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A Rhetorical Analysis of Edward Albee's *Tiny Alice*

Carolyn B. Curry
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by

Carolyn B. Curry

August, 1972

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CHAPTER I

THE BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

A difference of opinion exists today among the many branches of knowledge as to what constitutes the proper study of mankind. Since it is not always expedient nor desirable to subject living persons to laboratory experiments, "models" have been devised to study man. For many years lower forms of life have been studied and the resulting data applied by means of analogy to the behavior of man. More recently, man has been compared to the various "input-output" systems of machines. However, to be applicable to human behavior such models or analogies must account for the fact that human beings create and use symbolic communication systems which are called languages. The significance of this study lies in the observation that man is a social animal, differing from other animals in his ability to create and use language. Thus a proper study of mankind must give consideration to man's use of language in relation to his cultural and social environment. The most effective method yet devised by man for social control has been his persuasive use of language. Throughout recorded history man has used persuasive-language arts in discussion, debate, drama, and in religious ritual to convince his fellow man to

follow his leadership. These "modes of persuasion"¹ are the foundation for a rhetorical study.

Since the end of persuasion is said to be action, and persuasion through art is one of man's most useful tools for change, the statement of the American dramatist Edward Albee concerning his purpose in writing becomes germane:

. . . when I write a play, I'm interested in changing the way people look at themselves and the way they look at life.²

Since Albee's stated purpose is change, his discourse should be persuasive. Whether or not this is true is, as yet, one of the unanswered questions that this study has proposed for answer.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Background. Edward Albee's twelve years as a professional playwright have been exceptionally productive--ten original plays, three adaptations, the book for a musical comedy, and a libretto for an operetta.

That Albee has earned the right to be called one of America's foremost playwrights is evident. His dramaturgy

¹Aristotle, The Rhetoric, trans. W. E. Ross (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), p. 1394a.

²Guy Flatley, "Edward Albee Fights Back," The New York Times, April 18, 1971, p. 10B.

has earned the Berlin Festival Award, 1959, and Foreign Press Association Award, 1961, both for The Zoo Story and The Death of Bessie Smith; Vernon Rice Memorial Award, 1960, and Obie Award, 1960, and Argentine Critics' Award, 1961, all for The Zoo Story; Lola D'Annunzio Award, 1961, for sustained original playwriting; New York Drama Critics' Circle Award, Outer Circle Award, Antoinette Perry (Tony) Award, Foreign Press Association Award, Saturday Review Drama Critics' Award, and Variety Drama Critics' Poll Award, 1963-64, all for Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?; and the Pulitzer Prize, 1967, for A Delicate Balance.³ In addition to these honors, in 1966 he was elected to membership in the National Academy of Arts and Letters, and he is a member of P. E. N. and the Dramatists' Guild.

Concurrent with these plaudits, however, the considerable invective of his work has characterized it as "equivocal,"⁴ and "obscure"⁵ in meaning. While some critics have stated, or implied, that the true meanings of his plays are

³Publishing data for all of Albee's plays is included in the bibliography and will not be indicated by footnote references, except where specific page references are made.

⁴Henry Knepler, "Edward Albee: Conflict of Tradition," Modern Drama, 10:277, December, 1967.

⁵Harold Clurman, "Tiny Alice Hughie," The Nation, 200:65, December, 1967.

EXPLICATION OF RHETORICAL METHOD

The following is an explication of the eclectic method of rhetorical analysis which has been used as a frame of reference for this critical study of dramatic literature.

Review of the literature. Any system of literary analysis which is classed as "rhetorical" must begin, and probably should end, with Aristotle's The Rhetoric.⁹ Approximately twenty-three centuries have elapsed since Aristotle wrote his treatise and, yet, it is still definitive and meaningful for scholars today. It is not within the scope of this paper to present a digest of Aristotle's work since this is easily available from the original source. Library shelves are filled with volume after volume of philosophical systems and methodologies which accept Aristotle's work as a starting point.

Insight into the background of rhetorical criticism is provided in histories of literature and criticism. Notable in this field is Speech Criticism, by Lester Thonssen, A. Craig Baird, and Waldo W. Braden,¹⁰ which

⁹Aristotle, op. cit.

¹⁰Lester Thonssen, A. Craig Baird, and Waldo W. Braden, Speech Criticism (Second edition; New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1970).

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traces origins of rhetorical theory and sets forth standards of judgement. Also in this category is Edwin Black's Rhetorical Criticism A Study in Method,¹¹ which includes an exposition of the principles of neo-Aristotelian criticism.

In this century the rationale for rhetorical criticism of literary works was fully set forth by Hoyt H. Hudson's "The Field of Rhetoric"¹² in 1923 and Herbert A. Wicheln's "The Literary Criticism of Oratory"¹³ in 1925. A definitive restatement was offered in 1953 by Donald C. Bryant entitled "Rhetoric: Its Functions and Its Scope."¹⁴

Other than Bryant, contemporary writers of note in this field are the Belgian philosophers Chaim Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, authors of a two-volume work in French entitled: The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation,¹⁵

¹¹Edwin Black, Rhetorical Criticism A Study in Method (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965).

¹²Hoyt H. Hudson, "The Field of Rhetoric," Quarterly Journal of Speech Education, 9:167-180, April, 1923.

¹³Herbert A. Wichelns, "The Literary Criticism of Oratory," Studies in Rhetoric and Public Speaking in Honor of James Albert Winans (New York: Century Publishing Co., 1925) pp. 181-216.

¹⁴Donald C. Bryant, "Rhetoric: Its Functions and Its Scope," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 39:401-424, December, 1953.

¹⁵Chaim Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation, trans. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver (Notre Dame, Inc.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969).

and the American philosopher, Kenneth Burke. Burke's works include: Philosophy of Literary Form, A Grammar of Motives, and A Rhetoric of Motives.¹⁶

Rhetoric Defined. The term "rhetoric" has been given various meanings through the centuries since the time when Aristotle defined it as "the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion."¹⁷

Since rhetoric is a dynamic, rather than a static, method, it is natural that other writers through the years have ascribed new meanings to the word and that connotative meanings have evolved through use of the word in the language. The classic Roman theory of rhetoric--Cicero's and Quintilian's--was the "art of making winning speeches in law courts, or later in public exhibitions."¹⁸

Other definitions often cited are: "the study of figures of speech," "the study of Freshman English or composition," "empty language used to deceive," "stylistic language," "artificial elegance of language," "the art of

¹⁶Kenneth Burke, Philosophy of Literary Form (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951); A Grammar of Motives (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1945); A Rhetoric of Motives (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1950).

¹⁷Aristotle, Op. cit., 1355b, p. 595.

¹⁸Bryant, Op. cit., p. 404.

expressive speech or discourse," and "the art of writing well in prose."¹⁹

Modern theorists extend the meaning of rhetoric simply to "the art of speaking and writing effectively,"²⁰ or "those discourses, spoken or written, which aim to influence men."²¹ Crediting the general use of the medium of printing for this contemporary excursion into the literary field, Bryant says that "the agitator, the teacher, the preacher, the weilder of public opinion has used the press quite independently of the platform."²²

In this modern tradition is Bryant's functional definition of rhetoric which has been adopted as definitive for this study:

... rhetoric, or the rhetorical, is the function in human affairs which governs and gives direction to that creative activity, that process of critical analysis, that branch of learning, which address themselves to the whole phenomenon of the designed use of language for the promulgation of information, ideas, and attitudes.²³

¹⁹Bryant, Op. cit., passim.

²⁰Virgil L. Baker and Ralph T. Eubanks, "Democracy: Challenge to Rhetorical Education," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 46:73, February, 1960.

²¹Black, Op. cit., p. 15.

²²Bryant, Op. cit., p. 407.

²³Bryant, Op. cit., p. 412.

Definitions of other terms. If "rhetoric" consists of "the whole phenomenon of the designed use of language for the promulgation of information, ideas, and attitudes,"²⁴ then a "rhetor" is a writer or a speaker whose purpose is to communicate, in Bryant's words, "information, ideas, and attitudes." This act of communication can best be understood by the construction of a verbal-pictorial model which includes many synonymous terms in current use in communication theory.

COMMUNICANT	---->	COMMUNICATION	---->	COMMUNICANT
SENDER	---->	MESSAGE	---->	RECEIVER
ENCODER	---->	SYMBOL	---->	DECODER
		SIGNAL	---->	
RHETOR	---->	RHETORIC	---->	AUDIENCE
Speaker				Listener
Writer				Viewer
				Reader
Rheatorician				Critic
(Philosopher, Teacher, Student)				

These terms are often used interchangeably, i.e. a rhetor's message may be received by a reader.

One additional concept must be understood in connection with communication theory. The "field-of-experience," or "frame-of-reference," of a communicant includes those items of information, ideas, attitudes, opinions, and values

²⁴Bryant, Op. cit., p. 412.

which have been derived from his environment or cultural climate. This concept is highly significant to the understanding of the meanings of messages. If the fields-of-experience of the communicants in no way overlap, any signal sent by an encoder is most likely to be misinterpreted by the decoder.²⁵ When the encoded symbol is very general in nature, ambiguity may arise in the decoding process if the communicants do not share the same "fields-of-experience."²⁶

Webster's Dictionary has defined ambiguity as:

. . . the intellectual or emotional interplay or tension resulting from the opposition or contraposing of apparently incompatible or contradictory elements or levels of meaning in a . . . literary work; especially; the opposition or contradiction of two or more meanings inherent in one word or symbol or in a consistent set of metaphoric or symbolic words.²⁷

In short, ambiguity is "obscurity," or "uncertainty," arising particularly from "indistinctness"; or as "capable of being understood in two or more possible senses."²⁸

Hugh Holman offered a straightforward definition when he said that ambiguity was: "The expression of an idea in

²⁵The concept of ambiguity is given additional treatment pp. 10-15.

²⁶Wilbur Schramm, "How Communication Works," The Process and Effects of Mass Communication (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1955) p. 6.

²⁷Philip Babcock Gove (ed.), Webster's Third New International Dictionary (Springfield, Massachusetts: G & C Merriam Company, Publishers), 1966.

²⁸Ibid.

language of such a nature as to give more than one meaning and to leave uncertainty as to the true significance of the statement." Elucidating, Holman has asserted that:

Ambiguity may be intentional, as when one wishes to evade a direct reply . . . in literature of the highest order may be found another aspect of ambiguity which results from the fact that language functions in art on other levels than that of communication, where ambiguity is a cardinal sin . . . One of the attributes of the finest poets is their ability to tap what I. A. Richards has called the "resourcefulness of language" and to supercharge words with great pressures of meaning. The kind of ambiguity which results from this capacity of words to stimulate simultaneously several different streams of thought all of which make sense is a genuine characteristic of the richness and concentration that makes great poetry.²⁹

Wayne C. Minnick writes that "ambiguity occurs whenever a word or a series of words is subject to more than one reasonable interpretation."³⁰ He points out that in verbal communication the individual does not deal with objective reality but with symbols that merely stand for real things as well as for abstract concepts which have no real existence. For effective communication, the communicant, speaker or writer, must select and arrange symbols which have a

²⁹William Flint Thrall, Addison Hibbard and C. Hugh Holman, A Handbook to Literature (Revised edition, New York: The Odyssey Press, 1960), pp. 10-11, passim.

³⁰Wayne C. Minnick, The Art of Persuasion (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1957), p. 71.

Minnick offers no explanation for his use of the limiting adjective, reasonable; later, in redefining the word, he omits this qualifier.

certain meaning for him and transmit them to his audience. Plainly, if the meaning perceived by the audience is not the same as that intended by the communicant, an ambiguity occurs.

Almost all verbal symbols are ambiguous to some degree; this enables us to talk about a variety of things, in general, where a particular thing is meant or where no particular thing is meant. Particular meanings are usually inferred from the context. Minnick observed five types of ambiguity: ordinary ambiguity arises because the communicator does not make clear in the context which of several meanings of a term he intends, or because he uses terms unknown to an audience; occult ambiguity arises when the communicator uses a term for which he stipulates a meaning at variance with the common meaning; connotative ambiguity arises when the communicator uses a term that has a connotative meaning at variance with the intended meaning; subjective ambiguity arises when the communicator uses, without amplification, terms whose meanings are subjectively determined; and behavioral ambiguity which arises when a term is expressed by the communicator in such a manner that the audience is uncertain of its meaning.³¹

A communicant is often deliberately ambiguous. Minnick contends, "to avoid making his real views known on an issue." The proverbial "fence-straddler" hopes that his

³¹Minnick, Op. cit., p. 72.

statements "will be assigned one meaning by one faction and another meaning by another." Sooner or later, however, he must make his views clear, if he is to be taken seriously by advocates with explicit views on meaningful questions.³²

In his article entitled "The Language of Criticism," Weller Embler credits William Empson with the introduction of the word "ambiguity" into the technical vocabulary of criticism.³³ Empson has discerned seven types of poetical ambiguity: (1) linguistic words or structures which are effective in several ways at once; (2) alternative meanings which are ultimately resolved into one meaning by the author; (3) two seemingly unconnected meanings which are given in one word simultaneously; (4) alternative meanings which act together to clarify an author's complicated state of mind; (5) the confusion caused by a simile which refers imperfectly to two incompatible things and shows the author discovering his idea as he writes; (6) a statement which is so contradictory or irrelevant that the reader is forced to invent his own interpretation; and (7) a statement which is

³²Minnick, Op. cit., p. 84.

³³Weller Embler, "The Language of Criticism," Ect.: A Review of General Semantics, 22:268, September, 1965.

so fundamentally contradictory that it reveals a basic division in the author's mind.³⁴

Empson questions how far unintended and unwanted meanings are imposed upon communicants in spite of their efforts to prevent it. He sees past experiences and past judgements as the moving forces toward the reception and interpretation of poetry and drama. He alleges that "critics have long been allowed to say that a poem may be something inspired which meant more than the poet knew";³⁵ thus it is possible for the truly great poets and dramatists to write meaningfully for unborn generations and critical interpretation will then be made in terms of the frames of reference, experiences, and judgements pertinent to the era in which the criticism is given.

