

ملخص

العنوان باللغة العربية: "مفهوم القسوة في مسرح إدوارد أولبي: دراسة لمسرحيتي من يخشى فيرجينيا وولف؟ و التوازن الرقيق".
العنوان باللغة الإنجليزية:

"The Concept of Cruelty in Edward Albee's Drama: A Study of Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? and A Delicate Balance."

يتناول هذا البحث مفهوم العنف والقسوة في مسرح الكاتب الأمريكي إدوارد أولبي (1928-) من خلال دراسة خاصة لمسرحيتي من يخشى فيرجينيا وولف؟ (1962) و التوازن الرقيق (1966). في البداية تقدم الدراسة خلفية عن مفهوم القسوة كما نادى به الكاتب الفرنسي أنطون آر تو وتأثيره على المسرح الحديث بشكل عام ، و اتفاق أولبي على ضرورة وجود مثل هذا المسرح حيث انه مناسب للتعبير عن متطلبات العصر الحديث وجذب جمهور المتفرجين إلى المسرح. ثم تستعرض الدراسة أعمال الكاتب وبعض الخصائص التي تتسم بها و الآراء النقدية المتعلقة بها. أما دراسة المسرحيتين المذكورتين فتوضح حرص الكاتب على تناول مفهوم القسوة واستخدامه للعديد من العناصر المرتبطة في الواقع المادي أو الخيال ، أو اللاشعور ، و ذلك لإثارة الرعب، و القلق، و القسوة، و العنف. و يتضح أيضا أن أولبي لم يقدم كثيرا من الأحداث أو الحبكة، حيث اهتم بما هو مثير و درامي و خاص، بهدف إقحام جمهور المتفرجين مع الحدث الذي يركز فقط على أمور محدودة و خاصة في حياة شخصياته، فيتركهم للتعبير عما يجيش في صدورهم من إحساس بالملل و القلق بلغة عادية من حوارهم اليومي و تتميز تلك اللغة المستخدمة بالجفاف ، و المادية ، و الخسونة و ذلك بهدف تصوير الجفاء و تلبد المشاعر الإنسانية كالحب و التسامح حتى بين ممن ينتمون إلى العائلة الواحدة ، بل بين الزوجين في كل من المسرحيتين السابقتين على وجه التحديد. إلى جانب ذلك، فإن معظم مسرحيات أولبي تتعرض لجرائم قتل إما حقيقية أو في خيال الشخصيات، فنلاحظ أن بيتر يقتل جيرري في مسرحية قصة حديقة الحيوان، كما يقوم المحامي في مشهد مثير ، صعب التفسير على جميع المستويات ، بقتل جوليان البريء في مسرحية الصغيرة أليس، بالإضافة إلى عدة جرائم قتل أخرى تشمل الأطفال وغيرهم ، و التي قد يحكى عنها بتداعيات أفكار بعض الشخصيات الذين يقومون بارتكاب جرائم قتل حقيقية أو وهمية من اللاشعور لتعبر عن رغبة في القتل .

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⁵³ Roudane, Understanding Edward Albee, Op. Cit., 109.

⁵⁴ Gerry McCarthy, Op. Cit., 82.

⁵⁵ Roudane, Understanding Edward Albee, Op. Cit., 103.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 104.

⁵⁷ Vincent Canby, Op. Cit., 3.

⁴⁰ Anne Paolucci, From Tension To Tonic: The Plays of Edward Albee (Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1972), 81.

⁴¹ Mel Gussow, "Edward Albee, Elder Statesman is in a State of Professional Reprise," The New York Times, Dec.1, 1993.

⁴² Edward Albee, Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? (London and N.Y.: Penguin Books Ltd.,1976), 36. (All subsequent references to the play will be taken from this edition and indicated in textual parentheses.)

⁴³ Peter L. Hays, Op. Cit. , 440.

⁴⁴ Denise Dick Herr, "The Tophet at New Carthage Setting in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?," English Language Notes XXXIII, 1 Sept. (1995), 63 – 71.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 64.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 65.

⁴⁷ Walpurgisnacht' is a pagan myth that refers to the night before the first day of May when all witches are supposed to gather and create havoc and nightmarish feelings. Its usage for the title of the second act would probably refer to the collapse of modern civilization.

⁴⁸ Denise Dick Herr, Op. Cit., 69.

⁴⁹ Vincent Canby, "An Albee Horror Story, Set in a Drawing Room," The New York Times, April 22, 1996.

⁵⁰ Edward Albee, A Delicate Balance; The Selected Plays Of Edward Albee (N.Y.: Nelson Doubleday, Inc., 1987), 200,201. (All subsequent references to the play will be taken from this edition and indicated in textual parentheses).

⁵¹ Ronald Hayman, Edward Albee (N.Y.: Frederick Ungar Publ. Co., 1973), 111.

⁵² Gerry McCarthy, Op. Cit., 81.

- ²⁶ Lee Raxandall, "The Theatre of Edward Albee," Tulane Drama Review 9,4 (1965), 19-40.
- ²⁷ Richard E. Amacher, Edward Albee (Boston: Twayne Publ., 1982), 183.
- ²⁸ Lucina Gabbard, "Unity in the Albee Vision," Edward Albee: Planned Wilderness, Op. Cit., 23,24.
- ²⁹ Lee Raxandall, Op. Cit., 29.
- ³⁰ Harold Bloom, ed., Edward Albee (N.Y.: Chelsea House Publ., 1987), 6.
- ³¹ Scotta Smith, "Edward Albee Speaks to Students and Staff," The Daily Trojan 135, 45 Nov.5, 1998. 12.
- ³² Lucinia Gabbard, Op.Cit. 23.
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- ³⁹ Michael E. Rutenberg, Edward Albee: Playwright in Protest (N.Y.: DBS Publ., Inc., 1969), 9.

¹³ Ibid., 81.

¹⁴ Roudane, Op. Cit., 12.

¹⁵ Samuel Weber, "The Virtual Reality of the Theatre, Media Theory and Psychoanalysis Sydney, Sept. 1996. 4.

¹⁶ "Antonin Artaud," Encarta Encyclopedia 1999. (Microsoft web page)

¹⁷ The term 'Absurd' was first used by Martin Esslin to identify the bulk of plays which appeared in France in the mid-1940s through the 1950s. He included such writers as Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, and Jean Genet. See, Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd, 3rd.ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980).

¹⁸ Ibid., 291.

¹⁹ Roudane, Op. Cit., 11,12.

²⁰ Ibid., 13.

