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IN EDWARD ALBEE'S DRAMA: A STUDY
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Arthur O. Thanason
Major professor

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RITUAL STRUCTURE AND ROMANTIC VISION IN EDWARD ALBEE'S DRAMA: A STUDY OF THREE PLAYS

By

Mary Castiglie Anderson

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ABSTRACT

RITUAL STRUCTURE AND ROMANTIC VISION
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By

Mary Castiglie Anderson

Edward Albee's The Zoo Story, Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, and Tiny Alice contain a ritual structure, specifically an initiation ritual, which helps to explain the presence of violence and confusion within the plays, helps to interpret the ambiguous conclusions, and helps to place Albee within the Romantic tradition.

Each play shares with primitive initiation ceremonies a "novice" mid-way between childhood dependency and maturity. Peter, George, and Julian have all chosen passivity as a way of holding onto the security and external definition of a patriarchal institution; nevertheless, some inner psychic balance in each tries to assert itself and bring control to the individual. Peter's bench, George's imaginary son, and Julian's role as lay brother show them to be neither reconciled to authoritarian structure nor fully committed to freedom.

In response to the crisis, seductive females and/or male doubles appear, similar to the frightening agents who are the priests of primitive initiations. These antagonists

represent the emotional, carnal, aggressive, irrational, "dark" impulses which the protagonists fear in themselves, and they suggest a tension between female nature symbols and male social structures. Their presence demands a confrontation which polarizes the main characters' contradictory inclinations.

The polarization is then resolved in a moment of androgenous union connected with a death. As in primitive rites, the initiate experiences simultaneous obliteration and unification. The violent, terrifying experience not only symbolizes the change in identity--it causes it. Similar to the initiate's "rebirth" Albee's characters exhibit primal gestures and dialogue at the conclusions of the plays. Unlike primitive initiations, however, Albee's initiation is not into society but into autonomy, into the maturity to resist surrender to absolute systems of belief, external sources of self-definition. Albee is not nihilistic, nor are his plays simply descriptive of the problems of modern society; they prescribe a process of personal and social renewal.

For Laura and Alexandra
and especially
for David

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Edward Albee's dramatically vital early plays, particularly Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? (1962), have sustained the playwright's distinction and credibility as a significant voice in modern American theater, despite critical disagreement as to the moral and philosophic positions he takes. Albee's theater has been explained variously as a spiritual tract of Christian salvation, as a nihilistic homage to Supreme Nothingness, and as a cheerless existentialist portrait of heroic survival in the face of hopeless futility. Portraits of Albee himself are those of an angry young man of a lost generation, a beatnik, a talented trickster whose flair for dramatic dialogue and theatrical technique veils a central hollowness, a minor talent adept at borrowing from greater artists, past and present, and a committed social critic. His most demanding works have been proclaimed as both courageous and cowardly, profound and trivial, revelatory and gratuitously obscure.

Critical investigation on Albee, in short, fails to yield a consistent, convincing picture of the playwright as a prophet of hope, a prophet of despair, or a false prophet, nor does it conclude whether the closing scenes of The Zoo Story (1958), Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, and Tiny

Alice (1964) should be played with elation, despair, resignation, or anger. The absence of even the most general framework for Albee's dramatic intentions seriously jeopardizes the legitimacy of his art, especially given the diminishing success of his later career. At their best his plays shock, offend, and intrigue. Since these qualities diminish in his later works in proportion to their failure to convey the energy and import of the earlier plays, the question arises as to whether Albee's reputation was formed on sentimentality and sensationalism, or on substance.

Should Albee's contribution to modern theater end with this evaluation, not only would an injustice be done to his artistic integrity but American letters would be deprived of his important artistic vision. C. W. E. Bigsby, one of the most astute scholars of Albee's works, comes closest to defining the moral imperative of the playwright's message. He writes:

> Albee finds little attraction in the contemporary cant of alienation and despair; and, if he recognizes the crises of identity through which man is passing, he does not confuse this with an enervating determinism. For to Albee the absurd does not lie in the discrepancy between the aspirations of the human spirit and the incapacity of the world to satisfy them, but in man's resolute adherence to distractions and illusion in the face of a desperate need to acknowledge reality.[1]

Using three Albee plays--The Zoo Story, Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, and Tiny Alice--this study intends to find the structural basis for this assertion. Albee's vision is, as Bigsby suggests it is, apocalyptic in an

affirmative sense because the mythic pattern of initiation ritual underlying most of his major works implies not only death but renewal. In these particular plays, more so than in subsequent ones, this structure engages the audience (as well as the characters) to experience a search for definitive, absolute meaning as the ultimate universal illusion. The only satisfactory conclusion the plays indicate is of reality as an activity whereby humans, individually and collectively, create and develop themselves, hence the process of death or destruction and rebirth or re-creation. Form links inseparably with content in Albee's early achievements, moreover, to frustrate reductive critical intentions.

I

The Zoo Story, Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, and Tiny Alice form a unit. The Zoo Story, on its most naturalistic level, targets modern society's socio-economic stratification and leans toward social statement, while Tiny Alice both attacks institutional religion and makes explicit Albee's metaphysical concerns. Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? with its decadent intellectual milieu and its religious parodies combines the two. Beneath these complimentary perspectives all three dramas employ a similar form to similar ends.

The beginning point for understanding this structure is Albee's characters' passivity, the by-product of their

confinement within a large, authoritarian, historically grounded system. In each play the system acts as a displaced father figure: society in The Zoo Story, the university run by George's father-in-law in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, God the Father in Tiny Alice; and each is maintained by a female, or, in the last case, a feminine symbol: Peter's wife, Martha, and Mother Church.

The general malaise enveloping Albee's characters (a malaise characteristic of the tone of post-industrial dramatic literature) is symptomatic of their acquiesence to these authorities. Each character seems intent on effacing himself. Julian (Tiny Alice) raises "to serve and be forgotten" to a life's goal, but both Peter and George also deny themselves the privilege of self-assertion and therefore of identity. Martha, in fact, calls George a "cipher, a zero," and Peter "is not in the habit of talking about himself much." All this precludes all relationships except those which function symbiotically, as in the case of George and Martha.

When we look at the characters closely we find they consistently, almost conscientiously, avoid conflict. This is even true of George in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, who always stops his bickerings with Martha just short of full scale confrontation. Pieced together with all the information we are given about Peter, George, and Julian, the avoidance seems to suggest their fear of "losing control," that is, of lowering cultural restraints. The fear of

gross social trangression is, of course, the fear of expulsion from the defining and differentiating support system. Social structures may be confining, but they are, after all, also defining; they confer on Albee's characters a sense of who each is relative to his fellow creatures and relative to the institution itself. Their only available alternative would appear to be isolation and obliteration (or loss of social identity).

We can say, therefore, that fear of abandonment and obliteration (both come up as themes in the play--the latter is expressed through preoccupations with insanity) keep Peter, George, and Julian on the defensive against any intrusive agents who might appear to threaten the psychologically complex operation they've set up.

The operation is very complex, because each character balances his fear against what must be a persistent, characteristically Dionysian and Romantic urge toward freedom. To appease the impulse and to nurture (however meagerly) the individuality that spawns it, the characters maintain a compromise. Peter has his bench to assert his separate identity from his social group and to protect him from wandering too far from its watchful eye. George vilifies his father-in-law privately but remains publically loyal to his rule. George and Martha's childlessness asserts their freedom from the historical lineage of the intellectual machine; their fictional son soothes the panic of

what that freedom might mean. Julian is neither "of the world" nor "of the Church." He holds to the teaching of the traditional institution but, like George, is dissatisfied with the father figure in whose name the institution functions.

However, the characters' compromise between passivity and personal will, between group identity and individual identity, between security and freedom, encompasses a contradiction. The situations Peter, George, and Julian have assumed in order to protect themselves from alienation and from which they borrow identities, are, in fact, alienating these characters from others and from themselves. Albee projects through each character an embodiment of this contradiction: Peter, the archetypal middle or organization man, isolates himself on a lonely park bench; George, the history professor expounding lessons on historical inevitability, defies historical succession by renouncing his past (whether we take the allegory of the young boy literally or symbolically) and by having no progeny to invest in the future; Julian adhers to the dress and restrictions of the cleric without taking on the offices of the role. Each character is, on the one hand, merely a mouthpiece for the larger authority, though each, on the other hand, intuitively resists the tendency to accept this external referent as implacable reality.

We can make a reasonable assumption, therefore, that Albee intends each play to open at the character's point

of psychological exhaustion, the result of sustaining a mid-point position for many years. Each is at a juncture between change and absorption into the stronger will. In Lawyer's terminology (Tiny Alice) Julian "can be pushed" over to "the Truth"--and it is the intention of this study to investigate what message Albee wants to convey by that term; change is certainly an important component of it--or "back to the asylums," that is, to the loss of conscious will and ego.

In each play an agent or agents appear to generate conflict and eventually to push the character before he or she gives in to oblivion. Aside from The Zoo Story, however, in which Jerry clearly appears as Peter's opposite, the agents for change vary relative to the characters they come up against. Martha acts in opposition to George, and vice versa, but George and Martha together act in opposition to the intellectual community and to Nick and Honey. Lawyer and Miss Alice act in opposition to Julian, but, also in Tiny Alice, Alice (or Nature) acts in opposition to God the Father.

Peter, George, Nick and Honey, Julian, and God, therefore, are corresponding characters aligned with principles of order, control, rationality, spirituality, a-sexuality, causation, and objective detachment. All these personages reflect these characteristics in one form or another and are therefore polarized against Jerry, Martha, George and Martha, Lawyer and Miss Alice, and Alice respectively.

The characters in this latter group, it must be noted, are either seductive females or versions of the "dark twin," that inscrutable social outcast. Alice or Mother Nature, of course, is, like God, the matrix symbol from which the others emanate. Each antagonist plays a variation on themes of rebellion, randomness, sexuality, intuition, a-rationality, capriciousness, and subjectivity. The protag-onists (by which, for want of a better word, I mean the characters in the first group--protagonists and antagonists in Albee's plays are interchangeable) tend to be motivated by the impulse to by-pass natural processes as a means of avoiding biological inevitability (i.e. death) and so dedi-cate themselves (on one level) to upholding the social norms that assert priority over nature. Their fear of death is certainly associated with the primal fears of obliteration and abandonment I've already mentioned. The fear motivates the suppression of certain personal impulses (especially sexual and aggressive ones) which the characters then objectify, that is, see as belonging to a realm outside of themselves. This objectification, in turn, indicates their failure to come to terms with these "darker qualities."

Albee's antagonists are personifications of the "dark forces" which reassert themselves as the female or male "Other" and demand to be identified and reincorporated. The process leading to the reidentification--and I would call it a reidentification with nature since Albee, in Tiny Alice, gathers all the qualities of the Other into

that one central symbol, Alice, who is not immediately recognized because so long denied--involves propelling the characters from their ambivalence into conflict. The conflict allows for the polarization which defines the dichotomy between Spirit and Matter, Father and Mother, the patriarchal, man-made construct and nature, and so on. Once the polarization is recognized and named (and this occurs in various displaced verions in each play) the conflict resolves into synthesis. The Other is recognized, then lost, and the general framework of the characters' lives, which previously had been maintained by a delicate balancing of distinctions, falters.

For instance, Peter progresses from ambivalence toward Jerry, to clearly polarized debate, to the point at which he holds the knife Jerry impales himself on, signifying their union and Peter's loss of a certain protective innocence. George and Martha escalate from a steady stream of disagreements ("petty revenges" Martha calls them) to open battle over their son, to his loss and their loss of Daddy and Mommy gender roles. Julian explicitly accepts God the Father and Mother Alice simultaneously, at which point Albee renounces metaphor and makes his character's death explicit, or, perhaps, uses death as an explicit metaphor.

In any case, the procedure in these early plays of Albee's is clearly dialectic and always ends with an androgenous image, leveling away the most fundamental distinction: gender. The playwright, however, just barely brings

us to the point beyond the synthesis, leaving us with the question of how we are to interpret the dramatic process. Ritual structure becomes a useful tool, at this point, with which to search for meaning.

II

Analysis of the steps contained in the dramatic situations of The Zoo Story, Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? and Tiny Alice reveals a format almost identical to rituals of initiation. Because the similarities are so pervasive, and because the initiation pattern inherently contains certain thematic implications, we can conclude that the readings of these plays are built right into their structures. A search for meaning in Albee's work must therefore begin with an understanding of primitive ritual.

Primitive rites of initiation are modelled upon fundamental material phenomena: the death-rebirth cycle of nature and human birth and death. These basic experiences, signifying as they do a change from one state to another, become the prototype of the emotional, psychological, and physiological alterations influencing human consciousness.

Rites of passage isolate the movement from childhood dependency to adult responsibility as the central human experience. The rites do not so much celebrate this transition as cause it by creating an event intense enough to insure a fundamental alteration in the initiate's personality, tantamount to a new, expanded identity.

The following is a description of a typical initiation rite, still current in certain primitive cultures:

> On the first night boys sit by firelight, transfixed. Figures shrouded in rustling leaves and masked in hideous mud-caked gourds snake through the crowd, hissing. Men steal up behind the boys and put stone axes to their throats, while the monsters lunge. . .and are stopped short. Revealed behind them are men playing flutes.
>
> To the boys this is a big revelation indeed. All their lives they have heard those wondrous sounds, and been told they come from fabulous birds, hidden from women but associating with men.
>
> The sounds fade, and the instructor, a Big Man, speaks:
>
> "It is not a bird, as you can see. Men, and not other creatures, make these sounds. The flutes once belonged to the women, but we men took them away forever. We tricked them. If you go blabbing to your mothers or sisters, we will kill you!" The monsters hiss, the axes touch the boys' throats. . . .
>
> Day after day the rituals continued for the boys, until one noon they emerged dazed--borne on the shoulders of soot-blackened warriors, each boy gleaming red from head to toe. The red was an oil pressed from the seeds of a pandanus nut, to stimulate the blood of birth. Feathers bobbed on their heads--bright red ones from parrots and golden plumes from birds of paradise. Decisively separated from their mothers, the boys had been symbolically reborn as independent men.[2]

This particular procedure points out several important aspects of rites of passage: 1) the appearance of fearsome and mysterious figures who are actually the priests of the initiation ceremony; 2) the threat of death; 3) the suggestion that on the "other side" of death is a new, harmonious world; 4) a revelation that the powers once though to be mysterious and unattainable fall within the realm of human possibility (i.e. men themselves are the purported "fabulous creatures"); 5) the imposition of a code of secrecy

separating the initiates from the uninitiated by means of privileged information; 6) the assumption that the rite will cause a change in identity radical enough to require the external sign of birth. In primitive terms this rebirth signifies being born as a man, a fellow tribesman with adult responsibility and identity in the tribe. In withstanding a formidable experience, the initiate symbolically vindicates his own will against the dominance of maternal influence, nature, and physical frailty.

The initiation rite plays out, therefore, humanity's view of itself relative to the natural world. Modern psychology identifies the pattern as representative of individual and collective psychological development. Men have seen themselves as attracted to both oblivion and self-reflection, as capable of identification with and consequent subjugation to a will greater than their own (personified as nature and the mother) and differentiation from that will toward self-creation. They are compelled to acknowledge human physical subjugation to disease and decay, but are impelled to assert human consciousness and spirit by applying their power to manipulate and control their environment. They swing between irrationality and rationality; they are pulled one way toward fate, and the other way toward will.

Myth, folktale, and religion, as well as literature, express variations on this dilemma; influences from these sources pervade Albee's imagination. The religious,

ritualistic spirit the playwright absorbs into his dramas, in emphasizing the renunciation of the immature dependence on external authority, constitutes a triumph for human progress. Since, however, Albee deals with a post-technologized world inhabited by culturally refined humans, long insulated against the palpable terrors of nature, newly possessed of a psychological sophistication which assumes the perogative of individual choice, increasingly surrounded by testimonies to the ascendancy of human will and reason, and consequently blind to the trap set by their own achievements, the playwright's use of ritual patterns assumes new complexities.

Albee's early plays--in fact, all his major plays--rest on certain assumptions uniquely applicable to modern society, beginning with the understanding that the values and myths of civilization are evolving and arbitrary, not, as his characters seem to confuse them to be, static and absolute.

III

In each of the three Albee plays which concern us here the increasingly sophisticated social, intellectual, religious, and technological manifestations of human ingenuity, have, ironically, begun to deprive the characters of their creative abilities, their capacities to involve themselves emotionally with one another, and their will to determine their own destiny. Because of a characteristically modern

moral laziness one psychologist calls the "human malaise," the characters find themselves overwhelmed by their own ideological, bureaucratic, and technological constructs. Forgetting that they fashion their own reality they regress to dependency on external definition. As Albee has put it, "People would rather sleep through life than stay awake for it."[3] He obviously means to express through his characters, then, his concern over a collective identity grown so encompassing it begins to recreate the original infantile reliance on a parent figure, becoming, in fact, a dangerously stifling force.

Though "gods" of domination and security, therefore, pervade these plays in the form of grotesque female figures, seen and unseen (representing an original narcissism and dependency on the mother), these "gods" also appear as patriarchal institutions and ideologies. Albee's characters seem to have exchanged the mother's domination for the equally pervasive authority of the father; rather than coming to terms with the original fixation they succumb to it in different forms.

We find these characters, furthermore (and again we must take each to be representative of Albee's view of the contemporary individual), at the zero hour. They can still shape the course of their destiny through a forceful assertion of will. The alternative would assign them victim to their own creations, as George and Martha's relationship to their fictional son attests.

However, the key to understanding Albee's message and his use of ritual is that his characters can progress only by first going backward. That is, they reclaim the will to create by temporarily recovering their dormant "uncivilized" impulses, thereby renouncing the misapprehension that they are strictly rational and self-controlled.

The ritual regression or remembrance, paralleling the initiate's symbolic death, approximates a state outside temporal space and time. When Albee's characters go through this ritual all the structures that confer them with identity and provide them with a source of meaning for their lives disintegrate. They face the obliteration and with it the death they fear. At the same time, they move outside of all frameworks, and once they do that they cannot any longer confuse their own subjective individuality with an external structure or symbol, and so they face alienation as well. They are then back to a kind of primal beginning. From here they can, figuratively speaking, recommence the evolutionary climb, now applying consciousness and deliberate reason to direct the course of the progression. Or, put another way, they would, at this point, be constrained to reassert themselves by creating a new reality and actively shaping a new future.

Within the course of each play, primal impulses, reawakened, become the means to more elevated, subtle expressions of human inter-relatedness. Kindness and cruelty combined, as Jerry says in The Zoo Story, are the teaching

emotion. To the degree that the characters confront and name the "animal" in themselves, they implicitly retrieve the ability to reassign meaning and purpose to human empathy.

These ideas relate directly to the ritual structure of Albee's plays, since ritual, in its purest form, reclaims a lost unity between the isolated individual and everything and everyone that is not himself. Jane Harrison, in Ancient Art and Ritual, points out that originally humans simply celebrated "participation, unity, and community" with the natural world. Once consciousness began to evolve, however, ritual became the means to invoke the "old sense of participation and oneness by conscious imitation."[4] Thus, when Jerry stresses his need to unify himself with people, when George and Martha struggle desperately with the full force of their need for each other, when Julian seeks an apprehension of some ultimate, abstract reality as intangible as it is unnameable, they all are articulating the impulse guiding ritual, an impulse toward synthesis.

These plays, furthermore, combine frenzied elation with somber pessimism because the act transcending human alienation simultaneously gives testimony to that alienation; without this testimony, that is, unless the characters face their fears, they cannot create anything, they are arrested. In this sense, "Consciousness is pain," as Julian says, and the "gain" of understanding is also the "loss" of innocence as Jerry implies; and humanity's privilege to mold its

environment and shape its destiny is also its fate.

In light of this, Albee's remarks about George and Martha indicate his intention to depict, through these characters, the existential dilemma. According to the playwright, the couple are never deluded that their son is anything more than a symbol, the offspring of their education, sensitivity, and intelligence. They become "only occasionally . . .confused, when the awful loss and lack that made the creation of the symbol essential becomes overwhelming." They are, therefore, always aware they are playing a game: "Except," Albee says, "it's the most serious game in the world."[5] They struggle, in other words, during the night of Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? with the temptation to surrender to their creation as to some static meaning, and to stop playing the most serious game which is finally their life. After them, and after Julian in Tiny Alice, Albee's efforts to create such heroic strugglers who opt for change against security, diminishes considerably. The life force contained in characters such as Jerry, George, and Julian is so strikingly absent from more recent plays that critical commentary on Albee's growing "mellowness" seems ironic.

The urgency emanating from each of these characters inter-relates with the play's capacity to function as a dramatic experience for the audience as well as for the characters. Albee's artistic intention has been to overcome what he sees as people's preference for "vicarious

experience rather than real experience," their dislike of being "affected for themselves," and their willingness to substitute "the illusion of being affected by something" for "the real thing."[6]

The playwright delivers "the real thing" in an initiation ritual intended as much for his audience as for his principal characters. Therefore, the gothic, abrasive, perplexing theatrical devices characteristic of his early career target the audience's intellectual detachment in order to force them back upon their intuitive and emotional faculties. Albee creates characters with uncertain motivations and unclear intentions, the distinction between protagonist and antagonist is ambiguous, meanings of symbols shift, language becomes simple embellishment, and surrealistic elements intrude upon naturalistic settings, all to consistently frustrate attempts at logical deduction. Thus, the tension building in the drama reflects the audience's growing confusion. The viewer's experience at the point at which language becomes too unreliable to convey meaning and reason becomes inoperative, should correspond to the representational death occurring on stage.

Albee's early plays, however, neither renounce naturalism so completely as to lose the audience's emotional and intellectual involvement nor do they celebrate chaos for its own sake. Rather, he breaks down systems of logic and empathy to create a radical image of what existence would be without these higher human faculties as a reminder

to his audience that they have these capacities and as a challenge to them to use them.

The definition of reality in Albee's plays finally comes down to a continual series of "illusions" which are the products of human creativity. Illusions are only deceptive (even dangerously so) when they are allowed to become static and when they are mistaken as absolute and unalterable. The strongest achievement of The Zoo Story, Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, and Tiny Alice, therefore, is also their most frustrating, namely, that the structure of the plays, in not yielding their meaning in one central message in fact contains the message of meaning as process. The format of the initiation rite with its death-rebirth motif also emphasizes the endless process of creation and recreation by which humanity defines and expresses itself. Albee's characters, most notably George and Martha and Julian, reclaim this perogative in the annihilation of all their sustaining illusions. Their final revelation is that, in coming to the end of everything, they must begin again, but differently, by deliberately imposing human consciousness onto an intangible fluid reality.

IV

After Tiny Alice Albee's drama takes a different direction; though he maintains the same structure and works with much the same ideas, his application of these shifts significantly enough to allow us to view his later works

as contrasting rather than expanding upon his original intentions.

Albee himself gives us useful categories for this contrast in a remark he has repeated again and again. "I find," he says (most recently in reference to The Lady From Dubuque), "that most plays that interest me are concerned with life and death."[7]

The Zoo Story, Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? and Tiny Alice give us some understanding of what Albee means by "life." The protagonists in these plays all become heroic by accepting confrontation, danger, confusion, upheaval, actual or symbolic death, and alteration. "Death," then, would be, conversely, psychological and emotional death; that is, the condition of the comfortable and the unchallenged--"Death," for Albee's characters means to remain in safety, order, security, predictability, protection. It means never to renounce their objective detachment or exercises in logical analysis. It is, finally, their ability to adjust, their ability to cope, their ability to "make do." The temptation to take this route, held out to all Albee's characters, divides them by whether or not they can surmount it.