Other than the use of the word "reasonable" in Minnick's definition no exceptions have been taken with any of the authorities cited in this dialogue concerning the meaning and use of the term ambiguity. In the interest of clarity and brevity, however, the following pronouncement from Empson has been taken as definitive for the purpose of this paper:

³⁴William Empson, Seven Types of Ambiguity, (Third edition, Norfolk, Connecticut: James Laughlin, 1953), pp. 1-256.

³⁵Empson, "Preface to the second edition," Op. cit. p. xiv.

An ambiguity in ordinary speech means something very pronounced, and as a rule witty or deceitful . . . in an extended sense . . . [it is] any verbal naunce, however slight, which gives room for alternative reactions to the same piece of language. . . .³⁶

Method of Study. The method of approach used in this study has been that of rhetorical analysis. Historically, Edwin Black notes three major approaches to rhetorical criticism in this country: (1) the movement study, in which a single program or policy is studied from inception until public discourse on the issue is ended; (2) the psychological study, which traces relationships between the rhetor's personal life and his rhetorical activities, and; (3) the most often used--neo-Aristotelian study, which applies the canons of classical rhetoric--particularly that of Aristotle--to rhetorical discourse.³⁷ This neo-Aristotelian method forms a broad base for the eclectic method, explicated below, which has been used for this study.

"Rhetorical discourses," Black states, "are those discourses, spoken or written, which aim to influence men."³⁸ Whether the purpose is realized or not, the discourse is rhetorical if the effort to influence is made.

³⁶Empson, Op. cit., p. 1.

³⁷Black, Op. cit., pp. 18-19.

³⁸Black, Op. cit., p. 15.

Basic to any system of rhetorical criticism is Black's postulate that:

. . . there will be a correspondence among the intentions of a communicator, the characteristics of his discourse, and the reactions of his auditors to that discourse.³⁹

He further posits that:

. . . If there is no correspondence between the characteristics of a discourse and the reactions of auditors to it, then communication is impossible.⁴⁰

This view has been accepted as the point of departure for this study and a rhetorical analysis has been made from the standpoint of: (1) the intentions of Edward Albee, dramatist, as rhetor; (2) the rhetorical characteristics of Albee's discourse; and, (3) the reactions of Albee's audience to the discourse.

These interactive criteria indicate that the discourse itself is not the only source of evidence of communicative purpose. Evidence of intent to communicate may be found in "the authors own testimony, or the testimony of someone who knew his mind," Black avers, "or some aspect of the situation in which the discourse appeared that made the persuasive intent mandatory."⁴¹

³⁹Black, Op. cit., p. 16.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Black, Op. cit., p. 17.

The rhetorical characteristics of discourse are those strategies which indicate the rhetor's attitude or thematic approach to the situation, and the stylistic devices he uses to modify or sustain the situation.⁴²

In defining re-creative criticism, Black cites Theodore M. Green when he said " . . . to re-create a work of art is to apprehend the content which its author actually expressed in it, i.e. to interpret it correctly as a vehicle of communication."⁴³ Thus, the focus has now been turned toward the reaction of the auditors to the discourse. What were the reactions of the audience to the discourse? Did the audience--the auditors--apprehend and correctly interpret the vehicle as an act of communication?

If interpretation is the function of the auditors of rhetorical discourse, what is the function of the rhetorician and/or of neo-Aristotelian criticism? Black, again, speaks from a knowledgeable position:

Rather than seek an interpretation of the discourse that realizes all that is in it . . . the neo-Aristotelian critic attempts to make an estimate of the historically factual effects of the discourse on its relatively immediate audience.⁴⁴

⁴²Virginia Holland, "Rhetorical Criticism: A Burkeian Method," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 36:444-445, October, 1950.

⁴³Theodore M. Greene, The Arts and The Art of Criticism (Princeton, N. J.: 1947), p. 371, cited by Black, Op. cit., p. 43

⁴⁴Black, Op. cit., p. 48

In the case of the dramatist, then, "immediate audience" consists not only of those auditor-viewer-critics who witnessed the action of the drama, but it also consists of those auditor-readers who confront the discourse and offer an impressionistic interpretation of the drama as literary work-of-art.

The sources of critical materials used in this study were impressionistic reviews of the theatrical event found in newspapers and magazines following the initial New York productions of the plays studied. Interpretative essays and in scholarly books and journals which dealt with the plays under consideration were also examined.

In studying audience reactions, reference has been made to a thesis by Donald Ellis which is a critical reception study of all of Albee's professional New York productions from The Zoo Story (1960) through Malcolm (1966). The basic question to which Ellis addressed himself was whether the critics praised or condemned Albee's drama in terms of the development of the Aristotelian precepts of: plot, character, thought, diction, music, and spectacle. No conclusions were drawn concerning the interactions of the neo-Aristotelian concepts of writer-discourse-audience.

In studying Albee as rhetor, all interviews with Albee cited in the bibliography for this study have been consulted

as well as his own interpretative writings. Reference has also been made to Michael E. Rutenberg's Playwright in Protest which was the only book-length study of Albee extant. Rutenberg's thesis is that Albee is a playwright whose major concern is dramatic presentation of social protest. The original texts of the plays have also been examined.

The modus operandi for the study was as follows: the critical and interpretative materials, along with the personal materials on Albee, were gathered and studied. This cursory study of the materials generated the hypothesis and the rhetorical analysis was then made in an effort to support the generalization.

Edward Albee's play Tiny Alice has been chosen for this study primarily because it is Albee's most controversial work. While some critics laud it as his best, or most meaningful, drama, others are busy condemning it, unequivocally, as his worst play. It cannot be said that this play is representative of all of Albee's work, but it does contain in combination many of the characteristics singularly observable in his other plays: ideas grounded in discourse or dialogue rather than propelled by action; abstract and symbolically drawn characters; myths, metaphors, and symbols which carry ambiguous meanings because they are not grounded in reality; and unclear, or ambiguous, thematic meaning. Because of these shared characteristics, this analysis of Tiny Alice

will aid in illuminating the meaning of Albee's other work.

Although this study has centered around Tiny Alice, much reference has been made to three of Albee's other plays:

The Zoo Story, The American Dream, and Who's Afraid of

Virginia Woolf? Albee's work is a personal, private work, a statement of one's individual pleasure or pain.¹ With his personal Albee wrote five short plays, between 1955 and 1961, Albee won international repute as one of America's most promising dramatists. These early plays: [The Zoo Story (1955), Box (1956), For and Yet (1958), The Death of Beale Smith (1959), and The American Dream (1960)] find their themes in the breakdown of interpersonal communication in the modern world, the evils inherent in conformity, and the substitution in society of false values for real ones.

In addition to these one-act plays, Albee has now returned the American stage six full-length works in which he has developed his treatment of character and theme: Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? (1962), considered by many critics to be his best play, the winner of six awards and nominated for a Pulitzer Prize; The Ballad of the Sad Cafe (1963), his adaptation of a novella by Jerome McGUIRE;

¹Edward Albee, "Preface," The American Dream and the Zoo Story (New York: The New American Library, 1963), p. 53.

CHAPTER II

EDWARD ALBEE, RHETOR

In his preface to The American Dream, Edward Albee wrote: "Every honest work is a personal, private yowl, a statement of one's individual pleasure or pain."¹ With his personal statements in five short plays, between 1959 and 1961, Albee won international repute as one of America's most promising dramatists. These early plays: [The Zoo Story (1960), The Sandbox (1960), Fam and Yam (1960), The Death of Bessie Smith (1960), and The American Dream (1960),] find their themes in the breakdown of interpersonal communication in the modern world, the evils inherent in conformity, and the substitution in society of false values for real ones.

In addition to these one-act plays, Albee has now offered the American stage six full-length works in which he has deepened his treatment of character and theme: Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? (1962), considered by many critics to be his best play, the winner of six awards and nominated for a Pulitzer Prize; The Ballad of the Sad Cafe (1963), his adaptation of a novella by Carson McCuller;

¹Edward Albee, "Preface," The American Dream and The Zoo Story (New York: The New American Library, 1963), p. 53.

Tiny Alice (1964), his most controversial play; Malcolm (1964) a play based on a James Purdy novel; A Delicate Balance (1966), the winner of a Pulitzer Prize; Everything in the Garden (1967), an adaptation of an English play by Giles Cooper; and All Over (1971), his latest play which was received with mixed critical acclaim. He has also collaborated with James Hilton, Jr. on the libretto for an operetta, "Bartleby" (1961), a musical adaptation by William Flanagan of Herman Melville's story, "Bartleby, the Scrivener"; the scenario for "Breakfast at Tiffanys" (1966), a musical adaptation of the original play; and two short plays performed together in an experimental-contrapuntal score, Box and Quotations from Mao Tse-Tung (1968)².

As indicated in his quotation at the beginning of this chapter, Albee writes from a personal point of view; therefore, some knowledge of his personal life is necessary for an understanding of his work. In short, to know Edward Albee, the playwright, it is necessary to know Edward Albee, the man.

²The indicated dates are those of the New York openings except in the case of Fam and Yam, which opened in Connecticut and was never produced by Albee in New York; and "Breakfast at Tiffanys," which premiered in New York and closed without opening. Data for the published plays is included in the bibliography, and will not be indicated by footnote reference, except where specific page references are cited.

This explication has been made on three levels: biographical data, character revealing statements that other people have made about Albee, and statements made by Albee which reveal his rhetorical motivation, the direction, and the purpose--or intent--of his work.

Michael E. Rutenberg's book, Edward Albee: Playwright in Protest³ is noticeably sketchy in its biographical content and has been severely criticized for its failure to observe the autobiographical implications inherent in Albee's plays.⁴ A secondary intention of the biographical section of this chapter has been to note these comparisons.

Research on the biographical data revealed an interview with Whitney Balliett, in which Albee recounted the story of his early life. In a second interview with Balliett, three years later, Albee brought the story up to date.⁵ Another original, and later source, was Thomas B. Morgan's report; this has also been used extensively.⁶ Many

³Michael E. Rutenberg, Edward Albee: Playwright in Protest (New York: DBS Publications, Inc., 1969).

⁴Murray Hartman. "Book Reviews," American Literature, 41:617, January, 1970; and T. C. Burtt, Jr., "Book Reviews", Drama and Theatre, 7:241-242, Number 3, 1969.

⁵Whitney Balliett. "Albee," The New Yorker, 37:30-32, March 25, 1961; and "Albee Revisited" The New Yorker, 40:31-33, December 19, 1964.

⁶Thomas B. Morgan. "Angry Playwright in a Soft Spell," Life, 62:90-97, May 20, 1967.

of the other biographical accounts have apparently used these interviews as a base of appending additional material, although credit is not usually extended to the original source. This explication has been based on the information originally given in Balliett's interviews, with exceptions noted.

Edward Albee, The Man. Edward Franklin Albee has belonged to the theatre since two weeks after his birth-- when he was adopted by Reed A. Albee, who worked for his father's theatre circuit. The youth was named for this adoptive grandfather, a former vaudeville-house owner, who with B. F. Keith had founded the Keith-Albee Theater Circuit in 1883.

His adoptive mother, Frances Cotter Albee, Edward has said, "is a remarkable woman."⁷ Jean Gould speculates that it was probably Frances' idea to adopt a child; she apparently had rigid ideas about child-rearing which were not always too successful with Edward.⁸ Reed Albee's second wife, a former Bergdorf mannequin, and a large good-looking woman, stood a foot taller than her husband and was at least

⁷Balliett, "Albee," Op. cit., p. 30.

⁸Jean Gould, "Edward Albee and the Current Scene," Modern American Playwrights (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1966), p. 273.

fifteen years his junior. She was described just six years ago as "a white-blond, firm-looking, statuesque lady in her 60s."⁹ Fond of horseback riding, Mrs. Albee taught Edward to ride at an early age. "She would stride through the house," says one reporter, "wearing boots and riding habit, stropping her leg with a crop and urging Edward to be more like other boys."¹⁰ Jean Gould noted this same behavior and added that Edward liked neither riding nor riding crops,¹¹ but neither of the writers remarked on the obvious relationship between this description of his mother and Albee's last scene in the second act of Tiny Alice.¹² Miss Alice was also fond of horseback riding; in this scene, she and Julian have just returned from riding. He holds the crop while she changes clothes; and when she finishes, she tauntingly challenges him to use the whip on her.

For years Mrs. Albee didn't go to the theatre to see her son's plays, but she was observed visiting backstage on the opening night of A Delicate Balance. At that time she laid to rest the persistent story that she had once refused

⁹"Albee: Odd Man In On Broadway," Newsweek, 61:51, February 4, 1963.

¹⁰Morgan, Op. cit., p. 94.

¹¹Gould, Op. cit., p. 274.

¹²Edward Albee. Tiny Alice (New York, Atheneum, 1965), pp. 110-114.

young Edward the use of the family library because the missing books marred the decor. She stated that she had only made him put the books back in their proper places when he had finished with them.¹³ Currently living in White Plains, New York, Mrs. Albee, called Frankie by her friends, has been characterized by them as a "formidable, suburban club-lady."¹⁴

Reed Albee was a small, meek, silent man who wanted to please his wife, and so he agreed with her to avoid argument. "He was so taciturn," observes Jean Gould, "that he used to announce his presence by jingling coins in his pocket when he came into a room."¹⁵ Edward's friends are said to remember him for his "grunts and grumbles."¹⁶ Reed Albee's theatrical friends--Ed Wynn, Jimmy Durante, and Walter Pidgeon--were regular visitors in the Albee home. Ed Wynn remembers that Edward was "indulged" as a child.¹⁷ In ill health, Reed Albee retired in the late twenties and raised show horses until his death in 1961.

