁾ Genet's plays approach religious ritual and can be understood as sacred drama, through which the audience's deepest feelings are aroused by sharing in the theatrical ceremony. As with ancient Greek theatre or the Mass, the audience is offered the possibility of transformation as a result of participation. Genet is the inventor of a highly personal metaphoric imagery with a unique structure of mysterious relationships, analogies, extraordinary violence and cruelty that produce energetically rhythmic dramatic sequences. Generally, Genet's plays cultivate and denounce the stage illusion; they exude a strange ritualistic quality that successfully transforms life into a series of ceremonies and rituals that bring stability to an otherwise unbearable existence (<http://www.imagi>).

²¹⁾ Virginia Woolf – further referred as V.W.

²²⁾ New Carthage – Carthage meaning 'New City' was a famous city of the ancient world, situated on the north of African coast. Historically, the city became a rival power of Rome. There were the Punic Wars between the Romans and the Carthaginians in three phases from 265 to 146 B.C. At a later point, St Augustine called Carthage 'a cauldron of unholy loves.' These sex and power associations fit in with the New England society which Albee depicts (Selerie 14,20).

²³⁾ Oswald Spengler (1880 – 1936) was a German historian and philosopher. His major work, The Decline of the West, brought him world-wide fame. He maintained that every culture passes a life cycle from youth through maturity and old age to death. He believed that Western culture had proceeded through this same cycle and had entered the period of decline, from which there was no escape (<http://www.encyclopedia>).

²⁴⁾ Riddle-making is the tradition in Norse and Celtic mythology (Selerie 49).

²⁵⁾ Luigi Pirandello (1867 – 1936) was an Italian novelist and playwright, who got a degree in philosophy and philology. He wrote novels, short stories, and plays. His work contains the themes of madness, illusion, and isolation. The play that first brought him to prominence was Six Characters in Search of an Author. In this play, he introduces the design with which all his subsequent plays deal to a greater or lesser extent . . . the ambiguous relationship between reality and belief. Before his death, Pirandello stated:

When I am dead, do not clothe me. Wrap me naked in a sheet. No flowers on the bed and no lighted candle. A pauper's cart. Naked. And let no one accompany me, neither relatives nor friends. (<http://www.theatrehistory>. pirandello)

His plays and influence have extended to writers such as Beckett and Ionesco.

²⁶⁾ in English 'Beast'

²⁷⁾ in English 'Prostitute'

²⁸⁾ The famous American film star who specialised in roles that involve vitriolic wit – a posture which Martha characteristically adopts.

²⁹⁾ Selerie explains this expression as a malapropism for Bourbon. He says that presumably the boy has conflated Bourbon whiskey and Burgundy wine (20). In A Singular Journey, Mel Gussow, while describing the days of Albee's youth, also described a story connected to 'Bergin' story. When Albee was sixteen, a group of his friends went to a popular jazz club on Seventh Avenue. One of the teenagers in the group had apparently accidentally killed both his parents. When the boys ordered drinks, the young man fumblingly asked for "bergin" instead of "bourbon." "I'll have a bergin," he said, "Give me some bergin please . . . bergin and water." Albee and his friends laughed at the mistake. Eighteen years later in his first Broadway play, Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, Albee replayed that scene, transposing it to the 1930s Prohibition and making it a childhood memory of George (56).

³⁰⁾ The origins of drama are thought to lie in vegetation ritual, where a part of life is cut off to bring greater unity and health to the main body of nature. Ancient ceremonies in the Mediterranean world involved the worship of a being who represented the principle of growth, decay, and rebirth. Mythologists have called him the Year-Daemon or Vegetation Spirit. Such a ritual had regular phases. Firstly, a sacred combat between the old god (or king or hero) and the new. Secondly, the victim was literally or symbolically torn to pieces. Thirdly, a messenger delivers this news. Finally, lamentation and rejoicing by the onlookers. Further stages might be: the finding of the hidden or dismembered spirit; and his epiphany or resurrection. Dionysos, Osiris, Attis, and Adonis are all forms of the dying god; even Christ may be said to conform to this pattern. The Festival of Dionysos included rites of passage, celebrating stages in the growth of the individual and of society. Pain and happiness were always intertwined (Selerie 51).

In the twentieth century there have been attempts to reintroduce this ritual into drama. T.S. Eliot's The Cocktail Party is a notable example. Working from a less intellectual position and with different models, Antonin Artaud (1896-1948) has also brought back mysteries and rites to the stage. Significantly, he spoke of "an exorcism to make our demons FLOW" (Selerie 52).

³¹⁾ The former title should have been "Exorcism." Yet, it was again one evening in the bar, which caused that the play's title is Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?. Gussow wrote about it:

One of their favourite hangouts was Julius's on West 10th Street . . . and bar called the College of Complexes. Behind the bar . . . there was a large mirror, on which patrons would write slogans and messages with soap, "what they pleased," said Albee, "short of obscenity." On an evening in 1954, he noticed a graffito, "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" Placed there by an unknown hand, the line made Albee laugh. He said he "dropped it from mind." Actually he lodged it deep within his mind (87).

