

EDWARD ALBEE'S PLAYS: A PSYCHOLOGICAL CENTRUM OF ALIENATION AND ESTRANGEMENT

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Abstract

The core of literature encompasses the imitation of reality or Mimesis. The actualities of the modern scenario, and the parts of its creative manifestations, have transformed the shape and philosophy of the classic tale. Aside from realistic fiction, the course of literature has seen the emergence of works that disdain factual reality. Many European writers of the 19th and 20th centuries have affirmed about certain works arose out of the ludicrous, having the inventive reality that contradicts natural laws yet offering the illusion of realism referred to as Absurd. Absurd arises when unexpected occurrences disrupt people's mental representations of predicted linkages, so they feel uneasy, which causes them to reinforce alternate expected associations. The absurd is marked by the absence of rationality, the emergence of jarring and conflicting actions, and the portrayal of imagination as reality; it is populated by eccentric heroes with peculiar appearances and bizarre conduct. In such a universe, nothing exists to awe at since everything is feasible: norms of causality are meaningless and moral standards dictating the sequence and interaction between individuals are overlooked. Since the turn of the century, psychologists have been illustrating this tendency as a component of the universal psychological process. Literature and psychology are basically the two methodological approaches that investigate the human soul. In contrast to the literature, which investigates human behavior and its reasons, psychology studies human behavior and its causes. As long as humans constitute the core of the writings, psychological undertones will exist. Psychology embraces practically everything about the human psyche and literature is a product of the psyche. This paper will explore the character psychology in selected literary works and how the traumatic self constitutes the core of absurd literature.

Keywords: Mimesis, Realism, Absurd, Psychology, Human Psyche, Traumatic Self.

AUTHOR'S DETAILS

Edward Albee is regarded as the greatest American playwright of his cohort, and his psychologically perceptive and protruding dramas traversed the thorniness of intimacy, the chasm between delusion and reality, and the roiling despair beneath the surface of contemporary life. He took the baton of American drama from Eugene O'Neill and after Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller. In 1959, when his debut staged play, "The Zoo Story," debuted in Berlin alongside Samuel Beckett's "Krapp's Last Tape," he made a startling and explosive entrance. The Zoo Story, a two-handed one-act play that takes place in real time, focused on the existential fear at the centre of Eisenhower-era complacency by showing the progressively ominous intrusion of a probing, questioning stranger on a guy reading on a bench in Central Park. His work may be challenging to understand, not just tough-minded but also elliptical or cryptic, and his interactions with audiences, who only sporadically turned his works into hits, and reviewers, who were dismissive as frequently since they were kind, were erratic.

INTRODUCTION

Literature and Psychology

Literature is the artistic expression of life. It has nourished man's conscience in a way that through creativity, he satisfied his yearning for expression and interpretation. Literature is a mode of expression in which language is employed as a form to communicate, to interpret people, their existence, and civilizations. It is intertwined with areas such as history, theology, society, psychology, and so on. As both deal with men and their response, there is a profound tie between literature and psychology. Literature is viewed as a conduit for the articulation and transfer of cultural and social values:

"Literature is a social institution using as its medium language, a social creation ... literature represents life, and life is, in large measure, a social reality, even though the natural world or and the inner or subjective world of the individual have also been objects of literary imitation. The poet himself is a member of society, possesses of a specific social status ..." (Wellek & Warren, 94).

Aristotle in particular, who "used the term psyche to allude to the essence of life," is credited with introducing the first psychological theories in his works about the nature of existence. Wellek and Warren define psychology in literary works as "the study of the author, as type and as individual, or the study of the creative

process, or the study of the psychological types and laws existing within pieces of literature, or, eventually, the ramifications of literature upon its audiences (audience psychology)". Ismet Emre an academician addressed the relationship between literature and psychology:

Beside literature and psychology there is no other branch of science which is engaged so much in the study of the relationship between human body and soul with its contradictions and dilemmas, making efforts to define the relationship in terms of certain rules, to know the mysterious aspects of the human soul and its subconscious areas by means of long and detailed journeys: at the same time both branches have been struggling in their existence between arts and science for about a century.