Grandma Cotter, Mrs. Albee's mother, was a permanent

¹³Morgan, Op. cit., p. 95.

¹⁴"Albee: Odd Man In On Broadway," Loc. cit.

¹⁵Gould, Op. cit., p. 274.

¹⁶"Albee: Odd Man In On Broadway," Loc. cit.

¹⁷Ibid.

"doating visitor" in the Albee home. "I could communicate with her," her grandson is quoted as saying.¹⁸ In 1949 she established a hundred-thousand-dollar trust fund for him. He began receiving the interest on this fund when he was twenty-one--about fifty dollars a week--and was paid the principle when he was thirty.

The family's life style indicated that they were financially affluent. Albee grew up in Manhattan and in Larchmont, New York. Each year the family left their Westchester County home, where they kept a stable of horses, to winter in Arizona or Florida.

A personal element is present in Albee's caricature of the typical American family in his play The American Dream: the resemblance to his own family is singularly visible. Typical of the critical comment is Jean Gould's analysis:

. . . "Mommy," a large, handsomely turned-out woman, dominated the scene and towers over her husband much as Mrs. Albee must have. "Daddy," a drained little man, is acquiescent but ineffectual, sterile. Their "son," a big, cheerful, athletic Cipher is actually the identical twin of an adopted son whom Mommy had ordered years before but had dismembered after a few months because he was "too wild" and would not conform. "Grandma," the least cartoonlike of the characters, who faces facts and is always preparing for the "moving van" to come and take her away, may

¹⁸Ibid.

have been drawn after Albee's paternal grandmother^[19]
 . . . The boy has one defect; he cannot love; when Mommy cut off the vital organs of his twin, the sterility was naturally transferred to him. "Mommy" is a wildly exaggerated study of the emancipation of women . . . in Mommy's mean-tempered, immoderate, insincere and carnivorous attitude, the playwright seems to be recklessly discharging all the resentment of his early years.²⁰

Lee Baxandall posits that the core of Albee's technique is found in the "archtypal family unit," and that his characters are "interrelated and cohesive from play to play." He further maintains that this archtypal family is composed of three generations.²¹

"Then," the era of a "dynamic national ethic and vision," is represented by a patriarch and by the Grandma of The Sandbox and The American Dream. Grandma, who represents "pioneer stock" values, is Albee's only really human figure, but her children do not want her involved in their lives. The patriarch, also representative of the dying generation, was the primitive accumulator of wealth. Never

¹⁹The reporter for Newsweek, loc. cit., states that Mrs. Cotter was the Grandma in The Sandbox and The American Dream. This seems more reasonable, since Mrs. Cotter lived with the Albees and the Grandma in both plays was Mommy's mother.

²⁰Gould, Op. cit., pp. 280-281.

²¹Lee Baxandall. "The Theater of Edward Albee," The Modern American Theater, Alvin B. Kerman, editor. (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967), pp. 89-97. Baxandall is quoted passim throughout this exegesis of his interpretive essay.

seen, in The Death of Bessie Smith, he was the tyrant mayor of Memphis; in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, he was Martha's father, the college president; in Tiny Alice, he was the deceased father who amassed the fortune left to Miss Alice.

The "Now" generation is seen in several phases of decay, and Mommy and Daddy of The American Dream are the clear-cut archtypes. Mommy has inherited her characteristically male aggressiveness from the patriarch of the "Then" generation. She delights in power, but she is clearly incapable of playing the role of moral steward to her own generation. Mommy has several counterparts: the professional woman, Mrs. Baxter of The American Dream; Martha in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?; the Nurse in The Death of Bessie Smith, who is sadistic and prone to hysterics and is the "meanest of the Mommies"; the obscene landlady in The Zoo Story; and Miss Alice.

The Mommy characters, Baxandall alleges, have been ambiguously created by Albee, either representing the personal "revenge of an injured man," or some "important political truth." They may be symbolic of the female sex's emergent rise to power in the past two decades, or of the aggressiveness of American foreign policy following World War I.

Daddy has none of the patriarchal aggressiveness of

the previous eras. It is not always clear if he is Mommy's husband or her son because his behavior is infantile.

Castrated by Mommy years ago, he is now vapid and passive.

The "Nowhere" generation is representative of a prophetically dark future. The younger males in The American Dream are clearly demonstrative of Albee's passive-active axis." The twin who died as an infant was "sensitive, resentful, and indomitable with a wildness which made him unbearable to Mommy." His twin, the American Dream, was a passive-conformist who was always "welcome in Mommy's home and, it seems, her bed."

The other "Nowhere" males are also located in respect to their "passive-active" roles. In The Zoo Story, Jerry, "with a sensitivity so unbridled that he kills himself," is the counterpart of the twin who died; Peter, the conformist, is related to the American Dream. In Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, the conformist, Nick, is "the IBM male"; and Julian, in Tiny Alice, is the man with a mission while the other men--Butler, Lawyer, Cardinal--conform to their functional roles.

Females of the third generation also appear in two plays. One such female is Nick's wife, Honey, in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?. Honey did not want to accept the responsibility of growing up and bearing children. In Tiny Alice, Honey's counterpart is never seen; she is the

woman Julian speaks of having known in the asylum; and, like Honey, she was infertile and had a false pregnancy.²²

Although Jean Gould²³ draws close comparisons between Albee's real family and the archtypal family which Baxandall elucidates, neither writer articulates the resemblance between Edward Albee and the emasculated orphan of The Zoo Story and The American Dream and the illusory child finally killed by his parents in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?.

Having never known his natural parents, when Albee speaks of his family, he is referring to his adoptive family. He resents his natural parents for abandoning him, but he has stated that he holds no resentment toward his adoptive parents--although he was "both happy and unhappy as a child."²⁴

During his childhood Edward had few opportunities to make friends, and he was very lonesome. He was attracted to the theatre, however, and saw his first stage show when he was five years old. Albee has said that his parents gave him a good home and offered him a good education but he

²²The same "archtypal family unit" which Baxandall maintains is at the center of Albee's technique is also clearly recognizable in two of his later works: All Over and A Delicate Balance. Certain of the archtypal characters are present in the adaptations and Box-Mao-Box.

²³Gould, Supra, pp. 7-8.

²⁴"Albee: Odd Man In On Broadway," Loc. cit.

didn't appreciate it. After being expelled from several schools, his mother sent him to Valley Forge Military Academy as a disciplinary measure. He says that you can-- and he did--get an education there, but it was not scholastic. He remembers once reading a poem of his to a master, while the master beat another boy on the hands with a riding crop.²⁵

After a year of military school, he resolved not to get thrown out of another school and entered Choate School in Wallingford, Connecticut, where he was happy. It was at Choate, we are told, that Albee "demoniacally" filled his notebooks with plays, novels, short stories and poetry.²⁶

Graduating from Choate in 1946, Albee attended Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, where he played the role of Franz Joseph in Maxwell Anderson's The Masque of Kings.²⁷ When the college suggested that he not come back after he had attended for a year and a half, he was happy to comply with the request.

Upon leaving college, Albee returned to the family home and made an effort to conform to his mother's wishes by joining in with the young-set at the country club. He even became engaged to a debutante for a time. Still wanting

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

to become a writer, he formed other friendships with a group of artists and intellectuals. His mother neither approved of his arty friends, his ambition, nor his general behavior. One argument followed another, until one day in 1948 Edward packed his belongings and left home for good.

Having made the break from home, Albee now embarked upon a succession of apartments, roommates, and forty-dollar a week jobs which included: continuity writer for a radio station, office boy, salesman, and luncheonette counterman. For three years he was a Western Union messenger; this was his favorite job, because he liked walking and meeting interesting people.

At night Edward drank and prowled the Village streets with banjo-playing poets; he also took part in many literary discussions and all-night bull sessions. During this period, Jean Gould writes:

. . . Albee would start a bizarre game, the assassination of his friends: one must go because he was a private nuisance, another because he was a public bore, a third out of friendly feeling, to spare him a hot lonely summer in New York--a pastime suggestive of his first full-length play.²⁸ [Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?]

In the spring of 1958 he quit his job. Albee remembers, "when I hit thirty, a kind of explosion took

²⁸Gould, Op. cit., p. 277.

place in my life. I'd been drifting, and I got fed up with myself. I decided to write a play."²⁹

He wrote The Zoo Story on a wobbly kitchen table in the apartment which he shared with William Flanagan, the composer. He wrote one draft, made pencil revisions, typed a second script, and that's the way he has written all of his plays since that time.³⁰ After being turned down by producers in America, The Zoo Story was given its world premiere on September 28, 1959, in Berlin; and Edward Albee was on his way to becoming an international figure in the theatre. The play was produced in twelve other German cities, and news of Albee's success abroad reached the United States. Even before his first play had a New York production, Edward Albee had become a figure of public concern in this country.

William Flanagan, with whom Albee shared an apartment from 1952 until 1959, recalls that previous to Albee's writing The Zoo Story "there was no suggestion in anything that he had done or in any attitude he had toward life that he might be a playwright."³¹ Albee told Flanagan that he had decided when he was six years old that he was not "going to

²⁹Balliett, "Albee," Op. cit., p. 31.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Morgan, Op. cit., p. 95.

be," but that he already "was a writer."³² Albee had started writing poetry when he was six and stopped when he was about twenty-six because he wasn't getting much better. One of his poems, entitled "Nihilist,"³³ was published when he was seventeen, in a Texas magazine called Kaleidoscope.³⁴ When he was twelve, he says, he wrote his first play called "Aliqueen," a three-act sex farce. When he was fifteen, at Choate, he wrote a seven-hundred page novel, "The Flesh of Unbelievers," about an insanely romantic man;³⁵ and Albee states that he still likes this novel. In 1952, in Florence, Italy, he wrote about two-hundred pages of another novel, but he thought this one was pretty bad.³⁶

James E. White³⁷ has said that in listing his early plays, Albee failed to include a one-act play,

³²This account and the listing of Albee's early works, with exceptions noted, follows an Albee quotation cited in: Barbara Harte and Carolyn Riley (Eds.), 200 Contemporary Authors (New York: Gale Research Company, 1969), p. 18.

³³"Albee: Odd Man In On Broadway," Op. cit., p. 49.

³⁴Balliett, "Albee," Op. cit., p. 31.

³⁵"Albee: Odd Man In On Broadway," Op. cit., p. 51.

³⁶Balliett, "Albee," Op. cit., p. 31.

³⁷James E. White. "An Early Play by Edward Albee," American Literature, 42:98, March, 1970.

"Schisms,"³⁸ which was published in his prep-school's literary magazine. The themes are said to be very similar to those of Tiny Alice: "the tenuousness of religious faith, the difficulty of one's cleaving to a benevolent God in a seemingly malevolent world, institutional hypocrisy, and blind dogmatism."³⁹

In New York, The Zoo Story ran for 582 performances, a record for a non-musical off-Broadway play, and Albee's star has continued to rise since that time. By 1965, youthful admiration for all of Albee's one-act plays made him the most-produced playwright on college campuses in the United States.⁴⁰ By 1967 his plays were performed in the American theater more frequently than those of any other playwright. He has also aroused the most attention abroad.⁴¹

³⁸Edward Albee, "Schism," Choate Literary Magazine, 20:87-110, May, 1946. Also included in this issue, by Albee, are: a short story, "Lady With an Umbrella," (pp. 5-10), and a sonnet, "Nihilist," (p. 221). The issue is in the Harris Collection, John Hay Library, Brown University, Providence, R. I.

³⁹White, Loc. cit.

⁴⁰Morgan, Op. cit., p. 95.

⁴¹Harte and Riley (Eds.), Loc. cit., p. 18.

Albee is reputed to be a very wealthy man. Some of his wealth has been inherited and some has come from the sale of the movie rights for his plays; but he has derived the greatest part of it from the payment of royalties for the use of his plays. By 1967, he was reported to have made over a million dollars on the royalties from Virginia Woolf, exclusive of movie rights. His agents say that he is a good business man and that he watches his contractual affairs very closely.⁴²

Albee's plays are produced by Alberwild, an organization formed by producers Clinton Wilder and Richard Barr and playwright, Albee. In 1965, the three put up equal amounts of money to found the New Playwright's Unit Workshop to offer encouragement to young American dramatists by producing their plays. The Unit provides the fledgling playwrights with a theatre, professional acting and directing talents, and an atmosphere that removes the pressure of paid attendance and critical reviews.⁴³

The William Flanagan Center for Creative Persons, located at Montauk, Long Island, New York, is Albee's

⁴²Morgan, Op. cit., p. 90A.

⁴³Barbara La Fontaine. "Triple Threat On, Off, and Off Off-Broadway," New York Times Magazine, February 25, 1968, pp. 31-37.

latest project. This memorial to the late William Flanagan is financed by the Edward Albee Foundation which in turn is financed by the royalties from The American Dream and The Zoo Story. The Playwright's Unit is dormant at the moment due to exorbitant operating cost in New York City.⁴⁴

Located about six miles from the Center is Albee's beach-house; it is situated on three acres of land and stands on a hill sixty feet above the ocean. Albee uses it for a year-round retreat; it was here that he wrote Tiny Alice. He likes to write here because there is a study-- with an almost secret entrance through a kitchen pantry-- in which he can work undisturbed.⁴⁵

Thomas Morgan has observed that "Albee seems committed to a sheltered life, most remarkable for its deliberate detachment and opulence";⁴⁶ but Albee avers that he prefers to live in New York City, because he likes to be where things are happening.⁴⁷ He maintains a fourteen-room townhouse in the Village, at 50 West Tenth Street, and stays there when he has a play in production.

⁴⁴Patricia Bosworth. "Will They All Be Albees?," New York Times, July 18, 1971, II, pp. 1-2.

⁴⁵Morgan, Op. cit., p. 90A.

⁴⁶Morgan, Op. cit., p. 93.