²¹ Frederick Shroyer and Louis Gardemal, Types of Drama (Illinois: Scott, Foresman Co., 1970), 41,42.

²² Richard M. Coe, "Beyond Absurdity: Albee's Awareness of Audience in Tiny Alice," Modern Drama 18 (1975), 371-83. 372.

²³ Patricia De La Fuente, ed. Edward Albee: Planned Wilderness, Interviews, Essays, and Bibliography (Texas: Pan American Univ. Print Shop, 1980), 6.

²⁴ Edward Albee, "Which Theatre Is The Absurd One," The New York Times Feb.25, 1962.

²⁵ Matthew C. Roudane, "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?," Necessary Fiction, Terrifying Realities, Twayne's Masterwork Studies, 34 (Boston: Twayne Publ., 1990), 90.

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- ¹ Gerry McCarthy, Edward Albee (London: Macmillan, 1987) 2.
- ² Anonymous, "Albee To Hold Conversation with Audience," Yale Bulletin and Calendar 29, 8 Oct.27, 2000.
- ³ Joseph S. Pete, "A Delicate Balance Opens Today," Indiana Daily Student, March 24, 2000 (web page).
- ⁴ Terry Otten, "Played To the Finish, Coward and Albee," Studies in Humanities 6 (1977), 31-36.
- ⁵ For details about points of similarity, see Steven Gale, "Breakers of Illusion: George in Edward Albee's Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, and Richard in Harold Pinter's The Lover," Vision 1, i (1979), 70-77.
- ⁶ Peter L. Hays, "Child Murder and Incest in American Drama," Twentieth Century Literature 36, 4 (1990), 434 - 448.
- ⁷ Antonin Artaud, The Theatre and Its Double, Tr. Victor Corti (London: Calder and Boyars, 1974), 64.
- ⁸ Ibid., 64,65.
- ⁹ Ibid., 65.
- ¹⁰ Matthew C. Roudane, Understanding Edward Albee (South Carolina: Univ. of SC Press, 1987), 72.
- ¹¹ Edward Moore, "The Theatre of Cruelty and the Cinema of Safety," The Art of Pure Possibility Aug.25, 1997.
- ¹² Antonin Artaud, Op. Cit., 72.

elements include the costumes and the Lawyer's gun in Tiny Alice, the play and real shotgun of George and Peter in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, and The Zoo Story, and the invocation of cruelty through the consciousness of George and Tobias. By his use of real murder (i.e. Jerry's in The Zoo Story, Julian's in Tiny Alice, in addition to children's murders) and the imaginary murders, recalled from the consciousness of such characters as George and Tobias, Albee manages to give cruelty and violence their fullest expression.

reality, it seems that he solaces himself by having her killed in his subconsciousness.

In A Delicate Balance, Albee's general treatment of the concept of cruelty cannot be mistaken. Vincent Canby wonders: "what is this terror? It's a sudden loss of purpose and all sense of necessity: aimlessness made manifest."⁵⁷ The play ends with Agnes stating her ideas and beliefs exactly in the same way she started the action: "What I find most astonishing—aside from my belief that I will, one day ... lose my mind—but when?"(253) Now, Harry and Edna are gone, but the family will definitely remain loose because hostility and violence still dominate the lives of its members.

Apparently, the plays of Edward Albee are not overshadowed by plot events. Instead, they express feelings and sensations relating to terror and anxiety and force the audience into reacting and participating in what they view. Besides, most of the plays are structured in a way to invoke themes of distortion, cruelty, violence, and murder. Albee exposes modern realistic society and focuses on the language of materiality so as to give an impression of the dryness and insincerity of emotions. Also, in most of his plays, the dramatist implements other physical objective elements indicating terror such as: groans, fights, shouts, screams, guns, and murders. Such elements reflect Albee's intention to render the action as cruel as possible. Moreover, the dramatist employs other theatrical and dramatic elements that invoke ideas of violence and cruelty. These

just waiting till she could get down, and I said, "damn you, you like me; God damn it, you stop this! I haven't done anything to you." And I shook her; I had my hands around her shoulders, and I shook her ... and she bit me; hard; and she hissed at me. And so I hit her. With my open hand, I hit her, smack right across the head. I ... I hated her! (196)

Although Tobias is telling the story of a cat that he kept, there are many references that confuse the cat with his wife, Agnes, for he continues to narrate to Claire, in the presence of Agnes who seems to understand what really happened:

Tobias. ... And I hated her for that. I hated her, well, I suppose because I was being accused of something, of ... failing. But I hadn't been cruel, by design; if I had been neglected, well, my life was ... I resented it. I resented having a ... being judged. Being betrayed.

Claire. What did you do?

Tobias. I had lived with her; I had done ... everything. And ... and if there was a, any responsibility I'd failed in ... well ... there was nothing I could do. And, and I was being accused.

Claire. Yes; what did you do?

Tobias (Defiance and self-loathing). I had her killed.

Agnes (Kindly correcting). You had her put to sleep. She was old. You had her put to sleep.

Tobias (Correcting). I had her killed... (196, 7)

It may not be difficult to deduce that Tobias and Agnes understand well the story that Tobias is telling. It would in fact involve Agnes herself and her accusations of his physical weakness and impotence. And, when he insists that he had the cat killed it is only to lead Claire to confusion and distortion. If Tobias had not killed Agnes in

audience with terror. Roudane relates between the general state of terror in the play and Claire's own account:

The anxiety and wasted potential embodied in A Delicate Balance surface through the self government of the players. Claire seems the most honest, and perhaps the most perspicacious character despite her alcoholism. Her account of the terrors of her addiction, moreover testifies to an honest awareness of her personal form of terror.⁵⁶

By and large, Claire represents a whole generation of women who fail to find true love and refuge among family and relations. Her cruelty is a logical result of a general sense and a personal realization that "We're not a communal nation, dear," (221) as she explains to Julia.

The concept of cruelty is also evoked by Tobias, who seems to be, in many ways, a prototype that Albee finds pleasure in delineating. He does not differ much from other male characters like Peter, Daddy, or George; or the male guests like Jerry, Nick, and Harry. He enacts the sense of loss and desire for blood and violence both consciously and unconsciously. George's illusory desire to kill Martha, in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, is again repeated by Tobias who tells a story of his cruelty to a cat; a story that involves his subconscious or illusory desire to do the same with Agnes:

Tobias. ... She didn't like me any more. One night- I was fixed on it now—I had her in the room with me, and on my lap for the ... the what, the fifth time the same evening, and she lay there, with her back to me, and she wouldn't purr, and I knew: I knew she was

by shooting her sister, her niece, and herself. Because she seems to understand, in reality, what is meant by spiritual loss, she anticipates that Julia will soon arrive home after being divorced for the fourth time. Her desire to be killed is simply another expression of the desire to escape from reality for ever as she realizes that her weakness for alcohol achieves only temporary relief. However, Claire will not be able to decide if she really wants to be killed or not unless she sees Agnes killed first. She seems to love Tobias, and she may change her mind after he kills her sister:

Claire. Is Julia having another divorce?