Philosophically, the plays have a Romantic perspective. As a Romantic Albee extols the importance of spiritual revolution, emotional anarchy, and psychological upheaval. As a Romantic he sees the comfort of an unexamined life to be an individual and a collective threat.

As a Romantic his central focus is on how metaphysical issues bear directly on the more practical social, ethical, and material matters governing human existence. As a Romantic he isolates the powers of creation and redemption in human beings, who, as center of their own universe, must renounce dependence on created gods and accept responsibility for their own lives. At the same time, also as a Romantic, he draws upon mysterious, supra-rational personages and forces to guide the individual in his or her quest for identity.

In these definitions of life and death we can also find reasons for the dramatic success of Albee's earlier career relative to later works such as A Delicate Balance (1966), All Over (1971), Seascape (1975), and The Lady From Dubuque (1979). The earlier works symbolically represent the urgency to choose, the difficulty of the choice, all the violent emotional resistances the characters put up against it, and the terrible pain the choice for life involves. In these plays, moreover, Albee dramatizes that precise moment at which the characters must make their decision.

Though A Declicate Balance achieves a comparably impressive unity of style and theme, the lost dynamism results from the characters' choice for "sleep," the metaphor for death in the play. In All Over the choice for death has already been made (by the playwright as well as by the

characters) before the play begins; the dramatization is of the consequences of the choice. Seascape, more like the earlier plays, brings the characters to a moment of crisis, but, here, too, as the set certainly suggests, the choice for life is a foregone conclusion, depriving the play of dramatic tension and avoiding the dark and terrifying implications of renouncing old illusions and the comfort of familiar securities.

Even up to The Lady From Dubuque Albee continues to enrich the theme of the life vs. death struggle, proving how central the subject is for him, even though, in his increasing tendency to name his intentions and call attention to his devices, the playwright deflects the theatrical energy needed to involve his audience. The emotional death the character Jo must confront in the process of redefining her identity is introduced so early in the play and is made so literal as to risk all symbolic nuances. The play also articulates what has been an increasing disillusionment and pessimism in Albee's perspective: Sam, the main character and the prototype of the American male, so completely reflects his culture that he has no capacity to confront the terror of change; even more important, no force appears in this play strong enough and willing enough to lead him to the conflict and confrontation necessary for his own salvation as it is necessary for the play's dramatic vitality.

The premonition given of the kind of actual death this character can expect indicates the moral of all Albee's work:

> Such silence. And then it began; the eastern horizon was lighted by an explosion, hundreds of miles away--no sound! And within seconds they were everywhere, always at a great distance--the flash of light, and silence. . . . We knew what we were watching, and there was no time to be afraid. The silence was. . . beautiful as the silent bombs went off. Perhaps we were dead already; perhaps that was why there was no sound.[8]

Albee's continuing theme intends to remind modern society of the problematic human perogative to build its own reality and guide its own destiny. When Albee's characters abdicate the responsibility to choose the death prerequisite for rebirth they exchange that perogative for passivity and oblivion. Their choice to remain observers rather than participants in their own lives foreordains that their deaths will be external personifications of those same creations which they have made, maintained, and succumbed to. The prognosis for modern culture is that like Sam and like Tobias (in A Delicate Balance he will only wait for "the fatal mushroom") humanity, already "living death," will be the passive spectator at its own destruction when the individual failure becomes the cosmic doom.

The option presented in The Zoo Story, Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, and Tiny Alice should provide a focus for understanding Albee's theater and a new sensitivity for the motivations of his characters and the tone of his conclusions. These plays indicate, as well, Albee's efforts to reinvolve art as an instructive medium and a cultural influence.

CHAPTER I

The Zoo Story

The critical controversy surrounding The Zoo Story since its first United States opening (January, 1960) remains unresolved. Rose Zimbardo, for instance, reads the play as a modern Christian allegory of salvation, while Michael Rutenberg sees a socio-political message in Peter's "denial" of sympathy and empathy to Jerry. Along with Ronald Hayman, these critics seem to feel Albee intends to deliver a moral statement.[1]

Mary M. Nilan, on the other hand, disclaims Jerry's credibility as a spokesman for human understanding. In her view, Albee creates in this character a "universal symbol of alienated modern man" through whom the playwright suggests that the only "love" possible in the modern world is that which has been perverted into violence.[2] Early reviewers also focused on the play's apparent pessimism.[3] Gilbert Debusscher, Martin Esslin, and Anne Paolucci further expound on this view by attempting to establish Albee within a tradition of absurdist and nihilist theater.[4]

That all of these critics contribute valuable insights about the play even though they cannot agree on Albee's ultimate intention indicates the problems of interpretation

which Albee's style and form poses for critics. In each case, the critic has excluded the elements of The Zoo Story which are not consistent with her or his thesis. It is almost as if each is saying that, were Albee a better playwright, he would not have included the contradictory details. However, if one assumes that Albee is in control of his art, the critical burden is to encompass the contradictions rather than deny them. To focus only on the apparently nihilistic and absurdist aspects of the drama, for instance, is necessarily to accuse Albee (as Dr. Paolucci in fact does) of precisely that reliance on an absolute system (in this case the system of negation or nothingness) that his play seems to protest. In order for this critical approach to work, however, its system must be superimposed onto the play. Similarly, to reduce the ambiguity in Jerry's death by denying the unmistakable elation which contends with the despair is to attempt to reduce the play to simple, didactic statement.

Still other critics, such as Ruby Cohn, C. W. E. Bigsby, and Robert Bennett, avoid this reductionism by implying that the play's intention is to pose a dilemma and to ask a question, not supply an answer.[5] While this is closer to the spirit of the play, Albee's own statement about his work suggests that he is trying to do something more.[6] A close examination of the structure of The Zoo Story and the interpretations generally implicit in related cultural structures (such as initiation rites,

the romantic tradition in literature, and modern psychoanalytic theories) strongly suggests that Albee's drama is an affirmation of life, and a model of the process by which some modern people must seek it.

This model reveals that, according to the terms of Albee's art, life should not be a fixed code of behaviors or beliefs but a commitment to self knowledge, a constant testing of the intellectual environment for validity, and the acceptance of change, evaluation, synthesis, and renewed challenge. The Zoo Story gives us Peter as an example of how a human being can relinquish enormous power to ideals and institutions outside of himself and nearly obliterate his own identity in the process. The play points out as well how these ideals and institutions can be substitute parent figures. Thus, Peter appears subject to the male patriarchal social structure which seems to be maintained by his wife. The drama itself then becomes a rite of exorcism to move Peter toward maturity and autonomy by wrenching him from the external influences he has kept himself under.

Jerry is the agent who will push Peter away from his dependency. The process Jerry sets in motion has several phases. Peter first must confront the "Other," that is, the embodiment (in Jerry) of all those characteristics he has designated as being antithetical to him. He then must identify with this Other, realizing there is no real difference between them, at which point he will lose Jerry.

This last phase leads into Peter's confrontation with himself, for, when he loses the idea that there are clear and absolute distinctions between himself and those he has always considered radically different from him, he must confront the possibility that these conflicting tensions exist inside him, to be resolved in that way.

In explaining exactly how this works in Albee's play, I will refer to two literary conventions present in The Zoo Story: the literary convention of the double (which elucidates some of the more confusing aspects of Jerry's personality and behavior) and the pattern of primitive rites of initiation (which explains exactly how Peter's experience is meant to move him toward greater maturity and personal autonomy).

In order to understand why Albee's play employs these conventions, however, we must understand Peter's personality and his motivations. Albee's stage directions indicate immediately that the man is unremarkable in personal appearance: "neither fat nor gaunt, neither handsome nor homely."[7] Peter's age (he is in his early forties), his physical characteristics, and his attitudes qualify him as the perfect symbol of the man in the middle, given to neither excesses nor distinguishing features of any kind.

Albee did not create his character in a vacuum. As Michael Rutenberg has pointed out, the playwright seems to have modelled Peter on what William Whyte Jr. referred to as "the organization man," in his 1956 book of that

title. Whyte describes the type archly as the "wise young man" who

> is going to enjoy himself--plenty of time with the kids, some good hobbies, and later on he'll certainly go in for more reading and music and stuff like that. He will, in sum, be the apotheosis of the well-rounded man; obtrusive in no particular, excessive in no zeal. He will be the man in the middle.[8]

Albee's concern with the phenomenon of the organization man, furthermore, is consistent not only with Whyte's evaluation but with the feelings of other journalists of the time.[9] Their implications are similar to the playwright's: when a belief system becomes too rigid and automatic it begins to work against itself. Most seriously threatened by this ultimately is not the social outcast but those, like Peter, who have become so enmeshed in the framework of the social organization that they no longer are able to see themselves or it objectively, no longer able to sustain and balance the tension between self and system because within the pervasive security of the system the self has been obliterated.

This tendency is most apparent in Peter's self-effacing poses. "I'm. . .I'm normally. . .uh. . .reticent," he tells Jerry, and "I. . .I don't express myself too well, sometimes" (19). He conveys neither creativity nor initiative; he tends to "react" to Jerry (as we might suspect he reacts to all external stimulus), Albee tells us, "by reflex."

However, we also realize within the first scene of the play, that Peter, at least in regard to this one aspect of his life--the time he spends on his bench--can exhibit some assertiveness, albeit passively. From the moment Jerry approaches him, Peter resists the other man, but indirectly, trying first to ignore him and then to "politely" rebuff him. Jerry's appearance triggers a momentary struggle within Peter between self-assertion and acquiesence. Peter's fear of conflict is apparently so great that he succumbs to Jerry's overtures and violates his own need for solitude.

From the various clues Albee gives us we can piece together the motivation for Peter's passivity. The most obvious clue is Jerry's question about the dividing line between upper-middle-middle class and lower-upper-middle class (20). Presumably, the distinguishing characteristics of those belonging to each distinct social group, like the distinguishing characteristics of animals in a zoo, are the principal means humans have of differentiating themselves. That is, Peter can know that he belongs to a certain group only by exhibiting certain external features: he must dress a certain way--"He wears tweeds, smokes a pipe, carries horn-rimmed glasses"--live a certain place--"between Lexington and Third Avenue, on Seventy-fourth Street"--have a certain kind of job--"an executive position with a. . .small publishing house"--and adhere to certain social mores--being "a nice married man with two daughters."

Certain personality traits also belong to this group, traits Peter has learned so well he repeats them by reflex. Politeness is certainly one of these; deference to others and personal reticence are others.

These external identifying characteristics afford Peter the security of knowing where he belongs, what his place in life is. He seems to have made a pact with himself, as does anyone who wishes to be associated with a certain group, to refuse to deviate from social norms, even insofar as to test the validity of those norms. Rather than defining his own values he has assumed the values of his social class; anyone who falls outside those values is automatically different, or "Other." Peter derives a sense of who he is as a human being by virtue of his identification with those of his own group, his willingness to repeat the examples of those who have preceded him, and his disassociation from those different from him.

It is understandable, therefore, that Peter would wish to remain within the confines of his own social class. To violate its patterns is to risk expulsion and possibly to experience isolation, abandonment, and loss of identity. Philosopher Mary Daly provides an insight into just how threatening this would be. She writes of the need to realize "there is an existential conflict between the self and structures that have given. . .crippling security"; this, however, "requires confronting the shock of non-being with the courage to be." "It means," says Daly,

"facing the nameless anxieties of fate, health, and even life itself."[10]

Jerry, orphaned and socially outcast, is to Peter the shocking image of life outside the security of the social structure. As such, he personifies to Peter his own "Nameless anxieties." We must wonder, therefore, whether Jerry projects the only viable option to Peter's life or a fantasy of Peter's deepest fears. Before continuing along this line, however, we must examine how Peter comes to be vulnerable to Jerry at all.

As I've already suggested, to identify with an external structure to the extent that Peter has is to risk losing one's own individual identity to the group identity. Peter, however, in what has perhaps been an unconscious impulse to assert some personal distinction and individuality, has devised a small plan. He defines the plan late in the play:

> I sit on this bench almost every Sunday afternoon, in good weather. It's secluded here; there's never anyone sitting here, so I have it all to myself (41).

The gesture, though small, is crucial, for it violates Peter's role as the group man. It defies the dictum of "our" in favor of "mine," and so is the one way Peter detaches himself from the larger group.

Once he steps outside the parameters of his group, however, Peter risks isolation (immediately suggested by the image of a man sitting alone at a bench in the middle of a large city), calling attention to himself (becoming

"obtrusive"), and being approached by someone outside his usual milieu. Peter draws back from these risks; he wants to assert some individuality without wandering so far from his familiar realm that he'll be lost. He is attracted to independence and self-expression; he is afraid of isolation and loss of identity. The bench is a symbol of both the desire for individuality and the crutch Peter clings to in an attempt to go just so far but no further.

Peter must keep his bench, therefore, in order to maintain his half-way state, until Jerry appears to force him to make a choice. Since Peter has maintained this compromise "for many years" Jerry also appears as a signal for change. Considering the individuality Peter has invested in this symbol, if he renounces it to Jerry he will be forced to renounce his own tiny claim to personal identity and succumb completely to the role of "group man." Put another way, his passivity will triumph.

If, on the other hand, Peter asserts himself, and insists that Jerry leave, he must renounce his passivity, the one personality trait that most keeps him safe within the authority of social order. Peter is therefore caught between complete loss of will (and hence of identity) and confrontation. The confrontation would force him to acknowledge both the reality of his own will and the existence of contradictory realities. Peter's goal is to keep his bench but avoid asserting a claim to it, a goal which is itself contradictory and which Jerry further makes

impossible.

The contradiction Peter has been sustaining for so long itself makes him susceptible to Jerry, both physically (he is isolated on a lonely park bench) and emotionally (he can neither remove himself from Jerry's presence nor ask the other man to leave). In many ways it is as if Peter's own psyche has reached a point of exhaustion and is asking him to make a decision to renounce the delicate balance of his compromise in order to force a commitment. The real danger is that Peter's gesture of individuality, if not further acted upon, will prove ineffective against his strong need for security, and Peter will lose his identity completely. He is, therefore, in a crisis between further growth (or a movement toward life) and further retreat into emotional oblivion (or psychological death). It is with the understanding of this crisis that we can approach Jerry's role as Peter's double.

The double in literature tends, if fact, to emerge at the moment of crisis in the consciousness of the first self (in this case Peter) for the purpose of affecting some major change. In this sense Jerry is a call for renewal generated by Peter's own psyche.

The physical differences of the characters immediately and visually defines them as polar and complementary. Peter, for instance, although "moving into middle age" dresses and acts in a way to "suggest a man younger," while Jerry, though actually younger, has fallen from physical

grace and has a "great weariness" suggesting age. Peter in his innocence and Jerry in his "over-sanity" (Albee's term) both lack completeness, and so it is plausible that they should be drawn together in a desire for unity.

Jerry is elusive, uncanny, and mysterious. With his first lines ("I've been to the zoo"), which he repeats with increasing urgency ("Hey, mister, I've been to the zoo"), he creates the impression that there is a puzzle here to be solved, and so sets the tone for the whole drama.

Jerry's frustrating complexity further surfaces in his ability to move freely between irony and moral righteousness. Although he possesses almost diabolic characteristics he also speaks to legitimate feelings of frustration, alienation, and loneliness. In him, moreover, Albee creates a character who is both realistic and understandable and surrealistic and obscure. Jerry is, simultaneously, dream-like, forboding, benevolent, educative, cynical, and sentimental.

All this is consistent with the literary double, usually an ambiguous figure. C. F. Keppler, in his book The Literature of the Second Self, finds the source of this ambiguity in the fact that the double is both a part of and yet not a part of the first self. Applying Keppler's definitions to Albee's play we can say that between Peter and Jerry there is a "simultaneous distinction and identity"; they are "an inescapable two that are at the same time an indisputable one."[11]

More specifically, we can say that Jerry is, on the one hand, always external or part of the objective, outside world of Peter: "He is always 'there,' a self in his own right, never translatable into a product of mental aberration" (Keppler, 10). This is important, for Peter, as I've already pointed out, is severely controlled by the authoritarian forces from which he draws his identity. In order to keep himself in line within his social group he creates an image for himself of the consequences of social deviation, an image which he looks for outside of himself in the form of other people. Yet this image is in fact so threatening to him (as it must be in order to counteract his restlessness) that Peter pretends these other people (those radically different from himself) do not exist. He not only hides from himself by externalizing his own complexities and conflicts, he hides from his externalizations as well.

Peter, consequently, must confront Jerry; that is, he must see and acknowledge the loneliness and lack of social identity he so fears first as something outside himself, before he can make the next step which is to experience these fears and desires as his own.

Because these fears and desires <u>are</u> his own, Jerry is, on the other hand, a subjective projection of Peter. "He is always 'here' as well, his psyche intergrown by intraceable, shared tendrils with that of his counterpart, and so never translatable into a purely external fellow being"

(Keppler, 10).

This subjective aspect of Jerry's role helps to explain why he appears so disoriented; why, for instance, he introduces himself as someone who is lost, though he is apparently a native of the city. Or why, though he at first makes quite a point about having been to the zoo, he later cannot recall anything about it:

> Peter: Look here; is this something about the zoo?
> Jerry: (Distantly) The what?
> Peter: The zoo, the zoo. Something about the zoo?
> Jerry: The zoo?
> Peter: You've mentioned it several times.
> Jerry: (Still distant, but returning abruptly) The zoo? Oh, yes; the zoo. I was there before I came here. I told you that (19-20).

This is more than just a ploy Jerry uses, as the stage directions verify. The scene is only one of several when he must "return" as from a great distance. Another is when Peter asks him why he lives in the roominghouse; Jerry responds "From a distance again," not that he has no choice, but that he doesn't know. There are times, as well, when Jerry seems to be communicating on a level completely removed from everyday, social reality, such as when he seems unable to apprehend that Peter has a wife, even after the other man has established that he is married.

All this creates a shadowy and disturbing impression of Jerry that works dramatically apart from intellectualization of theme and motive. The expectations toward realism the play encourages make Jerry's bizarre qualities

as jarring and confusing to the audience as they are to Peter.

Keppler's definition of the second self fits the character perfectly:

> The second self is the shadowed self, surrounded by an aura of the uncanny that sometimes makes him seem to belong to a different order of reality from that of the world in which he moves. . .A part of this uncanniness is that the second self tends to be the possessor of secrets that the first self can never quite fathom and thus in being the stranger is also the stronger, always tending to be a real control of the relationship (Keppler, 11).

Jerry is, in fact, both the stranger and the stronger of the two characters, in that he orchestrates the interactions between them. Most related to Keppler's definition, however, is Jerry's role as intruder, for, from the opening lines of the play he invades Peter's solitude, his personal affairs, and, finally, his bench.

Jerry, furthermore, possesses secrets about Peter; he always has a disconcerting perception of the areas in which Peter is most vulnerable. He knows when to play on the man's "sense of decency," when to cultivate his sympathy, when to appear genuine and friendly, when to act distant, cold, or hurt, when to create a sense of mystery to entrap Peter's curiosity, and when to be straightforward and lucid. Peter himself encourages the impression that Jerry is privy to some secret information about him, "Why did you say that?" he demands after Jerry makes the assumption that Peter and his wife will have no more children. "How would

you know about that?" Jerry, in fact, is so much in control of the situation that when Peter half-jokingly alludes to himself as Jerry's "guinea pig for today" (17) he underscores an already implicit analogy to a controlled experiment.

Perhaps the key question about Jerry, however, and the one most relevant to his role as "second self" is whether each step in his interaction with Peter builds logically and sequentially to a climax, or whether that outcome was preestablished in Jerry's mind, waiting only for the opportunity for him to manipulate the circumstances to effect his end. At least twice in the play he seems to prophesy events that will eventually be fulfilled:

> Jerry: I've been to the zoo.
> Peter: Yes, I think you said so. . .didn't you?
> Jerry: You'll read about it in the papers tomorrow, if you don't see it on your T.V. tonight (15).

He often explains his strange behavior to Peter as if he is directing himself in a role:

> Peter: Why do you just stand there?
> Jerry: I'll start walking around in a little while, and eventually I'll sit down. (Recalling) Wait until you see the expression on his face (20).

In retrospect the audience will know that Jerry here refers to his own face, so that this statement would appear to be a statement of intention. Yet Jerry himself is not clear on this: "Could I have planned all this? No. . .no, I couldn't have. But I think I did" (48).

Jerry's words implant the suspicion that though the

surface reality of his meeting with Peter seems accidental (it is part of the literary convention that the encounters between doubles usually do) the event itself was somehow preordained, following some mandate beyond ordinary time and logic.

Since the first self is not conscious of this process, the situation affecting change seems to "just happen." The meeting, however, is actually the reverse of accident; the second self comes, rather, just at that crucial juncture when the first self "however reluctantly" is ready for him, "because of his vulnerability to and need for the influence that only the second self can bring" (Keppler, 196).

Psychologist Carl G. Jung's terminology in defining the double--he calls him "the immortal within the mortal man" and "the long expected friend of the soul"[12]--interestingly echoes Jerry's intimation that, on some level at least, Peter was expecting him:

> Jerry: Peter, do I annoy you, or confuse you?
> Peter: (lightly) Well, I must confess that this wasn't the kind of afternoon I'd anticipated.
> Jerry: You mean I wasn't the gentleman you were expecting.
> Peter: I wasn't expecting anybody.
> Jerry: No, I don't imagine you were. But I'm here, and I'm not leaving (37-8).

Jerry appears in response to Peter's unacknowledged desire for liberation and self assertion, expressed through his isolation on the bench. The rationale for the second self presupposes a natural psychic equilibrium (in the individual and in the culture generally of which Peter is a

symbol) which will always try to reassert itself, and, rather than threatening the possibility of free choice, the unconscious double provides the basis for it.

Yet, it is inevitable that Jerry would appear threatening to Peter. Peter is a product of years of social training; Jerry exists outside any social framwork and projects a-social and a-rational attitudes which are, by their very nature, antithetical to the requirements of civilized society. Together, the two characters present an age-old dilemma between the unrestricted, completely self-defined, instinctive, natural individual and the cultured, social being. For Peter, then, Jerry must represent conflicting feelings: an attractive freedom from externally imposed limitations and the consequent punishment for that freedom--isolation and lack of definition. This last is indicated by the fact that Jerry exists without any historical or biological roots; he is without the influence of all authoritarian parent figures, but also without the protection they afford.

This dilemma between lonely freedom and restraint has at least three metaphors in the play. One is Jerry's empty picture frames (which, incidentally, Peter signals out as worthy of emphasis). In being empty, these depict freedom from limitations on the one hand and loss of identity (or facelessness) on the other. Jerry, moreover, in having no one to relate to, exists in a vacuum.