⁴⁷Balliett, "Albee," Op. cit., p. 30.

When Albee has a play in rehearsal, he gets up very early and goes to the theater; he is interested in what is happening with the set, the lighting, and the props. He goes to rehearsals only after the actors begin to know their parts to see if he has "contradicted himself" or "created confusion."⁴⁸

Regardless of whether or not contradictions and confusions exist in the fiction of Albee's plays, they exist, in fact, in his personal aura. Early in his career, Albee is pictured with his dark-brown hair in a crew-cut; today he wears a shoulder-length cut with bangs which shorten his forehead and give prominence to his dark-brooding eyes. His smile has been termed "acid," "charming," "boyish"; he is described as "arrogant, humble, courteous, devastating, pompous, passionate, funny, warm, and cold."⁴⁹ Interviewers are prone to contrast his quiet easy-going manner and soft, well-modulated voice with the passion and the fury they have observed in his plays.

Walter Kerr says that there are two Edward Albees and they are both cast in The Zoo Story where a quiet man, minding his own business, is assailed by a desperate fellow determined to make communicative contact at any cost.

November (New York: Bantam and Schuster, 1957), p. 117.

⁴⁸Balliett, "Albee Revisited," Op. cit., pp. 32-33.

⁴⁹La Fontaine, Op. cit., p. 41.

"Edward Albee #1," states Kerr, "is the invader, the un-settler of other men's tidy little worlds, . . . not having been offered any sort of subject for conversation, he bridles, invents, mocks, lashes out." "Edward Albee #2," Kerr sees as "the passive reader on the bench, the man who doesn't want to be bothered . . . [he] has everything accounted for--nights and days, beliefs and rejections, what does and does not belong."⁵⁰

Thomas Morgan has stated that Albee presents to the public "a dour image of himself as "Playwright of the Western World," and he finds, behind that image, "a man who takes himself too seriously." While with Albee, Morgan continues, "I felt cut off from the Man by the owlsh gravity of the Writer and suspected that he might also be cut off from himself."⁵¹ Albee came close to acknowledging the man-writer split to Morgan when he said, "It is almost as if you had a small secret room where you keep you-as-a-writer locked up and visit him from time to time."⁵²

"He is a chronically ambivalent man," William Flanagan once said of Albee. Explaining, Flanagan remarked that

⁵⁰Walter Kerr. "Two Albees," Thirty Plays Hath November (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969), pp. 203-206.

⁵¹Morgan, Op. cit., p. 94.

⁵²Ibid., p. 90A.

he wrote with anger and looked back with cool detachment; and that in his plays he wanted to rip away illusion, but in his personal life he preferred secrecy.⁵³

Both Flanagan and Morgan have thus made allusions to the "secrecy"⁵⁴ surrounding Albee's life, and it has been necessary to turn to his critical interpreters for enlightenment in this area. A man's sexuality is usually considered to be his private domain; but when a man is a writer who uses the stage or projects his vision of truth to an audience, his sexuality becomes a matter of public interest.

In his master's thesis, Donald Ellis stated that the critics he polled had noted a "homosexual stigma that seemed to attach itself to all of Albee's work."⁵⁵ Strongly suggestive of things to come in American art, Richard Kostelanitz finds a "homosexual undercurrent" in The Zoo Story and adds:

. . . Albee is writing about the predicament of the lonely homosexual who is never quite sure if the man he tries to pick up is "gay" and whose possible contacts are limited.⁵⁶

⁵³"Albee: Odd Man In On Broadway," Op. cit., p. 51.

⁵⁴Supra, p. 40.

⁵⁵Donald Ellis. "Edward Albee: A Critical Reception Study," (Unpublished master's thesis, The University of Kansas, 1965), p. 54.

⁵⁶Richard Kostelanetz (Ed.), The New American Arts (New York: Horizon Press, 1965), p. 54.

Charles Lyons makes the same observations when he says that Jerry's need "is realized in an acute neurological tension which seeks release in a homosexual contact."⁵⁷ Wilfred Sheed declared The Zoo Story to be a prototype of the "theater of homosexual sensibility," because it contains one of its essential scenes--the one in which the hip character bullies the square one.⁵⁸ While other writers are busy attesting the homosexuality of the play and its characters,⁵⁹ Ruby Cohn avers that "homosexual interpretations of The Zoo Story miss its wide resonance,"⁶⁰ and Lenore Mussoff cites the reactions of her high-school students:

"Jerry a homosexual? No, . . . he's just lost.
A lonely guy, spilling his guts in Central Park.

⁵⁷Charles R. Lyons, "Two Projections of the Isolation of the Human Soul: Brecht's Im Dickicht Der Staedte and Albee's The Zoo Story," Drama Survey, 4:134, Summer, 1965.

⁵⁸Wilfred Sheed, "Back to the Zoo," Commonweal, 82:502, July 9, 1965.

⁵⁹See also: "Broadway's Hottest Playwright," Saturday Evening Post, 237:32-33, January 18, 1964; Robert Brustein, "Listening to the Past," Seasons of Discontent (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965), pp. 26-29; Tom Driver, "Drama: The American Dream," Christian Century, 78:275, March 1, 1961; Henry Goodman, "The New Dramatist: Edward Albee," Drama Survey, 2:72-79, June, 1962; and Carolyn E. Johnson, "In Defense of Albee," English Journal, 57:21-23+29, January, 1968.

⁶⁰Ruby Cohn, Edward Albee, Pamphlets on American Writers, No. 77 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1969), p. 10.

Communication? Yeah . . . that's what 'Zoo Story's' all about . . ."61

In his analysis of Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, Gerald Nelson alleges that The Zoo Story is "a courtship play." Since they are the opposite type, if either Peter or Jerry were of another sex their meeting could lead to marriage; but since homosexual marriage is still taboo on the stage, any union between them must be either symbolic or destructive. In comparison, Virginia Woolf is a "marriage play." George and Martha could be Peter and Jerry married, but this time, George and Martha are physically different and psychologically homosexual.⁶² John Simon stated it very aptly when he said it had been charged that Virginia Woolf was a play about sado-masochistic male homosexuals decked-out as husband and wife.⁶³ Tom Driver asserted that heterosexual marriage partners do not talk, or behave, like George and Martha. Since the play is obviously based on a "homosexaul liaison," its real meaning is hidden from the audience. Driver felt that

⁶¹Lenore Mussoff. "The Medium is the Absurd," English Journal, 58:566, April, 1969.

⁶²Gerald Nelson. "Edward Albee and His Well-made Plays," Tri-Quarterly, 5:186, Number 5, 1966.

⁶³John Simon. "On Broadway and Off," Harper's Magazine, 224:104, March, 1963.

Albee knew what he was doing but was afraid to state his real theme.⁶⁴ Marya Mannes agreed with these critics⁶⁵ when she stated that Virginia Woolf, as well as other plays on Broadway that season, gave us:

. . . a half-world in which the men and women are . . . interchangeable, in which, except for physical need, there is no basic reality to their relationship, and in which they are locked in the maximum-security prison of their one common sex, from which no escape is possible.

Eric Bentley disagreed with these critics saying that those who alleged that the dialogue between the husband and wife in Virginia Woolf was really that of "two catty homosexuals" wrongly assumed that this disposed of Albee and the play. Bentley found it both amusing and interesting to hear a married couple talk this way, because, he says:

. . . Albee is holding up the mirror to nature, and showing something that was always funny: inversion of natural function. His comment is valid . . . The confusion in sexuality symbolizes the American and modern confusion of identities . . .⁶⁷

⁶⁴Tom F. Driver. "What's the Matter with Edward Albee?" The Reporter, 30:39, January 2, 1964.

⁶⁵See also: W. H. Von Dreele. "The 20th Century and All That . . .," National Review, 14:35-36, January 15, 1963; and Donald M. Kaplan, "Homosexuality and American Theatre: A Psychoanalytic Comment," Tulane Drama Review, 9:25-55, No. 3, 1965.

⁶⁶Marya Mannes. "The Half World of American Drama," The Reporter, 28:49, April 25, 1963.

⁶⁷Eric Bentley. "Comedy and the Comic Spirit in America," The American Theater Today, Alan S. Downer, Editor, (New York: Basic Books Inc., Publishers, 1967), p. 59.

Lee Baxandall indicated agreement with Bentley when he wrote: "Albee the satirist is without peer among American playwrights as he crisply negates destructive values through the medium of his family."⁶⁸

With the advent of Tiny Alice, the critic's allusions to Albee's homosexual rhetoric became more copious. Typical of the interpretative criticism in the scholastic journals is the paper by Bernard F. Dukore.⁶⁹ He notes, in particular, four homosexual references in the play. First, the Lawyer and the Cardinal indulged in homosexual practices while in school. Secondly, the Lawyer and the Butler called each other "Dearest," "Darling," and "Sweetheart." Next, Dukore cites the passage where Julian tells of an imagined martyrdom when he was a child reading about how the Romans used the saints as playthings. In his description of the gladiator's assault on him, Julian uses images of penetration: a "trident fork," "entering prongs and fangs," an "open mouth," and "a soft-hard tongue."⁷⁰ Finally, Dukore believes that Julian's death at the end of the play

⁶⁸Baxandall, Op. cit., p. 96.

⁶⁹Bernard F. Dukore. "Tiny Albee," Drama Survey, 5:60-66, Spring, 1966.

⁷⁰Edward Albee. Tiny Alice, Op. cit., p. 124.

parallels this imagined martyrdom and that both passages have homosexual overtones. These passages do not relate to, or illuminate, other areas of the play, "unless," he says, "there is a secret homosexual code to which I do not have the key." In an appended footnote, he adds:

Since presenting the paper, I have been informed that "tiny Alice" is homosexual argot for a man's anus . . . [71] one might, I suppose, infer a homosexual parable, which could illuminate some aspects of the play: Julian, Butler, and the Lawyer might be lovers not of Alice but of a "tiny Alice"; Julian, kneeling, kisses Miss Alice's hand as he would a Cardinal's "ring"; and the opening door at the end of the play becomes a similar anal symbol. Nevertheless, if an understanding of the play depends on a knowledge of specialized homosexual argot, then it seems to me that the play is thereby appreciably weaker . . . 72

The monthly-magazine critics, Robert Brustein and John Simon, report in less academic terms that the dialogue of Tiny Alice is couched in the "excessive fruitiness,"⁷³ "waspishness," and "bitchiness" which "characterizes many homosexual relationships."⁷⁴ Simon contends that "Albee throws away on one brief scene fetishism, flagellomania,

⁷¹Ruby Cohn, (Op. cit., p. 29), also refers to this terminology and says that a Tiny Alice is "at once a reduced truth and a small obscene aperture into an aspect of being."

⁷²Dukore, Op. cit., pp. 65-66.

⁷³Robert Brustein. "Three Playwrights and a Protest," Seasons of Discontent, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965), p. 309.

⁷⁴John Simon. "Theatre Chronicle," Hudson Review, 18:83-84, Spring, 1965.

homosexuality, zoophilia, fellation, cunnilingus, and . . . voyeurism."⁷⁵ Brustein wonders about Albee's intentions and sincerity of purpose and speculates that the whole play may be a homosexual joke on the American culture industry.⁷⁶

Novelist Philip Roth, in a scathing denunciation of both Albee and Tiny Alice, protests that the failure of the play is due, in part, to "its ghastly pansy rhetoric and repartee." Roth claims that the play "is a homosexual day-dream in which the celibate male is tempted and seduced by the overpowering female." The subject of the play, he maintains, "is emasculation . . . its themes . . . male weakness, female strength, and the limits of human knowledge." Believing that art produced by homosexuals is irrelevant to life as lived by heterosexuals, Roth wonders when the American theatre will accept a drama "in which the homosexual hero is presented as a homosexual, and not disguised as an angst-ridden priest."⁷⁷

Taking a different approach than these cited

⁷⁵Simon, Op. cit.

⁷⁶Brustein, "Three Playwrights and a Protest," Op. cit., p. 307.

⁷⁷Philip Roth, "The Play that Dare Not Speak Its Name," The New York Review, February 25, 1965. p. 4.

critics,⁷⁸ Lee Baxandall points out that while Tiny Alice may be too homosexual to be universally meaningful, other plays which are implicitly heterosexual may be just as narrow in their views of the other side of sexuality. He names Genet's Our Lady of the Flowers, as well as Tiny Alice, as examples of "remarkable art" engendered by the homosexual vision, but he proposes that art suffers when its vision is narrowed and not set in universal perspective.⁷⁹

William Williford accepts Tiny Alice as a play which expresses a universal view, asserting that "the play explores an erotic twilight realm between homo-and heterosexuality." In pleading Albee's cause, he points out that the sexual problems which motivate the playwright may not be those of every member of his audience; but they still have "important general implications," and he adds: ". . . These implications may be seen in our attitudes toward the mystery of maleness and femaleness."⁸⁰

⁷⁸See also: "The Theater: A Tale within a Tail," Time, 85:68-70, January 15, 1965; Richmond Crinkley, "The Loss of Privacy," National Review, 21:1334, December 30, 1969; Alice Mandanis, "Symbol and Substance in Tiny Alice," Modern Drama, 12:92-98, May, 1969; and John McCarten, "Mystical Manipulations," The New Yorker, January 9, 1965, p. 84.

⁷⁹Baxandall, Op. cit., p. 98.

⁸⁰William Willeford, "The Mouse in the Model," Modern Drama, 12:141, September, 1969.

Stressing that those artists spoken of publically as homosexuals are placed on endless trial, Benjamin DeMott writes in their defense. Constantly defensive toward their own commitments, they are fully conscious of the unstable conditions of human love, and cannot condone the unthinking and uncommitted "habitual exploitation" and "slumbrous affection" which masquerades as life in many households.⁸¹

Although there has been abundant discourse on Albee's alleged "homosexual rhetoric," writers have been understandably non-committal on the subject of Albee's personal sexuality. In a highly-satirical essay, Gene Marine came close to pointing a finger when he said:

. . . I don't absolutely know for certain the names of any famous homosexuals, though I probably make the same guesses you do, and if I did know any for certain, I wouldn't tell you. As far as I know Edward Albee is a square family man . . .