Tobias. Hell, I don't know.

Claire (Takes the glass). It's only your daughter. Thank you. I should imagine—from all that I have ... watched, that it is come-home time.

(offhand)

Why don't you kill Agnes?

Tobias (Very offhand). Oh, no, I couldn't do that.

Claire. Better still, why don't you wait until Julia separates and comes back here, all sullen and confused, and take a gun and blow our heads off? ...

Agnes first—through respect, of course, then poor Julia, and finally—if you have the kindness for it—me?

Tobias (Kind, triste). Do you really want me to shoot you?

Claire. I want you to shoot Agnes first. Then I'll think about it. (186)

In spite of her cruelty, Claire may be regarded as a plain woman who expresses what she really feels honestly and this strikes the

and madness is significant in that it reflects different attitudes to escape from reality and its threats. Agnes will not accept the temporary means of alcohol by which her sister, Claire, solaces herself. She believes that insanity will be the proper solution:

Agnes. ... If all else should fail; if sanity, such as it is, should become too much. There are times when I think it would be so ... proper, if one could take a pill—or even inject—just ... remove.

Tobias (Fairly dry). You should take drugs, my dear.

Agnes. Ah, but those are temporary; even addiction is a repeated temporary ... stilling. I am concerned with peace ... not mere relief. And I am not a compulsive—like ... like some... like our dear Claire, say. (184)

There is no clear difference between Edna, the unexpected frightened guest, Agnes, the irritated host, Claire, the lost drunkard sister, or Julia, the nervous divorced daughter. All of them seem to be figures drawn to illustrate such cases of pathetic women who suffer from the cruelty of their community, feelings that they express by their awful sense of anxiety. This sense of anxiety, according to Matthew Roudane, “disturbs the characters’ sense of well being, forcing them to sense the precariousness of their being in the world.”⁵⁵ However, such expressions of anxiety on the stage function as direct references to the concept of cruelty.

Claire is an aggressive frustrated woman who finds delight in embarrassing her sister and pretending to commiserate with Tobias. Her cruelty appears in her suggestion that Tobias must free himself

Julia appears as a confused child. Though she is thirty six years old, she blunders herself into several failing marriages. She is troubled by her past recognition which appears now to diminish and frustrate her present views of father, mother, and every thing else in society. She comes home, but parental love, guidance, and advice turn out to a cruel sense of emotional rejection when she finds that Edna and Harry have already taken her room. Gerry McCarthy notes that this play is "coldly realistic," and that it "blends the demands of individuals with the poverty of relationships ... relationships of contemporary American society and its family."⁵⁴ Here, as in other similar plays, the purpose seems to make it clear that beneath the placid surface of relationships among the members of these families there are several shameful realities: lack of love, bored marriages, betrayals, impotence, emotional and spiritual loss, and disrespect.

It is only her sense of loss and restlessness that leads Agnes, at the opening, to admit: "I might very easily—as they say—lose my mind one day, not that I suspect I am about to, or am even ... nearby." (181) And, her husband's reply, "There is no saner woman on earth, Agnes," reflects his carelessness and cynicism. Agnes and Tobias and other couples are all burdened. Agnes is aware of this: "If I were to list the mountain of my burdens." (182) But, because they are incapable of identifying, confronting, or attempting practically to find out a solution for their problems, they resort to alcoholic drinks, the only refuge available. The talk about balance

secure refuge. The room in a family home would mean, as Claire explains, "Comfort.... Warmth. A special room with a night light, or the door ajar so you can look down the hall from the bed and see that Mommy's door is open." (220) The room in a family home symbolizes security, peace, and love, which both Julia and Claire seem to be really lacking. Commenting on this room symbolism, Matthew Roudane notes:

Julia's room stands as a last symbolic connection with some vestige of security. The strangers occupying the room overwhelm her; the tonal quality of her language—she begins talking as a child would, calling for "Daddy"—is indicative of her psychic vertigo, her collapse of nerve.⁵³

Therefore Julia undergoes critical moments of strain now, perhaps the pressure is much more than that caused by her fourth divorce. Eventually, she becomes distracted, and her outrageous manner will not be only against her mother, but she also frustrates her father by recalling memories from the past:

Julia (Rather wistful). When I was a very little girl—well, when I was a little girl: after I had gotten over my two-year burn at suddenly having a brother, may his soul rest, when I was still a little girl, I thought you were a marvel—saint, sage, daddy, everything. And then, as the years turned ... as the years turned—poor old man—you sank to cipher, and you have stayed there, I'm afraid—very nice but ineffectual, essential, but not really thought of, gray... non eminence. (207)

marriages simply because she is unable to understand the true meaning of marriage as a holy institution. Julia suffers from the usual sense of alienation, worry, anxiety, and distortion. Like all the characters in the play, she is lost and neither her family nor home does offer her love or tranquility. Therefore, when she finds out that Edna and Harry will probably stay with them and in her room, she becomes irritated and blasphemous:

Agnes. ... How are you my Darling?

Julia (Gathering energy). How is your darling? Well I was trying to tell you before you shut me up with Harry and Edna hiding upstairs, and ...

Agnes. ALL RIGHT!

Julia (Strained control). I will try to tell you, Mother—once again—before you you've turned into a man. ...

Agnes. I shall try to hear you out,...if I become uncomfortable...(Sees Julia marching toward archway as Tobias enters)... where do you think you're going?

Julia (Head down, muttered). ... you go straight to hell. ...

Tobias (Attempt at cheer). Now, now, what's going on here?

Julia (Right in front of him; force). Will you shut her up?

Tobias (Overwhelmed). Will I ... what? (205)

It appears from this conversation that the family ties between parents and daughter are characterized by a sense of disrespect, violence, and moral decadence. In fact, the matter of Harry and Edna taking Julia's room is not as simple as it may appear. But, on a deeper level, it may reflect that Julia has lost her private and most

create the illusion of the long friendship that ties them to Tobias and Agnes. Unfortunately, all illusions fall apart before the action ends. Tobias and Agnes are no different from these couples in many considerations; they share with the other couples the illusion of the dead child; they are also suffering from loneliness. They differ from the other couples in that they have a grown up daughter, but their daughter adds to their anxiety instead of giving them satisfaction and love.