A similar metaphor is the cages in the zoo which

separate the animals from each other, and the people from the animals. Again, these are both a restriction (indicating Peter's desire to step outside his group) and a definition (indicating the definition he derives from the group). Like Peter's daughters' caged parakeets these animals are spared the risk of harm from their natural predators by being denied their natural freedom. Peter cannot be aware that he has made the same compromise until he confronts his alternative self. However, it is important to keep in mind that Peter and Jerry are polarizations; neither has chosen a healthy solution. Because they are so obviously opposites on so many levels they together contain the theme of separation. Their relationship is still another metaphor expressing the tension between society and nature, deliberation and impulse, rationality and the unconscious, a tension which is the externalization of Peter's own internal conflict.

As the second self, Jerry is also a shaman conducting a rite, the purpose of which is to temper these dichotomies by externalizing Peter's internal crisis, first through a symbolically parallel story of his experience with the dog, and then by the argument he introduces over the bench.[13]

The argument forces Peter to acknowledge the existence of his "other half"; what has been virtually a continuous monologue by Jerry becomes, at last, a clearly polarized debate, prerequisite for resolution.

Jerry's actions are ritualistic because he is, in

fact, conducting a rite to initiate Peter from innocence ("You are possessed of a truly enviable innocence" he tells Peter early in the play) to experience. This experience will be the natural outcome of Peter's acknowledgement of differences, his loss of absolute identification with the external social authority, and the resulting loss of its protection.

All drama's connection to ritual is implicit; in The Zoo Story, however, Albee calls attention to the connection. That is, Jerry's actions when he catalogues his possessions, and when he relates the parable of the dog "as if reading from a billboard," ending with an incantation that is a kind of litany and invocation, are explicitly ritualistic. Periodically throughout the play Jerry also employs Biblical language, combining it with a speech pattern otherwise so vernacular that the juxtaposition becomes one more emphasis on the dichotomy between sacred and profane, spiritual and temporal. More ritualistic aspects of the play are conveyed through its setting ("a place apart" which, should Peter yell, no one would hear him) and in Albee's suggestion of how Jerry should use space on stage: "The following long speech, it seems to me, should be done with a great deal of action, to achieve a hypnotic effect on Peter, and on the audience, too" (29). Jerry tends to direct his own actions during his long monologue as if following a dance or ritualistic scheme: "I'll start walking around in a little while, and eventually I'll sit down" (19).[14]

The key element of Jerry's ritual, the story of himself and the dog, is also one of the more confusing aspects of the play. The story has a basic fairytale or myth plotline. The hero (Jerry) needs to gain admittance to a certain place which has associations with the underworld. He is prevented first by an old crone (his landlady); once he gets past her by repeating the right formula, he is accosted by a "raging beast" (the dog) which he must either tame or kill. Having undergone these ordeals he can resume his place in the real or everyday world with the possession of some new knowledge and understanding. Jerry defines this as "something to do with how sometimes it's necessary to go a long distance out of the way in order to come back a short distance correctly" (21).

Jerry's roominghouse--the tabooed place into which he must fight to gain entrance--does, of course, on one level function as a poignant example of the kind of social stratification alluded to several times in the play. Not only are different classes of people divided by the difference between "an apartment in the east 70's" and a "four story brownstone roominghouse on the upper West Side," but the people within that house are separated and unknown to each other as well.

The place, however, also has symbolic associations with the underworld; it is a place full of obvious outcasts, people somehow "dead" to most of society, as Peter admits: "It's so. . .unthinkable. I find it hard to believe that

people such as that really are." It has further associations with the unconscious, contents of which Jerry is aware, as he "knows" some of the people who live in the place, contents of which he is only dimly aware, as the woman who cries unseen behind the closed door, and contents of which he has never been in contact with at all: "there's somebody lives there, but I don't know who it is. I've never seen who it is. Never. Never ever" (22).

Jerry's roominghouse in Albee's first play functions much like Miss Alice's house does in Tiny Alice--as a dream-like center of mystery. As with Miss Alice's house it is a place with many rooms and levels, having four stories. Jerry lives on the top floor, the place close to consciousness. The rooms are all "laughably small," separate from each other, and "better as you go down, floor by floor" into unknown territory. Jerry carefully points out he does not know "any of the people on the third and second floors." (22,27).

The term initiation means to enter into and implies an inward journey of some sort. In primitive initiation rites the novice was often led into a house representing a microcosm of society and his symbolic installation at the center of the universe. Anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep in Rites of Passage defines the first step in initiation as the rite of separation.[15] In mythology the hero must encounter the labyrinth separating him from his former life. The entrance into new life is symbolized as passing through a door, for

to cross a threshold is to unite oneself with a new world. Jerry draws specific attention to his place of confrontation with the dog:

> And where better, where better to communicate one single, simple-minded idea than in an entrance hall? Where? It would be a START! Where better to make a beginning. . .to understand and just possibly be understood . . .(italics mind) (35).

The landlady and her dog are guardians of the threshold, and, as in the traditional quest format, they must be honored and appeased. The landlady, a displaced sybil-figure, combines the personages of seductress and witch. Jerry describes her as the "fat, ugly, mean, stupid, unwashed, misanthropic, cheap, drunken bag of garbage who comes after him with her sweaty lust" (28). Usually this figure tries to prevent the seeker's entrance into the place which is the source of knowledge. If the person has the right information, such as the knowledge of the labyrinth design, the right password, or if he makes the right request he finds his road easily; if not, the woman devours him.[16]

Jerry has found the formula to undercut her power:

> But I have found a way to keep her off. When she presses herself to my body and mumbles about her room and how I should come there, I merely say: but, Love; wasn't yesterday enough for you, and the day before? (28).

The dog is an extension of the landlady; in fact, they look alike: "She had forgotten her bewildered lust, and her eyes were wide open for the first time. They looked

like the dog's eyes" (32). Dogs have been associated in mythology with the priesthood of Great Mother figures: "male votaries of the Great Goddess who prostituted themselves in her name."[17] The dog in The Zoo Story is another displaced mythic symbol and also tries to devour Jerry:

> . . .this dog wasn't indifferent. From the very beginning he'd snarl and then go for me, to get one of my legs. Not like he was rabid you know; he was sort of a stumbly dog, but he wasn't half-assed either. It was a good stumbly run; but I always got away. He got a piece of my trouser leg,. . .but, I kicked free and got upstairs fast, so that was that. (Puzzles) I still don't know to this day how the other roomers manage it, but you know what I think: I think it had to do only with me (30).

Because of Jerry's attempt to kill him, the dog goes through a "death" and "rebirth" mirroring Jerry's subliminal experience and foreshadowing Peter's. The possibility of the dog's recovery creates in Jerry the expectation of a transformation: "I wanted the dog to live so that I could see what our new relationship might come to" (33). The transformation, however, is more poignantly a personal one for Jerry, uncovering in him a felt need for relatedness with the external world he had never before realized. The transformation occurs because of the momentary communion he and the dog achieve: "during that twenty seconds or two hours that we looked into each other's faces, we made contact" (34).

From his words it seems that Jerry has breached a

separation with the dog that, in making time irrelevant, must have a meaning beyond time. That such a breach is possible in his revelation, but along with it comes the awareness of the separation itself.

In this story Jerry focuses on his alienation from an animal. Since he also speaks in the play about the zoo, we can assume that this sense of separation from the animal world is crucial to him. In fact, Jerry, by means of his own initiation rite, arrives at the understanding that as a sentient human being he is subject to more than biological needs and impulses. The understanding immediately alienates him from nature by virtue of his rationality, his ability to be self-reflective, and his capacity to invent, create, and thereby shape his environment. He at once realizes his power and his aloneness. Jerry's "loss of innocence," therefore, is just the reverse of Peter's, since Peter has been subsummed by a man-made culture from which he is eventually severed by a reawakening of his biological impulses.

In the format of primitive rites of initiation, the ordeal for the novice has three basic components leading to his rebirth as a new, mature individual: separation from his mother and from his counterparts, confrontation with danger and death, and hallucination or loss of consciousness. Jerry's encounter with the dog (like his encounter with Peter) proceeds along similar lines, from conflict, to identification, to loss. The momentary identification

is like a loss of consciousness; it is the achievement of synthesis beyond any superimposed defining framework in a reality which, in the words of British scholar, Tony Tanner, "lies forever outside our names for it."[18] Inevitably, therefore, Jerry and the dog reenter time and space:

> When the dog and I see each other we both stop where we are. We regard each other with a mixture of sadness and suspicion, and then we feign indifference. We walk past each other safely; we have an understanding. It's very sad, but you have to admit it's an understanding (35).

This understanding--Jerry's revelation--has been summarized in an analysis of the human situation by Ortega y Gasset:

> In the vacuum arising after he has left behind his animal life he [man] devotes himself to a series of nonbiological occupations which are not imposed by nature but invented by himself. This invented life--invented as a novel or a play is invented--man calls human life, well being. It is not given to man as its fall is given to a stone or the stock of its organic acts--eating, flying, nesting--to an animal. He makes it himself, beginning by inventing it.[19]

Albee's preoccupation is, as his character's becomes, with the phenomena of these fictions--he creates a reverberation of fictions in his play--not the least of which is the fictional construct of language. Jerry perceives that by isolating and dividing elements of total experience the experience itself is falsified and limited: "I have learned that neither kindness nor cruelty by themselves, independent of each other, creates any effect beyond themselves; and I have learned that the two combined, together,

at the same time, are the teaching emotion" (35-6).

What he means by "the teaching emotion" remains ambiguous in the play, but we can make a reasonable guess that the term has something to do with dissolution of all the opposing distinctions which people usually use to define life. Jerry immediately adds: "And what is gained is loss." In using paradox (which conveys meaning by trying to transcend it) Albee attempts to express the tension between necessary definitions and the experience of reality. Jerry is frustrated with the inadequacy of language to express reality: "And was trying to reach the dog an act of love? And, perhaps, was the dog's attempt to bite me not an act of love? If we can so misunderstand, well then, why have we invented the word love in the first place?"[20]

Jerry's words amplify his connection to the mythic hero who, in his individual adventure, typifies the collective experience. The fall from innocence is the fall into knowledge; the fall from undifferentiated unity into the dialectic world is the understanding of the loss of total relatedness and the beginning of the continuous dialogue between the conflicting human impulses toward good and ill. The gain is knowledge, progress, and experience; the loss is harmony and unity. Human beings, according to Albee in The Zoo Story, have a continuously problematic relationship between their conflicting desires.

Because Jerry has apparently had an experience in

which these conflicts were temporarily resolved he is in Joseph Campbell's words, "the master of two worlds" whose task involves "rendering back into the light-world the speech defying pronouncements of the dark."[21] He is disoriented throughout the play because he moves back and forth between these two worlds, which can also be the realms of consciousness and unconsciousness. As the hero he must, according to Campbell, represent "on a two-dimensional surface a three-dimensional form, or in a three-dimensional image a multi-dimensional meaning" or (again using Campbell's definitions) he must "perceive eternity in time while capturing eternity through time" (Campbell, 218).

The end of Jerry's initiation becomes the beginning of Peter's. Peter's need for communication with Jerry is essential because of his rigid adherence to the conventions of the social collective which tends to encourage conservatism, repression of natural impulses, and suspicion of change.

Peter's rupture from the security of the social collective is symbolized by the severance from his bench and by the confrontation he has with death. When Jerry takes out and clicks open an "ugly looking knife," the realization of his mortality and the apparently arbitrary imperatives that exist beyond rationality dawns on Peter: "You <u>are</u> mad! You're stark raving mad. YOU'RE GOING TO KILL ME!" (46).

The violence that Jerry employs at this point in the play emphatically moves the characters toward the interchangeability that reinforces their relationship as doubles, whose very opposition presupposes their unity. In fact, the violence in The Zoo Story is one more piece in the tightly interlocking structure of the play. The confrontation Jerry initiates over the bench isolates and focuses the sharp yet arbitrary differences between Peter and Jerry that, when broken down, reveal an essential sameness.

According to René Girard in Violence and the Sacred, violence is precisely that aspect of human behavior which, if given full vent, will break down all societal differentiation.[22] Jerry's expressed need for Peter's bench is only an incidental symbol for his real need to possess Peter's being, or, in his own words, to "get through to" the other man, to "make contact."

Jerry's focus on the bench is realistic since the more Peter is threatened with its loss the more he associates it with himself, linking it to his adulthood, his manhood, and his sense of responsibility:

> I've come here for years; I have hours of great pleasure, great satisfaction, right here. And that's important to a man. I'm a responsible person, and I'm a GROWNUP. This is my bench and you have no right to take it from me (45).

Peter's words reinforce Girard's view:

> It is not some vulgar trophy or second-rate divinity the adversaries are trying to wrest

> from each other's grasp, but their very souls, their vital force, their being. Each finds this being reflected in the other's violence, because their mimetic desires have converged on one and the same object (Girard, 154).

The desire is mimetic because the impulse toward imitation of the other grows out of the felt loss of connectedness with the objective world. When Peter and Jerry diverge over the bench, the tensions which have existed between them all through the play erupt, revealing them as unmistakable antagonists. Their conflict is simultaneously a convergence, making their implicit relationship as likes explicit; in reflecting each other's violent behavior they dissolve the original difference between them and become equals. The violence growing out of difference destroys difference.

Jerry brings Peter past the social structures dividing them--structures which make Peter unable to accept the original brotherhood Jerry offers--by provoking him to a level of interaction at which they can share experience, that level outside society which Jerry calls animal. As they approach this level, differences between them dissolve; when Jerry rushes to grab Peter by the collar Albee's stage directions indicate that their faces must almost touch (46).

At this point Peter calls Jerry a monster, echoing Jerry's description of the dog as "a black monster of a beast"(30). According to Girard, the monster and the double are closely related. Violence, in rendering

differences confused and intermingled, dissolves the familial, the cultural, the biological, and the natural distinctions upon which society is constructed and so creates a formless and grotesque mixture of things that are normally separate" (Girard, 160). Peter sees himself reflected in Jerry and, especially as the image is one his ego has struggled to keep at bay, it appears to him as a monstrosity.

The unity and reciprocity which violence effects is perfectly depicted in The Zoo Story in the climactic tableau scene (47). There, for all their initial differences, Peter and Jerry unite beyond all definition, structure, and language--even the line between victim and victimizer becomes blurred. In that moment, too, the act leading to Jerry's death loses its distinction as either suicide or murder. This nondifferentiated union, moreover, mandates Jerry's sacrifice-death: the cultural crisis culminating in the characters' violent interaction over the bench must find an outlet upon which to spend itself; otherwise their distinction (and, by extension, the social order) cannot be restored.

In his death Jerry also realizes the practical aspect dividing ritual from art. In so doing he links real life and art, experience and object, for in the moment he impales himself on the knife Peter holds he is AT ONE with the other man--the synthesis toward which the drama has been moving is realized. In Jerry, with his power to fade

the boundaries of the individual and create some unity with the collective, Albee portrays a romantic, Dionysian hero as that hero has been described by Nietzsche:

> No longer the artist, he has himself become a work of art; the productive power of the whole universe is now manifest in his transport, to the glorious satisfaction of the primordial ONE.[23]

The Dionysian elements in Jerry's character, moreover, correspond to that god's title of Master of Magical Illusions.[24] The illusionist, like the artist, points out to society the fact of illusion in its assumption, the masks they all conspire to wear, and the fictions they engage in. This is Jerry's role in regard to Peter, as it has continually been Albee's purpose in almost all of his drama.

Albee, consistent with his aesthetic of process, makes no attempt to resolve the paradox between fiction and fact, imposed meaning and discovered meaning. Jerry's final invocation of God, uttered with "a combination of scornful mimicry and supplication" (49), typifies the ambiguous feelings of human beings in regard to their position in the universe, feelings somewhere between genuine belief and simple imitation of convention.

The playwright presents the prevailing social structure as a major force to be reckoned with, since it, too, has contradictory meaning; it is, on the one hand, the form that, in bringing order to the confusions of fluid experience, allows for meaningful actions and human progress. Yet (as Albee illustrates through Peter), the form can too

easily become fossilized and, if left unchallenged, can result in entropy.

Jerry is a fearsome character: he does move toward the destruction and breakdown of the prevailing order, he does wish to break through patterns we (the audience as well as Peter) rely on for meaning, he does try to reach Peter in some metaphysical, undifferentiated way, and he does, finally, bring violence to both express and effect his end.

On the other hand, Jerry by his death incorporates the principle he represents back into society, an idea amplified by his contention that Peter will see Jerry's face on television--the reflector of modern America's experiences and self-images. His death, also, restores order--not cyclically, but with the crucial difference implied that Peter must restructure his life (without his bench, hence with lost security) around a new understanding and must consciously create for himself an ordered reality. This new system should be different, Albee's play seems to suggest, in that it will be self-consciously formed.

There is the strong message in The Zoo Story, as there is in later Albee plays, that inherited patterns are untested patterns. Yet, in reaching beyond them Jerry and Peter come to what the Lawyer in Tiny Alice calls "the edge of the abyss" to face the two most primal fears: abandonment and loss of personal identity. Put another

way, the characters temporarily escape all limits, encounter formlessness, and, if the pattern of their initiation holds true, strike their own bargain with reality and experience.

The idea that humans are positioned on a delicate balance between opposites was present in Albee's work long before he titled his fourth play. The idea surfaces as early as The Zoo Story when Jerry "proves" that all humans teeter on that line between freedom and circumscription, choice and destiny. Albee's characters are initiated into the understanding that all patterns are created fictions, fictions which are necessary nonetheless, since they are the only means through which experience can be made comprehensible. The tableau scene in which Peter and Jerry transcend these fictions is necessarily one with silence. Synthesis is a metaphor for death in Albee's plays, and vice versa, and death becomes synonomous with beginning again.

Albee's point is that because humans create their fictions they can both control and change them. He presents the idea through Peter that the disintegration of an old identity (an identity "borrowed" from identification with external authority) along with the panic such disintegration provokes may provide the possibility for a new, more consciously formed personality. The message is, then, that life patterns must be self-created and continuously reformed, and so never mistaken as absolute and implaccable. The playwright continues this theme through the characters of George and Martha in his next and most highly acclaimed play.

Chapter II

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?

In comparison to The Zoo Story, there has, in general, been more critical agreement as to both the dramatic merit of Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? and its theme. The centrality of the illusion and reality motif is usually agreed upon, making George and Martha's imaginary son the hinge to all the dramatic conflict.[1] The destruction of the symbolic son is the play's climax; the subsequent denouement in which George and Martha, reduced to monosyllables, reveal their existential fear, has been seen by most critics, at least tentatively, as an affirmative resolution.

The most tentative in this reading tend to interpret the existential message as being oppressive. Reality, which is finally the confrontation with "the absurdity and cruelty of existence," remains, in a world divested of absolutes, unrelieved by the absolution the characters must inevitably crave.[2]

In contrast, Foster Hirsch in Who's Afraid of Edward Albee? somewhat breezily explains the "suggestion of moral redemption" at the end of the play as Albee's inability "to accept the notion of absolute meaninglessness or

finality."[3] Those critics, however, who truly explore the existential message underlying the play, find a sounder basis for a positive ending. In the words of Duane R. Carr, once George and Martha "experience the nothingness of human existence, they are also able to see, as only George did before, the necessity of going on, of creating new illusions." This reading coincides, in spirit, with Charlene M. Taylor's interpretation of the play as a rite of passage into adulthood through which the characters must accept the complexities of life including "the full range of human potential for both good and evil"; and it leads logically into Thomas Adler's contention that the play's focus is less on the destruction of old illusions than on the creation of new realities.[4]

These last interpretations of the existential message of Albee's first full length play are more accurately correspondent with the thematic demands of its structure. As in The Zoo Story, the underlying structure of Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? is the ritual of initiation involving death and renewal. This rite has several phases; it is triggered, first of all, by a crisis. In social terms this crisis is indicated by a condition of stasis in which no forward progress is possible. In psychological terms the individual ego or self-determining function is becoming annihilated by external forces to which it has relinquished power. The change that is consequently needed can be brought about only by the confrontation of the ego (or the

culture) with its most violently destructive side. This is simultaneously a confrontation with death since it involves a renunciation of all the old, relied-upon rationalizations and familiar frameworks for meaning. The process can be seen, therefore, as involving a return to cosmic chaos on the collective level and a return to infancy on the individual level. The implication of the ritual of initiation is that in order for the individual and/or the group will to reassert itself after this "death" it must form new, consciously chosen meanings. The movement is in effect one from determinism to self-determination, from non-consciousness to consciousness, from the relinquishment of responsibility and individual autonomy to their acceptance. As Mircea Eliade describes the primitive ritual in The Sacred and the Profane:

> Initiatory death reiterates the paradigmatic return to chaos, in order to make possible a repetition of the cosmogeny--that is, to prepare the new birth. . . . This psychic chaos is the sign that the profane man is undergoing dissolution and that a new personality is on the verge of birth.[5]

When one applies this to Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? the stagnation of George and Martha's lives at once indicates a repressed crisis. The crisis is indicated first by their moral and emotional inertia, an inertia to which they are in danger of succumbing completely; and second by the surfacing of a satanic cruelty which suggests that their destructive impulses are not being tempered by

reason or morality and so remain non-creative. This situation has come about because they have come to rely too fully on their self-created myth--their "son"--and because their rituals--their "games"--have become too automatic and trivial. What is established early in the play, therefore, is George and Martha's need for a new myth and new rituals, and a shift from compulsive, "reflex" (and therefore non-conscious) behavior to deliberate, willed action.

In order for this to happen, the destructive, chaotic principle in the couple's personalities (which early in the play is only hinted at) must be fully and forcefully unleashed and confronted so that the creative potential in this destructive principle can become effective. George and Martha must establish complete anarchy in order to allow themselves to form new "laws." Death must be faced in order for new life to begin. This "return to cosmic chaos," an integral part of the initiation rite, will culminate, appropriately enough, in the murder ritual enacted by George.

The play consistently supplies evidence that the characters (and, by extension, the culture they represent) are in a social, psychological, and moral decline. George, for example, seems to have a great weariness; he refers to himself as being "tired," which Martha calls a lack of action and motivation: "I don't know what you're so tired about. . .you haven't <u>done</u> anything all day."[6] She also refers to him as "a blank," a "cipher" (17), suggesting that perfect zero out of which no growth is possible.

George and Martha, intelligent, educated, articulate members of the upper middle class have deteriorated into a kind of mental morass. Their constant, continual drinking is the most evident example of the dissolution to which they have succumbed and is further supported by their apparently meaningless dialogue, habitual bickering, profanities, and sexual distortions. That there is "something wrong" between them is so blatant that Nick and Honey, greeted by Martha's "SCREW YOU!" meant for George as he opens the door to admit them, immediately sense that they "shouldn't have come" (20). Martha and George, moreover, are middle-aged; Albee reinforces the metaphor of a couple in their declining years by setting the play in autumn.

Throughout the play, the verbal confusions perpetrated by the couple express and contribute to their own confusions. George is particularly adept at these, usually targeting Nick, whose propriety he seems inclined to undermine:

George: How much do you weigh?
Nick: I. . . .
George: Hundred and fifty-five, sixty. . . something like that? Do you play handball?
Nick: Well, yes. . .no. . .I mean, not very well.
George: Well, then. . .we shall play some time. Martha is a hundred and eight. . .years old. She weighs somewhat more than that. How old is your wife?
Nick: (A little bewildered) She's twenty-six.
George: Martha is a remarkable woman. I would imagine she weighs about a hundred and ten.
Nick: You're. . .wife. . .weighs. . .?
George: No, no, my boy. Yours! Your wife. My wife is Martha.
Nick: Yes. . .I know.