Marine continues to make his point that homosexual playwrights, directors, and producers are creating a power center in the American theater which has every possibility of stiffling free expression from those writers who are not members of the clique.⁸²

⁸¹Benjamin DeMott, "But He's a Homosexual . . .," New American Review (New York: The New American Library, 1967), p. 178.

⁸²Gene Marine, "Who's Afraid of Little Aunt Fanny?," Ramparts (Magazine?), n.d., cited by DeMott, Op. cit., p. 167.

Stanley Kauffman, writing on homosexual drama for The New York Times, started a big guessing game when he wrote: ". . . three of the most successful American playwrights of the last twenty years are (reputed) homosexuals." While defending the homosexual's right to freedom of expression, he avers that plays by homosexual dramatists are codes to be deciphered, i.e. disguises and private jargons which require continuous translation by the audience. He places the blame on our culture which decrees that the homosexual's life must be concealed. With this type of societal repression, the homosexual dramatist must invent a two-sex version of a one-sex experience; and we can expect, he says, "these playwrights to be vindictive in their attitudes toward the society that discriminates against them."⁸³

In two interviews with Michael Rutenberg, Albee was given an opportunity to reply to some of the above-recited charges. When confronted with Dukore's allegation that "tiny Alice" was homosexual symbolism for a man's anus,⁸⁴ he replied that he didn't know where people got their "arcane information," but it was interesting

⁸³ Stanley Kauffman, "Homosexual Drama and Its Disguises," The New York Times, January 23, 1966, II, p. 1.

⁸⁴ Supra, pp. 45-46.

and he might use it in a play sometime.⁸⁵ In answering the critic's assertions that George and Martha in Virginia Woolf were disguised homosexuals,⁸⁶ he declared: "No, the play was written about men and women, for men and women," and he added, "They [the critics] should try harder to clarify in their own minds and for their readers the distinction between an author's disturbances and their own."⁸⁷ When asked about the charges concerning homosexuality in The Zoo Story,⁸⁸ he told Rutenberg that all those references to homosexuality upset him, and he continued, "I'm trying to think if I've ever written about a homosexual at all in any of the plays I have written so far. I don't believe that I have."⁸⁹

Edward Albee, the writer. To better understand the enigma of Edward Albee, the man, the first part of this chapter has been concerned with biographical data, plus opinions and statements about Albee from those who know him

⁸⁵Rutenberg, Op. cit., "Two Interviews with Edward Albee," pp. 229-260. The date of this interview was August 7, 1968.

⁸⁶Supra, pp. 43-44.

⁸⁷Rutenberg, Op. cit., p. 255.

⁸⁸Supra, pp. 41-42.

⁸⁹Rutenberg, Op. cit., p. 239. The date of this interview was March 17, 1965, three months after the preview of Tiny Alice.

either personally or through his work. To understand the motives and intentions of Edward Albee, the writer, it has been necessary to consult his own words through the medium of published-personal interviews, the essays he has written, and his plays.

Tom Predeaux once asked, facetiously, if Albee was a "secret weapon." He wondered if he had "been smuggled in by a foreign power, timed to go off once a season, designed to be a devisive influence on U. S. playgoers and sow confusion among our critical establishment."⁹⁰ Faced with these kinds of questions, Albee might reply, existentially, as he once did: "I am a writer--what one does is what one is."⁹¹

Writing for Edward Albee is an emotional catharsis; and for him, part of the joy in writing is getting the play out of his system and down on paper.⁹² Albee prefers not to talk about the way he works; too much analysis, he thinks, could be destructive to the creative process.⁹³ He does not use a plot outline; he believes that he could never write a play if it was completely thought out before he went to the

⁹⁰Tom Prideaux, "Why Must I Worry About Albee?," Life, 64:16, February 2, 1968.

⁹¹Morgan, Op. cit., p. 94.

⁹²Rutenberg, Op. cit., pp. 243, 241.

⁹³William Glover, "Playwright Albee's Ideas Simmer a Long Time before Being Noticed," Associated Press Dispatch, Arkansas Gazette, April 25, 1971.

typewriter, because it would lose its interest and surprise and become just an exercise in typing.⁹⁴ He works three or four hours at a time when writing; he writes on yellow paper and uses a typewriter because it helps him to get the rhythm of the dialogue.⁹⁵

Feeling that the unconscious is the most efficient part of his mind, Albee likes to let it do as much work as possible. He usually starts by discovering that he has been thinking about an idea that may eventually be a play. This being "with an idea" will probably continue for anywhere from six months to two-and-a-half years before he gets anything down on paper. During this time, he may not often consciously think about the play until he begins to realize that characters are starting to take shape and the situation, environment, and ambiance have begun to take form. At this point, he usually improvises with the characters by choosing a situation that will not occur in the play; he places the characters in this situation and watches their reactions. When the characters take over from him--start behaving on their own by acting natural and believable in the improvised

⁹⁴Alan S. Downer, (Ed.), "An Interview with Edward Albee," The American Theater Today, (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1967), pp. 120-121.

⁹⁵Balliett, "Albee," Op. cit., p. 31.

situation, and become more real than the people around him-- he knows it is time to start writing the play.⁹⁶

Although not a musician, Albee is very fond of music and he "intuits" that the structure of some of his plays is analogous to musical form. Many themes within his plays are counterpointal; they return again and again, as he explains, ". . . the way they will in a sonata allegro form."⁹⁷ In his early work--the five off-Broadway plays, Albee returned many times to the theme of the emptiness, the vacuity, the conformity inherent in American life. The most recurrent theme in his later plays has been the difference between truth and illusion.

In all of Albee's plays there has been some death, either of a person or of the heart; but the real subject of his plays is life, in his words ". . . life and the degree to which people are willing to live it fully and in communication with each other . . ."⁹⁸ For Albee the worst kind of death is a death within life situation because people fail to live to their full capacity. He points out that just as

⁹⁶Downer, Op. cit.; Glover, Op. cit.; and R. S. Steward, "John Gielgud and Edward Albee Talk About the Theater," The Atlantic, 215:63,64, April, 1965.

⁹⁷Rutenberg, Op. cit., p. 229

⁹⁸Glover, Loc. cit.

things are said to become more real to people who take acid;⁹⁹ a confrontation with death should make life more real. Albee has made this confrontation and says that as he enters middle age, for him, life is just beginning. He wants other people to become aware, too, and proposes that they "experience the extremities of life" and "fulfill themselves completely."¹⁰⁰

Albee states that he is more aware of the symbolic meanings attached to his plays than most critics impute to him,¹⁰¹ but he suspects that there is a great deal more Christian symbolism than he is aware of because so many symbol-hunters have discovered this phenomena.¹⁰² He wants his audiences to read whatever symbolism they choose into his plays as a catharsis to set off their own stream of consciousness based on analogous personal experiences. Audiences--particularly critics and playwrights--should rid themselves of the idea of a conscious symbolism and under-

The New York Times Magazine, February 25, 1962, p. 30.

⁹⁹Albee states that he does not take acid (Guy Flatley, "Edward Albee Fights Back," New York Times, April 18, 1971, Section II, p. 10.); however, one writer has suggested the possibility that Tiny Alice might have been written by a "hip Plato smoking pot." (Robert Skloot, "The Failure of Tiny Alice," Playwright's Magazine, 43:79-81, February-March, 1968).

¹⁰⁰Flatley, Ibid.

¹⁰¹Rutenberg, Op. cit., p. 247.

¹⁰²Ibid., p. 231.

stand that the most interesting development in the theatre in this century is the use of the unconscious. People go symbol-hunting because they are not willing to let the unconscious come into full play and suffer the experience the playwright wants them to. The process of intellectualizing an emotional experience makes people feel "terribly smart," but Albee sees it as an avoidance of the dramatic experience.¹⁰³

Because of the thematic content of his work, Albee has often been considered a member of the Theatre of the Absurd. Several years ago when he first heard this allegation, he was shocked; he had never heard the term and thought that the description applied to the commercial Broadway theatre.¹⁰⁴ The Theatre of the Absurd, a term coined by Martin Esslin,¹⁰⁵ is descriptive of the philosophy and

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 248.

¹⁰⁴Edward Albee, "Which Theatre is the Absurd One?," The New York Times Magazine, February 25, 1962, p. 30.

¹⁰⁵For a full discussion of Absurdest Theatre see: Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd (New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1961). In summarizing the movement, Esslin writes: "Ultimately, a phenomenon like the Theatre of the Absurd does not reflect despair or a return to dark irrational forces but expresses modern man's endeavor to come to terms with the world in which he lives. It attempts to make him face up to the human condition as it really is, to free him from illusions that are bound to cause constant maladjustment and disappointment . . . For the dignity of man lies in his ability to face reality in all its senselessness; to accept it freely, without fear, without illusions--and to laugh at it." Cited by Edward Albee, "Which Theatre is the Absurd One?," Ibid., p. 31.

theatrical methods of a group of avant-garde playwrights and their followers who are often accused of being "destructive," "obscure," "sordid," "perverse," and "absurd." Now accepting that he is a part of the movement, Albee states that they are a "group" only because they have been doing some of the same things, in somewhat similar ways, at approximately the same period of time. He explains:

. . . The Theatre of the Absurd is an absorption-in-art of certain existentialist and post-existentialist philosophical concepts having to do, in the main, with man's attempts to make sense for himself out of his senseless position in a world which makes no sense . . . because the moral, religious, political, and social structures man has erected to "illusion" himself have collapsed.¹⁰⁶

Albee feels that Esslin's Theatre of the Absurd is the contemporary Realistic theatre, because its purpose is to make man face up to the human condition as it really exists; and the supposed Realistic theatre--most of what is done on Broadway which panders to the public's need for reassurance and presents a false picture of humanity--is really the Theatre of the Absurd.¹⁰⁷

Because of the Blatant sado-masochistic dialogue in many of his plays, Albee has also been linked with the Theatre of Cruelty which originated in France with Antonin

¹⁰⁶Ibid.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., p. 31 + 64.

Artaud. Characterized by stylistic movement and lavish staging, this Theatre, as envisioned by Artaud, was subliminally cathartic and involved the spectator through his senses rather than his intelligence. Through a series of evolutionary developments, culminating with Strindberg, the primary appeal of the contemporary Theatre of Cruelty is to emotional intelligence through the medium of sado-masochistic dialogue.¹⁰⁸ Albee has affirmed a statement made by Julian Beck to the effect that more will be seen and heard of the Theatre of Cruelty; because, in Beck's words, ". . . if we could at least feel pain, we might turn towards becoming men again instead of callous automats."¹⁰⁹ In agreeing with Beck, Albee says that audiences prefer to be comforted by having their own values re-affirmed, but he believes the function of the playwright is to cause the pain of disturbance.¹¹⁰

Albee has observed that it is characteristic of American authors to repudiate classification and group affiliation, and to this repudiation, he is no exception.

¹⁰⁸Ruby Cohn, "Dialogue of Cruelty," The Southern Review, 3:322-340, April, 1967; and "Towards a Theatre of Cruelty?," The Times Literary Supplement, 3235:166, February 25, 1964.

¹⁰⁹Rutenberg, Op. cit., p. 243.

¹¹⁰Ibid., p. 244.

Although often referred to as a social critic, he pictures himself in the American tradition of the individual writing in defense of the democratic spirit. Neither reactionary nor revolutionary in political philosophy, he avers that:

... we are no longer looking for panaceas against all evils or solutions manufactured abroad. Our aim is to prevent our political system from being denatured by too much facile conformism.¹¹¹

From time to time Albee has been disturbed by complaints that his plays have no relevance to political realities, but he thinks those who complain have no understanding of the meaning of political theatre. He feels that all of his plays have been political in essence;¹¹² and that no writing, except "carefully controlled escapism," can avoid such political commitment although some writers are more concerned with facts than with truth.¹¹³

Rather than write a play about the death of Martin Luther King, Albee feels it would be better to write about the mentality which allows such a shooting to take place.¹¹⁴ If he were writing a play about Vietnam, he has said, he

¹¹¹Cohn, "Towards a Theatre of Cruelty?," Loc. cit.

¹¹²Flatley, Op. cit., p. 10.

¹¹³Edward Albee, "The Writer as Independent Spirit," Saturday Review, 49:26, June 4, 1966.

¹¹⁴Flatley, Op. cit., p. 10.

would be more interested in the larger implications than the specifics.¹¹⁵ A play about Nixon would have no interest after 1972; so rather than make specific attacks on politicians or particular horrors, he thinks it is better to write about a society which cares for nothing but self-preservation. Albee feels that specific and particular problems in a society are caused by people who are "closed down about themselves," and he is interested in ". . . changing the way people look at themselves and the way they look at life." He continues, ". . . we don't need an attack on the specific or the conscious. We need an attack on the unconscious."¹¹⁶

Albee has also been concerned about the criticism that there is no physical action in his plays.¹¹⁷ He finds that the newer writers in the American theater, including himself, are experimenting with new structural forms of the drama; they are interested in redefining the nature of the theatrical experience.¹¹⁸ This change is plaguing the critics, because in these newer forms the action is not

¹¹⁵"He Can Try Anything," Newsweek, 69:90, May 29, 1967.

¹¹⁶Flatley, Op. cit., p. 10.

¹¹⁷Ibid.