The delicate balance is a terrible balance that reflects awful cruelty in modern American society. On the surface level it may appear as delicate, but in reality it is so broken out that Agnes struggles to keep it in proper shape: "I shall keep this family in shape. I shall maintain it; hold it." To this suggestion, Julia wonders: "But you won't attempt the impossible." (215) The family balance appears to be shattered immediately as the action starts and develops gradually with the appearance of Claire, Edna and Harry, and finally Julia. Julia comes home, a deeply hurt woman being divorced for the fourth time. Her furious tone alerts the audience. When Agnes compares her daughter's attitude, she regrets: "I don't recall if I ever asked my poor mother that," and continues to condemn the present with an implicit sense of gratification of the past values, "if they knew what it was like ... to be a wife; a mother; a lover; a homemaker; a nurse; a hostess, an agitator, a pacifier, a truth-teller, a deceiver..." (204) It seems that Julia has failed in her four

nothing) ... and then ... nothing happened, but ... (Edna is crying more openly now) ... nothing at all happened, but ...

Edna (Open weeping; loud). WE GOT FRIGHTENED.

(Open sobbing; no more moves)

Harry (Quiet wonder, confusion). We got scared.

Edna (Through her sobbing). WE WERE ... FRIGHTENED.

Harry. There was nothing...but we were very scared.⁵⁰

Apparently, Edna and Harry are frightened because of no definite reason or cause for fear. They were sitting peacefully at home; Harry, reading his French, and Edna, working with her needlepoint. Suddenly, they got frightened. Their fear can be regarded as “an embodiment of the suppressed fears of Tobias and Agnes, and granted a separate identity.”⁵¹ When Harry and Edna decide to seek peace at Tobias and Agnes’s home, their choice seems ironic for they seek refuge in an already threatened home; a home that “has not the emotional or moral resources to withstand the demands. It is balanced too precariously, and its energies are directed solely to preserving its own limited stability.”⁵²

Like Mommy and Daddy in The American Dream and George and Martha in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, Harry and Edna are isolated and impotent. To solace their loneliness each couple invents an illusion and accepts it. The first two couples invent an illusory image of a child who is dead or killed, but Harry and Edna

According to this notion, ancient Carthaginian parents sacrificed their sons to the gods in hope that they would be rewarded and compensated. If such a mythological concept was to be applied to the structural division of the acts in Albee's play, it would make some sense. Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? is divided into three acts entitled successively as: 'Fun and Games,' 'Walpurgisnacht,' and 'Exorcism.' In the first act, George and Martha play destructive and cruel games in front of Nick and Honey. Such cruelty develops in the second act reaching its climax which is expressed by the German term⁴⁷ used for the title. In this act, George and Martha talk about their sacrificed son. And, in the third act, the symbolic significance of their sacrifice appears as a means that "brings redemption to George and Martha ...Martha no longer blames only George for their barrenness; they talk quietly instead of fighting."⁴⁸

In his review of the play, Vincent Canby states that "A Delicate Balance is a horror story."⁴⁹ Again, the dramatist sets a middle-aged couple, Tobias and Agnes, to lead a battle of wills with Claire, Agnes's alcoholic sister, and Julia, their only daughter who comes home after failing in her fourth marriage. Their balance is further disturbed by the arrival of their best friends, Harry and Edna whose unjustifiable sense of fear strikes a note of terror on the stage:

Harry (Looks at Edna). I ... I don't know quite what happened then; we ... we were ... it was all very quiet, and we were all alone ... (Edna begins to weep, quietly; Agnes notices, the others do not; Agnes does

to New England – and begins to wonder what symbolic meanings are inherent in the setting.⁴⁴

Although the living-room setting of the play is supposed to be extremely realistic as it is in a house on the campus of a small college in New England, the uncertainty of the city of New Carthage and its location leads Herr to investigate its symbolic references. On the first level, it is noted that:

There is the allusion to the passionate love story of Dido and Aeneas. Martha, as the daughter of the college president who fell in love with the new history teacher, is somewhat like Dido, the Queen of Carthage who fell in love with the young traveler, Aeneas. Furthermore, the destructive nature of George and Martha's relationship echoes Dido's suicide at Aeneas's departure.⁴⁵

The first reference suggested by Denise Dick Herr and the equation of the destructive forces in the destiny of both couples (the destructiveness of the modern couple and the suicide of the ancient one) reflect an element of violence and cruelty expressed by the dramatist's use of symbolism. Having illustrated points of parallelism between the New Carthage setting of the play and the ancient Carthage, Herr concludes that:

Ancient Carthage was the scene of a tragic love story, a place condemned by St. Augustine, and a symbol of impending destruction. But most importantly, it is the site of a tophet – a child sacrifice precinct. Activities in the tophet at ancient Carthage parallel the climax of the play when George kills his phantom child ... child sacrifice was required in ancient Carthage... George and Martha's son must be sacrificed.⁴⁶

importantly, they aim to depreciate the respectable images of their fathers-in-law:

Nick: [Pause] My father – in – law ... was a man of the Lord, and he was very rich.

George: What faith?

Nick: He ...my father –in – law ... was called by God when he was six, or something, and he started preaching, and he baptized people, and he saved them, and he traveled around a lot and he became pretty famous... and when he died he had a lot of money.

.....
George: ...Martha's got money because Martha's father's second wife...not Martha's mother, but after Martha's mother died...was a very old lady with warts who was very rich.

Nick: She was a witch.

George: She was a good witch, and she married the white mouse...with the tiny red eyes. (68, 69)

The origin of Martha's money reveals her father as an opportunist and an exploiter. He did not only rob his wife's money, but has also "been robbing this place [his college] ... for years."(68)

It is not only through its plot development that Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? provides the essential motives of cruelty, but it also suggests another dimension through its dramatic structure. In a study of the play's setting, Denise Dick Herr notes that:

The action in Edward Albee's drama Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? takes place in a living room in New Carthage, somewhere in New England. Because the characters George and Martha repeatedly mention New Carthage (they do six times), the audience soon notices it is a strange name – a name relatively foreign

Probably, a state of hysteria had paralyzed the boy's rational awareness and most probably, too, he would be suffering for a number of years, if not to the rest of his life. Peter L. Hays doubts that the boy might have been George himself:

George also tells the story of shooting his mother with a shotgun by accident, and of killing his father by colliding with a tree while learning to drive, but we can not be sure whether these occurrences have any more reality than the fictional child. However, the fact that the events are twice-told – once by George as about another...then by Martha as something funny in the past...something not fictional – suggests that George really did kill his parents.⁴³

Although there is no real evidence in what Hays claims to support his assumption, it remains baffling however that George becomes uneasy whenever Martha refers to their son, and frequently assures her not to mention anything about this son to the guests. The mystery of George and Martha's son will continue to be unresolved, but if this murdered child is real or illusory, the murder will be a reminder of the sense of cruelty experienced by the parents.