George: If you were married to Martha you would know what that means. (Pause) But then, if I were married to you're wife I would know what that means, too. . .wouldn't I?

The interchange, like others, has an "Alice-in-Wonderland" quality that defies logical sequence, levels all distinctions, and undercuts all seriousness. When the couple's childlessness and Martha's contention that George is a "bog" in the history department are included, the portrait emerges of a couple in crisis of culture, reason, language, education, tradition, and family. Their situation is summed up by George in Act Two: "I've been trying for years to clean up the mess I made" (102) and by Nick's definition of Martha's strategy in Act Three: "Aimless. . . .butchery. Pointless. . . .Aimless. . .wanton. . .pointless. . ." (193-194). All indications are that George and Martha are locked into repetitive, self-destructive patterns and that any efforts to "clean up the mess" further compound it.

As ineffective as their solutions are, however, Albee indicates that no viable alternatives will present themselves from within the existing culture. History, about which George talks a great deal, is, of course, a central motif in the play. The setting is New England, a place rich in cultural history and tradition, and a college, bastion of the society's cultural heritage. Rather than providing enlightenment, however, history is presented as an obstructive authority and a deterministic force. George's statement that he is "preoccupied with history"

(50) amounts to an admission that, though he has not surrendered to it--he is "in the History Department as opposed to being the History Department"--he has been dominated by it. This becomes particularly evident when seen in terms of one of the chief metaphors for history in the play: Martha's father.

"Daddy," as Martha calls him, is the symbolic, unseen, patriarchal "god." George ironically associates him with Parnassus (30) and Martha credits him with a "sense of history. . .of. . .continuation" (79). George, as Martha explains, was meant to be the chosen "son" to continue this patriarchal line of succession: "A succession. . .you know what I mean?. . .which is natural enough. When you've made something, you want to pass it on, to somebody" (79).

However, George's failure to "go anywhere" in the department denotes something more than just stasis. If Martha's father represents permanence, planning, order, and tradition--Martha brags that "He <u>is</u> the college. The college <u>is</u> him" (77-78)--George is in defiance of that order. Significantly, "Daddy" also represents stasis. He is the larger-than-life structure that has grown to overwhelm the individual, seeking, in fact, to stamp out individuality completely. According to George: "Martha's father expects loyalty and devotion out of his. . .staff . . .I was going to use another word. . .expects his staff. . .to cling to the walls of this place, like ivy. . . to come here and grow old. . .to fall [surely there is a

double meaning intended here] in the line of service" (41). The "other word" George intended was most likely "slaves." Martha's father symbolizes a psychological dependence to which individuals become slaves. In terms of the timeless, continual aspect of this need, George's estimation that "the old man" is "over two hundred years old" and "is not going to die" is a psychological reality.

Martha's father personifies a structure that provides safety, purpose, definition, boundaries, and the ultimate annihilation of the self-determining ego. The patriarchal god of law first arises in consciousness as a response to the ego's effort to differentiate itself from, in Freud's terms, the "blissful repose" of "non-being" or the pre-conscious state. In time, however, this "god" comes to assume the same pervasive proportions as the Earth Mother goddess it replaces, and is equally attractive and detrimental to the ego.

George and Martha try to come to terms with their subjugation in ways typical of humans' response to their gods: Martha through devotion and dedication--"Jesus, I admired that guy! I worshipped him" (77)-- and George through resentment: "The S.O.B. [George] hates my father. You know that?" (76). Neither can surmount the fear and avoidance for which Daddy is simply an excuse. As the historical god of western, patriarchal culture, he is simply another cause of moral and psychological impasse.

In contrast, Nick and Honey, who Martha refers to as

"the kids" (20), as new faculty arriving at the start of a new academic year announce the possibility of a new generation, and consequently of a new beginning. Yet, as the play progresses, the fact becomes more and more clear that, rather than representing an alternate direction, Nick and Honey seem destined to repeat fixed patterns. They "fall into" the same inebriation as the elder couple, are similarly childless, and have apparently been equally successful in avoiding self-confrontation.

Eventually, Nick's "confessions" reveal even more similarities to George and Martha's model, especially in that Honey's father, too, was a dominating force in their lives, if not a god, then a "minister of god" (109), a "church mouse" (110). Nick and Honey do not possess the epic dimensions of George and Martha; their similarities are in a miniature; they have not had time to solidify their mistakes as completely, and perhaps do not have the creative energy to raise them to quite the same overwhelming proportions. But George's advice to Nick in Act Two indicates that, given an acceptance of the cultural and personal norms which demand as "the order of things" "accommodation, malleability, adjustment," the younger man is in the same danger of becoming "bogged down":

> George: I'm giving you good advice, now.
> Nick: Good God. . . !
> George: There's quicksand here, and you'll be dragged down, just as. . . .
> Nick: Oh boy!
> George: . . .before you know it. . .sucked down. . . . (115)

Not even the scientific possibilities of the future, represented by Nick's profession, are depicted as a viable means for change. In fact, George visualizes a scientized future which will artificially create a state of static perfection that, in eliminating randomness and chaos, will ensure a "perfection" disastrous to the human will:

> I read somewhere that science fiction is really not fiction at all. . .that you people are re-arranging my genes, so that everyone will be like everyone else. Now, I won't have that! It would be a. . .shame (37).

The institutionalized sameness, or lack of differentiation, suggested by his description is the most perfect symbol for the crisis and inevitable downfall of western culture. George is so taken with the horrific implications of this possiblity that he brings it up again:

> Martha, this young man is working on a system whereby chromosomes can be altered. . . .the genetic makeup of a sperm cell changed, re-ordered. . .to order, actually. . .for hair and eye color, stature, potency. . .I imagine . . .hairiness, features, health. . .and mind. Most important. . .Mind. All imbalances will be corrected, sifted out. . .propensity for various diseases will be gone, longevity assured. We will have a race of men. . .test-tube bred. . .incubator-born. . .superb and sublime. . . . BUT! Everyone will tend to be rather the same. . . . Alike (65).

George's reaction suggests that the issue is a metaphor for his personal psychic fears, but he is also concerned for the culture, and he suggests that, in eliminating dissimilarity, the future might also eliminate change; the result of progress, therefore, will be the end of progress--stasis. This ultimate order would be the

solidification and implementation of the same historic ideals personified by Martha's father. The point is therefore made that the future can offer no solution to the past if it is maintained as part of the same continuum. George's preoccupation with "historic inevitability," and the implication that Nick, from his position in biology, "can take over the History Department" (64) are not simply nonsensical allusions. Nor is Nick's half-ironic self-assessment:

> . . .what I thought I'd do is. . .I'd sort of insinuate myself generally, play around for a while, find all the weak spots, shore 'em up. . .become sort of a fact, and then turn into a. . .a what. . .?
> George: An inevitability.
> Nick: Exactly. . . .an inevitability (112).

These examples all point out that the possibilities of the future grow out of the cultural value assumptions, myths, and ideologies of the past--later in the play this will have significance in terms of George and Martha's mythic son as well. The future, furthermore, will possess the technology to convert these into tangible forms. That the problem lies less in the technological expertise itself than in the historical ideologies that support it is implicit in George's remark that, "[the genetic business] is very upsetting. . . .but history is a great deal more disappointing" (38).

The one remaining solution, therefore, seems to be the destruction of the historical/cultural context--which in the particular circumstances of the play is symbolically equated with George and Martha's marriage--within which

all these "alternatives" are contained, and the subsequent establishment of new mythologies and new ideologies to replace the old. George implies as much in his comment to an uncomprehending Honey in Act Two:

> It's very simple. . .When people can't abide things as they are, when they can't abide the present. . .either they turn to a contemplation of the past, as I have done, or they set about to. . .alter the future. And when you want to change something. . . you BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! (178).

The hint of destruction and upheaval inherent in George's last words, juxtaposed with the social order to history and science, isolates the two opposing factions in the play, factions which are represented in the human psyche and in the cultural group as the Dionysian impulse and the Apollonian standard.

The Apollonian ideal, that is, the principles of reason, social order, law, cultural differentiation and linear thought, tempers the chaotic, instinctual elements of the human mind and channels them into creative use. George as much as defines this ideal in a speech he makes to Nick in Act Two:

> "you [i.e. society] endeavor to make communicable sense out of a natural order, morality out of the unnatural disorder of the human mind. . . (117).

However, if the Apollonian factor becomes too rigid, it can also disallow all creative progress; it can become the "larger system" which, like Martha's father and the college and, in some cases, society itself, dwarfs the individual

will. George also alludes to this danger in Act Two when he reads from one of his books:

> And the west, encumbered by crippling alliances, and burdened with a morality too rigid to accommodate itself to the swing of events, must. . .eventually. . .fall (174).

The Dionysian principle, in contrast, moves the individual and the group toward undifferentiation, that is, toward the demolition of all the usual cultural distinctions, norms for behavior, frameworks for meaning, and discursive, discriminating functions of reason. However, the random and chaotic qualities that characterize this principle have a creative function as well since, to eliminate it, as George also points out, would be to relegate society to

> a race of scientists and mathematicians, each dedicated to and working for the greater glory of the super-civilization. . . .There will be a certain. . .loss of liberty, I imagine, as a result of this experiment. . . but diversity of mind will no longer be the goal. Cultures and races will eventually vanish. . .the ants will take over the world. . . [History] will lose its glorious variety and unpredictability. I, and with me the. . .the surprise, the multiplicity, the sea-changing rhythm of. . .history. will be eliminated. There will be order and constancy . . .and I am unalterably opposed to it. I will not give up Berlin! (67).

As this impassioned speech points out, the Dionysian impulse, at its most positive, stands for human freedom, cultural diversity, variety, and change and, as such, vies for power with the order, permanence, and predictability of the rational impulse. In aligning himself with the Dionysian side of culture, George implicitly defines

himself as the romantic hero, like Jerry before him. As such, however, he is also subject to the dark side of the element, for, when the chaotic impulses in man are repressed and are denied all the tempering effects of reason they become primitive and gratuitously destructive, undermining all the efforts of the individual to gain control over his or her life.

The doubling of the characters in The Zoo Story clearly established their separate adherence to the opposing principles, their obvious polarization, and their need for incorporation. In his rigid allegiance to order and structure, Peter disowned and suppressed the irrational and variable aspects of his personality to such an extent that these aspects presented themselves in external form, split-off from him in the person of Jerry. The double, Jerry, brings Peter to accept him by accepting his own violent and destructive impulses: i.e. his "dark side." Since the process undermines all Peter's most cherished assumptions about himself and the world this amounts to a debacle for him--summed up in George's "BANG, BANG, BANG, BANG!" theory--though the destruction inherently contains new possibilities.

The doubling of the characters in The Zoo Story gives way to the much more complex marital union of Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? George and Martha as a unit both exhibit a tendency to be dominated and suppressed by systems which they have blown up to be larger than themselves. Daddy and

the college (the past), as indicated, are two of these; their mythic son (the potential future), as we shall see, is another. Yet, because they are in obvious rebellion against the usual social norms of order and permanence and because of the obvious chaos of their lives, they are more closely aligned with the destructive impulse. Their interactions with each other and with Nick and Honey suggest, moreover, Jerry's Dionysian drive to disallow all sustaining fictions. For instance, George in Act Two encourages Nick to "confess" his ambitious pragmatism and the mutual deceit and subterfuge surrounding his and Honey's marriage, and by Act Three the younger couple's overly polite, syrupy solicitousness toward each other gives way, under George and Martha's influence, to encroaching testiness.

However, George and Martha have consciously and actively faced neither their potential for destruction nor their mutual sexual and emotional need for each other. From the first scene of the play they exhibit a careful, delicately balanced interaction between hostility and love.

The potential anger in the scene is deflected into Martha's whining complaint on the one hand and a gentler mutuality between the couple on the other. When the playfulness leads to Martha's sexual overture, however, George avoids that as well. Here, as throughout most of the play, George and Martha channel their real hostility toward each other into bickering and complaining and their real emotional need for each other into teasing.

Similarly, their rebellion against convention and their exclusion from the larger social system is based only indirectly on the intention to subvert those conventions; more immediate is their fear of their own inadequacies, a fear which, as noted, they have externalized onto existing external structures. They themselves make this fear explicit:

> Martha: George hates Daddy. . .not for anything Daddy's done to him, but for his own. . .
> George: (Nodding. . .finishing it for her) . . .inadequacies.
> Martha: (Cheerfully) That's right. You hit it. . .right on the snout.

This is also an excellent illustration of the degeneration of language and the defusing of psychological insight which Albee associates with modern society. Unlike Peter in The Zoo Story whose verbal abilities were nascent ("I don't express myself very well"), George and Martha use words as tools divorced from their potential meanings. That is, though they are self-aware and articulate enough to voice their "unconscious" motivations, they can, at the same time, avoid internalizing the implications behind the words. They exhibit, therefore, a modern failure of language to provide clarification and illumination. Martha in Act Two again reveals that George has used his moral rebellion as an excuse for his own fears:

> You mean he didn't start in on how he would have amounted to something if it hadn't been for Daddy? How his high moral sense wouldn't even let him try to better himself? (124).

George and Martha exemplify how the Dionysian impulse, which (as George's futuristic predictions underscore) can be a means for change and growth, can also, if repressed and used as a means to avoid responsible action, exhibit itself as a distortion. George and Martha display these distortions by their pointless cruelties, their constant shifts in attitudes and behaviors, and their entrapment in habitual, repetitive actions. At the point at which they are in the play, the violent, disruptive aspect of Dionysis must, ironically, be unleashed in all its most destructive potential in order to become once again creative; hence, what the drama consists of essentially is a Dionysian night of revelry. Because all the more positive associations usually made with Dionysis--ritual, sexuality, revelry, elated intoxication, emotional release, magic, even song and dance --are present but perverted in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? these become both examples of the couple's dissapation and the possible means for their liberation.

The definition of the drama as a displaced Dionysian initiation rite is made in the first and last scenes. As the "front doorbell chimes" in Act One, Martha announces expectantly: "Party! Party!" (17). When finally those same chimes have signalled the death of George and Martha's mutual myth--their "son"--the party ends and George proclaims "(Softly) It will be dawn soon. I think the party's over" (237). As in The Zoo Story Albee makes an overt connection between his play and the Dionysian ritual from

which all drama originates and in so doing reestablishes drama's religious/mythic potential.

The ritual, Albee's play suggests, becomes trivialized in its modern setting: the "rite" is a "party" and the "rituals" are the "games" which George and Martha alternately lead: "Humiliate the Host," "Get the Guests," "Hump the Hostess." The format of these games are obviously familiar extensions of their habitual marital interactions.

The most serious function of ritual, as was established in the last chapter, grows out of the impulse of the self-conscious human ego to make contact with the external world, that is, everything apart from its own consciousness. It is an effort to reestablish a lost feeling of relatedness with nature and with the Other (all that is not perceived as the self). George and Martha's ritualized interactions, therefore, underscore their real desire for connectedness. However, the method of these interactions represents a gross deterioration of ritual from its original function; ritual in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? has diminished into "fun and games." The example given earlier of how George and Martha's games are benevolent and playful without being truly loving and are caustic without revealing the anger that might lead to true confrontation illustrates why these games, by always falling short of the extremity of emotion needed to bridge the gap between self and Other, can never achieve their original purpose. They

become instead, in Martha's words, "Ugly games. . .ugly" (207).

Though, as the play progresses, the characters are able to uncover real anger and pain in each other, even this remains pointless. For instance, Martha is "viciously triumphant" in "Humiliate the Host," reducing George almost to tears. As she persists in her pursuit, however, he undercuts the image she paints of him, an image he does not want to confront, by singing "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" "to drown her" (85). The song, rather than a vehicle for release, is a means of avoidance; by the next act, though he is quiet and preoccupied, George seems to have readjusted himself to his old role.

His own game, "Get the Guests," in this next act contains similar potential for self-disclosure and self-confrontation that is likewise aborted. Nick reveals his "secret" about Honey's false pregnancy and his own decision to marry her for her money. George, in turn, confronts the couple with a mirror. The "explosion" he creates with his revelation of "the puff [that] went away. . .like magic . . .pouf!" (147) also comes to nothing. Not only is George, himself, certain that Honey will "get over it" but by the next act she has come to the apparently deliberate decision to readjust to her old patterns:

> Honey: (To George) I've decided I don't remember anything. (To Nick) Hello, Dear.
> . . .

George: (Close to Honey's ear) It's just some things you can't remember. . . hunh?
Honey: (A great laugh to cover; then quietly, intensely to George) Don't remember; not can't. (At Nick, cheerfully) Hello, Dear.

George's indulgence in "Get the Guests," moreover, given the extent of his own self-avoidance, is, as Martha points out to him, "pigmy hunting" (151). The game reveals "the corruption of weakness and petty revenges," the same terms Martha uses to define her and George's mutual assaults.

The sustained inebriation of the couples is another reminder of the connection between the action of the play and the ritualistic, primitive, bacchic cults. The original purgative function of Dionysian intoxications has degenerated in modern society to an inverse condition summed up in an exchange between Nick and George:

Nick: After a while you don't get any drunker, do you?
George: Well, you do. . .but it's different . . .everything slows down. . .you get sodden. . .unless you can upchuck. . .like your wife. . .then you can sort of start all over again (106).

In contrast to the explosive release of tensions triggered by bacchanalian gods, the inertia in which "everything slows down" is an entropic state which precludes progressive movement. The condition is suggested by Martha early in the play when she calls George "a cipher" and "a zero": that perfect circle excluding the chaotic elements necessary for growth.

Though Honey's "upchucking" signals the need to shatter this cycle and "start all over again," the gesture, in being involuntary, is inevitably ineffective. Honey leaves the room to vomit whenever the characters' games reach the point of intense emotion, after "Humiliate the Host" and "Get the Guests," for instance, and so she translates into physical terms all of the characters' ability to continue and recontinue familiar strategies.

Honey also converts psychological ploys into physical reality by her self-inflicted abortions, which we learn about in Act Two. Like her vomiting, the characters' drinking, and George and Martha's games, Honey's abortions, intended to avoid pain, also prevent new possibilities. In her cry against giving birth--"I don't. . .want. . .any. . . children. . .I'm afraid! I don't want to be hurt. . . PLEASE!" (176)--she articulates that fear of death which prevents life. This, as George makes us aware, keeps her in an infantile state:

> You going to throw up again? You going to lie down on the cold tiles, your knees pulled up under your chin, your thumbs stuck in your mouth. . .? (177).

All of the characters are psychologically at the same arrested level, and they figuratively effect the same "smaller murders" to avoid confrontation with larger, more comprehensive pain. The childlessness of both couples, in translating a psychological condition into a physical reality, symbolizes the detrimental consequences of this

avoidance.

The epithet "crummy, totally pointless infidelities" (191) Martha gives her perverted sexual activities defines these as another example of meaningless, repetitive, compulsive actions. Her seduction of Nick also plays upon an aspect of the nature and fertility cults associated with earth goddesses and Dionysian spring gods. George and Honey's comments as Nick and Martha dance explicate how vestiges of instinctive fertility dances manifest themselves:

> Honey: They're dancing like they've danced before.
> George: It's a familiar dance. . .they both know it. . . .
> . . .It's a very old ritual, monkey-nipples. . .old as they come (131).

George earlier alluded to the relationship between Martha's seduction and the rites of spring: "Martha's going to put on some rhythm she understands. . .Sacre du Printemps, maybe" (129).

Though Martha refers to herself as an "Earth Mother," the term is ironic given her inability to have children, a biological condition that is itself simply symbolic of the much more important issue of her incapacity for personal psychological growth. She is, in fact, locked into a stereotype: the seductive, domineering Mother appealed to by young men--"sons"--for the sexual and (more pertinently) the material favors she might bestow. This stereotype, furthermore, is a cheapening of the original archetype

of the Earth Goddess, which, in its most positive, undistorted form represents life, healing, and continuity. In being suppressed and devalued by patriarchal culture, the symbol is seen as vindictive, castrating, and dominating: "the Shrew." Even so, the Earth Goddess has little potency: the "favors" Martha is wanted for ultimately are not hers to give; they belong to "Daddy." As she ruefully remarks, "But that's how it is in a civilized society." (189).

It is clear, therefore, that Martha is locked into a negative cultural image that, by confiscating her best qualities, turns her into, in George's words, "a Satanic bitch" (137). The real issue, however, is that she is locked into a stereotype at all. Her own individuality is what is really suppressed. She reveals her frustration with this to Nick:

> Martha-poo sits there with her dress up over her head. . .suffocating--you don't know how STUFFY it is with your dress up over your head--suffocating! (191).

The image here is of the individual human identity lost in the sex role. Martha, the person, is being stifled; but all roles, even the most personally destructive, provide the comfort of the familiar. Only through her relationship with George (who apparently sees her as an individual and who, for all his problems, remains himself free of the culturally-defined "male" role) can Martha achieve potential freedom from the pre-defined symbol. This potential for individuality and psychological autonomy is one

she both wants and rejects:

> There is only one man in my life who has ever. . .made me happy. Do you know that? One!. . .George; my husband.
>
> . . .
>
> . . .whom I will not forgive for having come to rest; for having seen me and having said: yes; this will do; who has made the hideous, the hurting, the insulting mistake of loving me and must be punished for it. . .
>
> . . .
>
> . . .who tolerates, which is intolerable; who is kind, which is cruel; who understands, which is beyond comprehension. . . . (191).

Because of his acceptance of her as an individual (the person beyond the function) George represents an implicit challenge to Martha. In rejecting him she rejects the challenge of self-actualization or self-creation.

Martha's fears are not unfounded. To shed relied-upon roles and behavior patterns (especially those which are socially sanctioned) is to lose all assumed personal and social definition; to leave the individual, in effect, without a language. Obviously, this presents both a liberation and a radical reduction. In fact, the more cherished the beliefs the more destructive must be the force to demolish them.

Once again, both the liberating and the frightening aspects of this force are more delineated in The Zoo Story. In the character of Jerry Albee creates the romantic, Dionysian hero whose role it is to liberate the individual (Peter) from the confining structures that are impeding him. The playwright retains the frightening aspects of

the process in Jerry's non-rational, threatening, confusing actions and rhetoric.

The image of modern society in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? illustrates more complexly how the liberating/frightening Dionysian impulses have become so misused and diminished that they, themselves, present an obstacle to the individual person and to the social group. As illustrated, dance, intoxication, sexuality--functions meant to discharge tensions--in being distorted into a kind of "social acceptability," become confining and tension-producing. Consequently, we are given in this play several symbols corresponding to the stultifying "cages" in The Zoo Story, of which George and Martha's ritual games are a prime example. The cages in the earlier play represented a severely repressed individual personality adhering unquestioningly to the social establishment and its code of rationality. Conversely, the characters in the later play are "caged in" by their anti-establishment and anti-rational activities. Consequently, in The Zoo Story the force which broke through this "cage" came from outside the person of Peter and, as Jerry is a social outcast, from outside the social system as well. In Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? George and Martha are already outside the social system; they have, in fact, created their own microcosmic society and must, therefore, generate their own "breakthrough" or initiation by pushing to the extreme those forces for change that have atrophied.