¹¹⁸Edward Albee, "The Future Belongs to Youth," The New York Times, November 26, 1967, II, p.7.

primarily found on the stage; as Albee advances, the action takes place in the head of the spectator.¹¹⁹

Albee asserts that he is personally interested in the theater as a measure of the cultural health of this nation--a nation which has, during the past decade been divided in its opinions concerning the Vietnam War and civil rights issues. He further states that: "The most valuable function of the theater as an art form is to tell us who we are, and the health of the theater is determined by how much of that we want to know."¹²⁰

In speaking of playwrights, in particular, Albee has posited that one kind of playwright is just a manufacturer for a buyer's market. The other type is the playwright who writes for himself and is delighted if other people also like his work.¹²¹ In enumerating the differences between good and bad writers, Albee has set forth a criteria for the good writer:

. . . Good writers define reality; bad ones merely restate it. A good writer writes what he believes to be true; a bad writer puts down what he believes his

¹¹⁹Flately, Op. cit., p. 10.

¹²⁰Edward Albee, "The Decade of Engagement," Saturday Review, 53:19, January 24, 1970.

¹²¹Rutenberg, Op. cit., p. 241.

¹²⁴Cohn, "Towards a Theatre of Cruelty?", 122, p. 111.

readers believe to be true. The good writer believes the intellectual and moral posture of his audience to be equal to his own; the bad writer considers the opposite posture proper¹²²

Thus, for Edward Albee, the function of the playwright is to define his own version of the truth for his audience and not merely to project a falsely-glowing image of public opinion which would indicate that everything in America is, in his words, "peachy-keen."¹²³ Albee points out that his aim has been to corrupt his audiences in the direction of the good, or at least what he thinks is the good; and his voice becomes persuasive when he asks his audiences:

"Do you like it? If you don't like it change it."¹²⁴

¹²²Albee, "The Writer as Independent Spirit," Loc. cit.

¹²³Albee, "Preface," The American Dream and The Zoo Story, Op. cit., p. 54.

¹²⁴Cohn, "Towards a Theatre of Cruelty?," Loc. cit.

CHAPTER III

THE AUDIENCE

The previous chapter of this paper was devoted to an analysis of Edward Albee, Rhetor, in an effort to discover his style, his intentions, and his purposes in writing. His discourse was discovered to be persuasive in nature when he exhorted his audiences to change the world in which they lived if they did not like the truthful views of the human condition which he projected in his work.¹ The purpose of this chapter has been to characterize the type of audience to which Albee issued his challenge and to understand the true state of mind which prevailed among the audience.

Most often called "The Swinging Sixties," no one term has evolved to completely categorize the ten-year period between 1960 and 1970--the time when Edward Albee rose to the fore as the leading playwright in America. Society in the United States was then characterized as "affluent"; people lived "the good life." Political non-participants were called "the silent majority," yet the prevailing mood of the latter years was violent, noisy, and flamboyant.

¹Supra, p. 38.

²Peter Steinfelds, "Decoding the Decade, Paying the Bill," Commonweal, 93:399, January 9, 1970.

The decade of the sixties belonged to the impatient "Now Generation"; they wanted freedom and peace, "NOW." John F. Kennedy had struck the theme in his inaugural address when he called upon the new generations to "challenge old conventions," "ask questions," and "get involved." Thus was born the "compulsion to commitment"; being alive meant being "into" something. Finding the self assurance they lacked as individuals, many people began defining themselves through devotion to group causes. "Activism was all the rage--if something was wrong, one must do something about it; not just complain."³

The "Now Generation" found its common cause early in the decade in the Civil Rights movement, but toward the end of the era the cry of black power was heard. When the Negro again became black, the white liberal found that he was no longer entirely welcome in the movement.

American involvement in Vietnam was at first considered an exercise in altruism as the United States committed itself to the defense of the "free world"; later in the decade, liberals came to the conclusion that the United States was destroying a nation to save it.

Involvement was the key word of the decade. Convinced

³Kenneth Auchincloss, "The 60s," Newsweek, 74:12-19, December 20, 1969. Following this account throughout the exposition, the article is quoted passim with exceptions noted.

by their successful peers in the music and entertainment fields that higher education was unnecessary, many students left college and university campuses to become involved in sit-ins, teach-ins, earth-days, and student riots. They demanded that curriculums be made "relevant," and that universities become involved in the communities of which they were a part. Journalists, formerly striving for objectivity, now involved themselves both physically and emotionally in their subjects to offer an enriched account of what was happening.

With all the pressure toward commitment and involvement, individual detachment from society became very difficult; yet the decade saw the birth of the hippie movement as social dropouts first gathered in the urban areas and later sought the quiet, simple life in rural communes. People strove for a sense of community; families, ethnic groups, hippies, radicals, and peace marchers all discovered a sense of purposeful "togetherness."⁴ The early years of the era saw a revival of interest in personal religion and in an ecumenical movement designed to bridge divisions among organized religious groups which had existed for centuries.⁵

⁴Ibid.

⁵"End of a Year, End of a Decade," America, 21:628, December 27, 1969.

The decade of the sixties has been called a "Manic Time"--a time when voices were raised and ideas were carried to logical, or illogical, extremes as commentators fluctuated between elation and despair; a time when clothes, art, and even conversations were created to amaze or shock; a time when "happenings" were fashionable in art, and when avenues of communication became clogged with name-calling obscenities. A "generation gap" was evident and established authority was defied as the young denounced the society their parents had created--a society that had succeeded in polluting the earth and exposing life on the entire planet to extinction; a society that claimed to be egalitarian and wasn't; a society where assassination was an accepted fact of political life and where bloody confrontations abounded between black and white, radical and cop, student and dean, child and parent.

The decade was a time of experiment--a time when social niceties were dropped in encounter groups and people learned about themselves as well as their neighbor; it was a time when people tampered with the old taboos concerning sex and mind stimulation, a time when technology reached its peak in the Apollo moon-landing. Despite all the progress made in technology and science, the United States was still fighting its "war on poverty" at the end of the decade, and wars and rumors-of-war abounded between nations which

professed to be civilized.⁶ Summarizing the decade in a sentence, one editorialist wrote: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times"⁷

Concurrent with the beginning of the decade of the sixties, Robert Brustein has pointed out, was the ending of the lethargy of the "Eisenhower age." The awakening was characterized in most cultural areas by radical dissent and artistic ferment; but the theater, evidencing hostility to new ideas and experimentation, continued to repose in contented mediocrity. The theatre which had dominated Broadway for twenty years had "banished poetry and imagination from the stage," Brustein notes; but by mid-decade a new American theatre was beginning to emerge and bridge the cultural gap which he had earlier deplored.⁸

To understand the contemporary American theatre and its audiences some historical perspective is necessary. The early American theatre had its roots throughout the country--many towns had stock companies and every large city had its own theater. With advancements in transportation around the turn of the century, the situation changed as touring

⁶Auchincloss, Loc. cit.

⁷Steinfels, Loc. cit.

⁸Robert Brustein, "Forward: Theatre Retrospective 1959-65," Seasons of Discontent (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965), p. 13.

companies, originating in New York, were booked into these local theaters. The work of American dramatist of note in this century, until about 1960, was produced originally on Broadway and went from there to the rest of the country. Primarily because of increasing production costs, Stanley Kauffmann contends, Broadway has offered fewer and less-innovative productions each year. Largely commercially oriented, Broadway has pandered to the taste of the largest segment of its audiences and in so doing has neglected the sophisticated or intellectually attuned theater-goer. In the years following World War II, off-Broadway productions offset this decline on Broadway; but just as serious theatre devotees discovered these theaters, the labor unions stepped in causing a rise in production costs which has also limited the experimental nature of this movement. Off off-Broadway consists of mostly nonprofessional theatre in the improvised environments of warehouses, churches, cafes, and lofts.⁹

While Stanley Kauffmann contended that high production cost was the major limiting factor in the development of the contemporary American theatre, other commentators have attributed the demise of this theatre to the critical review system of the New York newspapers.

⁹Stanley Kauffmann, "Drama on the Times," New American Review (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1967), pp. 39-41.

According to Edward Albee, one of the most "staggering remarks" ever made by drama critic Walter Kerr, was to the effect that the majority of the influential critics felt that it was their responsibility to reflect the taste of their readers as they understood it. The audience, on the other hand, assumed that its taste was being molded by the critic--this same critic who believed his function was to represent the audience's taste. Albee propounds that until this misunderstanding between critic and audience vanishes, until the audience is willing to accept the theatre as adventurous participation rather than escape, and until the critic ceases pandering to the public demand for entertainment, "we are going to have very bad theatre."¹⁰

Albee believes most of the leading drama critics are not interested in "adventurous theatre"--particularly that theatre found off-Broadway.¹¹ About 1960 the critics started doing off-Broadway reviews and in a years time the number of productions there rose from ten to two-hundred and forty. Later, a majority of the critics felt it was too much work to review this avant-garde theatre, but their audiences--the

¹⁰Alan S. Downer, (Ed.), "An Interview with Edward Albee," The American Theater Today (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1967), pp. 114-115.

¹¹Ibid., p. 116. "Thing," Newsweek, 69-70, May 20,

readers of their reviews--had become so conditioned to these first-string reviewers that they did not find the second-string reviewers believable and there has been a reaction against the experimental theatre in New York.¹² Albee feels that Broadway audiences and critics are lagging far behind the playwrights. The audience feels that the theatre is a commodity, and they're the buyers; while the critics respond less to art than to what the audience wants.¹³

This situation--the state of dramatic criticism--was the subject of a discussion at the annual meeting on October 10, 1966, of the Drama Desk, the organization of New York theatrical reporters. Appearing on the panel were Henry Hewes, moderator, drama critic for the Saturday Review; Arthur Miller and Edward Albee, playwrights; June Havoc, actress; Clifton Daniel, editor of The New York Times; and other outstanding figures of the New York theatre. Many of the speakers agreed that in most cases a Broadway play had to get a rave notice from the major New York newspapers if it was to survive, and standards of the theatre were being arbitrated by newspaper reporters who were not educationally prepared for dramatic criticism.¹⁴

¹²Ibid., p. 118.

¹³"He Can Try Anything," Newsweek, 69:90, May 29, 1967.

¹⁴Packard, loc. cit.

Arthur Miller asserted, in the meeting, that in 1966 when The Harold Tribune ceased publication, The New York Times became almost omnipotent in its effect on public opinion; and that a Times opening-night review could make or break a show. Even people in Europe, he remarked, were aware of what was said in The Times' critical review before most New Yorkers even had an opportunity to see the show for themselves. In suggesting two reviewers for The Times, Miller pointed out that the practice in England was to have two opinions--a Sunday reviewer and a daily reviewer.¹⁵ "We are slaves in this country to public opinion," Miller remarked, "it's a folkway we've inherited, partly due to the incredibly high prices."¹⁶ People are used to being told what to think . . ." Miller then expressed his belief that the system inhibits the young writer who cannot feel that he is speaking to his own community in the theatre, because he is facing his enemy--an army of critics.¹⁷

¹⁴William Packard, "Playwrights and Reviewers," First Stage, 5:197-198, Winter, 1966-67.

¹⁵Walter Kerr also proposed this system before accepting the job as drama-critic for The New York Times in October, 1966; and in September, 1967, The Times divided the function of the drama critic between a Sunday and a daily reviewer. (Kauffmann, Op. cit., p. 47.)

¹⁶Miller implies that people are unwilling to spend from five to twelve dollars for a ticket to a show which has received a bad review.

¹⁷Packard, Loc. cit.

In answering Miller, Clifton Daniel stated that The Times was considering the long-range possibility of two drama critics, but he asserted that the newspaper was not in the theatre business and that it could not send two reporters to cover music, television, or sports events. Someone present reminded Daniel that the theatre was of no less importance than the World Series and The Times had sent four reporters to cover that event.¹⁸

Presenting his views to those present, Albee, calling himself an "optimist," declared that he believed in the past ten years a generation of theatre-goers had developed which could think for itself. They were beginning to realize that critics probably knew a good deal less about the theatre than the people they criticized. He suggested that critics should try to write reviews which playwrights could learn from instead of treating the theatre as a packaged commodity up for sale. He then advanced his opinion that the only people qualified to be theatre critics were men like Thornton Wilder, Arthur Miller, and a few others¹⁹ who had already proved that they possessed a sense of the theatre as an art form.²⁰ In

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹See also: "He Can Try Anything," Op. cit.; in this interview Albee added himself and Tennessee Williams to his list of qualified critics.

²⁰Packard, Op. cit., p. 197.

an earlier interview Albee had remarked that it wasn't wise for a playwright to say too much about drama critics because they had totalitarian powers. He suggested upon this occasion that all of the drama critics should be re-elected from year to year by playwrights and actors.²¹

Before accepting the job as drama critic for The New York Times in January, 1966, Stanley Kauffmann, proposed to the management that he be allowed to attend a preview showing of a play in addition to the opening night performance in order to have a minimum of twenty-four hours to write a review. He felt that it was "critically criminal" to review a work that may have taken years to write in a maximum of ninety minutes. The best dramatic criticism in America, according to Kauffmann, had been published in scholastic journals of relatively small influence, and good dramatic criticism in the newspapers would be beneficent to the American theatre. Broadway theatre audiences have always resisted serious theatrical criticism, Kauffmann avers, and would probably be happier with a "one-to-four-star" rating service, plus a brief synopsis. He also stated that the readers of The Times, who are less than half college graduates, like to see positive reviews because they want to have

²¹R. S. Steward, "John Gielgud and Edward Albee Talk About the Theater," The Atlantic, 215:67, April, 1965.

an opportunity to go to the theatre and judge the merits of a play for themselves.²²

Echoing the sentiments of Albee, Miller, and Kauffmann, Theodore Hoffman has predicated the thesis that both ". . . contemporary audiences and drama critics have lost the art of seeing plays."²³ Hoffman reiterates the view that the critical review system is just a habit of the age and that critics are no brighter than the educated segments of the New York theatre audience; they have the same degree of intellectual sophistication and speak the same intellectual jargon. Part of the answer, Hoffman posits, is for audiences--including critics--to cultivate the "lost art of seeing plays"; because plays exist as works of art only on the stage. The meaning of a play can never be ascertained through a mere reading of the dialogue; because, he says, a knowledge of how the theatre worked when the play was written and an understanding of the creative techniques which caused the play to exist as a work of art must be added to the text.²⁴

²²Kauffmann, Op. cit., pp. 40.

