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Faculty of Education
Jihočeská univerzita v Českých Budějovicích
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Diplomová práce

Alienated Heroes of Edward Albee´s Theatre Plays

Odcizení hrdinové divadelních her Edwarda Albeeho

Vypracovala: Bc. Lucie Krautová
Vedoucí práce: PhDr. Kamila Vránková, Ph.D.

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Poděkování

Zde bych ráda poděkovala vedoucí své diplomové práce PhDr. Kamile Vránkové, Ph.D. za cenné podněty, rady, inspiraci a za všechen čas, který mi věnovala při zpracování práce.

Anotace

Náplní této diplomové práce je analýza vybraných her amerického dramatika Edwarda Albeeho zaměřená na psychologickou analýzu jednání jednotlivých postav a jejich rodinných a partnerských vztahů. Práce v úvodu představí osobnost a charakterizuje tvorbu Edwarda Albeeho v kontextu jeho doby. Teoretickým východiskem práce je seznámení s tvůrci absurdního dramatu a přiblížení hlavních prvků absurdního divadla ve vztahu k filosofii existencialismu a jejím představitelům s důrazem na význam komunikace a hledání individuální identity ve filosofii existencialisty Karla Jasperse. Jádrem práce je analýza vybraných her z hlediska rodinné a partnerské krize. Na příkladech konkrétních postav je zkoumáno téma ztráty a hledání identity a jeho souvislost s odcizením a absencí významu v soukromých i společenských vztazích.

Abstract

This thesis aims to analyze selected plays by the American playwright Edward Albee, focusing on the psychological analysis of individual characters and their family and partner relationships. The thesis introduces Edward Albee, his life, and the characteristics of his work in the context of his time. The theoretical background presents the writers of the Theatre of the Absurd and its main elements in relation to the philosophy of existentialism and its representatives, emphasizing the importance of communication and the search for individual identity in the philosophy of existentialist Karl Jaspers. The core of the thesis analyzes selected plays in terms of family and partnership crises. The theme of loss, search for identity, and its relation to alienation and the absence of meaning in personal and social relationships is explored through the examples of specific characters.

Content

1 Introduction

Edward Albee is one of the most notable American writers of the Theatre of the Absurd, unique due to his style and innovative nature of his plays, concentrating mainly on the absurdity of human existence, its authenticity, and a desperate need to establish meaning and purpose for their lives. This thesis aims to analyze four of Edward Albee's plays *The American Dream* (1961), *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* (1962), *Marriage Play* (1987), and *The Play About the Baby* (1998) in terms of characterization of individual characters and their search for identity in alienated and meaningless personal and social relations.

The thesis first introduces the course of Edward Albee's life and work, from his rise to his downfalls. The next chapter introduces his literary style specific to his plays, his emphasis on the characters' personalities, and the importance of influencing his audience. It also concentrates on the role of language in his plays.

The following part of the thesis introduces the general characteristics of the Theatre of the Absurd and its most notable representatives, Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter. It proceeds with defining elements of existentialism and presenting a group of existentialists, Søren Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger, Gabriel Marcel, Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, and Karl Jaspers and their specific attributes of philosophy in relation to the existential and absurdist aspects of Edward Albee's plays, with a particular emphasis on Karl Jaspers philosophy of authentic communication.

The second part of the thesis analyzes characters and their relationships in the chosen plays, concentrating on their alienation, inauthentic experience, loss, and search for identity in their established relationships. Each play is analyzed individually, with characters divided based on their partnerships or specific role in the play and compared to the personalities of the play's other characters. The analysis also depicts the characters' connections and depiction of existentialists' specific philosophies of authentic existence and absurdness of life.

2 Edward Albee's Playwright Career

Edward Albee is listed as one of America's greatest playwrights, alongside Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, and Eugene O'Neill. Albee is known as a controversial and rebellious playwright of many moods and faces, refusing to act on society's expectations of him, poking the conventional sensitivities through the burlesque energy of his plays. At the same time, Albee manages to keep a serious and educated facade. Naturally, the structure of his plays happens to be as much diverse and multifaced as he is. Edward Albee's multifaced career may be divided into the early, middle, and late period.[1]