Another expression of cruelty is given in the attitudes and cynical visions of the Ph.D. faculty members: George and Nick. When they are left alone, they find pleasure to unveil to one another and to the audience as well, the shameful facts about the sources of their wives' money. It is not only the sense of boredom and falsehood, or loveless marriage that they reflect, but more

becomes a reminder of Virginia Woolf's themes and narrative technique that George employs on several occasions to give various cruel scenes. In the Second Act, for example, while giving a drink to Nick, the drink reminds George of a terrible accident which he relates to his guest:

George [at the bar, still]: When I was sixteen and going to prep school...a bunch of us used to go into New York on the first day of vacations.... And one time, in the bunch of us there was this boy who was fifteen, and he had killed his mother with a shot gun some years before- accidentally, completely accidentally, without even an unconscious motivation... and this one evening this boy went with us, and we ordered our drinks, and when it came his turn he said, I'll have bergin...give me bergin, please ...bergin and water. (61)

This cruel experience of the young boy killing his mother with a shotgun is subsequently associated, in George's mind, with what happened to the boy the following summer. While he was driving, and his father sitting on the front seat beside him, the boy swerved suddenly to avoid an animal and drove into a large tree. The boy was not killed, but George relates again to Nick:

George: And in the hospital, when he was conscious and out of danger, and when they told him that his father was dead, he began to laugh, I have been told, and his laughter grew and he would not stop, and it was not until after they jammed a needle in his arm, not until after that, until his consciousness slipped away from him, that his laughter subsided...stopped. (62)

been... and he stumbled back a few steps, and then
CRASH, he landed... flat... in a huckleberry bush!
[Nick laughs. Honey goes tsk, tsk, tsk, tsk, and shakes
her head.] (40)

Martha's cruelty and aggressive nature make her feel triumphant
when she makes the guests laugh at her husband, but suddenly when
she and the guests are unaware,

[George enters now, his hands behind his back. No
one sees him... George takes from behind his back a
short-barrelled shotgun, and calmly aims it at the back
of Martha's head. Honey screams... rises. Nick rises,
and, simultaneously, Martha turns her head to face
George. George pulls the trigger.]

George: POW !!!

[Pop ! From the barrel of the gun blossoms a large red
and yellow Chinese parasol. Honey screams again...]
You're dead! Pow! You're dead! (41)

Apparently, the scene does not embody real murder, yet it is
significant as a dramatic device that strikes terror and frightens the
characters as well as the audience. It may be also a reflective
expression of George's inner desire to get rid of Martha in reality:
"Did you really think I was going to kill you, Martha?... Well, now,
I might ...some day." (42)

Different forms and expressions of cruelty, violence, murder, and
asylum seem to brood over the whole action. As soon as the action
starts, Martha, drunkenly unaware of what she says, sings: "Who's
Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" instead of "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad
Wolf." It is not only used as an idea for the play's title, but it also

academic intellectual background, they exchange insults and accusations which gradually develop to embody all sorts of violent behavior. To reveal the extent of anxiety and boredom they live in, Martha, being heavily drunk, takes the lead and stirs the sense of bitterness and woe they mutually share in their life. She begins by unveiling George as a complete failure in his academic career:

Martha:....George is bogged down in the History Department. He's an old bog in the History Department, that's what George is. A bog.... A fen.... A. G. D. swamp. Ha, ha, ha, Ha! A swamp! Hey, swamp! Hey swampy! 42

George tries to control his nerves so as to avoid an early clash with his wife in front of their guests. But as they cannot bear this kind of life any longer, they begin to fight with one another, partly about the color of their son's eyes, and about other trivial matters which became intolerable in the course of time. In addition to George's relentless satire and disrespect to his father-in-law, describing him as 'red-eyed,' and as 'a little mouse,' he also shakes the audience with sudden fear as he breaks a bottle against the wall. Before the first act ends, George and Martha play a most frightening and violent scene. Martha recalls a scene from the past and relates to Nick and Honey how she knocked him down in a boxing match she had with him upon her father's request:

Martha: ... and George wheeled around real quick, and he caught it right in the jaw...POW! [Nick laughs.]... and he was off balance... he must have

Again, in this play, Edward Albee continues “the destruction of individual illusion ... an exploration of modern man’s very real sense of isolation and estrangement from society and his God.”³⁹

The action of the play concerns a number of cruel people whose drives in life seem too complex to understand. Anne Paolucci describes the character of The Lawyer:

His task is cruel, his tactics impersonal. He is the most unattractive member of the trio. His cold efficiency has colored all his relationships. Butler’s judgment is painfully accurate: “I watch you carefully—you, too—and it’s the oddest thing: you’re a cruel person, straight through; it’s not a cover; you’re hard and cold, saved by dictation; just that.” He enjoys inflicting cruelty and is at his best in the confrontation with Julian.⁴⁰

Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, Albee’s masterpiece and most celebrated work, “earned the Tony Award and New York Drama Critics Circle prize as best play of the year, and... would have won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama were it not for a censorious Pulitzer board.”⁴¹ Conveying much of the potentials of cruelty, the play continues to reflect Albee’s observation of the individual relationships in modern American society. Its action is full of shouts, groans, and surprising dramatic movements. Such expressions of violence are magnificently manipulated from the beginning to the end. The action concerns a married couple: George, a Ph.D. faculty member in the Department of History, and his wife, Martha, the daughter of the University President. In spite of their

exasperated by Grandma who frustrates her attempts to put her away in a nursing home. Grandma is a militant old woman who still keeps her spirit from the good past. Unlike Mommy, and Mrs. Barker, Grandma has most of the qualities that would identify her with the values and traditions of the past. Commenting on her role, Ervin Beck writes: "in the dehumanized, alienated society of Mommy and Daddy's apartment in which she lives, she alone bears the standard of benevolent humanism for which America has always stood."³⁷ Although Grandma reverts gradually to cruelty, as it seems to be the natural influence of Mommy's behavior, she remains the unique figure who symbolizes the old humanistic American Dream. The action ends ironically with Grandma going away, while Mommy and Daddy accept The Young Man (a symbol of the modern materialistic American dream) as a substitute for their dead adopted child that Mrs. Barker had brought to them twenty years before. The Young Man, being the identical twin of the murdered child, reflects the theme of cruelty and dehumanization. Mommy accepts him, most probably, on the ground of his physical strength and power.