Resumé

„Filosofické a psychologické aspekty v díle Edwarda Albeeho“ je studií o hledání zdravé cesty životem v současném světě západní kultury, kde se význam jednotlivce jako člověka ztrácí v neosobní, anonymní a materialisticky orientované společnosti druhé poloviny dvacátého století.

Předmětem eseje jsou tři základní otázky. První hledá příčinu pocitu nenaplněného lidského života, zvláště, je-li přirozenou touhou každého jedince prožít život v lásce a spokojenosti. Druhá otázka se zabývá současnou orientací společností západní Evropy a Severní Ameriky. Třetí úkolem eseje je zkoumání smyslu lidské existence, a na příkladu her amerického dramatika a reálného představitele absurdního divadla Edwarda Albeeho, podání určitého návodu, jak uniknout způsobu života, který se nazývá jistým druhem smrti, přání můžeme jen napůl naživu.

Teoretickým podkladem pro detailní psychologicko-filosofickou analýzu postav, chování a mezilidských vztahů v Albeeho hrách jsou Irrational Man od Williama Barretta a Families and How to Survive in Them od amerického rodinného psychoterapeuta Robina Skynnera.

Úvod studie se věnuje filosofickému hnutí existencialismu, které prostřednictvím umění, literatury, dramatu a malířství, definuje pocity člověka v materialisticky zaměřené společnosti. Studie se pokouší nastínit historické příčiny vzniku takové společnosti, a to od samotného oddělení racionální části lidské bytosti od fyzické, které představili svět staří Řekové, přes Renesanci, protestantismus, kapitalismus a to až do moderní doby nejmodernějších technologií, masmédií a rychlého přenosu tzv.: informací z druhé ruky.

Studie se zároveň snaží vysvětlit vlivy takto silně materialisticky zaměřené společnosti na její základní jednotku--rodinu, a v konečné fázi na jednotlivce samotného. Pomíjí-li společnost, nepřijímá-li dostatečně o lidské podvědomí, které je nedílnou součástí lidské bytosti, způsobuje tak vytržení člověka

z kořenů samotné jeho existence, nebo násilně odděluje neoddlitelné: v domě od nevě domí. Stejně tak jako je vše provázané ve vnějším, člověk hmatatelném světě, je vše provázané v jeho vnitřním světě, který je zároveň i odrazem světa vnějšího.

Člověk k takové společnosti se pak zákonitě dává síť přirozených lidských pocitů, které však filosofie amerického „logického pozitivismu“ odmítá. Jsou to pocity ztráty původních jistot, osamění, nejistoty, strachu, v domě konečnosti vlastní existence či špatně prožitého života.

Tímto pocity se zabývá po druhé světové válce i absurdní divadlo. Hlavním tématem absurdního divadla je pocit odcizení a už od současného světa, který je chaotický, a který ztratil důležitější křesťanskou hierarchii hodnot nebo pocit odcizení ve vlastní rodině, nedůvěra, strach, předstírání a neschopnost čelit problémům a vyrovnat se s nimi.

Druhá část úvodu je proto v novaně hlavním rysem absurdního divadla, které myšlenky existenciální filosofie odráží. Existencialisté jako například S. Kierkegaard, J.P. Sartre, E. Husserl, K. Jaspers či A. Camus se v nich kterých zájmech, myšlenkách či v názorech lišili, ale spojovalo je přesvědčení, že svět a existence člověka v něm nemůže být racionálně objasněna. Navíc všichni zdůrazňovali důležitost vnitřního světa člověka a zajímali se o něj jako o prostředek k pochopení různých pohnutek, pocitů a chování člověka navěnek. Právě toto pochopení vede k lepší komunikaci mezi lidmi. Pro tyto učence slovo existence, znamenalo vlastní koexistence, neboli jak nejlépe komunikovat a existovat ve společnosti lidí.

Absurdní divadlo přináší do hry nové technické prostředky, kterými se snaží postihnout atmosféru nejistoty a strachu ve světě bez řádu po druhé světové válce. Tak nutí diváka přemýšlet o tom co vidí, co přitom cítí a divák se často s řešenými problémy na jevišti ztotožní.

Hlavními postavami her jsou často anonymní hrdinové, kteří mohou představit kohokoli znáš. Hry už nemají jasný úvod, logicky vystaví nový děj a závěr; zdánlivě náhodně někde začnou a zase skončí. Hry jsou situovány na velmi malém prostoru, aby vyjádřily atmosféru strachu. Jazyk je často použit pouze tak, aby zakryl hluchou mezeru mezi lidmi, a hlavně tak, aby se za pávalem slov zakryl skutečný psychický stav hrdinů.