All of the characters' reluctance (or downright refusal) to relinquish known patterns has already been illustrated. What is necessary for them--particularly George and Marth--(as was necessary for Peter) is the complete demolition of everything familiar; anything less will leave them traveling in the same circles.

The destruction of all frameworks for meaning is the movement toward non-differentiation. This is the condition where all distinctions are leveled away; everything presents itself as "equal" and therefore drained of the meanings which distinctions, differentiations, and separations provide. All becomes meaningless. In mythic terms this condition is referred to as the return to cosmic chaos; in the modern existential terms usually used in reference to Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? it is confrontation with the void; in romantic terms it is transcendence or the manifestation of total abstraction; in terms of the theme of illusion and reality with which Albee is concerned, it is the annihilation of all the fictions which serve as a bulwark against unmitigated reality. Whatever it is called, it is a central aspect of the true Dionysian ritual. In Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? this movement toward non-differentiation is presented in many forms, from more trivial and comic verbal confusions to the escalating violence, Oedipal crisis, and ritual sacrifice.

As early as the first act, George and Martha perpetrate confusions that, in their implications, threaten the

order of the characters' lives. Martha confuses Nick's position in the Biology Department with a position in the Math Department, and George not only continues the error but compounds it repeatedly by suggesting that Nick will one day run the History Department. These "departments" are also metaphoric "cages" serving both as convenient definition and as personal restriction. The definitions they provide, however, signify crucial distinctions between the various "disciplines" or aspects which in essence define culture.

George and Martha's almost deliberate confusion in regard to Nick's department hints at their impulse toward undifferentiation, though, because their intention is never quite deliberate and never completely carried through it remains simply a hint, pointing the way toward necessary action.

Similarly, the couple personify a challenge to the social order by reversing the usual sex-role distinction. George's passivity and Martha's aggressiveness are apparent throughout the play. Martha articulates the role reversal in her boxing match story (55). Though she underscores the importance of the incident--"I think it's colored our whole life. Really I do!"--she disclaims responsibility for it--And it was an <u>accident</u>. . .a real, goddam accident!" Later in the play, as the characters begin to move further from accident and closer to intention, she again brings up the role reversal, though she still rejects the implications:

"I'm loud, and I'm vulgar, and I wear the pants in this house because somebody's got to, but I'm not a monster. I am not" (157). Gender differentiation is even more central to the structural understanding and definitions upon which society organizes itself. Martha expresses the fear of the "monstrosity" of the crisis in definition which could occur were these distinctions to become inoperative.

On an increasingly serious level, George and Martha undermine the most fundamental aspect of civilization: language itself. The theme of breaking through assumed structures is expressed here, as in The Zoo Story, through a de-emphasis on the usefulness of language to communicate experience. Tony Tanner's term "foregrounding," that is, the "use of language in such a way that it draws attention to itself" and becomes "both referential and part of a verbal display," applies to Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? as it did to the earlier play.[7]

George is, as Martha calls him, a "PHRASEMAKER!" (14) who is continuously conscious of words as words: "Good, better, best, bested. How's do you like that for a declension, young man? Eh?" (32). One of his stories relies on the mispronounciation of bourbon and seems to have little meaning beyond that verbal confusion and its illustration of the power of language to create an event. He often seems to create verbal confusions to which he then arbitrarily assigns or removes significance:

George: Look. . .Martha has money too. I

mean, her father's been robbing this place blind for years, and. . . .
Nick: No, he hasn't. He has not.
George: He hasn't?
Nick: No.
George: (Shrugs) Very well. . . .Martha's father has not been robbing this place blind for years, and Martha does not have money. O.K.? (107-108).

He similarly shifts symbols abruptly, turning the benign gift of snapdragons into a weapon (204) as earlier in the play he used a toy gun to create a dramatically tense incident (57).

His "son" is, significantly, also a verbally created fiction who can be and is destroyed by words in the form of the imaginary telegram which George claims he eats, in effect, eating his own words. Albee creates an insightful portrait of the twentieth century man who reduces all reality to verbal constructs whose meanings he then cannot trust.

The focus in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? is therefore not only on the power of language but on its limitations. Of particular importance is the barrier which words set up against the confrontation with whatever reality exists beyond the forms imposed upon it. As Tanner explains:

> American writers seem from the first to have felt how tenuous, arbitrary, and even illusory, are the verbal constructs which mean call descriptions of reality. . .there has. . .been from the start in American literature an intermittent sense of the futility of pretending that the putative exactitude of words can ever measure up to the actual mystery of things (23).

George voices a similar opinion to Nick: "And every

definition has its boundaries, eh?" (40). The drama moves toward the breakdown of boundaries to expose direct experience free of intervening structures. The final scene in which George and Martha speak in monosyllable somewhere between language and silence becomes the most eloquent expression of meaning in the play, parallel to the tableau scene in The Zoo Story.

As critical as he is of language, Albee does not present silence as an alternative. The postscript to George's story of the boy who killed his mother and father is that the boy has "not. . .uttered. . .one. . .sound in the thirty years following the incident. George comments:

> The saddest thing about men. . .Well, no, one of the saddest things about men is the way they age. . .some of them. Do you know what it is with insane people? Do you? The quiet ones?. . .They don't change. . .they don't grow old. . .in the usual sense. They maintain a . . .a firm skinned serenity. . .the. . .the under-use of everything leaves them. . .quite whole" (97).

The boy's insanity, as an avoidance of pain and a refusal to participate in life, becomes another example of arrested growth. Albee's emphasis, again, is not on the end-point of any absolute but on the active interplay of form/fiction and reality, life and death, language and silence.

Though George and Martha represent, for reasons illustrated above, a challenge to rigid, unquestioned adherence to most of the structures sanctioned by civilized society, they have, ironically capitulated to their own, privately created, myth. Their creation of such a private myth was

inevitable since it would be impossible to derive meaning from experience without some verbal, mythic, fictional system to contain it. Thus, the couple's use of the son as a way of giving their life together meaning and purpose conveys Albee's point that all systems of meaning are arbitrarily created, as opposed to being absolute, and since whatever function the son has had for the couple is clearly eroding as the drama begins, Albee is also noting that such systems are potentially dangerous to the psychic equilibrium of the individual and social group. The creators of structures must never forget that they are arbitrary, must never identify too strongly with what they have created, must never cease to question and examine.

George's warning to Martha at the beginning of the play "not to start in with the bit about the kid" is an early signal of crisis. Martha has come to believe in their "myth" to the point where she can no longer maintain any objectivity toward it; the illusion begins to envelop her. To speak of the son to others, that is, to those who have <u>not</u> created him, who cannot know that he is not real, not an absolute certainty, who could not understand that he provides simply a useful framework through which husband and wife can relate, is to risk becoming entrapped within a system of belief so completely that it takes on a life of its own. Once this happens, the individual will become dominated by and subject to something larger than itself, something upon which it can project its own hopes and fears

and which it can consequently use as an excuse for its own actions and impulses. This is the connection between the "son" and Martha's father, the hope of the future and the contribution of the past.

On this particular night of fun and games George has somehow realized the seriousness of this situation. In bringing up the son at all, he in effect, "cues" Martha by feeding her her lines. He thereby sets in motion the process which will result in his assumption of the deliberate action of murdering the myth. By implanting the subliminal suggestion in Martha's mind to violate their "pact" of secrecy in regard to their fictional child, George solidifies her complicity in the ritual murder.

This ritual murder is crucial to the couple's initiation rite, that is, the process by which old forms will be eliminated and new ones begun. The sacrifice will be of the one myth they rely on most strongly and toward which they are least objective. Their fictional son represents, however, more than just a framework for meaning. He is the symbol for George and Martha's actual need to "penetrate" through to each other.

The theme of one character "making contact" with another, and of characters "getting through to each other" runs throughout this play as it does throughout other of Albee's dramas. In a scene between the two men in Act Two, for instance, George expresses sentiments which echo Jerry's to Peter:

George: I've tried. . .tried to reach you. . . to. . .
Nick: (Contemptuously) . . .make contact?
George: Yes.
Nick: (Still). . .communicate?
George: Yes. Exactly. (116)

At this point Nick's response is reasonable; George's overture is cliche, perhaps revealing his ultimate intentions but having no basis in his actions. His focus, at any rate, is actually on Martha; it is in relationship to her that the full and frightening implications of "making contact" will be brought to the fore. What George says to his wife later in the act is ultimately more revealing: "It's just that I've got to figure out some new way to fight you, Martha. Guerilla tactics, maybe. . .internal subversion. . .I don't know. Something" (125). He repeats this again several scenes later, underlining the importance of the idea: "I've got to find some way to really get at you" (156). Their subsequent exchange makes explicit the frustration that drives them. Martha vows, "Look, I'm not going to try to get through to you any more. . . .There was a second back there, maybe, there was a second, just a second, when I could have gotten through to you, when maybe we could have cut through all this crap. But that's past, and now I'm not going to try." George, in turn, duplicates the message: "There is no moment. . .there is no moment any more when we could. . .come together" (158).

This scene is the turning point of the drama. George and Martha's expressed resolve to "give up" on each other

misleads, however, for the result is the inverse of the emotional detachment the words would normally suggest. Martha is earlier concerned about the same risk of complete severance from her husband: ". . .some night. . .some stupid, liquor-ridden night. . .I will go too far. . .and I'll either break the man's back. . .or push him off for good. . ." (191). But George's continual warning to her "not to go too far" prophesies a different event. Without realizing the full implications of their decision the couple agree in this scene to confront the extremity of their emotions, and to thereby approach the mutuality they want. Because this will inevitably explode old assumptions, Martha's pledge to "make the biggest damned explosion you ever heard" has a peculiar truth.

With their declaration of "total war" the dynamics of the ritual they have been unconsciously preparing for throughout the play will begin to take effect. In a ritual to end their rituals they will act to penetrate the elemental barrier between self and Other. George, as usual, defines the procedure, ending, significantly, with "a strange smile at Martha":

> We all peel labels, sweetie; and when you get through the skin, all three layers, through the muscle, slosh aside the organs . . . .and get down to bone. . .you know what you do then?. . . .When you get down to bone, you haven't got all the way, yet. There's something inside the bone. . .the marrow. . .and that's what you gotta get at (212).

In the last scene of the play, after George and Martha have

in fact gone through to the marrow, Martha will question why George had to "push it over the Edge." Albee uses this phrase or something equivalent to it often in his works to convey the condition of complete abstraction, the reduction or elimination of all distinguishing differences, and the renunciation of all sustaining fictions. This "psychic chaos," as noted above, is at the core of initiatory death and rebirth.

For George and Martha the only fiction not undermined in their martial system is the "son." He remains the perfect ideal representing "strength, goodness, and innocence" (224), "the one person" Martha sentimentalizes she has "tried to protect, to raise above the mire of this vile, crushing marriage; the one light in all this hopeless. . .darkness. . ." (227). Because this darkness is exactly that which George and Martha must face, the son has actually become an impediment to their psychic growth and so is the last and most central illusion that must be destroyed. This destruction will thereby resolve, in a single unifying action, even the radical polarization between death and life. Only in embracing the task of destroying his mythological son, and thereby his own historical continuity, will George transpose chance to choice, passivity to conscious action, accident to will and thus uncover his link to the unhistoric hero and to the shaman.

George comes to accept this task of shaman on his own and Martha's initiation rite by a process very similar

to Jerry's decision to force a confrontation between himself and Peter. But Jerry does not become aware of his intention until his death and the end of the play, and even then, the awareness is only tentative, never fully-faced. George, with the help of Martha's increasingly urgent provocations, accepts his role at the end of the second act of the play. Essentially talking to himself (though Honey is present in the room), "his mind racing ahead" he gropes toward a decision:

> . . .somebody rang. . .it was somebody. . . with. . . I'VE GOT IT! I'VE GOT IT, MARTHA . . .! Somebody with a message. . .and the message was. . .our son. . .OUR SON! (Almost whispered) IT was a message. . .the bells rang and it was a message, and it was about . . .our son. . .and the message. . .was. . . and the message was. . .our. . .son. . .is . . .DEAD! (180).

Because his decision is consciously formed and the actions of it deliberate George retains an emotional ironic detachment from these actions; consequently, at the end of the scene, "He begins to laugh very softly." However, this cannot deny the importance of the ritual he will enact nor the seriousness of its consequences, and so, his laughter "is mixed with crying" (180).

In George, Albee creates a perfect blending of the romantic tragic hero and modern ironic anti-hero; George is a man aware of being caught in the human predicament and impelled to transcend it, aware of the urgent need for action and haunted by the possibility that all action may be futile, a man driven by destiny in whatever forms it

presents itself-- as historical inevitability, as unconscious processes, as archetypal images--and acquiescent to the challenge to surmount these through willed effort and self-determination. He is positioned between the ironic detachment of laughter and the emotional involvement of tears. He is Albee's strongest protagonist (who, incidentally, also functions as an antagonist) because, unlike the many of Albee's other characters who come to the understanding of their situation at the conclusion of their dramas, George understands it early and moves to act nevertheless.

Though at the end of Act Two his decision to enact a sacrificial murder becomes conscious, it has been an unconscious motivation from the opening scene of the play. Even more expressly than Jerry in The Zoo Story and Julian in Tiny Alice George writes his own script, or rather some unconscious "ghost" writer, seeking to re-establish a lost equilibrium in his own psyche, writes it for him, until he takes the task in hand in Act Three.

He thus orchestrates the last "game" he and Martha will play within the existing context of their marriage: "Bringing Up Baby," in which, in the true spirit of mourning, they will recollect what they have lost before letting it go. They idealize and crystallize the idea of their son as a prelude to relinquishing him to memory (214-222). Appropriately, therefore, at the end of a lengthy, idyllic dialogue on the blissful and perfect birth and youth of

the boy Martha seems to "slip," putting her image in the past tense: "It was true! Beautiful; wise; perfect."

At this point there is a shift in tone; "son as saint" becomes "son as weapon":

> Martha: Of course, this state, this perfection. . .couldn't last. Not with George. . .not with George around.
> George: (To the others) There; you see? I knew she'd shift.
>
> . . .
>
> Martha: Not with George around. A drowning man takes down those nearest. George tried, but, oh, God, how I fought him.God, how I fought him (223).

In Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? Albee is particularly effective in fashioning characters who reveal universals through particular circumstances. Martha here depicts the need to find causes and assign blame for a condition--the loss of an idyllic paradise--which, in actuality, is an inevitable outcome of the process of life. This generally applicable human trait is more apparently self-deluding in this play since, as we will come to learn, neither the original "perfect condition" nor George's "guilt" in destroying it have objective correlatives. Albee thus encourages us to see all his themes as metaphoric, not in order to lead us to some center of absolute meaning, but to emphasize reality as continuous process and change based on an interplay of "meanings."

Because the purpose of the battle Martha refers to will uncover a more abstract truth, George joins her in trying to pinpoint a particular cause to a universal

condition: "She had a son who fought her every inch of the way, who didn't want to be turned into a weapon against his father, who didn't want to be used as a god-damn club whenever Martha didn't get things like she wanted them!" (225).

The "son," as the couple's "offspring," would normally be the expression of their mutuality, created to give tangible form to their union. This would be especially true of George and Martha's metaphoric son since, as a myth, he would always remain in his original form and serve his original function, without assuming any autonomy apart from his creators. However, a curious inversion occurs. Since George and Martha's real desire is to "possess each other's being" (a desire for which their son is simply a metaphor) they inevitably try to imitate each other by seeking to possess what the other has. In their case what they each have is a mutual possession--the son. The accusation of incest which George levels at Martha"--". . .the real reason (Spits out the words) our son. . .use to throw up all the time, wife and lover, was nothing more complicated than that he couldn't stand you fiddling at him all the time, breaking into his bedroom with your kimono flying" (120)--serves two purposes. On the one hand it is another metaphor for the breakdown of distinctions, the incest taboo being a very crucial differentiating principle of civilization. On the other hand, Martha's "incest" serves as an indication of her elemental desire

for George, who, as already explained, presents her with the possibility of accepting herself. Because on some level of her psyche she wants to "possess" herself and because George represents the externalization of that self-possession, she wants, in effect, to incorporate him by incorporating what he has, their son. Nick (and all the other men Martha seduces) is simply one more level removed from her basic, original goal. George brings that level one step closer to the truth when he "mistakenly" substitutes Nick for the son in Act Three (195-196).

Paradoxically, therefore, George and Martha try to "reach" each other by commandeering the son, over whom a dispute naturally arises, polarizing the couple even further. Their decision to engage in a fight for victory is one that is really meant to break the cycle.[8] An escalation of the "battle" and the violence it engenders will finally convert the couple from opponents to "likes" who reflect each other's violent behavior. In the final stages of the drama the struggle itself, not the object under contention, becomes the central issue. George is particularly emphatic in his insistence on the condition that the two approach each other evenly matched. He will not accept Martha's plea for "no more games" because he senses the imperative to follow the violence through to its ultimate result:

> Now you listen to me, Martha; you have had quite an evening. . .and you can't just cut it off whenever you've got enough blood in

> your mouth. We are going on, and I'm going to have at you. . . .I want you up on your feet and slugging, sweetheart, because I'm going to knock you around, and I want you up for it (208).

Whereas throughout the play George and Martha perpetuated their perfected offense/defense strategy in which one would advance while the other would retreat, here, for the first time, they finally simultaneously mirror each other's violence. George wants "An equal battle, baby; that's all" (209) because he intuits that in the process he and Martha will be converted from antagonists to doubles, and will thus achieve, finally, the mutuality they originally sought.

Albee clarifies this doubling at the point at which George and Martha's verbal battle over their son escalates to their synchronous monologues (227). Martha continues the argument while George, in what must sound both ominous and nonsensical, chants the last rites in Latin. The words which they have been using as weapons are rendered meaningless and inoperative as they drown each other out. The Dionysian initiation ritual culminates here, blurring, equalizing, leveling everything to indistinction and reducing reason (and all "reasons" or rationalizations) to a sham. Nick's fear at the opening of the Act that everyone had "gone crazy" (187) is given visible, prophetic, substance. This is a true "ecstacy" contrasting the assumed joviality of the rest of the play. Obviously, the consequences are intensely dramatic and powerfully chaotic; the

liberation which the breakdown makes possible seems both a triumph and a crisis.

According to the theories of Rene Girard in Violence and the Sacred, a ritual sacrifice would be necessary at this point to restore order by deflecting the antagonists' hostility from each other toward an arbitrary, surrogate victim.[9] A case for this can be made in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? by George's follow-through on his decision to reveal the son's death to Martha. Interestingly, whereas Girard discusses ritual sacrifice as the end result of violence, George decides first upon the sacrifice and then orchestrates the events to lead to the predicted result. What must have been a spontaneous impulse toward ritual becomes, once the structure is consciously applied, a staged event, again formulating the link between ritual and drama, shaman and playwright. A question in fact arises regarding George's ability to "create" this event:

> Martha: You cannot. You may not decide these things.
> Nick: He hasn't decided anything, lady. It's not his doing. He doesn't have the power. . . .
> George: That's right, Martha; I'm not a God. I don't have the power over life and death, do I?
> Martha: You can't kill him! You can't have him die!

Nick remains part of the old context which projects responsibility outside of the realm of the individual. Martha knows, as he cannot, that George, as creator of the son, can also destroy him. George, a representative,

modern Everyman, incorporates the powers previously assigned to gods, accepting those powers as his own: "I have the right, Martha. We never spoke of it; that's all. I could kill him any time I wanted to" (236).

Given the centrality of the son myth to George and Martha's lives there are two even more important reasons for his sacrifice. First, since the purpose of the initiation rite is to actualize the formation of a new personality, elimination of the one symbol upon which the couple projected crucial aspects of their own selves will necessitate the reincorporation of those aspects back into their psyches, thus allowing them to re-create their lives, and, not incidentally, to take personal responsibility for their "new" selves. To prove this, George equates the son with the boy who killed his father in a car accident by using the same incidents to explain both events. Both occurred "on a country road" with "his learner's permit in his pocket" when "he swerved the car, to avoid a porcupine, and drove straight into a large tree" (95, 231). The boy-murderer, the son, and George the man/father, are all interchangeable selves. As Emerson, another romantic put it, "the child is father to the man." The "guilty" George, haunted by history (the mother and father and their "accidental" deaths), is finally killed by the man's deliberate murder.

The second reason grows from the first. Albee's characters' real psychic drive is to possess, accept, and

confront themselves, or more specifically if less precisely, the Self, an idea he will expand on in his next play, Tiny Alice. When everything George and Martha have placed as obstacles to this confrontation is eliminated, the one remaining "barrier" is the Other, what they are to each other. When the son, who is the final barrier separating self and Other is also removed, the characters become doubles: they encounter each other and they find themselves. This, of course, cannot be their end-point, since the Self and Other (in the metaphysical sense in which Albee employs them) push the characters beyond ordinary reality. Edna, at the end of A Delicate Balance will explain the problem most clearly when she speaks of "the boundaries. what we may not do. . .not ask, for fear of looking in a mirror."

That George and Martha begin again, that is reenter the continuum, is depicted by their halting, groping, elementary words in the closing lines of the play, words by which they relinquish all certainties and acknowledge the paradoxes whereby reality becomes not a polarization of opposites but a coexistence of contradictions:

George: (Long silence) It will be better.
Martha: (Long silence) I don't. . .know.
George: It will be. . .maybe
Martha: I'm. . .not. . .sure
George: No.
Martha: Just. . .us?
George: Yes.
Martha: I don't suppose, maybe, we could. . . .
George: No, Martha.
Martha. Yes. No.

George: Are you all right?
Martha: Yes. No.

In Tiny Alice Albee will again take up the theme of self-confrontation, and that play will end similarly with a death-rebirth image that attempts to emphasize the idea of meaning as process by uniting opposites without eliminating them.

CHAPTER III

Tiny Alice

Near the end of his lengthy monologue about himself and the dog, Jerry, in Edward Albee's The Zoo Story, unleashes a desperate rambling which springs from his deep need to establish contact with something:

> If not with people. . .if not with people . . .SOMETHING. With a bed, with a cockroach, with a mirror. . . .

But, here he stops: ". . .no, that's too hard, that's one of the last steps."[1] It is approaching this last step that we find the lay brother, Julian, in Tiny Alice which remains Albee's most cryptic play. Julian's oddyssey within Miss Alice's house takes him, in fact, through the looking glass on a quest for self-discovery, a quest resounding with psychic implication and leading (if we accept the conclusion as epiphany) to a revelation of mythic proportion.

Most critics willing to go beyond Robert Brustein's and George Wellworth's dismissal of the play as "meaningless" have interpreted its theme as ironic; among them, Anne Paolucci and Ruby Cohn agree on a definition of Alice as "an incomprehensible Nothing" while Lee Baxandall and Leighton M. Ballow see her as simply the manifestation of Julian's need to believe in something, the final irony

being that he accepts the man-made symbol of God he so strongly resisted.[2]

Harold Clurman pans the play as an ultimately uninteresting effort "to prove the world an intolerably damned place" and only John Gassner is willing to concede that its concern with "the enigmas of life" or "the futility of trying to explain existence rationally" has claimed playwrights' attention from the beginning of literate theatre.[3] Albee himself has said of the ending of Tiny Alice:

> [Julian] 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 proven real, or the dying man, in the last necessary effort of self-delusion, creates and believes in what he knows does not exist.[4]

The ironic interpretation remains ultimately unsatisfying, however, especially since in all his drama, most critical interpretations not withstanding, Albee has never shown himself to be either absurdist or nihilist. In The Zoo Story, he portrays the wasteland of modern society in which the chasm between one human being and another has become so vast that Jerry must sacrifice his life in order to bridge it. But, by so doing, he does, in fact, manage to break through Peter's carefully designed cage of false security and self-preservation. The essence of Jerry's communication with Peter at the moment their lives touch is disturbingly transient and enigmatic. Albee questions the substance of one human being's contact with another,

but he never doubts that somehow that contact is possible, and he posits unquestioningly that it is essential.