Absurd Theatre

The premise that theatre is a fading art form has been disputed for thousands of years. Many people believe that drama is either tedious old Shakespeare or just ridiculous singing and dancing, but there is far more to it than these two ends. It started as a religious ritual and developed into an art form that imparts lessons on the fundamental meaning of existence. Lessons from ancient Greek plays may still hold true in the present era because theatre may combine significant and thought-provoking insights about the human condition. Following the devastation of World War II in 1950's, artists started to rebel from conventional concepts of theatre. They produced what playwright Eugène Ionesco dubbed "anti-theatre" as a reaction to a world which seemed bereft of rationale and purpose. The theatrical subgenre known as "theatre of the absurd" first appeared in Paris in the middle of the 20th century and quickly migrated to New York City. The Myth of Sisyphus by philosopher Albert Camus, who argued that absurdity constituted human existence, was a major influence on existentialist philosophy and the development of the genre. Realisticism, story, characterisation, or any other conventional ideas of theatre are not the key considerations of absurdist plays. Rather, absurdist theatre concentrates on the mental condition of its protagonists when they find themselves in absurd and inexplicable circumstances.

Edward Albee and his Absurd plays

Edward Albee was among the most well-known and controversial contemporary writers active in American theatre in 20th century literary scene. Edward Albee has cemented himself as America's preeminent absurdist dramatist. His plays are distinguished by a wide range of interests and subjects. These plays do not deal with societal concerns in a shallow way; rather, he is focused in the individual's psyche in reference to society, particularly the collective social psyche. In his plays, we see a drive to examine some of man's core anxieties, obsessions, and conflicts. His work examines the suffocating paradoxes of life, the innermost impulses, a Christian mind's meditation on the nature of human sexuality- incest, the knowledge of incestuous wants, sin, grief, agony, and so on. In other words, he digs up the root of spiritual pain at the heart of human existence and brings out the mysteries, impulses, and suffering of human circumstances via his dramas. Over the years, his style has fluctuated, going from a realistic style to that of an absurd approach and returning again. However, the bulk of his plays are Naturalist-Symbolist in genre. Albee has skilfully blended previous literary genres in his realistic pieces, such as *The Zoo Story*, *The Death of Bessie Smith*, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, *Tiny Alice*, and *A Delicate Balance*. Sometimes, like in *The Zoo Story* and *A Delicate Balance*, Albee unexpectedly adopts a surrealist aesthetic. Albee has tried to completely meld several styles in his works *The Death of Bessie Smith* and *Tiny Alice*. Albee has exploited some of the flimsy aspects of the ludicrous tradition in *The American Dream* and *The Sandbox* to make a profound point about the American family and American ideals. The murkiness of the individual's existence and his meaningless life are connected to one other throughout Albee's writings.

"His figures are incomplete; their sexuality is compromised, their values betrayed, their hopes abandoned, their relationships attenuated. As a result, they become hollow men and women, evidence of their own spiritual emptiness." (Bigsby, 147)

In *Waiting for Godot* Pozzo as well as other existential characters view on the absurdity of birth, this initiates life, and death, which concludes it. Jerry struggles from his existence much like Beckettian characters do in *The Zoo Story*. In *The American Dream* Grandma wretchedly thinks she can stuff her entire life into a few boxes since it is so pointless. Grandma is devastated by her plight as Young Man pushes the boxes outside the house: Grandma: (A little sadly) I don't know why I bother to take them with me. They don't have much in them [...] (She shrugs)... you know... the things one accumulates. (Albee,143).