²³Theodore Hoffman, "An Audience of Critics and the Lost Art of Seeing Plays," Theatre in the Twentieth Century, Robert W. Corrigan, editor (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1965), p. 169.

²⁴Ibid., pp. 171-179, passim.

²⁷Ibid.

American theatre audiences in the early sixties had, indeed, lost the art of seeing plays. They were stupified by affluence; movies and television had effectively dulled their imaginative powers. As a result they had become slothful and found it difficult to understand anything except explicit dialogue; they tended to reject anything that demanded active effort or response.²⁵ To this audience Albee dared say:

. . . it is the responsibility of everyone who pretends any interest at all in the theatre to get up off their six-ninety seats and find out what the theatre is really about. For it is a lazy public which produces a slothful and irresponsible theatre.²⁶

Albee stresses that the health of a nation can be determined by the art it demands; and if we insist of our live theatre that it not "have anything to do with anything," as we have on television and the movies, he specualtes that nothing will be left of the visual-auditory arts.²⁷

Another reason advanced for the absence of distinguished drama on the American stage in the early sixties was that the theatre had no playwrights. More sophisticated

²⁵Robert W. Corrigan, "Introduction: The Theatre in Search of a Fix," Theatre in the Twentieth Century, Robert W. Corrigan, editor (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1965), p. 23

²⁶Edward Albee, "Which Theatre is the Absurd One?," The New York Times Magazine, February 25, 1962, p. 64.

²⁷Ibid.

audiences, who had been stimulated by the radical-metaphysical drama from France, were rejecting the psychological drama which had dominated the American stage for the past twenty years. Brustein cites Albee's work as exceptional; it was accepted both on and off-Broadway. He points out, however, that "Miller was still silent, Inge was no longer considered a serious contender and Williams was repeating himself from year to year."²⁸ Almost every serious play on the American stage was a clinical case history which presented a very limited view of man; and the possibility of deliberative and moral choice was dissolved, writes Robert Corrigan, when all actions were explained or resolved in terms of psychological cause and effect.²⁹

"The truth," Albee avers, "is that in this country we just do not have a theatre culture." Theatre didn't get serious until around the end of the Second World War, with Tennessee Williams and O'Neill's late work. In the early sixties Broadway was only producing entertaining diversions, and writers and producers--such as Albee and Richard Barr--were beginning to question whether commercial Broadway could support a serious work of art. Only a few musicals and light

²⁸Brustein, Op. cit., p. 18.

²⁹Corrigan, Op. cit., pp. 16-17.

comedies survived its offerings along with occasional shows imported from abroad.³⁰

Albee says he has no objections to the musicals and sex comedies which "inhabit" the commercial theater. His objection is that they also "inhibit" it to the point where there is no competitive co-existence with serious work.³¹ Most people go to the theatre to escape from life, and the purpose of serious theater is to put them into life which is a proposal that most people don't like; so Albee has resigned himself to the fact that musicals and escapist plays will always do better at the box office than serious plays.³²

This confusion between commercial success and artistic success which has corrupted both the Broadway and off-Broadway theatres, Albee protests, has also prompted the beginning of a healthy revolution in the American theatre. A new generation of playwrights has now turned its back on the commercial theatre to work as it wishes, and a new generation of theatre-goers has come up with the education to know good

³⁰Guy Flatley, "Edward Albee Fights Back," The New York Times, April 18, 1971, p. 10.

³¹Steward, Op. cit., p. 66.

³²William Glover, "Playwright Albee's Ideas Simmer A Long Time Before Being Noticed," Associated Press Dispatch, Arkansas Gazette, April 25, 1971.

theatre from bad. This probably would not have happened, Albee speculates, if the commercial theatre had not slipped below mediocrity.³³

Albee summarized the Broadway theatre-audience situation of the early sixties when he reasoned that nothing could be more absurd than a theatre which had the following esthetic criterion:

. . . A "good" play is one which makes money; a "bad" play . . . is one which does not; a theatre in which performers have plays rewritten to correspond to the public relations image of themselves; a theatre in which the playwrights are encouraged . . . to think of themselves as little cogs in a great big wheel; a theatre in which imitation has given away to imitation of imitation; a theatre in which London "hits" are . . . greeted in a manner not unlike a colony's obeisance to the Crown; a theatre in which real estate owners and theatre party managements predetermine the success of unknown quantities; a theatre in which everybody scratches and bites for billing as though it meant access to the last bomb shelter on earth; a theatre in which, in a given season, there was not a single performance of a play by Beckett, Brecht, Chekhov, Genet, Ibsen, O'Casey, Pirandello, Shaw, Strindberg--or Shakespeare? What, indeed, I thought, could be more absurd than that?³⁴

Albee sounded a note of hope, however, when he observed that young people responded to the "new and fresh" in the theatre. He found knowledgeable audiences at the colleges where he lectured who were also dismayed by the

³³Edward Albee, "The Future Belongs to Youth," The New York Times, November 26, 1967, II, p. 7.

³⁴Albee, "Which Theatre is the Absurd One?," Op. cit. p. 30.

Broadway scene.³⁵ This audience, he discovered, had not yet cut off its responses; they were, in his words, "questioning values, knocking the status quo about, considering shibboleths to see if they are pronounceable."³⁶ He credits these students at colleges around the country with really knowing about the contemporary theatre and its playwrights--Beckett, Genet, Brecht and Pinter. "They want a theater which engages rather than disengages;" Albee maintains, "they want to be shook up, and not placated; they want the theater to be tough and intense, and adventuresome; they want questions and not merely answers."³⁷ Regretably, he remarked, most of these "kids" will eventually settle down to their own version of the standard; but in the meantime they make an "alert, alive, accepting audience."³⁸ Albee proposes that the university can be of enormous value in "corrupting" future theatre audiences into expecting more from the theatre than they now get.³⁹

³⁵Albee notes, ". . . that if an off-Broadway play has a substantial run, its audiences will begin young and grow older; as the run goes on, cloth coats give way to furs, walkers and subway riders to taxi-takers. Exactly the opposite is true on Broadway." Ibid.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Albee, "The Future Belongs to Youth," Loc. cit.

³⁸Albee, "Which Theatre is the Absurd One?," Op. cit., p. 64.

³⁹Downer, Op. cit., p. 115.

Maintaining that the sixties was the "Decade of Engagement" in the theater, Edward Albee has speculated that the era will probably be remembered as the most exciting, and yet depressing, decade of the American theater. It was during this period of time that the public first realized that it should not be passive toward the arts, but that it should participate in them with the same sense of responsibility and engagement as those who were creating them.⁴⁰ This engagement in the arts which Albee advocates is the same philosophical stance--the involvement, the activism, the commitment--advanced by the "Now Generation."⁴¹

To this new theatre-going public Albee has issued an invitation:

. . . The avant-garde theatre is fun; it is free-swinging, bold, iconoclastic, and often wildly, wildly funny. If you will approach it with childlike innocence--putting your standard responses aside, for they do not apply--if you will approach it on its own terms, I think you will be in for a liberating surprise. I think, you may no longer be content with plays that you can't remember halfway down the block. You will not only be doing yourself some good, but you will be having a great time, to boot. And even though it occurs to me that such a fine combination must be sinful, I still recommend it.⁴²

⁴⁰Edward Albee, "The Decade of Engagement," Saturday Review, 53:19-20, January 24, 1970.

⁴¹Supra., pp. 2-3.

⁴²Albee, "Which Theatre is the Absurd One?," Op. cit., p. 65.

CHAPTER IV

THE MESSAGE

During the time of its New York premiers, the theme of Edward Albee's new play, Tiny Alice, became a "cocktail-party guessing game." Two days previous to the Broadway opening Albee called a press conference to squelch the hearsay that the play was about a homosexual priest. Answering this allegation, Albee assured the reporters, "It isn't."¹ He then offered this explanation:

It is a mystery play in two senses of the word. . . . That is, it's both a metaphysical mystery and at the same time, a conventional "Dial M for Murder" type mystery. For that reason, I'm not telling anyone what it's about, and I hope, too, that the critics won't give away the play's surprises in their reviews. Anyway, I'll say this much--it's a contemporary three-set, two-act play of ordinary length. . . . Also, the title, Tiny Alice, is part of the mystery; but more, I will not say.²

In answering to further probing concerning the meaning of the title, Tiny Alice, Albee replied, "Something very small enclosed in something else." Smiling, he continued, "Plays have to be called something. I like this play, and it will be nice. It's a mighty peculiar play," and in conclusion he added, "instead of a sparkling new comedy."³

¹"Who's Afraid of Success?," Newsweek, 65:51, January 14, 1965.

²Thomas Meehan, "Edward Albee and a Mystery," The New York Times, December 27, 1964, II, p. 1.

³"Who's Afraid of Success?," Loc. cit.

Responding further to the reporter's questions, Albee admitted using the church as a symbol of power; because he declared, "I need a power structure and the church is one of the few absolute power structures available in the West." He then advanced that: "The play is not an attack on the church. It's like the corruption of wealth. There's nothing to attack in wealth, but there is in what people make of it."⁴

The critical response to Tiny Alice, following the Broadway opening on December 29, 1964, was varied and verbose. Much controversy still rages concerning the true allegoric and symbolic meaning of the play. Critical characterization of the work since that time has run the gamut from "a notable contribution to the American stage"⁵ to "deliberately ambiguous."⁶

In his master's thesis, which was a critical-reception study, Donald Ellis called Tiny Alice Albee's "most obscure play."⁷ From this study, which dealt primarily with newspaper and weekly-magazine reviews following the initial Broadway

⁴Ibid.

⁵William F. Lucey, "Albee's Tiny Alice: Truth and Appearance," Renascence, 21:76, Winter, 1969.

⁶Robert Skloot, "The Failure of Tiny Alice," Player's Magazine, 43:81, March, 1968.

⁷Donald Ellis, "Edward Albee: A Critical Reception Study," (Unpublished master's thesis, The University of Kansas, 1965), p. 27.

production, he concluded that: "The critics were in unanimous agreement as to the ambiguity of the play on all levels: logically, symbolically, and literally."⁸ The major criticism propounded by the critics who were surveyed by Ellis was that the production failed to make sense on a literal level, i.e. " . . . the story could not be followed with any degree of certainty, and remained obscure even after the play's climax."⁹ Not until the members of the academe, who are prone to reflective thinking, began writing in the scholastic journals did the tone of the critical response to Tiny Alice become positive.

Even Sir John Gielgud, England's veteran Shakespearian actor who played Julian in the play, kept insisting to Albee that he did not understand Tiny Alice, and Albee reportedly countered by answering him that he wasn't sure what it was about either.¹⁰

Albee and Sir John discussed the play shortly after it opened. Gielgud confessed that he had been frightened about playing the role of Julian. The play puzzled him because

⁸Ellis, Op. cit., p. 28. Out of forty-five specific references to critical reviews of Tiny Alice, only two were made to material in scholastic journals.

⁹Ellis, Op. cit., p. 30.

¹⁰Whitney Balliett, "Albee Revisited," The New Yorker 40:31-33, December 19, 1964.

there were a great many threads which Albee had neglected to tie up: the ages of the characters were not definite, the time was not given and there was no specific locale.¹¹

"The actual content, the metaphysics, and the arguments do baffle me in quite a number of cases," Gielgud pointed out, ". . . but you've written the play and you've completed it, and presumably that is what you wanted to say."¹² Albee then expressed that the only bafflement which Gielgud showed in the part was the proper stance for his role because Julian was the innocent moving into a strange environment and the audience had to follow the play through Julian.¹³

Albee noted that the critics had objected to the play on the grounds that it was "obscure and difficult." He stated that he could not understand this complaint. He explained that if a play was "confused and muddled in its thinking," it was badly written, but if it demanded a little bit from the audience of critics that was no failure on the part of the play. "Tiny Alice," he advanced ". . . is not

¹¹R. S. Steward, "John Gielgud and Edward Albee Talk About the Theater," The Atlantic, 215:61, April, 1965.

¹²Steward, Op. cit., p. 68.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Steward, Op. cit., p. 67.

¹⁵Steward, Op. cit., pp. 67-68.

supposed to be terribly easily apprehensible. It is meant to contain things that the audience must take out of the theater with them and think about."¹⁴

In speaking specifically of the audience which saw Tiny Alice, Gielgud recalled reading a review which contended that the audience coughed all through the play. He told Albee that this was not true, because as an actor he listened for coughs and he had not heard them. He recalled that during rehearsals he had observed that the audience would never sit through his long death scene; he thought they would all be out getting on their snow boots. Gielgud then told Albee that the play had succeeded in holding the audience's attention, and that he had seen no one leave before the end of the play. He then pointed out that the "magic of the theater" was in this relationship between the audience, who relied on the actors to give them "excitement and stimulation," and the actors, who relied on the audience as a "sounding board"; and if both sides give enough, he emphasized, the usual result would be an "exciting and rewarding performance."¹⁵

Gielgud then reiterated that he felt that many things in the play were confusing but that he was sure that Albee

¹⁴Steward, Op. cit., p. 67.

¹⁵Steward, Op. cit., pp. 67-68.

had done this intentionally. Albee then wondered aloud if he had " . . . meant to be intentionally confusing." He puzzled, "Maybe, I meant to be something a little different from confusing--provocative, perhaps, rather than confusing."¹⁶

Gielgud then asked Albee about three specific confusions in the play which he felt were difficult for the audience to interpret: the relationship between the Butler and the Lawyer, why Julian was never allowed to refer to the 'deal' and whether or not Alice was directing the three protagonist--the woman, the lawyer and the butler--as well as directing Julian. Albee answered him by saying: "I know you want to know what the play is about, John, but I don't know yet, so I can't say."¹⁷

After three months of speculation concerning the meaning of the play among the members of the press, Albee called another press conference at the Billy Rose Theater; "ostensibly," Louis Calta reports, "to explain the complexities and obscurities of Tiny Alice."¹⁸ On this issue, Albee

¹⁶Steward, Op. cit., p. 68.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Louis Calta, "Albee Lectures Critics on Taste," The New York Times, March 23, 1965, p. 33.