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? is a purgation rite in which George and Martha strip each other of their defenses, illusions, and fictions. The destruction of their metaphorical son provides at least the potential for their rebirth into a new and more authentic relationship where before none had existed. But again, Albee will not define for us the nature of authenticity nor even suggest whether that authenticity can ever be actualized and sustained between George and Martha. His message is only that in order to begin we must face our past, admit our illusions and our vulnerability, and accept our fear.

In Seascape, we find Charlie, who must learn to relinquish the womb-like security to which he has retreated (as a child he would descend to a cove at the bottom of the sea where mentally he has remained through his adult life) in order to accept the challenge of assisting a new species, themselves emerging from the sea, to "Begin." In this context, then, it is plausible to give Tiny Alice, despite its dark and foreboding tone, an apocalyptic reading.

It has been suggested often enough that the play operates on numerous levels, the simplest being an apparent betrayal story of a man offered by his church to a group of demonic characters for the sum of $100-million a year for 20 years. The man is sent as an emissary to the house of the donor, an eccentric woman named simply Miss Alice,

to "clear up odds and ends." While there, this man, a celibate and ascetic, is lured into a strange and mysterious world by the temptations of wealth, luxury, friendship, and finally sexuality. He is offered happiness in the form of marriage to Miss Alice; but once he accepts he is abandoned by her and her cohorts (including his Cardinal who sent him on the bizarre mission), fatally shot, and left to die alone on the altar of Alice, the mysterious goddess whom they all seem to serve, thus becoming their sacrifice to her.

But, the play seen on this level leaves many ambiguities, the chief of which is, perhaps, the role of the three tempters: Lawyer, Butler, and Miss Alice. They seem at first sinister agents of an evil force sent to undermine the virtues of Julian. But, often they indicate to him that they are helping him, that the process he is undergoing, painful though it is, is for his own benefit. In the last act, for instance, when Julian asks Butler, "Are you my friend?" Butler responds, "I <u>am</u>; yes; but you'll probably think not."[5] In the same scene, Julian insists that all his life he has "fought against the symbol" and Miss Alice tells him, "Then you should be happy now" (162), indicating his struggle is over. We must question, too, whether Julian's virtues, sincere though they seem as far as he is aware of them, are in fact genuine. As he begins to reveal himself to Miss Alice, it becomes apparent that his conscious spirituality has been based all

along on a subconscious carnality.

This insistent split demands a more subtle interpretation of the play, one focused on Julian's psychology. The disclosure of Julian's personal unconscious with its powerful, repressed sex drive is prepared for early in Tiny Alice by the motif of revealing information (as one would reveal repressed motivations). The first scene between Lawyer and Cardinal is filled with persistent references to secret pasts, dossiers, and the manifestation of defamatory information. When, in the following scene, Julian refuses to reveal to Lawyer the details of his years in the asylum, Lawyer hisses prophetically, "You will. . . in time. Won't he, Butler? Time? The great revealer?" (42).

The action of the drama will unveil the layers of Julian's psyche, from the exposure of his repressed sexuality to the disclosure of the Oedipal drive and the father-son conflict. And, beyond that we find yet a deeper layer--so that we might concur with Miss Alice when she exclaims "expansively" at one point, "Oh, my Julian! How many layers! Yes?" (114).

That the play undertakes a journey through his mind is made clear from the very first scene in which Julian appears and describes his experiences in the mental home to Butler: "I declined. I. . .shriveled into myself; a glass dome. . .descended, and it seemed I was out of reach, unreachable, finally unreaching, in this. . .paralysis of

sorts" (43). The model house, the home of Alice, a shriveled version of the real house sealed by a glass dome also appears on stage for the first time in this scene. Clearly, it presents itself to us as a symbol of Julian's unconscious.

Butler explicates the theme of self-confrontation when he suggests to Julian that one feels one should see one's self in the model (25). The theory he poses on the care one would take if one had such a "dream toy" made invites psychic correlation:

> It would almost be taken for granted--one would think--that if a person or a person's surrogate went to the trouble, and expense of having such a dream toy made that the person would have it sealed, so that there'd be no dust (26).

"Dream toy" becomes a significant word choice here when considered in terms of the subconscious.

Julian remarks as he gazes into it, ". . .it seemed so. . .continual" (25); and in response to Butler's comment that the house is enormous he replies, "Endless!" (27). Significantly, in both dimensions, the house has many rooms, as Miss Alice's non-sequitur points out: "I . . .am a very beautiful woman. . .and a very rich one. . . and I live here, in all these rooms" (63). Throughout the play, other references to rooms, divisions, and partitions --the asylum to which Julian committed himself was "deep inland" and had "buildings, or floors of buildings" (58)-- bolster the mind imagery. The phrenological head is an

obvious symbol.

As I've already suggested, it becomes clear early in the play that Julian's expressed intentions are belied by the unconscious drives which motivate them. The fantasies and hallucinations he divulges betray the libidinous forces threatening his conscious self-concept. In his scenes with Miss Alice, Julian is always the one to initiate an atmosphere of high tensioned eroticism by relating a past fantasy. (Act 2, scene 3 is surely the best example of this.)

Julian sublimates his sexual drives into a desire to serve and constructs a persona of himself as martyr, refusing to accept that any self-actualization must be channelled into a role which serves his human needs one way or another. In other words, Julian's image of himself as martyr does not eliminate or even substitute for his other needs; it simply displaces them.

This repression accounts for the perverse eroticism which fills the stage each time Julian divulges his fantasies. According the C. G. Jung, the ideal relationship of the unconscious to the conscious is compensatory, with the one balancing the extremes of the other. The more repressed the unconscious tendencies--the more, in Julian's case, the sexual needs are denied--the less displaced and the more primitive, even distorted these tendencies become. The stronger his desires make themselves felt to Julian as doubts or temptations (since the effects of the

unconscious will always present themselves as forces outside the person), the more his conscious attitude takes on an extreme, rigid position to compensate. In turn, the unconscious drives become even more exaggerated and grotesque in a continuously vicious cycle. What might have been the healthy expression of his sexuality has become for Julian violent, distorted and pathological.

Julian's desire for martyrdom, then, is anything but a healthy expression of his faith. It is, rather, an obsessive, fanatical drive to counteract the threat from his unconscious. He is obsessed with martyrdom. We might also see this obsession as an impulse toward self-destruction brought on by the tension between his conflicting desires, as well as an unrealized longing for punishment for his transgressions, unconscious though they be.

But Albee is hardly offering us any profound insight when he suggest that religious fanaticism is often based upon sexual repression. If his play sought only to uncover Julian as a fraud at the end, after having uncovered institutional religion as a fraud right from the start, Tiny Alice would simply be a social statement against all the spiritual trappings, even the most strenuous, with which we surround ourselves. There is certainly that statement made in the play, but it is not the central issue. For one thing, unlike Soeur Jeanne des Agnes in John Whiting's The Devils, Julian is far too attractive a character. Some critics have suggested that he is, in fact, the most

appealing of Albee's protagonists. He is sincerely confused in regard to this area of his life, but in other respects he is open, intelligent, flexible, genuinely simple, unlike his Cardinal, without conscious ulterior motives.

And Julian, like Jerry in The Zoo Story and George in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, is an outsider, belonging wholeheartedly neither to the traditional hierarchical church, which uses God for its own gains, nor to the secular world, which has long since substituted money and technology for God. His title, lay brother, typifies his situation: "You are of the cloth but have not taken it" as Butler puts it (28).

Because, like Jerry and George, his sensibility precludes his place within traditional structures, Julian is set apart as a modern hero, who, in Jung's words, "has become 'un-historical' in the deepest sense and has estranged himself from the mass of men who live entirely within the bounds of tradition." We find him isolated and at a crossroads: either he must block out the outside world completely and return to the asylum, or he must discard his personal illusions, accept and understand himself, and acknowledge that, again to quote Jung, he "has come to the very edge of the world, leaving behind him all that has been discarded and outgrown, and. . .he stands before the Nothing out of which All may grow."[6]

Therefore, it is difficult to accept that the main

motive of the tempters in Tiny Alice is to uncover Julian's weaknesses and undermine his good intentions simply to punish him with abandonment and death. If it is necessary for Julian to recognize and discard the fictions he has clung to, as it was for George and Martha to discard their fictional son, we might question whether his possibility for new light and understanding should be any less than theirs. And, if these unconscious motives are uncovered, leaving a more balanced Julian, can we accept that he is betrayed and punished for these unless we accept his own original, distorted definition of his "sins"?

The questions turn on the meaning of Alice and the significance of Julian's acceptance of her. The first part of the play, in which Julian's personal unconscious does become integrated, is only a first or preparatory step, leading to some understanding of even greater, deeper consequence. What this is can be understood in part by viewing Tiny Alice not in the context of realistic, ironic tragedy, but within the genre of allegorical romance. Several signs in the play point in this direction.

Northrop Frye states that "in romance the characters are still largely dream characters" and that they function as "expressions of emotional attachments, whether of wishfulfillment or of repugnance."[7] The very first word we hear Julian utter, "Extraordinary," in the light of Frye's definition is very apt. From the moment he enters Miss Alice's house there is a sense that he has entered

a dream-like or extra-ordinary world, where common sense logic will not apply. The characters who people that world are, by their very names, embodiments of ideas, concepts, or split-off parts of Julian's own psyche, on one level at least. Lawyer, for instance, is the prototype of everything repugnant and reductive, Julian's Shadow or dark side as it were, and critics who accept his commentary as a key to understanding the play are hearing only one bias.

Julian's mission contains the obvious allegorical overtones of the life-cycle quest: the accomplishment of a task to achieve a treasure, represented by the money Miss Alice promises to the church. In traditional mythological format, the hero is sent on a task or journey by a devine superior, a role into which the Cardinal fits nicely (36).

Part of his reward is the winning of a bride, whom he takes from the hands of a previous, older lover; the hero, though he must die, is exalted at the end. According to Frye, the quest has three stages:

> The stage of the perilous journey and the preliminary minor adventures; the crucial struggle, usually some kind of battle in which either the hero or his foe, or both must die; and the exaltation of the hero (187).

From the beginning of Act Two, it becomes very clear that little but open hostility exists between Lawyer (the evil ogre) and Miss Alice: lustful pursuit on the part of the one, revulsion and evasion on the part of the other.

Lawyer makes such little effort to conceal his tremendous hatred of his successor that Butler can easily observe, "I've noticed, you've let your feelings loose lately; too much: possessiveness, jealousy" (99).

Julian, himself, is fully cognizant of the rivalry, as his accusation to Miss Alice attests: "You have allowed that. . .that man, your. . .your lover, to. . .ridicule me. You have permitted it. . .You have allowed him to abuse me, my position, his, the church; you have tolerated it and smiled" (117).

To quote Frye once again, apropos of Miss Alice:

> This bride-figure is ambiguous: her psychological connection with the mother in an Oedipus fantasy is more insistent than in comedy. She is often to be found in a perilous, forbidden or tabooed place. . .and she is, of course, often rescued from the unwelcome embraces of another and generally older male, or from giants or bandits or other usurpers. . . (193).

The tension between Lawyer and Julian reflects the son-father rivalry for the mother. Miss Alice does, in fact, treat Julian as a favored child, referring to him as "my little Julian" and "little recluse." The three characters' interaction as hero/rescuer, bride, and ogre is structured upon the son, mother, father psychological triad in which the child perceives his father as a rival hurting his mother who must be rescued.[8]

That is one level on which the quest motif operates in Tiny Alice. On another level, Miss Alice herself is the temptress, and as mother-figure she personifies the

most formidable taboo. Julian articulates his instinctive dread of what she represents toward the end of Act Two: "WHY AM I BEING TESTED!. . .And why am I being tempted? By luxury, by ease, by. . .content. . .by things I do not care to discuss. . ." (117).

The quest for the treasure is the more generalized version of Julian's specific or personal lifetime preoccupation: the search for the Father, in his terms, God. Within Miss Alice's house his dual purposes converge. He realizes only intuitively at this point that the latter is the search for his Self, a fact implicit in his declaration "My faith and my sanity. . .they are one and the same" (45).

The motif of the search for the Self brings us, finally, to the last and most elusive level of Albee's play. If the house is the symbol of Julian's unconscious (as well as a female archetype), and Alice lives there, then Alice must be the personification of something within Julian which he must confront. That something can be explored through the Jungian theory of the Anima, the female principle existing inside all men.

The Anima first appears as an image in a man's mind of the nurturing, all embracing, protecting mother (but it includes other archetypical images as well, such as the virgin, the tempress, the witch, and the spiritual guide). It is not clear from where this image arises for it does not come from the real mother. Jung attributed it to the

collective unconscious, present a priori in a person's mind; while other psychological studies do not accept this completely, they do concede, in the words of Maud Bodkin in her book, Archetypal Patterns in Poetry, that "where forms are assimilated from the environment upon slight contact only, predisposing factors must exist in mind and brain."[9]

In his infantile or immature state, the man will cling to this first image of the mother, his unconscious desire for what Jung calls "the enveloping. embracing. and devouring element."[10] He projects this desire first onto his real mother and later onto the substitute mother, that is, the wife or lover. Seen in this context, Miss Alice is Julian's projection of part of his Anima or his desire, in Jungian terminology, to be caught, sucked in, enveloped, and devoured. This is easily supported from the play by the numerous images of envelopment, for instance, Miss Alice's quote from D. H. Lawrence's "Love on the Farm":

> 'And down his mouth comes on my mouth! and
> down His bright dark eyes over me. . .
> . . .his lips meet mine, and a flood
> Of sweet fire sweeps across me, so I drown
> Against him, die and find death good!' (112).

In Julian's fantasies of martyrdom he sees himself devoured by a lion and after a graphic description he concludes:

> And as the fangs sank in, the great tongue
> on my cheek and eye, the splitting of the
> bone, and the BLOOD. . .just before the
> great sound the coming dark and the silence.
> I could. . .experience it all. And was. . .
> engulfed (124).

When Julian finally comes to Miss Alice in Act Two, scene 3, the stage directions indicate that she opens her gown like great wings unfurling and "Julian utters a sort of dying cry and moves, his arms in front of him, to Miss Alice; when he reaches her, she enfolds him in her great wings" (127). And, of course, in the final scene the darkness moves out of the model house, surrounds Julian as a presence and, again to quote Albee's directions, "his head moves to all areas of the room, noticing his engulfment" (190). [All emphases mine.]

Mother Church, to which Julian's loyalties lie before he relinquishes them to Miss Alice, is also an archetypal Anima--the female counterpart to Christ, the male Animus. We might recollect, too, that Julian's memory of his first sexual experience which "did or did not happen" involved a woman who believed herself to be yet another female archetype: the Virgin Mary, Mother of God.

When Miss Alice appears in Act One, scene 3 as in Albee's directions, a "withered crone, her hair gray and white and matted," bent and moving with two canes, and speaks "with a cracked and ancient voice" this is more than simply an indication that in this play things will not be as they seem, though it certainly is that. The disguise is also a sign, from the outset, that she is playing a role--the doning of a mask transforms the wearer into an archetypal image--a role with mythic significance. In this case, she is the projection of another aspect of

the Anima of Julian's psyche: the Terrible Mother, which appears in archetypal dream imagery as a witch or crone. The duality between the Good Mother and the Terrible Mother is explained best by a quote from Ruth L. Munroe regarding Jungian theory:

> For the infant the mother is the major image, regardless of the sex of the child, and the mother remains the symbol of bliss, repose, comfort, and total passivity, the source of life. But a duality is apparent in the definition. Life is not passive. The child must go forth into the real world. So while the man retains a nostalgia for the Eternal Mother. . .he must also leave the Mother. The Good Mother of his deepest dreams is also the Terrible Mother within the person's own psyche. . .[11]

The Terrible Mother is associated with death and the dark side of life a man must accept in order to live actively. Therefore, when Miss Alice appears to Julian first as a crone this is a message to him from his own psyche that, in order to find what he is looking for, he must first leave the safety of his secluded world, the confines of Mother Church. In light of this, the exchange between Julian and Miss Alice after she has removed the mask makes more sense than it otherwise would:

> Miss Alice: Oh, indulge us, please.
> Julian: Well, of course, it would be my pleasure. . .but, considering the importance of our meeting. . .
> Miss Alice: Exactly. Considering the importance of our meeting.
> Julian: A. . .a test for me (53).

Julian comes very close to a conscious awareness of the meaning of the Terrible Mother when he describes his

meeting with her as a test. He will not arrive at full consciousness of everything that is happening to him, however, until the very end of the play. These events and the people who act within them are simply signals from his unconscious, similar to the symbols of dreams, revealing a great deal of what his conscious self cannot immediately comprehend. The extent to which this is true adds weight to the association frequently made between the title of the play and the wonderland of Lewis Carroll's Alice.

It may be to her function as a dream symbol (which is experienced but not always understood) that Miss Alice refers when she says early in the play, "It may be I am . . .noticeable, but almost never identified" (59).

Though Julian is obviously fascinated and enticed by Miss Alice this alone would not provide sufficient incentive for his renunciation of the safety of Mother Church. Miss Alice must lure him out of that world and into a dynamic participation in life. In her primary role of Temptress, she does this by being to him still another projection of his desire for "the protecting, nourishing, charmed circle of the mother." He succumbs to this illusion when he comes to her uttering "a sort of dying cry" and she enfolds him in her wings (127).

This is a point of initiation for Julian, necessitating the loss of innocence (Albee, in an interview appearing in the April 1965 issue of The Atlantic Monthly, referred to Julian as an innocent); he undergoes a symbolic

death and an entrance into experience resulting in the sacrifice of rigidly idealistic (and, by implication, immature) beliefs. Thus, as the hero, Julian experiences a kind of initial re-birth into a more autonomous individualism, enabling him to continue on his quest to penetrate the mysteries of life and death.

A definition from Jung further explicates Miss Alice's role:

> the seductress. . .draws him into life with her Maya [Illusion personified as a celestial maiden]--and not only into life's reasonable and useful aspects, but into its frightful paradoxes and ambivalence where good and evil, success and ruin, hope and despair, counterbalance one another.[12]

That he has, in fact, progressed in his journey and shed his limiting and self-protecting beliefs is suggested by his words to the Cardinal in the scene following his marriage to Miss Alice:

> But then I judge it is God's doing, this wrenching of my life from one light to another. . .though not losing God's light, joining with it. . .my new. I can't tell you the radiance, humming, and the witchcraft, I think it must be, the ecstasy of this light, as God's light exactly; the. . . blessed wonder of service with a renewing, not an ending joy--that joy I thought possible only through martyrdom. . . (140).

Julian intuits that his entrance into life has had something to do with witchcraft. Though he is focusing on the bright side (which is real) he senses that there is a dark side as well (also real). His first experience of leaving the mother's womb-like safety is abandonment. In

fact, at the opening of that same scene we see Julian, the bridegroom, confused and anxious as to why everyone, including his new wife, has left him on his wedding day. One of the first things he says is, "I feel quite lost," and a little later, "There I was. . .one moment married, flooded with white, and. . .then. . .the next, alone. Quite alone. . ."(132). Entering the continuum of life he begins to experience the "frightful paradoxes" Jung speaks of, where light and dark, the Apollonian and the Dionysian, expansion and diminuition, exist side by side.

Miss Alice seems to be Julian's betrayer by initiating him into that world, but he must take that necessary step toward the goal he has set for himself, a goal he cannot reach without conscious acceptance (in the final scene) of everything happening to him so far in his unconscious. His only alternative is complete withdrawal from the world; that is, total surrender of his unconscious, the substitution of hallucination for reality. Lawyer and Butler refer to these two alternatives when they speak of Julian in Act Two, scene 2 as "walking on the edge of an abyss, but is balancing. Can be pushed. . .over, back to the asylums. . . Or over. . .to the Truth" (106).

This Truth will come with the integration of the conscious and the unconscious, with the attainment of the masculine principle to balance the feminine, and with the acceptance of the ambiguities, paradoxes and limitations which will become recognizable. In this sense, it must be

remembered that Miss Alice is the projection of Julian's own Anima seeking this balance. And even when, in Act Three, he is lost and abandoned after his marriage, he has not forsaken his quest (138).

The pain of "the reality of things" is so great, however, that Julian's ego resists it to the point where he almost opts for insanity: "I cannot. . .accept. . .this . . .No, no, I will. . .I will go back! I will. . .go back to it. . .To. . .to. . .I will go back to the asylum" (170).

According to Jung, if the conscious and the unconscious become too split, as in the case of Julian, a tension arises, and the function of the Anima in a man and the Animus in a woman "harmless till then, confront the conscious mind in personified form and behave rather like systems split off from the personality, or like part souls."[13] It must be made very clear, I think, that on one level Lawyer, Miss Alice, and Butler function as full, three-dimensional characters with independent motivations and psychologies. But, on another level, they are projections of Julian's mind. It is because of this dual function that their roles and rhetoric become so confusing.

If, in the case of Julian, the Anima can be withdrawn from projections, these projections can be integrated into consciousness. Thus, to a certain extent, the Anima represents a function which filters the collective unconscious through to the conscious mind. Alluding to this function, Miss Alice attempts to explain to Julian, "I have tried to

be. . .her. No; I have tried to be. . .what I thought she might, what might make you happy, what you might use, as a. . .what?" (161), and later, ". . .accept what's real. I am the. . .illusion" (167); and to which Lawyer refers when he says, "We are surrogates; our task is done now" (162).

As functionaries of Julian's psyche, Lawyer's, Butler's and Miss Alice's tasks are done as they bring him to the point of consciousness, in which they can no longer be personified for him by projections, and so in a sense must abandon him. As archetypal symbols, however, they function beyond Julian's psyche in the realm of a collective unconscious. Therefore, they remain autonomous even after he has integrated them into his ego ("On. . .and on. . .we go" [99]). Because of this, Lawyer declares, "You have brought us to the end of our services here. We go on; you stay" (161). The indications are that they will continue to act the same roles within other circumstances (177-178).

Like Sophocles' Oedipus, Julian had been on a search for the truth; like Oedipus who questioned everyone, Julian was sent to Miss Alice's house to take care of "a few questions and answers"; and like Oedipus, Julian had not bargained for the outcome that truth is painful, that it brings with it the recognition of unconscious forces and existential alienation and that it leads ultimately to self-confrontation. His anger toward and rejection of Miss Alice's protective gesture in the last act of Tiny

Alice (183) underscores the dawning of his understanding of autonomy and acceptance of responsibility: "It is what I have wanted, have insisted on. Have nagged. . .for" (188).