Tiny Alice (1964), is a horribly violent play in which the dramatist illustrates a variety of themes depending on a confusion between illusion and reality. Immediately after it was premiered in 1964, Elliott Norton considered the play as "big and brutal as an Elizabethan tragedy, sinister and blasphemous as a black mass, more depraved than any drama yet produced on the American stage."³⁸

what has always been implicit in the playwright's works: life must be defined by the inescapable proximity of death."³⁴ In Fragments (1993), Albee does not provide a plot, but mere segments of ideas, stories, and impressions expressed by eight characters who sit in a semi circle on a bare stage. According to David Richards, the play "obeys no conventional emotional logic," and when the characters interact together, Richards adds, "it is generally to ask for a clarification or to provide a footnote to the subject at hand."³⁵

Albee employs several ideas and conventions of cruelty in The American Dream through his severe attack on the artificial social appearance of twentieth century Americans. He harshly criticizes their choice of deceiving themselves and accepting a dazzling image or a dream. He admits that this play is:

an examination of the American scene, an attack on the substitution of the artificial for real values in our society, a condemnation of complacency, cruelty, and emasculation and vacuity, a stand against the fiction that everything in this slipping land of ours is peachy-keen. 36

In this play, Mommy and Daddy are revealed as a sterile couple representing an average American family. Both are bored and boring. Their conversation at the beginning reflects their cruelty to one another as they reveal mutual disinterest, sterility, loneliness, and spiritual loss. Daddy complains and Mommy suffers, but they both reflect a deep sense of superficiality. Mommy becomes

develop in his sub conscious and he begins putting them on paper only after a long gestation in his thoughts”³¹ While, The Zoo Story conveys a sense of alienation and disillusionment, The Death of Bessie Smith (1959) explores American race relations. With The Sandbox and The American Dream, the dramatist, in a semi-absurd method, explores “images of family discord, focusing on the ‘bad’ mother and an initially passive father.”³² Seascape (the dramatist’s second Pulitzer Prize winner, 1975) combines both theatrical experiment and social critique. Albee’s dramatic production includes the following plays: Listening (1975), Counting the Ways (1976), The Lady From Dubuque (1978), Another Part of the Zoo (1981), The Man Who Had Three Arms (1982), Finding the Sun (1983), and Marriage Play (1987). Handling Albee’s favorite theme of family ties, Marriage Play introduces a couple : Jack and Gillian, after 30 years of marriage. They have grown more and more tedious as they express their restlessness, anxieties. Alvin Klein notes that Jack and Gillian are “rarefied specimens jointly defeated in an unending semantic war, with their identity and humanity crushed.”³³ In Three Tall Women, (the third Pulitzer Prize winner in 1991), Albee introduces a different dramatic experiment. The three tall women (actually they are one woman in three different stages) of the play are : A, B, and C, ageing 92, 52, and 26 years respectively to represent three different age ranges, and three different views to life. By these women, Albee, according to Ben Brantley, “reinforces

Jerry's violence and his strategy are like those of American urban juvenile gangs. The gang members feel themselves outcasts; with no other outlets, they run to destructive but significant acts. Two gangs battling for a turf are struggling for something that, like the park bench, in reality can "belong" to neither. And while they, like Jerry, may dislodge Peter with their knives, the victory is Pyrrhic – that is symbolic.²⁹

Jerry appears to illustrate torture and rebellion. His violent methods and attempts to win Peter's sympathy turn out to frighten Peter. Before the play ends, Jerry plays a striking scene of cruelty which Harold Bloom describes:

Screaming with the fury of a fatally wounded animal, Jerry begins his final moments, attempting to tell Peter and the audience just what happened at the zoo, yet failing to do so, because he himself does not quite know what happened to him there. Though he speaks the language of annunciation... his only revelation to Peter, and to us, is that: "it's all right, you're an animal. You're an animal too."³⁰

As they cruelly develop such a desire to wound and hurt the feelings of one another, these two men reflect Albee's intention to expose how American people have become and what brought them to such a frightening and saddening state.

Throughout his dramatic career, Albee has reflected a profound interest in theatrical styles and subjects. The subjects of his plays, "are not limited to his own experiences," Scotta Smith notes, "but often have a great deal of invention...his characters and plays

American Dream's images of deformity and mutilation balance Virginia Woolf's images of humiliation and murder."²⁸

From The Zoo Story to A Delicate Balance, Albee reveals people as uneasy, reckless, and unstable because they lack spiritual refuge and comfort. Their search for genuine and meaningful substance in a materialist world will end in futility. They have opinions but they do not really express or support profound convictions (i.e. George and Nick, in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, are Ph.D. university members who dramatize the moral and intellectual vacuum and sterility). People do not love one another because they do not often love themselves. Agnes and Tobias, in A Delicate Balance, George and Martha, in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, are couples who illustrate an awful sense of boredom of marriage life powerfully and tragically. In spite of the much talk about humanity and love, they feel separate and isolated. It is obviously their sense of insecurity and anxiety that leads the two men, Peter and Jerry, in The Zoo Story, to mistrust one another and fail to communicate with or understand one another. When they are put under the pressure of loneliness, insecurity, and misinterpretation of one another's move, hostility appears dominant in both men's attitudes. Quickly, the action turns to violence as Peter, the good citizen, kills Jerry because of the latter's unjustifiable and inexplicable aggressive attitude. Commenting on this scene, Lee Raxandall writes:

are definitely interrelated and cohesive from play to play; the heart of his technique is an archetypal family unit, in which the defeats, hopes, dilemmas, and values of our society (as Albee sees it) are tangibly compressed.²⁶

In his character portrayal, Albee is keen to manipulate ideas and themes of cruelty and violence. He introduces different types of people belonging to different social strata, who astonishingly reflect similar concepts of degeneration, moral loss, and sterility. Richard E. Amacher states that: "This sense of loss evinces itself in his characters... all have failed in some fundamental way. This sense of loss gives thematic unity to much of Albee's work."²⁷

In The American Dream (1960), Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? (1962), and other plays like The Sandbox (1959) and A Delicate Balance (1966), there are many identical and interrelated points: bored married couple at mutual difference, dead or murdered children, and outsiders who come and visit the married couple. The visitors are, in many ways, counterparts of their hosts and their function appears to emphasize apparent themes of spiritual loss, cruelty, and loose family ties in modern American society. Significantly, Lucina P. Gabbard elaborates the points of identical cruelty in Albee's plays as she notes that two of Albee's plays "are filled with verbal violence—accusations and recriminations. The

a meaning in whatever they say or do. Besides, when his work was first classified as absurd, the dramatist himself stated:

I don't like labels; they can be facile and lead to non-think on the part of the public. And unless it is understood that the playwright of the Theatre of the Absurd represent a group only in the sense that they seem to be doing something of the same thing in vaguely similar ways at approximately the same time—unless this is understood, then the labeling itself will be more absurd than the label.²⁴

Albee believes that his plays were structured on different methods and it was some particular need that imposed that kind of method. It is therefore, an oversimplification to label any dramatist's work under one category as far as the dramatist employs more than one dramatic style in one or more plays.