¹⁹Ibid.

set forth his opinion " . . . that if an author's work cannot speak clearly for itself, then no length of classification by the author as to his intentions will make the work of art any less opaque." Continuing, he described his work as "a perfectly straightforward story, dealt with in terms of reality and illusion, symbol and actuality"; he then added that it was neither "a straight psychological study nor a philosophical tract, but something of a metaphysical dream play which must be entered into and experienced without predetermination of how a play is supposed to go."¹⁹

"Plays like Tiny Alice, or works of a somewhat greater density than their more immediately apprehensible counterparts," Albee broached, "run into trouble in the commercial theater . . . because of a round-about misunderstanding between the critic and the audience."²⁰ In explaining his remarks, Albee lectured the press on their functional role as theatre critics. He contended that if the critic were not so powerful, it wouldn't matter how he approached his job; but since the audience tends to take the critic at face value, Albee suggested that the critic should face up to the responsibility of his awesome power. This responsibility, as Albee

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid.

outlined it, ". . . is not only to inform the public what has occurred by its present standards, but, . . . to inform the public taste"; because, he offered, "The final determination of the value of a work of art is the opinion of an informed and educated people over a long period of time."²¹

Albee later used the written statement which he had used at this press conference as the introduction to Tiny Alice in a collection edited by Otis L. Gurnsey, Jr. He wrote that the play is an examination of "how much false illusion we need to get through life," "the difference between the abstraction of God and the god we make in our own image, the personification," and "the relationship between sexual hysteria and religious ecstasy."²²

The story, Albee said, is simply this:

A lay brother, a man who would have become a priest except that he could not reconcile his idea of God with the God which men create in their own image, is sent by his superior to tie up loose ends of a business matter between the church and a wealthy woman. The lay brother becomes enmeshed in an environment which, at its core and shifting surface, contains all the elements which have confused and bothered him throughout his life; the relationship between sexual hysteria and religious ecstasy; the conflict between the selflessness

²¹Ibid.

²²Edward Albee, "Tiny Alice Introduction by the Playwright," The Best Plays of 1964-1965, Otis L. Guernsey, Jr., editor (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1965). p. 252.

of service and conspicuous splendor of martyrdom. The lay brother is brought to the point, finally of having to accept what he insisted he wanted: union with the abstraction, rather than man-made image of it, its substitution. He is left with pure abstraction--whatever it be called: God or Alice--and in the end, according to your faith, one of two things happens. Either the abstraction, personifies itself, is proved real, or the dying man, in the last necessary effort of self-delusion, creates and believes in what he knows does not exist.²³

Albee then reiterated that the audience should let the play happen to them, let the mind respond by receiving impressions; they should "sense rather than know," should "gather" rather than "understand." The play's symbols and allusions, he said, should be taken as echoes in a cave, overheard, but not fully understood.²⁴

Following this press conference, drama critic Walter Kerr wrote that Albee's defense of Tiny Alice was the standard approach--although perfectly valid--to plays of any complexity--either the "don't think" or the "let-it-happen-to-you" theory. Albee's specific directive was to sit back and "intuit" the play as "a poetic," just as you would with a piece of music or a dream. Kerr said that he could not prove Albee either right or wrong about Tiny Alice, but the play struck him as if it had been manipulated into being by a series of thought processes, which, in spite of attempts to

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid.

conceal them, did not materialize into anything more than thought processes. Kerr reports:

. . . At Tiny Alice I felt no feeling. I was there and I heard no music, I was there and nothing dreamlike happened to me . . . the play proper, providing no dream, forced me into trying to cope with it analytically . . . There is no resolving any such difference of opinion apart from the event as it took place in the auditorium: the audience either did or did not "sense rather than know," either was or was not satisfied in the sensing.

. . . the issue can be called ambiguous: perhaps the play was genuinely a piece of music but the audience was unattuned to this sort of music at this moment or put off it by tendentious reviewers; perhaps the play closed because it offered audiences very little that could actually be sensed. Take your pick, and hold your position.²⁵

Continuing, Kerr suggested that when a play caused agitated public concern over its meaning, as Tiny Alice had, it probably did not have much "poetic" effect on the audience. If the sensing did take place, he offered, not much would have been said of the play other than "I like it;" and not until later, after heads were cleared of the dream, would the audience begin to try to understand why. The play which must be explained, he stressed, probably did not assert itself intuitively. A general stir of anxiety, or clamor, about the meaning of a play and a request from the author that the clamor cease, would indicate that the play had no other life

²⁵Walter Kerr, "Letting It Come To You," Thirty Plays Hath November. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969), pp. 208-209.

than its meanings. Kerr's concern was that if a playwright should misinterpret the effect which his play had on its audience, he might approach the writing of his next play with a false image.²⁶

In a later defense of his work, Albee chose one of Kerr's alternatives. He took the position that the audience was attuned to the music of his play but was, in Kerr's words, "put off it by tendentious reviewers."²⁷ Albee reported to Alan Downer that the preview audiences for his comedy, Tiny Alice, were very vocal in their responses. The majority of people had opinions and comments about the play; loud arguments were heard in the audience; some people booed and hissed while others said 'bravo!!' Then the critics saw it and told the public, Albee asserted, that ". . . the play was too complicated, too difficult or too confused (as opposed to confusing) to understand." From that time, the audiences who went to see Tiny Alice entered the theatre confused. The same type of people were understanding the play before they were told by the critics that they couldn't understand it. Albee, once again, drew the obvious conclusion that the

²⁶Kerr, Op. cit., pp. 209-210.

²⁷Supra, p. 10. (editor), "An Interview with Edward Albee," The American Theater Today (New York: Drama Books, Inc., Publishers, 1967), p. 117.

audience was relying too heavily upon the opinion of the critics and not thinking for itself.²⁸

CONCLUSIONS

Introduction. This study of Edward Albee's discourse in, and surrounding, his play, Tiny Alice, has been made through the medium of rhetorical analysis. Analysis has been made of the playwright--his life and his dialogue--with reference to the dramatic event of Tiny Alice and the audience who participated in and bore witness to these communicative acts.

The first question proposed for answer was whether or not Albee's discourse was persuasive; whether or not it affected his audience's lives to the extent that it changed the way they looked at themselves and at life. Inherent in the above question was the second set of questions which this study proposed to answer: Is "ambiguity" a deserved description of Albee's style? If so, did this strategy impart strength or weakness to his dramatic discourse? And finally, how can rhetoric which is ambiguous be persuasive?

Ambiguity in Albee's Tiny Alice. If Walter Dill Scott's pronouncements concerning the meaning of ambiguity are

²⁸Alan S. Downer (editor), "An Interview with Edward Albee," The American Theater Today (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1967), p. 117.

²⁹Supra, p. 5.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Introduction.

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The first question proposed for answer was whether or not Albee's discourse was persuasive; whether or not it affected his audience's lives to the extent that it changed the way they looked at themselves and at life.¹ Inherent in the above question was the second set of questions which this study proposed to answer: Is "deliberately ambiguous" a deserved description of Albee's style? If so, did this strategy impart strength or weakness to his dramatic discourse? And finally, how can rhetoric which is ambiguous be persuasive?²

Ambiguity in Albee's Tiny Alice.

If Walter Empson's pronouncements concerning the meaning of ambiguity are

¹Supra, p. 2.

²Supra, p. 5.

accepted as definitive, in part, "any verbal naunce, however slight, which gives room for alternative reactions to the same piece of language";³ then it must be agreed that Albee's discourse in Tiny Alice was ambiguous. Evidence has been presented which attests to the many alternative reactions to this work.

The first proof of Albee's ambiguity in Tiny Alice resides in the play's script. The plot evolves from a clear and understandable situation in the first act into total confusion at the end as the many modes of symbolism and allegory are presented without an organizing principle. The locale of the play is unknown and the time sequence is uncertain. The dialogue is cryptic and full of incomprehensible illusions.

The minor characters are stereotyped models of their functional roles who act mechanically as if they are puppets on a string--even their sexuality is questionable. The relationships between the characters becomes extremely diffuse and hard to delineate as the work progresses.

Miss Alice is the prototype of Albee's domineering women. Ambiguously drawn, the character is seen in various postures as a decrepit old woman, a seductress and trusting

³Supra, p. 15.

lover, a nervous bride, an efficient agent of a high power, a sophisticated aristocrat, a cold-blooded conspirator, and the Virgin Mary.

Less ambiguously drawn is the character of the hero, Julian; symbolically, he is a personification of innocence. Literally, Julian is the innocent; he is a victim of the action rather than the protagonist. The entire action of the drama is seen from his viewpoint; and if the audience does not understand Albee's ambiguous symbolism, they suffer in the same manner as Julian, the innocent, who doesn't understand what is happening either.

Albee once stated that he considered the metaphor "essential to his art";⁴ yet, in Tiny Alice, when religious faith became his metaphor, he led his audience into a confused world of reality and fancy, truth and illusion, when he failed to give all the clues necessary to sustain the allegory.

The second proof of Albee's ambiguity in Tiny Alice is grounded in the reactions of commentators and critics who witnessed the event. In his critical reception study, Donald Ellis concluded that: "The critics were in agreement as to the ambiguity of the play on all levels: logically,

³Supra, p. 83-85.

⁴"He Can Try Anything," Newsweek, 69:90, May 29, 1967.

⁵Supra, p. 85.

symbolically, and literally."⁵ Even Albee was unsure about the meaning of the play. When Sir John Gielgud, who played the male lead on Broadway, questioned him before the play opened concerning its confusions, Albee told him that he didn't know what the play meant either. Albee also told Gielgud that he had meant to be provocative--to cause the audience to think--but he had not meant to be confusing.⁶ Yet three months later, at another press conference, Albee issued a statement which set forth the story and the meaning of the play.⁷

Albee has said time after time that he wants his audiences to read whatever symbolism they choose into his plays to set off their own stream of consciousness based on their own experiences. He does not want them to go symbol hunting; he prefers that they let the unconscious take over for a full dramatic experience.⁸

This is where Albee's work becomes deliberately ambiguous. If the field-of-experience of the audience in no way overlaps the field-of-experience of the playwright, the audience is forced to encounter the material

⁵Supra, p. 82-83.

⁶Supra, p. 83-86.

⁷Supra, p. 86-89.

⁸Supra, p. 89.

from its own point of view. *their own fields of experience.*

Nature of the discourse. In an internal summary, the conclusion was drawn that the communicative purpose of Albee's rhetoric was persuasive. Albee exhorted his audiences to change the world in which they lived if they did not like the truthful views of the human condition which he projected in his work.⁹ Although Albee felt that the theatrical critics were most often not receptive to his work, he felt that his audiences--particularly those on college campuses--were receptive to his style and purpose.¹⁰

Strengths and Weaknesses. The weakness inherent in Albee's ambiguity is that the playwright provided no leadership for his audiences toward resolving the problems in society.

Yet in using ambiguity as his major stylistic device, Albee's resultant work has a timeless quality which broadens its appeal to future audiences. It asks questions rather than offering answers. It can become cathartic and stimulatory to all future audiences when

⁹Supra, pp. 61-62.

¹⁰Supra, pp. 71, 77-78.

interpreted in the light of their own fields-of-experience. Because of his ambiguity, Albee's major strength as a playwright may yet be found in the relevance of his work to future generations rather than in writing for and becoming one of the most often produced playwrights of his own time.

All Over. New York: Atheneum, 1971.

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"Breakfast at Tiffany's," (Unpublished musical adaptation of Truman Capote's novel.)

Sex and Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-Tung. New York: Atheneum, 1968.

The Death of Bessie Smith. New York: Coward-McCann, 1953.

Everything in the Garden. New York: Atheneum, 1967.

Fun and Yaw. New York: Coward-McCann, 1960.

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An Abstract of a Thesis

Presented to the

Faculty of the Graduate School

North Baptist University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Carolyn S. Curry

August, 1972

A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF EDWARD ALBEE'S

TINY ALICE

An Abstract of a Thesis

Presented to the

Faculty of the Graduate School

Ouachita Baptist University

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by

Carolyn B. Curry

August, 1972

The paper is a study of the communicative acts of Edward Albee as evidenced in his play Tiny Alice. A rhetorical analysis was made to support the hypothesis that while employing deliberate ambiguity as his major rhetorical strategy, Edward Albee's discourse was primarily persuasive.

The canons of classical rhetoric--particularly that of Aristotle--were used for the study. Analysis was made of the playwright--his life and his dialogue--with reference to the dramatic event of Tiny Alice and the audiences who participated in and bore witness to these communicative acts.

Tiny Alice contains in combination many of the characteristics singularly observable in Albee's other plays: ideas grounded in discourse or dialogue, rather than propelled by action; abstract and symbolically drawn characters; myths, metaphors, and symbols which carry ambiguous meanings; and unclear or ambiguous thematic meaning. Because of these shared characteristics, this analysis of Tiny Alice will aid in illuminating the meaning of Albee's other work. Although the study centered around Tiny Alice, much reference has been made to three of Albee's other plays: The Zoo Story, The American Dream, and Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?

The conclusion was drawn that the communicative purpose of Albee's rhetoric was persuasive when he exhorted his audiences to change the world. The inherent weakness discovered in Albee's rhetoric was that the playwright merely pointed to problems; he offered no solutions for societies' ills. In using ambiguity as his major stylistic device, Albee's resultant work was found to have a timeless quality which broadened its cathartic and stimulatory appeal for both his past and future audiences.