Albee has insisted that though "The sound of heartbeats and heavy breathing as the doors open have widely been misinterpreted as being those of an increasingly terrified Julian. . .they are meant to belong to whatever comes through the door."[14] Alice is the abstraction of the Anima which exists in the most sublimated realm of Julian's unconscious--his archetypal or collective unconscious. In recognizing her, Julian finds her counterpart, the Animus, or the God for which he has been searching (190); and consequently he comes to possess himself.

The Animus or Logos representing the male aspect of spirit and intellect and the Anima or Eros representing the female or Earth Mother, are, as Jung tells us, god-like because of the great psychic energy they produce:

> Both of them are unconscious powers, 'gods' in fact, as the ancient world quite rightly conceived them to be. To call them by this name is to give them that central position in the scale of psychological values which has always been theirs whether consciously acknowledged or not; for their power grows in proportion to the degree that they remain unconscious.[15]

In accepting them both, Julian has reached his epiphany which, according to Northrop Frye is:

> The symbolic presentation of the point at which the undisplaced apocalyptic world and the cyclical world of nature come into

> alignment. . .Its most common settings are the mountain-top, the tower, the island, the lighthouse, and the ladder or staircase. Folk tales and mythologies are full of stories of an original connection between heaven or the sun and earth. . .The movement from the one world to the other may be symbolized by the golden fire that descends from the sun. . .and by its human response, the fire kindled on the sacrificial altar (203-204).

The setting for Julian is up against the model house, the altar of Alice, but it is interesting that Albee originally intended him to be locked in an attic closet (corresponding more closely to Frye's tower or ladder), an idea he had to forego for the sake of dramatic effect. The movement of the world of Nature (Alice) into the world of the Spirit (God) comes in the form of the light descending through the rooms of the model house into the room Julian occupies (Frye's golden fire descending from the sun). Julian is the human response on the sacrificial altar.

Through a modern rite of initiation he comes, at last, to achieve the integration he sought. What the drama depicts, finally, is a birth-rebirth ritual in which Julian is first outfitted in ritual robes (in his case, a business suit), shot with a pistol (phallic symbol of fertility), and united with the Earth Mother who destroys in order to immortalize. In an impressive feat of dramatic compression, the scene of his death, with heartbeats and ensuing darkness, carries unmistakeable overtones of a birth--expulsion from the womb.

The modern audience may well remain impervious to

to the suggestion of spiritual rebirth for Julian, since, as Jung argues in his essay, "Freud and Jung," our civilization has by and large forgotten the meaning of d vine procreation and tends to overlook the possibility that incestuous longings go back past the desire for the temporal father and mother to a primal desire for unity with the spirit and with nature.[16]

Perhaps in this play, in which Albee must surely have been working out of his own unconscious, his contention that the use of the unconscious is 20th century theatre's most interesting development, comes most fully to bear.[17] The psychological processes dissected here occur simultaneously in the play so that the overall effect contributes to its most fascinating element: the capacity to recreate the atmosphere of the dream. Thus, it is haunting and disturbing despite its resistance to discursive logic.

Like many of Albee's plays (one is reminded of the three mentioned early in this essay), the effect of the ending of Tiny Alice in one of suspended motion; there is a sense of resolution but it remains intangible. Julian's epiphany is as elusive as the elation Jerry experiences right before his death: a bright flash of light before what remains, for us, darkness. Both characters, at their deaths, take the full implication of their visions with them, leaving the audience to ponder, finally, the persistent sense of mystery which remains.

CONCLUSION

Examination of Albee's themes reveals that he shares the impulse of many twentieth century artists to renounce all belief in absolute values and fixed systems of meaning. This, however, does not automatically qualify him as a voice for the existential pain, inevitable disillusionment, and ultimate isolation and futility of human existence. As a dramatist he is more than one of the modern "priests" who, in Robert Brustein's words, "turns the mirror on the void" in protest "against the conditions of his existence."[1] The opposite is true. Albee's plays recover the concept of salvation by depicting the modern human as a de-energized psychological system in need of radical personal and collective renewal, and by using the stage as the dramatic, ritualistic medium for that renewal.

Albee reaches back past the forms of modern cultural and religious rituals (which appear in his works as distorted echoes) to utilize the structure and reclaim the intention of primitive rites of initiation. Since these rites found the paradigm of all experience in the recurring natural cycle of death and rebirth, the playwright recovers through them the earliest human impulse to dramatize the continual process of psychological regeneration. He comes

to his dramatic structure through the tenants of modern psychology which also assume a process of psychological renewal in the calling up of dream images, unconscious motives, and latent desires to challenge and restructure the conscious personality. All of this ties Albee philosophically to the Romantic ideal of human reidentification with the preconscious natural world.

Theatrically, Albee's drama continues the tradition of Strindberg's dream plays and builds upon Pirandello's artistic challenges to the assumed distinction between illusion and reality and his emphasis on the chameleon human character, uncertain and unconscious of its own motivations. More directly, Albee realizes the theories of Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty which would representationally confront modern humans with their most primal impulses in order to annihilate their comforting social forms and reinvolve them in their own lives.

Albee's theater, then, shares with primitive ritual, 19th century Romanticism, and some of the major philosophies of the 20th century stage a focus on the redemptive aspects of revolution and anarchy in the human spirit and in the social body. Each of his early plays begins with a metaphorically significant occasion: an encounter between strangers in The Zoo Story, a private party in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, a task in Tiny Alice. These occasions begin ordeals during which the principal characters are brought to name those aspects of their lives upon

which they have relied for self-definition. At the same time, the situations grow increasingly intense and threatening to the point of an explosive confrontation: Jerry forces Peter to fight for his bench; George and Martha lock horns in a battle over their son; Julian is forced to remain in Miss Alice's house alone. These confrontations finally render all rationalizations and definitions absurd by reducing the characters to their most primal fears and desires; from this point they should begin again to restructure their lives.

Most of this contains overtones of Greek tragedy because Albee does try to revitalize drama's capacity for catharsis and renewal. A Delicate Balance, as the first exception to this pattern, illustrates the point. Agnes and Tobias do not directly confront the primal fear that Edna and Harry represent--what Agnes calls "the plague"--and so they sustain none of the same losses that crumble the framework of the lives of the characters in the other plays. Unlike Peter, Jerry, George and Martha, and Julian, the characters in A Delicate Balance experience no visible change in their situations at the end of their drama. More in keeping with much absurdist drama, the play stresses the repetitive patterns that maintain order and predictability at the expense of growth.

In keeping with this contrast, Tobias' fortress of security, his home, is clearly invaded from the outside, whereas the ordeals for the other protagonists begin with

their self-imposed exile from the larger social structure. Anthropologists speak of the transition stage in rites of passage during which the initiate is physically placed in an isolated zone symbolizing his position between the "profane" world of the uninitiated and the world of knowledge of the "sacred" mysteries. Though Albee's characters are not conscious of their motives, they all place themselves (either physically or emotionally or both) in a position which makes them vulnerable to invasion by the forces that will challenge them.

Though, for instance, Peter can consciously define himself in no other way than as the "group" or "organization man," he nevertheless seeks solitude and isolation on a lonely park bench. This habit underscores his unnamed quest for individuality and personal autonomy; he becomes, in fact, a convenient target for Jerry, the intruder who will actualize his quest. Jerry's own isolation and social alienation reflects on an explicit level the emotional isolation the audience will come to see lurking beneath Peter's surface contentment.

George and Martha, as blatant non-conformists, have likewise placed themselves emotionally and actually apart from the larger university structure of New Carthage. George, in his further alienation from the patriarchal figure of his father-in-law and from the History Department, is, as a symbol of modern man, also removed from all of Western civilization. Moreover, in their metaphoric

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son, the couple have created a personal ideal they cannot share with anyone; their belief in him helps them to maintain an isolated nucleus that ensures their separation from the rest of the world. Yet, by inviting Nick and Honey into their home, George and Martha risk confronting in the potentially successful younger couple the spectre, of their own vulnerability to the society which names them failures. Inversely, Nick and Honey, as long as they remain in George and Martha's home and allow themselves to be confronted by the other couple's rebelliousness, are in a position which highlights, by contrast, their own willingness to compromise their integrity and sacrifice their individuality to the cause of status.

Like George, who is "in the History Department as opposed to being the History Department," Julian in Tiny Alice is "of the cloth, but has not taken it." He, too, positions himself between worlds, in this case a life of self-renunciation and service in the Church on the one hand, and active participation in the world on the other. Clearly he has not committed himself to either. The isolated detachment this inevitably ensures for him takes actual form once he (with briefcase in hand like the symbolic fool carrying his past on his back) enters Miss Alice's house: "a castle" with "pillared walls, obviously well removed from the rest of the world." His chosen role as obedient servant justifies for him his surrender to the external forces of Cardinal, Lawyer, Butler, and Miss

Alice, who become his guides. But in his acceptance of the role of emissary, Julian himself, like Peter, has unconsciously taken the first step in making himself susceptible to "alien forces"; his implicit invitation to them is as ultimately effective as George and Martha's more explicit summoning of Nick and Honey.

In many of Albee's plays, as in rites of passage, houses, doors, and thresholds give symbolic form to the characters' psychological point of transition. Since dwellings and entrances separate the realms of the foreign and the familiar, the profane and the consecrated, the ordinary and the extraordinary, "to cross the threshold is to unite oneself with a new world."[2]

In a dramatically pointed and effective scene, George and Martha litigate at length the issue of who will open the door to admit Nick and Honey. When George finally "flings open the front door" "Honey and Nick are framed in the entrance," after which there is a momentary pause in the action. Julian, of course, crosses over from the ordinary, everyday world to the exotic, confusing castle, and Jerry, whose "parable of Jerry and the dog" provides perhaps the clearest metaphor for the initiatory experience of all the characters, hovers on the threshold between the social world and the mysterious, unknown, outcast realm of his boardinghouse, at the entrance of which he has his revelatory encounter with the hostile dog.

All these examples indicate the characters'

willingness, on one level, to undertake the transition from one stage to another. Albee, however, creates psychologically complex characters dominated by conflicting impulses. Though they themselves begin the process which invites the upheaval of their lives, they also cling tenaciously to the "limbo" of the safe, socially acceptable forms of individuality they have devised as compromises between the radical instinct for change and the conservative instinct to adapt to the status quo. When pushed, furthermore, to confront the increasingly fearsome consequences of their own steps toward autonomy, they tend to retreat, like children, further back to the original source of refuge.

Perhaps Tobias states the internal approach-avoidance conflict ("I don't want you but I need you to stay") of the other characters most explicitly when he says to Harry: "YOU BRING YOUR TERROR AND YOU COME IN HERE AND YOU LIVE WITH US! YOU BRING YOUR PLAGUE! YOU STAY WITH US! I DON'T WANT YOU HERE! I DON'T LOVE YOU! BUT BY GOD. . . YOU STAY! . . .Stay? Please? Stay?"[3] This play illustrates, by contrast with the others, how the strategy, once named, becomes inoperative. Tobias names his own lack and his own cowardice; he tries consciously and deliberately to force Harry to force him to do what he does not have the courage to do on his own: consciously accept the challenge to restructure his life.

In these conflicts of his characters Albee most

closely approximates the tendency of many modern artists, beginning with the Dadaists and the Surrealists, to hold modern man responsible for his spiritual inadequacies and his drab existence. The playwright echoes, as well, the Romantics' conviction that, though man wants liberty, his cowardice invents gods to prevent him from getting it and to keep him dominated by a nostalgia for reunification with an idealized, mythic, lost paradise. On the other hand, Albee realizes man's capacity to call up other "gods" to help him secure his freedom.

The first human tendency--to create out of our own cowardice, gods we must also resist--most often takes the form in Albee's plays of female characters to whom the male is subjugated and from whom he seeks freedom. Both a material world and a "maternal" world (in the form of his wife and daughters), for instance, dominate Peter in The Zoo Story. The female figure of Jerry's landlady would prevent him from completing his quest into the boarding house by "devouring" him with her "sweaty lust." He evades her and even tries to conquer her (and his unconscious fears) through her counterpart, the dog. Julian wages the strongest battle with female figures--Mother Church, the Virgin Mary, Miss Alice, Alice--all personifications of his threatening attraction to retreat through reincorporation into a "paradisal" union with the female mother figure. He comes to terms with this to a certain extent when he marries Miss Alice, though, even then, he

must go one step beyond to conquer his own over-blown dread of the undisplaced Earth-Goddess (Alice) and to discover, like the Romantics, that "The lost paradise becomes an unborn world, a pre-existent idea."[4] The fact that Alice is first "tiny" then overpowering illustrates how Julian's repression of his fears make him increasingly subject to them. In Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? Albee translates this phenomenon to a "male god"--Martha's Daddy--whom the characters both discount and idealize, rebel against and obey. Interestingly, Albee unites a female and a male symbol of dread in the title of his play. Martha, too, retains for the author some of the vestiges of the overpowering female figure in her voluptuous seductiveness, but, in comparison with the "unseen goddesses" of The Zoo Story and Tiny Alice, she loses much of her symbolic potency as she begins to claim greater personal distinction.

In A Delicate Balance Agnes perpetuates the dangerous comfort of a life of security and balance. Though a force against change, she renounces personal responsibility by defining her role as one in which she simply carries out male decisions. As she tells Tobias: "Whatever you decide. . .I'll make it work; I'll run it for you so you'll never know there's been a change in anything" (132). Tobias obviously cannot assume the responsibility to decide to renounce the confining order Agnes maintains.

In addition to mother figures, younger female

counterparts appear in Albee's plays. Honey, for instance, like a younger daughter to Martha, refused to grow up, as does Julia in A Delicate Balance. This mythic-dream duo of Earth Goddess and maiden daughter begins in The Zoo Story with Peter's wife and daughters, takes various forms in Martha and Honey, Alice and Miss Alice, Agnes and Julia, and becomes more explicit, hence consciously applied, in Elizabeth and Jo from Albee's latest play, The Lady From Dubuque. In this play Albee makes explicit as well how the male's fear of the female mother symbol is self-generated; that is, Sam's fear and hostility toward Elizabeth has no objective correlative in her own demeanor or actions.

Primitive cultures were clear that initiation must begin with an act of rupture they saw as separation from the mother, who represents the place of security, the place that is known. Modern psychology likewise assumes that a differentiated individual arises only in moving away from the narcissism represented by its attachment to the initial caregiver. Albee's protagonists usually must learn, like Proust, "that maturity means among other things the irreparable and final loss of the mother" as a symbol of bliss as well as of dread.[5]

For Albee, as for the Romantics, inability to renounce false security, whether this false security is represented by the mother, by an ideal of Paradise, or by the social organization, drains the human psyche of vitality and creative energy. Thus Albee's plays often begin with an

atmosphere of depletion, waste, weariness, and stasis. Martha's first words are, "What a dump" as she enters her home; George is "tired" though he hasn't "done anything"; Jerry is lost and has "a great weariness" suggesting age; Peter completely lacks verve; Julian calls his years in the asylum a time of "dull waste" when he was "in paralysis of sorts." The interaction between Lawyer and Cardinal in the first scene of Tiny Alice best depicts the decadence and moral degeneration to which the major institutions of modern society have sunk. The energy in that scene, however, like the energy in the opeining scenes of the other two plays differs dramatically from the tone Agnes sets up for A Delicate Balance when she muses on the possibility of declining into a madness she "never" sees "as violent" (hence redemptive), only as "becoming a stranger in. . .the world, quite. . .uninvolved" (3). Albee sets up the same need for revitalization in the characters of A Delicate Balance as he does for the characters in his other plays; yet, since his schema includes precisely that violent "insanity" Agnes denies, that play neither moves toward the same intense crisis as the others nor makes possible for its characters the same intense re-involvement.

Until Albee's protagonists can break from their need to retreat, they can neither cross the line into authentic freedom nor achieve through an integrated psyche and in communion with the natural (as opposed to the acquired) world the alternatives to isolation and alienation. Yet,

as Peter, Julian, and Martha in particular make clear, the individual responds to the invitation to freedom by retreating; the forces for change, therefore, must become more and more strident in proportion to the resistance they meet. Albee's most dramatically effective plays provide a representational framework to unleash the full energy of these forces. These plays are, therefore, displaced versions of the original Bacchanalian rites whose purgative function in society theater has traditionally striven to approximate.

In keeping with this connection to Dionysian revelry, the dramatic climates of The Zoo Story, Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, and Tiny Alice grow more confusing, chaotic, and threatening as the plays progress. The behavior of certain characters becomes more incomprehensible; language becomes less meaningful and more decorative, often becoming incantation; the meanings of symbols shift; the atmosphere becomes frightening, though the exact source of the threat remains vague; the undertones of sexual frenzy escalate and the violence and the threat of violence increases.

If, as Agnes says, the characters in A Delicate Balance "sleep to let the demons out--to let the mind go raving mad, our dreams and nightmares all our logic gone awry, the dark side of our reason [sic]" (170), in the other three plays Albee actually dramatizes the "Walpurgisnacht" necessary before the "Exorcism" can be effected. The

characters in these plays face their internal demons head-on when they lower the barrier of consciousness. Albee's plays thereby approximate the Romantics' challenge to the mandate of the civilized world, a world which, in the words of Northrop Frye, ascribes to the Christian dogma that "To regain his true identity man had to keep the barrier of consciousness against nature, and think of himself first as a social being."[6] Albee realizes, too, Artaud's view of theater as the arena in which to reintroduce primitive ritual into civilized life in order to reclaim the "archetypal, prelogical, primitive spirit" that "still lives in the unconscious of Western man, though deeply submerged under the dead skin of civilization."[7]

The chief perpetrators of all this emotional and intellectual anarchy in Albee's plays appear in the roles of Jerry, George, and Lawyer in their relationship to Peter, Nick, and Julian respectively, and in their relationship to the audience. The dramatic purpose of these characters can be found in their connections as types to certain recurring figures of ritual, myth, dream, and literature: the shaman of primitive rites, the Dionysian god, and the shadow or double of dream and literary archetype.

Jerry, George, and Lawyer each retain identifiable characteristics of the shaman or high priest presiding over the initiation ordeal. These personages traditionally acted out visibily and publicly the social group's latent irrationality. This then qualified them to lead

others in summoning and confronting unconscious contents. So, too, Albee's characters confront personal "demons," employ explicitly ritualistic language and gestures, and operate within some undefined larger plan. As a shaman figure, Jerry, furthermore, employs what the stage directions designate as mesmerizing, incantatory language in cataloguing his own possessions and in retelling the parable of Jerry and the dog. He creates and leads Peter through an ordeal culminating, appropriately, with a ritual sacrifice--death.

George assumes the role of shaman more deliberately than Jerry, and Albee highlights the ritual exorcism in this play. Yet, the ritual elements in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? echo those in The Zoo Story: George leads Nick through a series of confessions, retells in the story of the boy who killed his mother and father an event both personal and symbolic, and conducts a sacrificial rite. Two crucial differences in George's role in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? suggest a more complex application of the shaman and explain, in part, the triumph of that play over Albee's others. The first is that George simultaneously provides a framework for Nick's potential initiation, assists Martha in her initiation, and, most importantly, conducts the rite of exorcism for himself; that is, he is both initiate and priest, both the subject of the event and its author. Secondly, at a pivotal point in the drama, George decides consciously to undertake this role and to

undergo its consequences. Therefore, while the effects of Peter's initiation remain circumstantial and unacknowledged, and the outcome of Julian's leads to a point of abstraction that cannot be articulated except through his death, George assumes conscious responsibility to change his situation. While the other two characters are acted upon, he is the actor.

Lawyer, whose only virtue is dedication to his task, takes principal responsibility for arranging the details leading Julian into Miss Alice's house. He oversees Miss Alice, coaching her in the "way to behave," drilling her in "matters of consequence." More apparently in service to a mysterious author than Jerry, Lawyer, in his own words, will continue to play out a scenario more ancient than the individuals subject to it: "until everything is desert. . .on the chance that it runs out before we do." In shooting Julian he, too, officiates at a sacrificial rite.

However, though Julian is clearly the initiate in Tiny Alice, his struggles with insanity, his expertise with wines and plants, and his clerical position constitute Dionysian associations similar to the shaman's. In actuality, Julian, like Peter, though less obviously than George, conducts his own rite of passage, guided by Lawyer as Jerry guides Peter and George guides himself. These psychological doubles play out unacceptable but indestructible characteristics of the complete human identity.

If the shaman calls up unconscious contents, the double personifies those contents; he therefore appears as the other half of the divided self. Thus Jerry is cruel and aggressive while Peter is polite and reserved; verbose and self-revealing while Peter is guarded and inarticulate; ironic and cynical while Peter is gullible and sheltered; and physically and mentally unstable while Peter appears in his prime.

Lawyer--"Satan" according to Cardinal--aggressive, vengeful, crudely and overtly sexual, ironic and detached, self-serving, scornful of religion and all softer emotional and spiritual concerns, similarly counterpoints Julian's good-natured "saintliness." Emissary of Crosseus, king of gold, with correspondence exclusively to the material world, Lawyer contrasts the emissary of the Church who has renounced all such worldiness. Even Butler calls his cohort a "cruel person--straight through, hard and cold."

In fact, Albee's doubles challenge the innocence their counterparts derive from unexamined adherence to social, intellectual, and religious establishments. The playwright thus exhibits shades of the Romantics' attraction to the "earth man" as an alternative to the unheroic, social man spoiled by a soft, decadent civilization. Jerry, George, and Lawyer implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) threaten the existing establishment. Victims of cultural repression, aiming to undermine social order, they invariably do not speak the language of reason and

logic. Rather, they personify confusion and generate frustration in the protagonists.

Jerry, like the stranger in Euripides' Bacchae, seems to appear out of nowhere, has no biological or social roots (his parents are dead and there are no pictures in his picture frames), seems incapable of carrying on what Peter describes as "normal conversation," and is at once aggressively threatening and placatingly suppliant.

George is equally changeable and more overtly reminiscent of the magician, with whom the double is also connected. He creates deliberate verbal confusions, relates allegories whose validity seems questionable, produces a weapon from which emerges a red and yellow Chinese parasol, and is the parent of a mythological son he can cause to appear and disappear at his will.

Lawyer, together with Butler and Miss Alice, further an atmosphere of confusion, ambiguity, and illogic, especially as to the question of whether they are Julian's friends (as they often avow), dedicated to bringing him to the "Truth," or his enemies, intent on proving to him the futility of his noble aspirations.

Peter, Nick, and Julian eventually experience chaos when they can no longer rely on their long-held assumptions and familiar behavior patterns. "I don't understand any of this!" wails Peter to Jerry at the conclusion of the story of Jerry and the dog. "Hell, I don't know when you people are lying, or what," Nick explodes in exasperation

to George and Martha. "What's being done to me. Am I . . .am I being temp--tested in some fashion?" Julian asks Miss Alice, and later, after her marriage to her, he confides to Butler that he feels "quite lost."

In each case, the character's confusion verbalizes what must also be the audience's experience. Contrary to what has often been thought about Albee's plays, this confusion and the frustration it inevitably generates, is not arbitrary, gratuitous, or privately idiosyncratic. Rather, the experience of chaos foreshadows renewal. The double gives testimony to the impulsive, a-social part of the self designated "Other." The individual must, in acknowledging his double's potency, discover a lost self and, simultaneously, a new, more comprehensive and mature identity. Without the personal self-acceptance, inter-personal understanding is untenable.