In spite of their various dramatic structures, most of Albee's plays provide reason and logic. His settings, as Matthew Roudane notes, are "grounded in everyday variable reality."²⁵ In reality, it should be noted that most of the people are not so venomous or wicked, but there are some points of reserve about their behavior which arouse different paradoxical feelings and emotions. In most of his plays, Albee introduces a consistent image of what he thinks as the average American character. The backgrounds of his plays depend, most entirely, on a modern American vision of the complexities and worries. Besides, his characters, as Lee Raxandall notes,

Indeed, the dramatist admits some kind of influence, but he is unaware if it is a conscious or unconscious influence. In an interview with Patricia De La Fuente, Albee states:

My first experience with Beckett, Genet, Ionesco, Sartre, and Camus— going back further even, my first experience with Gide was a powerful influence... [but] I am not conscious much of anything in the sense that when I read a book or see a play... I don't recall the experience a week afterwards. It vanishes into my head, and then I'll discover twenty years later that a character of mine will have figured something out based on something that I had read twenty years ago. So I don't retain things. And so I'm never aware whether I'm being consciously influenced by something or not.²³

However, Albee's theatre may not be entirely classified as absurd, because his plays, most often, provide logical and realistic characters; an aspect that most absurd dramatists avoid. His plays provide logical meaning and apprehension even though it may be difficult or symbolic. Also, he differs from Beckett, Genet, or Pinter, in the sense that he does not, in most of his plays, present man's condition as hopeless, or odd in his attempts to make sense for himself in a senseless world, like Estragon and Vladimir in Samuel Beckett's Waiting For Godot, or Mr. and Mrs. Smith in Eugene Ionesco's The Bald Soprano. It is true that the characters of Mommy and Daddy, in Albee's The American Dream (1960), reflect many of the qualities that may characterize them as absurd, yet they provide

Albee's literary career started when he was twenty when he left home and moved to New York, where he tried a variety of jobs including attempts of writing stories and poems. However, it was only in the year 1958 when The Zoo Story was first premiered in Berlin, and later in New York, that Albee was able to achieve success and reputation as a famous dramatist. In the 1960s, Albee introduced the most representative bulk of plays that dealt mainly with American life and society during the second half of the twentieth century. The debut of The Zoo Story and its success came around the time the European absurd plays of Samuel Beckett, Jean Genet and Harold Pinter were thought to have had an impact on the American theatre. On the grounds of his unconventional dramatic expressions, structures, and plot developments, Albee was thought to be influenced by the European absurd theatre. He is plainly classified by Frederick Shroyer with absurd dramatists: "At the periphery of the movement are several playwrights, among them Edward Albee, who employs Absurdist views and techniques in some of his plays."²¹ This is also assured by Richard M. Coe who notes that Albee's absurdist themes are:

the failure of verbal communication; the falsity of apparent reality; the inability of human beings to discern meaning in the world or purpose in their lives. But Albee attempts to manifest these themes by portraying realistic characters striving to fit their lives into meaningful patterns.²²

In many ways, Edward Albee is one of the modern dramatists whose plays reflect that overriding influence of Artaud. The essential themes in Albee's plays have much in common with the themes and concepts Artaud sought. In his attempt to involve the audience in his dramatic action, and the other dramatic methods he employs to force them into participation, Albee admits the Artaudian influence:

In nine or ten of my plays, you'll notice, actors talk directly to the audience. In my mind, this is a way of involving the audience; of embarrassing, if need be, the audience into participation. It may have the reverse effect.... But I am trying very hard to involve them. I don't like the audience as voyeur, the audience as passive spectator. I want the audience as participant. In that sense, I agree with Artaud: that sometimes we should literally draw blood. I am very fond of doing that because voyeurism in the theatre lets the people off the hook.¹⁹

Albee's attempt to involve his audience in the dramatic action aims at making them capable of developing a specific experience that exceeds mere entertainment or passive reaction. Besides, the impact of Artaud on Albee's dramas is obvious in Albee's employment of different shapes and aspects of violence; physical and psychological; visionary and illusory. In an interview with Matthew C. Roudane, Albee states: "all drama goes for blood in one way or another.... And sometimes the act of aggression is direct or indirect, but it is always an act of aggression."²⁰

figure involved. But Artaud does not stop there. For “psychology”, as he uses the term, does not just designate the state of mind and soul of individual human beings or subjects: it goes further.¹⁵

Obviously, Artaud’s theory of cruelty meant to enable the audience project their feelings and sensations beyond the usual limits of time and place. In this way, they would be capable of developing a powerful perceptual experience out of what they watch on the stage.

Artaud’s theory of the theatre of cruelty must have influenced the appearance of several dramatic trends and expressions throughout the mid years of the twentieth century. In his The Theatre and its Double, Artaud “describes theatrical modes ... [which] became identifying traits of the ensemble theatre movement, the theatre of the Absurd, and the environmental and ritual theatre.”¹⁶ Artaud’s theory might have been of a particular impact on the absurd theatre¹⁷ because the absurd plays reacted against familiar theatrical conventions and rejected the logical assumptions of character, plot, and language. This theatre, according to Martin Esslin, appeared as an expression of “the tragic sense of loss at the disappearance of ultimate certainties.”¹⁸ Probably, Artaud’s concept of cruelty must have had a wider influence on modern drama and theatrical performances in general.