Alienation and Estrangement; Albee's characters psychology

Albee dramatises ambiguity, alienation, and the issue of freedom in a way that is reminiscent of Beckett. Individuals in Albee's works struggle with identity issues because they lack stable identities. This confusion is heightened by the idea of "other." Another issue for these characters is the uncertainty of existence—whether they are genuine or not. Their lives are founded on deception, and there is no distinction between reality and imagination. In order to underline the immediacy and contemporaneity of Albee's thematic focus, other themes such as the inherent issues of human life, a complete loss of self, his dreadful feeling of alienation, his anxieties and disappointments, and his amorous impulses are also brought to the forefront in his plays. When dramatising uncertainty, alienation, and the issue of freedom, Albee follows Beckett's pattern. Albee's

characters struggle with identity issues because they lack stable identities. This confusion is heightened by the idea of "other." Another issue for any of these figures is the uncertainty of existence—whether they are genuine or not. Their identities were constructed on fantasies, and there is no distinction between reality and their imaginations. Another existential subject that Albee addresses is human alienation from oneself and others. In his writings, the concept of freedom is ambiguous because it makes the protagonists nervous when they make independent decisions from a range of options and because it makes them accountable for those decisions. Because of this, the characters frequently lead inactive lives, which is also another option. Albee, who is also a social critic, expands Beckett's absurdist concepts and uses the Absurd Drama to illustrate his social concerns. He criticises capitalism, a lack of morals, and strained interpersonal connections. The dramatist solicits the audience to change their views on these issues. It is worth noting that feeling estranged from an entity or circumstance from which one feels a strong connection—that is, an object or scenario with which one has a desire or expectation for affiliation and belonging—is what is meant by alienation. American playwrights portray alienation as a frustration-inducing sense of loss as well as an absence.

Albee's characters also isolate themselves. Agnes worries in *The Delicate Balance* that she could go insane one day, "becoming a stranger in the world, quite... uninvolved [...] only a drifting." (Carroll & Graf, 43.) Her obsession with the idea of going insane makes her seem alien to herself. The alcoholism of Claire demonstrates her efforts to put some space between her calm and inebriated selves. She consistently consumes alcohol despite any warnings.

The relevance of the characters and their behavior in *The Zoo Story* may also be used to deduce the play's meaning. In this play, Jerry is shown to be in a condition of isolation and loneliness while yet making frantic attempts to make friends. It should be highlighted that the ambiguity of Albee's characters' identities contributes to their estrangement from themselves. The characters are unsure about their decisions and thoughts. Jerry asks Peter in a condescending manner, which makes Peter agitated. "I...I don't express myself too well, sometimes." (Albee, 21) *The Zoo Story* attempts to depict the issue of alienation, which by the middle of the 20th century had already developed into a symptom of societal disease in the United States. Jerry, one of the two protagonists in the play, illustrates the issue of alienation that characterises modern living in the middle of the twentieth century. In Albee's plays, castaways and idle characters are also featured. Jerry is a tramp in *The Zoo Story*. He doesn't have a family or a comfortable house. He delivers the following description of his residence:

Jerry: I live in a four-story brownstone rooming house on the Upper West Side... It is a laughably small room and one of my walls is made of beaver board; this beaver board separates my room from another laughably small room. (Albee, 21)

This "laughably tiny chamber" contains Jerry alone. He doesn't enjoy living there since he doesn't belong there. He also addresses himself as "a permanent transient" implying that he has no connection to anyone.

Grandma is categorised by Mommy in *The American Dream* as "a troublemaker". Additionally, Albee depicts the family's elderly, isolated personalities. Grandma from *The American Dream* serves as an illustration of it. Her daughter, Mommy, desires to place her in a care home. She explains to Daddy why she wants to get rid of Grandma in their conversation. Despite the fact that Grandma is her mother, Mommy sees her as an intrusion within their relationship. She creates a fight with Grandma whenever she gets the opportunity since she can't abide living with her mother. She blames Grandma for overcrowding their flat during one of these arguments.

Charlie and Nancy are the human pair at the play's core of *The Seascape*, and they are married. Charlie is timid and quiet, in contrast to his spouse. Charlie wants to relax and do nothing during retirement, whilst Nancy wants to be busy. He cannot comprehend his wife's desire to connect with the old and discover an aspect of the world they haven't yet experienced. Charlie acknowledges having a more daring attitude when he was younger. When he needed to breathe again, he would let out a breath and rise from the bottom of swimming pools or other aquatic bodies. Charlie used to enjoy doing this, but he no longer wants to. He does not enjoy being pushed since he is happy with the way things are in his life right now.