The action of The Zoo Story, for instance, serves to equate the characters; Jerry, in a very explicit gesture, tosses his knife to Peter to make the two men "evenly matched" in their fight for the same object, the bench. Since the metaphoric language in this play is that of a materialistic culture, the object under contention clarifies Peter and Jerry's division between what is "mine" and what is "yours." Though throughout the play Peter has sought recourse in his social role and the amenities and rationalizations it supplies, Jerry intends to resolve their differences by forcing the other man to meet him

face to face in an instinctive, undeniably mutual, interaction.

Like Jerry, George wants his opponent evenly matched; he requires his wife to be up and swinging and madder than hell. George and Martha both lay claim to one object, their "son"; this mutual possessiveness first polarizes the couple, then resolves the polarization in the reflective hostility it engenders. In this play, as in the earlier one, human beings, alienated from themselves and others by rational, intellectual, and religious moral conventions, meet in the implacable reality of their undifferentiated animal impulses.

The same theme applies more complexly in Tiny Alice in which opposites are less displaced toward realism. Julian simply divides his world into the spiritual father-God, with whom he identifies himself, and the flesh which he consigns as the province of the "Other," including all women and certain men, like Lawyer, linked exclusively to the material world. Both realms obsess and neither satisfies him. In the play, Julian's god-image takes three forms: Lawyer (logos?), the aggressive authority figure, Butler, the humble servant, and Julian who longs to renounce all form to become substanceless spirit, to "serve and be forgotten."

Albee's audiences can see in Julian's concepts of Alice and God (flesh and spirit) the same tension between material-temporal concerns and spiritual-intellectual

concerns also characteristic of Peter and Jerry and George and Martha's relationships. Julian's marriage to Miss Alice resolves the conflict in finite terms; but the play goes on to merge the polarization on its most abstract level when the amorphous reality without distinguishable form (God and Alice, Spirit and Nature) literally overwhelms Julian, the individual bound by temporal space and time.

Since Julian (like Jerry) does not return to his original dimension (he dies), Tiny Alice emphasizes as expressly metaphysical that sudden synthesis which Peter and Jerry and George and Martha also experience. Each play, therefore, realizes in some way the Romantic inclination to destroy the subject-object relationship within and among human beings.

Nietzche, the Romantic from whom so much of modern thought emanates, reclaimed as the symbol of this ideal the god Dionysis, the god of freedom from the constricting bond of a rationalistic society and the means toward reconciliation and unity between "man" and "man" and between "man" and nature. Dionysian influences are indeed evident in Jerry, George, and Lawyer. By symbolically violating or manipulating others into violating social taboos, by endangering the uniquely human reliance upon language as a meaningful tool, and by perpetrating violence, each of these characters incites chaos. This function coincides with the role of shaman and of double: each aims to

disrupt the status quo.

In keeping with these roles these characters personify cultural polarizations only to dissolve them by equating themselves with their counterparts. As a by-product of their actions, they undertake a sacrificial death symbolic of the emotional and intellectual "death" the audience and the other characters experience as a result of the events taking place on stage. They instigate in the other characters, moreover, the surfacing of latent feelings ranging from nonsense to incest.

Though these characteristics would seem to consign Jerry, George, and Lawyer to the realm of the diabolic, these characters actually inherit from the mythic Dionysis the paradoxical qualities identifying them as both demonic and heroic, as both death-dealing and life-giving. The apparently mutually exclusive attributes come together in the psychological verity that the terrible influences capable of leading people to commit unspeakable, "perverted" acts become more potent the longer and more forcefully they are resisted. The Dionysian figure, therefore, is, like the double, an image of an internal self and a signal to individuals that the time has come for them to admit not that they necessarily would do terrible, "unspeakable" things but certainly that they are capable of doing such things. The more willingly the individual admits this the less influence the destructive aspect of Dionysis can exert on him or her.

This provides the reason why Jerry is so intent to prove Peter an "animal" not a "vegetable"; why George and Martha explore their capacity for increasingly destructive cruelties toward each other and toward their guests; why Miss Alice, Butler, and Lawyer so ruthlessly challenge Julian's ideals. Each character functions, like the Dionysian figure of ancient ritual, as a kind of savior who comes to remind individuals that they are, in part, irrational animals so that, under the expedient rationalistic imperatives of civilization, their repressions do not become great enough to overwhelm them. The ancient world knew Dionysis as the "loosener"; that is, the god who expressed the need "to escape from the repressions that so dangerously exist below conventional consciousness." The function the Dionysian ritual served was to act as "a cathartic that took man out of himself and purged his irrational impulses, or directed them into this special channel."[8]

Albee's implementation of Dionysian ritual would, therefore, confront his audiences with their own impulses toward evil. Again, this has been misinterpreted as the playwright's desire to "prove the world an intolerably damned place."[9] On the contrary, the point is that evil cannot be combatted unless it is first recognized. It must, furthermore, be recognized not as the province of some alien force existing "out there" and projected onto other people and other ideologies, but as one's own potential.

Otherwise, like Peter (the prototype of social man and the prescursor of all Albee's initiates), the individual is the eternal victim subject not to an active acceptance of fate but to a passive, untested conviction of his own impotency. "What do you want?" "What are you going to do to me?" he asks of Jerry. Jerry hands him the knife and goads him into fighting in order to thwart this adherence to the role of victim. If Jerry cannot make Peter into an actual victimizer at least he can create a complicity between them which makes the distinction meaningless.

Like Peter, George and Martha see themselves as wronged by each other and victimized by circumstances; they must eventually transcend this view of themselves, as Julian must outgrow his idealization of martyrdom. In The Zoo Story, Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? and Tiny Alice these representative characters re-experience the innate a-rationality attesting to humans' origin in nature in order to know, first hand, what makes succumbing to this side of themselves so intolerable.

Thus, the Dionysian god is also the spring god. Jerry, George, and Lawyer (and company), create frightening situations metaphoric of the mandatory experience of night, winter, or death, and thus attest to the continual interplay between destruction and regeneration. Since destruction implies reconstruction, these characters generate renewal as well.

Because Albee, through these characters, dramatizes chaos, the sense of rebirth or reentry into life after death is built right into the fabric of these plays; hence the elation struggling with the irony in Jerry's final monologue. George and Martha's reduction to elemental language and primitive emotions, their admission of uncertainty and fear, and the sense that they will start again equally imply renewal. The womb imagery implicit in the heartbeats and darkness at the point of Julian's dying also combines a death and birth image.

Albee, we can therefore conclude, leads his characters to a confrontation with their primal fears and impulses, a place beyond all fictions and illusions, as an ordeal necessary to effect in them the means toward their renewal. This thematic device is consistent with rites of passage. In these rites death symbolized reincorporation similar to the process of nature. Jane Harrison writes: "There are but two factors in every rite, the putting off of the old, the putting on of the new; you carry out Winter or death, you bring in Summer, or life."[10] In keeping with nature's model, the ordeals of initiation included at some point the initiate's confrontation with the possibility of his own death, after which he could emerge possessed of a new identity:

> Hence, the mystical death of the novice is not something negative. On the contrary, their death to childhood, to asexuality, to ignorance--in short to the profane condition--is the occasion for a total

> regeneration of the cosmos and the collectivity.[11]

Again, A Delicate Balance proves the relationship between anarchy and renewal in the earlier plays by depicting the alternative. Julia, in that play, comes home to find her room occupied by "alien persons," that is, persons who have no "right" to be there. Julia's room, like Peter's bench, George and Martha's son, and Julian's mind, is both her stake in individuality (what she can claim, as she does repeatedly, as "Mine") and the private refuge to which, again like the other characters, she can retreat when the outside world appears too threatening. The room becomes her excuse to avoid growth.

Also like the earlier characters, Julia is between worlds: the outside world of maturity and responsibility and the childhood world of protection and dependency. Because she cannot remain in this midway state, the issue must be resolved one way or another. In her outburst against Harry and Edna, Julia comes very close to fighting for her right to her room and to accepting, in the process, the responsibility of naming and defending her own desires and needs. However, whereas in the other plays the characters are pushed to follow the implications of their desires to their most extreme consequences, renouncing, in the process, all the measures of safety they have evolved in order to avoid just such a confrontation, Julia, in her fear, calls on her mother and father, and to her detriment,

Agnes responds. The forces closing in on Julia in the persons of Agnes and Harry and Edna (her godparents) are guardians, not of change but of the status quo.

Julia, at this point, becomes the outsider, the outcast. She follows through on this role when she appears in Act Two, scene two with a gun, introducing, as Jerry, George, and Lawyer do before her, the threat of death. But the balance tips in A Delicate Balance not toward increased anarchy, as it does in the other plays, but toward a reassertion of order, a force which Julia is too weak to meet. She hands her gun to Tobias, as all the characters hand him the responsibility to make their decisions, a responsibility he, like they, cannot accept. Consequently, the scene ends with an emphasis on the characters' calm. When they subsequently retire to sleep Tobias can do no more than sit and watch.

The dialogue and action of A Delicate Balance imply that the characters' refusal to confront their fears and disrupt their lives in the profound way necessary to challenge their beliefs, condemns them to lives as observers rather than as participants, as maintainers rather than as initiators. Agnes may brag of her "ability to view a situation objectively," but Claire's explanation captures the irony in the boast: "We live with our truths submerged in the grassy bottom, and we examine alllll the interpretations of alllll the implications like we had a life for nothing else" (93).

All attempts at initiation in A Delicate Balance are aborted. The characters do not "attempt the impossible," do not confront the looking glass, do not embrace death, do not risk the plague (which refers not so much to death as to disruption). Consequently, they each remain in their separate rooms refusing the salvation Albee equates with change. "Nothing changes," says Julia. "The individuality we hold so dearly sinks into crotchet; we see ourselves repeated by those we bring into it all," says Agnes (82). In the conflict between change and adaptation, as central to A Delicate Balance as to the earlier plays, adaptation triumphs; rather than risk the walk on water, the characters "develop gills."

Conversely, in Albee's three most important plays change triumphs through a moment of synthesis uniting disparate elements and confronting the characters with their pre-civilized, pre-conscious natures. For Jerry and Julian the radical extent of the experience can be metaphorically contained only in their deaths. Frye explains this Romantic solution as follows:

> The only point at which one visibly enters into an identity with nature is death. Thus death is all we can usually see of what may or may not be the fullest entering into life.[12]

The deaths of these two characters and of George and Martha's son come to exemplify Albee's equating of psychological death with revitalization. Rather than encouraging the replacement of one attitude with another or one lifestyle

with its opposite, Albee focuses, through the death-rebirth motif, on the continual process of change. Whenever any one "reality" grows large and fossilized and threatens to define rather than be defined by human capabilities it must be shattered. The destruction must be complete enough to force individuals consciously to create new mythic structures, informed by a new understanding of themselves and their place in nature. In nearly all his plays, Albee's characters, representing modern American society, fall on either side of this one dividing line: those who will actively participate in change and impose the imprint of human ingenuity on destiny, and those who will remain a casualty of it.

NOTES

Introduction

[1]C. W. E. Bigsby, Albee (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1969), p. 111.

[2]"Fertility Rites and Sorcery in a New Guinea Village," National Geographic, 1952 (July 1977), 131.

[3]Digby Diehl, "Edward Albee Interviewed," Transatlantic Review, 13 (Summer 1963), 62.

[4]Jane Ellen Harrison, Ancient Art and Ritual (Cambridge: Henry Holt and Co., 1913), p. 45.

[5]William Flanagan, "The Art of the Theater IV: Edward Albee, An Interview," Paris Review, 10 (Fall 1966), 111-112.

[6]Diehl, p. 59.

[7]"Albee Returns to the Living Room," Interview, The New York Times, 27 January 1980, p. 5.

[8]Edward Albee, The Lady From Dubuque (New York: Antheneum, 1980), p. 158.

Chapter I: The Zoo Story

[1]Rose A. Zimbardo, "Symbolism and Naturalism in Edward Albee's The Zoo Story," Twentieth Century Literature, 8 (April 1962), 15; Michael E. Rutenberg, Edward Albee: Playwright in Protest (New York: Avon Books, 1969), p. 29; Ronald Hayman, Edward Albee (New York: Frederick Unger Publishing Co., 1973), pp. 16-17.

[2]Mary M. Nilan, "Albee's The Zoo Story: Alienated Man and the Nature of Love," Modern Drama, 16 (June 1973), 58-59.

[3]Brooks Atkinson, "Theatre: A Double Bill off

Broadway," New York Times 15 January 1960, II, 1; Robert Brustein, "Krapp and a Little Claptrap," New Republic, 142 (22 February 1960), 21-22.

[4]Gilbert Debusscher, Edward Albee--Tradition and Renewal, Trans. Anne D. Williams (Brussels: American Studies Center 1967), p. 12; Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd (Woodstock, New York: Overlook Press 1973), pp. 266-267; Anne Paolucci, From Tension to Tonic: The Plays of Edward Albee (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1972), p. 43; see also Charles R. Lyons, "Two Projections of the Isolation of the Human Soul: Brecht's Im Dickicht der Staedt and Albee's The Zoo Story," Drama Survey, 4 (Summer 1965), p. 131.

[5]Ruby Cohn, Edward Albee (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1969), p. 10; Bigsby, Albee, p. 16; Robert Bennett, "Tragic Vision in The Zoo Story," Modern Drama 20 (March, 1977), 58.

[6]Albee is quoted in an interview with Arthur Gelb as explaining that "'The Zoo Story is neither nihilistic nor pessimistic. My hero is not a beatnik and he is not insane. He is over-sane. Though he dies, he passes on an awareness of life to the other characters in the play; the play, therefore, is obviously not a denial of life.'" Arthur Gelb, "Dramatists Deny Nihilistic Trend," New York Times 15 February 1960, p. 23, col. 1.

[7]Edward Albee, The American Dream and The Zoo Story (New York: Signet, 1963), p. 11. All page references are from this edition and are indicated in the text.

[8]William H. Whyte, Jr., The Organization Man (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956), p. 147.

[9]See, for instance, Russell Baker, "Has the Senate Gone Grey Flannel?" New York Times Magazine, 19 July 1959, p. 11.

[10]Mary Daly, Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), pp. 23-24.

[11]Carl F. Keppler, The Literature of the Second Self (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1972), p. 1, p. 10. All page references are from this edition.

[12]C. G. Jung, Four Archetypes: Mother/Rebirth/Spirit/Trickster, trans. R.F.C. Hull (Princeton: Princeton University Press, Bollingen Series, 1959, 1969), p. 55.

[13]Albee uses themes such as shamanism and initiation

in the tradition of Romanticism. For a discussion of the connection between these, as well as an enlightening definition of the shaman, see Ross Woodman, "Shaman, Poet, and Failed Initiate: Reflections on Romanticism and Jungian Psychology," Studies In Romanticism, 19 (Spring 1980), 51-82.

[14]The obvious application of ritual in The Zoo Story is a reminder of drama's original link to ritual and ritual's emphasis on the intermediary position of human consciousness. The device also has an alienating effect, reminding the audience it is witnessing mimetic, not real, action. Thus, like Pirandello, Albee presents the dilemma between unmitigated reality and illusion, between subjective participation and objective scrutiny, both structurally and thematically. Jerry's obviously directorial role contributes to the alienation effect; the theatrical ploy goes back at least to Shakespear's Hamlet and is emphasized in modern times by Brecht, Pirandello, and Wilder, among others. In Albee's play the ploy is less obvious, the effect on the audience more subliminal. Albee strikes a balance between realistic and stylized actions, an aesthetic balance that reflects the theme of balancing opposites.

[15]Arnold van Gennep, The Rites of Passage, trans. Monika B. Vizedom (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 65-115; see also Mircea Eliade, Birth and Rebirth, the Religious Meanings of Initiation in Human Culture, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper and Row, 1958), p. x.

[16]Eliade, P. 62.

[17]Erich Neumann, The Origins and History of Consciousness, trans. R.F.C. Hull (Princeton: Princeton University Press, Bollingen Series, 1954), p. 61. There have been various other explanations of mythological animals. Joseph Campbell in The Hero with A Thousand Faces writes of how the hero "comes at last to the Lord of the Underworld. . .[who] rushes against him, horribly bellowing; but if the shaman is sufficiently skillful he can soothe the monster back again with promises of luxurious offerings." Joseph Henderson in The Wisdom of the Serpent calls the mythic animals "sacred animals possessing secret wisdom the dreamer wishes to learn" and representatives of the experience of "submission to a power greater than the hero himself" (p. 51). C. G. Jung refers to them as "part of the instinctive psyche" which has been lost or separated from consciousness like a "'loss of soul'", Jung, p. 73.

[18]Tony Tanner, City of Words: American Fiction, 1950-1970 (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 25.

[19]Quoted in Tanner, p. 29.

[20]Tanner calls the self-conscious uses of language (noticeable in Jerry), "foregrounding." According to Tanner the stylistic device of foregrounding permeates most of American literature. His thesis is that American writers are overwhelmingly concerned with the tension between structure or artifice and reality. Though Tanner does not refer to Albee in his book, his analysis that "American writers seem from the first to have felt how tenuous, arbitrary, and even illusory, are the verbal constructs which mean call description of reality" can apply to the playwright. We can see the tension in Jerry's frustration with the inadequacy of definition. Tanner, p. 27; see also, Robert S. Wallace, "The Zoo Story: Albee's Attack on Fiction," Modern Drama 16 (June 1973), 49-54; Arthur K. Oberg, "Edward Albee: His Language and Imagination," Prairie Schooner, 40 (1966), 139-146.

[21]Joseph Campbell, The Hero with A Thousand Faces (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 218.

[22]René Girard, Violence and the Sacred, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977), p. 49.

[23]Friedrich Nietzche, "The Birth of Tragedy," in Critical Theory Since Plato, ed., Hazard Adams (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1971) first published in 1872 in The Birth of Tragedy and the Genealogy of Morals (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1956), p. 638.

[24]Eric Robertson Dodds, The Greeks and the Irrational (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), p. 77.

Chapter II: Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?

[1]See, for instance, Bigsby, Albee, p. 43; Wendell V. Harris, "Morality, Absurdity, and Albee," Southwest Review, 49 (Summer 1964), 255; Lawrence Kingsley, "Reality and Illusion: Continuity of a Theme in Albee," Educational Theatre Journal, 25 (March 1973), 71-79; Emil Roy, "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? and the Tradition," Bucknell Review, 13-14 (March 1965), 29; Peter Wolfe, "The Social Theatre of Edward Albee," Prairie Schooner, 39 (Fall 1965), 248-262.

[2]Ruby Cohn, Edward Albee, p. 24; Anne Paolucci, From Tension to Tonic, p. 62; James P. Quinn, "Myth and Romance in Albee's Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" The Arizona Quarterly, 30 (Autumn 1974), 197-204.

[3]Foster Hirsch, Who's Afraid of Edward Albee? (Berkeley: Creative Arts Book Company, 1978), p. 33.

[4]Duane R. Carr, "St. George and the Snapdragons: the influence of Unamuno on Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" The Arizona Quarterly, 29 (Spring 1973), 10; Charlene M. Taylor, "Coming of Age in New Carthage: Albee's Grownup Children," Educational Theatre Journal, 25 (March 1973), 53-65; Thomas P. Adler, "Albee's Who Afraid of Virginia Woolf?: A Long Night's Journey into Day," Educational Theatre Journal 25 (March 1973), 66-70.

[5]Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), pp. 195-196.

[6]Edward Albee, Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? (New York: Atheneum, 1965), p. 7. All page references are from this edition.

[7]Tanner, City of Words, p. 20-21.

[8]Orley I. Holton, "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? and the Patterns of History," Educational Theatre Journal 25 (March 1973), 52. Holton links this to the name Albee gives the college town: "In order for the illusion [of the son] to be destroyed. . .a night of carnage and chaos has been required. It is undoubtedly significant that the name of the town. . .is New Carthage, with its echoes of the struggle between two great powers, one destroying the other in the interests of Empire, and then destroyed in its turn."

[9]Girard, Violence and the Sacred, p. 8, 132.

Chapter III: Tiny Alice

[1]Edward Albee, The American Dream and the Zoo Story (New York: Signet, 1963), p. 34.

[2]Brustein, Seasons of Discontent (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965), p. 308; Wellworth, The Theatre of Protest and Paradox, 2nd ed. (New York: New York University Press, 1972), p. 332; Paolucci, From Tension to Tonic: The Plays of Edward Albee (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1972), p. 96; Cohn, Currents in Contemporary Drama (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), p. 249; Baxandall, "The Theatre of Edward Albee," Tulane Drama Review 9 (Summer 1965), 35; Ballew, "Who's Afraid of Tiny Alice?" Georgia Review, 20 (1966), 299.

[3]Clurman, The Naked Image (New York: Macmillan Co., 1966), p. 24; Gassner, Dramatic Soundings (New York: Crown Publishers, 1968), p. 602.

[4]Quoted in Alice Mandanis, "Symbol and Substance in Tiny Alice," Modern Drama, 12 (May 1969), 92.

[5]Edward Albee, Tiny Alice (New York: Atheneum, 1965), p. 138. All page references are from this edition.

[6]Carl Gustave Jung, "The Spiritual Problem of Modern Man," from Civilization in Transition in The Collected Works, Vol. 10, trans. R.F.C. Hull (New York: Bollingen Foundation Inc., 1964), p. 75.

[7]Northrop Frye, The Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (New York: Atheneum, 1968), p. 206. All page references are from this edition.

[8]For a discussion of the theme of Tiny Alice in Oedipal terms, see John W. Markson, "Tiny Alice: Edward Albee's Negative Oedipal Enigma," American Imago, 23 (1966), 3-21.

[9]Maude Bodkin, Archetypal Patterns In Poetry (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), pp. 4-5.

[10]Jung, "The Syzygy: Anima and Animus," from Aion: Researches Into the Phenomenology of the Self in The Collected Works, Vol. 9, II, trans. R.F.C. Hull (New York: Bollingen Foundation Inc., 1959), p. 11.

[11]Munroe, Schools of Psycho-Analytic Thought: An Exposition, Critique, and Attempt at Integration (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1955), p. 542.

[12]Aion, p. 13.

[13]Aion, p. 20.

[14]Quoted in Henry Hewes, "The Tiny Alice Caper," Saturday Review, 48 (30 January 1965), 39.

[15]Aion, p. 21.

[16]Jung, Modern Man in Search of a Soul, W. S. Dell and Gary F. Baynes, trans. (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1933), p. 123.

[17]Michael E. Rutenberg, Edward Albee: Playwright in Protest (New York: Avon, 1969), p. 227.

Conclusion

[1]Robert Brustein, The Theatre of Revolt (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1962), p. 16.

[2]Arnold van Gennep, The Rites of Passage, trans. Monika B. Vizedom (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 20.

[3]Edward Albee, A Delicate Balance (New York: Atheneum, 1966), p. 162. All references are from this edition.

[4]Northrop Frye, A Study of English Romanticism (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 18.

[5]Frye, English Romanticism, p. 43.

[6]Frye, English Romanticism, p. 8.

[7]Brustein, Theatre of Revolt, p. 367.

[8]Michael Grant, Myths of the Greeks and Romans (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1962), pp. 283, 281.

[9]Brustein, Seasons of Discontent, p. 308.

[10]Harrison, p. 111.

[11]Mircea Eliade, Birth and Rebirth, p. 19.

[12]Frye, English Romanticism, p. 34.

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