V souvislosti s filosofií existencialismu, absurdní divadlo odhaluje vnitřní pocity postav, proto jsou hry plné nočních můr, fantazií, snů a představ. Ty jsou často nejednoznačné, proto mohou vyjadřovat několik různých pocitů v jednom okamžiku najednou, přesně podle potřeby diváka: ztrátu lásky, problémy v komunikaci, či problémy syna a matky.

Hlavní část studie je pak věnovaná detailní psychologické analýze postav. Hledání příčiny jejich chování a vysvětlení vztahů mezi jednotlivými členy rodiny je hlavním předmětem analýzy nejprve na obecné rovině, následně ve dvou hrách Edwarda Albeeho: Kdo se bojí Virginie Woolfové a Křehké rovnováze. V obou hrách, které byly napsány v šedesátých letech dvacátého století, Albee kritizuje negativní vliv materialistické společnosti na rodinu, falešné ideály pokroku, optimismu a víry v národní poslání. Zároveň poukazuje na narušené ideály americké společnosti, falešnou soudržnost a fyzickou dokonalost. Formuluje tak jeden z hlavních nedostatků soudobé americké společnosti a tou je iluze, neboli neschopnost člověka čelit jeho opravdové životní situaci v daných podmínkách, ve kterých žije.

Virginie Woolfová je ostrou kritikou společnosti, která je posedlá mýtem úspěchu, a která nechce uznat, že štěstí člověka nespočívá v jeho společenském či akademickém postavení, nebo dokonce ve výši jeho bankovního konta. Je to společnost, která vědomě obelhává člověka v tom, že jeho štěstí přichází zvenčí místo zevnitř. Je to hra o ztracených ideálech americké revoluce z doby prvního prezidenta George Washingtona a jeho manželky Marty. Je to hra o materialismu a oportunismu, které společnost

zabudovala do instituce manželství. Tak se zároveň Albee dostává na druhou rovinu, tou je psychologická analýza jednotlivce v rodině .

Virginie Woolfová a Křehká rovnováha jsou hry o iluzi a pravdi . Obě zdánlivě naplňují představu spokojeného a šťastného života v dobře vybaveném domě s velmi uspokojivým finančním zázemím. Přesto jsou to obě hry o citovém strádání, nedostatku lásky, zatvrzelosti, póze, předstírání, strachu, nejistoti , smrti, neochoti či neschopnosti převzít odpovědnost za svůj život, promarnění příležitostí a pasivním čekání.

Jsou to hluboké psychologické analýzy postav, jejichž současné problémy a hlavní neschopnost jim čelit a řešit je pochází z dětství. Jejich rodiče totiž trpěli podobnými nedostatky a tento kód--tyto specifické problémy typické pro rodinu, proto předali svým dětem. Jinými slovy, Albeeho postavy neprošli v dětství tolik potřebnými vývojovými stádii pro zdravý duševní vývoj, proto se mnohokrát v dospělosti chovají jako děti. Marta šišlá, Julie se vrací z neúspěšných manželství domů a hledá útěchu u rodičů, Tobias se chová, jakože se ho nic netýká a všichni, i nejbystřejší Claire, volí pasivní cestu životem.

Přesto Albee staví své postavy do situace, kdy jim nabízí náhradní zkušenost, která, přestože je velmi bolestivá, neboť končí dochází ve fyzické dospělosti, je-li využita, přenáší jedince z fáze adolescenta do fáze opravdové duševní dospělosti. Tedy do fáze, ve které si člověk musí plně uvědomit, že je jen to, co sám ze sebe udělá. Albee ani v této fázi opravdové psychologické dospělosti nezaručuje šťastný život plný lásky, ale dává šanci. Jak tuto šanci Martha a George, Julie či divák samotný využije, už nechává na nich.

Studie končí zamyšlením nad Albeeho pojetím společnosti, významem lidského života a rolí smrti. Sám Albee říká, že ten kdo nemyslí na smrt, nežije plným životem. Postava B, z Těch velkých žen říká, že nejšťastnější okamžik v životě je pokaždé „teď“. Jinými slovy k divákovi promlouvá Albee samotný, když říká, že nejraději má pocit, kdy ví, že se každý den něčemu novému naučí,

že získá novou zkušenost, jakkoli trpkou, protože právě a jen to vede ke zdokonalení jedince samotného, ke zdokonalení společnosti, ke zdokonalení všeho.

A takový je asi smysl lidského života, aneb jak říká Albeeho oblíbený autor Albert Camus v překladu Roberta Mertlíka:

Sisyfos nabírá dech a promýšlí svoji existenci, uěí se rozumět své absurdní svobodě . Ví, že jeho osud patří jen jemu, že skála je jeho vůcí a peklo přítomnosti jeho úší. Chápe, že jeho trýzeň je vyvažována revoltou proti bohům a láskou k životu 'on poznává, že vše je dobré Boj proti vrcholu dokáže vyplnit lidské srdce. Musíme si Sisyfa představit jako šťastného člověka. (Janke 93)

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