necessarily directly, the state of unrest and duplicity of life. The subjects and themes of the theatre of cruelty must correspond to the chaotic state of the modern times, and this theatre, Artaud notes, "does not intend to leave the task of revealing man or life's contemporary myths to the cinema."¹³ Instead, it should find out more convenient modes of theatrical expressions so that theatre can keep its audience and its interesting position. According to Matthew C. Roudane, Artaud's propounded means for cruelty:

was the primary ingredient that could generate an apocalyptic revolt within the audience—an audience which Artaud viewed as the bourgeois Parisian who expected realistic performances. But it is important to recognize that his theories extolling aggression and violence were grounded more in the cerebral and metaphysical than in the merely physical.¹⁴

The dramatic representation of such violence may take any possible expression to reflect the inner and the outer reactions and senses. Further, Artaud's concept of cruelty continued to interest drama scholars and critics during the last decade of the twentieth century. Samuel Weber, for example, studies the traditions of Artaud and juxtaposes them to the classical traditions of Aristotle:

The juxtaposition of Artaud and Aristotle allows us to see what is distinctive in the Theatre of Cruelty. What Artaud condemns is not simply narrative as such, but the kind of narrative that Aristotle himself would have condemned: that which sacrifices action to character. What Artaud condemns is a theatre that "recounts psychology", i.e. that tells stories whose unity derives from the structure of character, of the individual

The concept of cruelty was then thought of as a means to restore a conclusive and particular concept of life to the theatre.

One significant aspect of the theatre of cruelty, according to Artaud's assumptions, was concerned with language and dialogue. Although he did not want it to "do away with dialogue," he still wanted to "find new ways of recording this language, whether these ways are similar to musical notation or to some kind of code."¹⁰ Therefore, the theatre of cruelty demanded a specific use of language and dialogue that would cope with the themes and ideas of cruelty. Edward Moore notes that: "the language of Artaud's theatre is a language of materiality, of the present body..."¹¹ It is also clear that Artaud's theory laid more emphasis on other theatrical conventions which concentrate on and reflect, through different possible expressions, the agitation and unrest of the modern time. For this purpose, Artaud suggests that:

Every show will contain physical, objective elements perceptible to all. Shouts, groans, apparitions, surprise, dramatic moments of all kinds, the magic beauty of the costumes modeled on certain ritualistic patterns, brilliant lighting, vocal, incantational beauty, attractive harmonies, rare musical notes, objective colours, ... surprising objects, masks, puppets many feet high, abrupt lighting changes, the physical action of lighting stimulating heat and cold, and so on.¹²

The objective of the theatre of cruelty is to give enough freedom for the implementation of more theatrical conventions and technical devices to express, consciously or unconsciously, but not

distinguishing dramatic aspects of the writer and introduce different shapes of violence and cruelty which seem to be a dominant aspect characterizing the sense of worry and anxiety of modern family life.

The potential ideas of cruelty as a concept in drama have been first considered, and advocated in the dramatic theory of the French dramatist Antonin Artaud (1869 –1948). In The Theatre and Its Double (1938), Artaud calls for a theatre that would move the audience and stir them into action, as he notes: “our sensibility has reached the point where we surely need a theatre that wakes us up heart and nerves.”⁷ This theatre was to be known as the theatre of cruelty, and Artaud believes that this kind of theatre has become urgently required in order to give an adequate expression of the chaotic modern times:

In the anguished catastrophic times we live in, we feel an urgent need for a theatre that is not overshadowed by events, but arouses deep echoes within us and predominates over our unsettled period ...[a] theatre which upsets all our preconceptions, inspiring us with fiery, magnetic imagery and finally reacting on us after the manner of unforgettable soul therapy. Everything that acts is cruelty. Theatre must rebuild itself on a concept of this drastic action pushed to the limit.⁸

Such a “drastic action,” advocated by Artaud, must introduce everything as in real life with all its contradicting themes; love and hatred, war and peace, tranquility and terror. Precisely, he demands that this action be a “full scale invocation of cruelty and terror.”⁹

The interest in studying the dramatic works of Edward Albee (1928 -) has grown out of a realization of the dramatist's popularity and the success he achieved throughout his dramatic career. In a short time, this dramatist has become "second to none in the United States ... and his first full-length play was a smash hit on Broadway."¹ He has been also described "as the successor to Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams and Eugene O'Neill."² Moreover, Christopher Wixon, the director of the March and April 2000 production of Albee's A Delicate Balance (1966), notes that the dramatist's "subtle characterization and skillful, unique language, make him the equal to Chekhov and Shakespeare."³

One enigmatic quality of Albee's work has been the fact that the dramatist remains controversial and baffling. He is read, enjoyed, and his work is paralleled to the work of Noel Coward.⁴ His treatment of the absurd illusions makes him also akin to Harold Pinter.⁵ He is also compared to such dramatists as Eugene O'Neill and Sam Shepard, and the basic point of the comparison is that these writers introduce "characters in drama [who] sacrifice their children, their future, in an attempt to preserve their present."⁶ Therefore, the present study will be an attempt to explore Albee's dramatic work and examine his treatment of the concept of cruelty as reflected in most of his plays. Particular emphasis will be given to Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? (1962) and A Delicate Balance as these two plays, apart from being successful prize winners, reflect the most

The Concept of Cruelty in Edward Albee's Drama
A Study of Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? and
A Delicate Balance

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Title: "The Concept of Cruelty in Edward Albee's Drama: A Study of Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? and A Delicate Balance."

Abstract

This paper is an attempt to study the concept of cruelty in the drama of Edward Albee (1928 -) with particular reference to who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? (1962) and A Delicate Balance (1966). It starts with giving a backdrop to introduce the concept of cruelty as it was first advocated by the French dramatist Antonin Artaud, and the influence it has had on modern theatre and drama. Further, it will generally survey the dramatist's most representative work and give an overall review. Then, the study focuses on the plays mentioned to examine the dramatist's handling and implementation of the elements and ideas of cruelty. It will be made clear that Albee has almost used all possible elements, physical and illusory, to invoke ideas of terror, anxiety, cruelty, and violence. In addition to his concern to involve the audience in the action, Albee does not seem to be much interested in plot action, and this aspect meets the demands and principles of Artaud's theory. Instead, Albee focuses on some specific and confusing realities in the lives of his characters, within or outside the limits of time and place, and the characters express these issues in their regular daily discourse. He also uses materialistic language to reflect the dryness and lack of human emotions of love and tolerance among the people belonging to the one family. Besides, in most of the plays, Albee's expression of cruelty mounts up to include murders, actual or imaginary. Peter Kills Jerry in The Zoo Story, The Lawyer Kills Julian in Tiny Alice. Children are also killed in most of the plays. Other murders are brought about on the stage by the true killers or by characters who suppress their desire to kill.