The characters in Albee's works require some sort of interaction with another human, animal, or inanimate item. "every once in a while I like to talk to somebody, really talk; like to get to know somebody, know all about him." (Supra, 21)

Jerry appears to be among the most estranged of Albee's figures and has a painful desire for love. He makes an effort to permanently end his estrangement. He infuriates Peter towards the conclusion of the performance and hands him a knife. Upon "impaling himself on the knife," he passes away. His pain is therefore finished. He may have first considered committing suicide while carrying the knife. Perhaps he was searching for a man to support him in this destructive behaviour. Peter will live with the consequences of this murder or playing a role in Peter's suicide, but Jerry will no longer suffer. The creeping self-destruction is Claire's choice. In some ways, her severe alcoholism is an euthanasia. She tries every beverage in the home. She indulges in heavy drinking even while she is out.

Another factor contributing to the characters' isolation in Albee's pieces is a paucity of dialogue. Albee's characters frequently struggle to interact with one another while appearing to be able to. The talks of Albee's characters frequently take the form of monologues because they find it difficult to interact with other characters. In *The Zoo Story*, Peter feels hesitant to converse with Jerry, a complete stranger. Jerry can tell

Peter is reluctant by the way he reacts to him. As Peter is forced to talk, he prefers to “steer the conversation to the safe, if shallow, waters of conventional small talk”.(Albee) Jerry can sense Peter doesn't want to speak to him by the way he expresses himself in sentences, which oftentimes signals a person's aversion to social interaction. Jerry asks Peter questions about his family, dogs, house, job, etc. in the beginning of the chat, but Peter's speech quickly devolves into a monologue. Additionally, it should be observed that the discourse of Edward Albee's characters often deviates from logical progression and that the topics they discuss might shift abruptly. In *The Zoo Story*, Jerry discusses the likelihood that Peter would develop lung cancer and reminds Peter about Freud's use of prosthesis. The conversation quickly shifts to the *Time Magazine* and continues incoherently. This also marks the presence of one's alienated self.

OBJECTIVE

- To acquire and advance knowledge about the theatre of absurd and its applications to Albee's works.
- To discuss the various elements of Psychoanalysis, existentialism, theatre of absurd and have a thorough understanding of the literary creativity, criticism, and research methods.
- To have a detailed interrogation of the philosophical and the psychological aspects of writer's notion of absurdity in human life.
- To explore various facets of character personalities of Edward Albee's characters.

PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

The main part of the method is a close reading of the primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include all the major works of Edward Albee included in the research study. The secondary sources include the various book-length and short studies, journals, articles, and interviews on the writer and his works. The study will be based on data collected from various sources. Both descriptive and analytical methods will be used for the research. A comparative reading on themes, characters, symbols, and plots is proposed.

CONCLUSION

Basically, Albee's silliness in his plays, defiance against convention, vehement responses to criticism of him and his works, and attitude toward homosexuality make him the most divisive contemporary dramatist. Albee is an authentic representation of the Theatre of the Absurd. Master of absurdism, Albee is known for his ridiculousness and Deconstruction. In a significant way, the Theatre of the Absurd foreshadows the advent of deconstruction, and as a result Albee very deliberately substantiates several deconstructionist ideas in his previous works, which turn out to be the classic works. His plays incorporate aspects of deconstruction, which heighten his absurdity and establish him as the most significant dramatist of the modern era in America. The issue of isolation in large American cities, particularly around the middle of the twentieth century, is depicted in Edward Albee's plays. Problems with alienation and impersonality in contemporary metropolitan cities are reflected in the lack of interpersonal interaction, the emotions of loneliness, futility, solitude, detachment, and unrest. It is possible to escape the folly of life as it is portrayed in his dramas by becoming more conscious of the fact that people are social animals who require deep relationships with each other. However, for individuals to coexist peacefully, they must have the guts to scale back restrictions on their life. Albee is drawn into the circle of intellectuals, philosophers, and artistic writers who take existential anguish sincerely because of his focus on household and societal unrest with wider ramifications.

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