2.1 Early Life and Career

Albee was adopted after being abandoned by his biological parents right after his birth in 1928 in Washington, D.C. Fortunately, he was adopted by two millionaires, Reed and Frances Albee, living in New York, who adopted him two weeks later and named him Edward Franklin Albee III. Luckily, Albee was adopted by a family with a theatrical history, as his grandfather owned a chain of vaudeville theatres. Albee was a rebellious child, expelled from three preparatory schools and a military academy but finally graduated from Choate, a Connecticut prep school. His stay at Choate wildly influenced his writings as *Choate Library Magazine* accepted his writings and thus encouraged him. He later attended Trinity College in Connecticut but never finished his studies. From 1948 to 1958, Albee felt desperate as he failed to find a suitable job, which brought him back to serious playwriting, finalized in *The Zoo Story*.[2]

Albee's early career may be characterized by his "trial-and-error experimentation" following the period of sudden success.[3] Edward Albee's creative writing career began when he was just six-year-old, attempting to write poems. He strived to become a poet for the next twenty years, however unsuccessfully. Albee also tried to write novels; however, such writing felt a bit off and against his instincts, turning him into playwriting.

[1] BOTTOMS, Stephen, ed. The Cambridge Companion to Edward Albee. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. ISBN 0521542332, p. 1.
[2] ROUDANE, Matthew Charles. Understanding Edward Albee. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1987. ISBN 0872495027, p. 4–5.
[3] BOTTOMS, Stephen, ed. The Cambridge Companion to Edward Albee. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. ISBN 0521542332, p. 2.

He wrote his first play called *Aliqueen* when he was twelve years old and later in his teens, followed up with *Chism,* a one-act play. Albee finally found himself as a playwright in his play *The Zoo Story* in 1958. After publishing the play, Albee said: "I discovered that I had *been* a playwright all my life but didn't know it because I hadn't written plays."[4]

In his twenties, Albee left his wealthy adoptive parents and lived among the artists in New York's Greenwich Village. At this time, he attempted to write several different genres of playwriting. Plays in his work's early stages are a naturalistic melodrama *The City of People* (1949) and *The Making of a Saint* (1954). *The Making of a Saint* seemed nothing like Albee's later works, mainly because the play was "written in rigidly metered rhyming couplets." However, the play already reflected his interest in existentialism.[5]

In his thirties, Albee finally seemed to find his identity as a playwright and wrote a one-act play, *The Zoo Story* (1958). Albee later described the writing of the play as revolutionary for him as "it was the first time he felt as if the characters' language and rhythms were simply flowing, unforced, from his subconscious." He created the main character Jerry as an opposition to the conventional world represented by Peter. The play also mirrored the context of the American theatre at the time, demonstrating the energy of the paralyzed Beat generation as well as reacting to the European absurdist playwrights such as Samuel Beckett. *The Zoo Story* quickly attracted critics due to its minimalistic setting of two men sitting on a bench and their "compelling and controversial dialogue." Edward Albee suddenly became a symbol of the theatre of the absurd and continued writing one-act plays, which fought against the conventional theatre that, according to Albee, presented people with a false sense of themselves.[6]

Due to Albee's provocative reputation, his next multi-act play, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962) drew a lot more attention than his previous plays. Critics reacted contrastingly to the play, either with hostility or high praise. Surprisingly, the play interested a range of audiences and immediately became popular. The play was brutal

[4] ROUDANE, Matthew Charles. Understanding Edward Albee. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1987. ISBN 0872495027, p. 3.
[5] BOTTOMS, Stephen, ed. The Cambridge Companion to Edward Albee. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. ISBN 0521542332, p. 2.
[6] ibid. p. 3.

and hilarious, fusing "domestic realism with the cyclical verbal interplay and mysterious uncertainties." Even though Albee reached Broadway success in the mid-1960s, he needed to fight to keep that position and develop himself. He refused "to settle into predictable, easily marketed dramatic style" and sustained experimenting with content and form of his plays. Having assured his position on Broadway, his next play, an adaptation of McCullers's novella *The Ballad of the Sad Café* (1963), was instantly accepted by the public, following his original play *Tiny Alice* (1965), which became highly successful as well. *Tiny Alice* concentrated on the relationship between sexuality, religion, and reality, owning its success partially to the timing of its release closely after the boom of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*.[7]

2.2 Middle Era: Crisis

Albee's first playwright failure was an adaptation of James Purdy's *Malcolm*, which received contemning reviews universally. The play marks Albee's beginning of the middle part of his career, lining his fall from the heights of Broadway. Edward Albee was not favored by critics or the audience from this point on. Critics mainly compared his new plays to *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, and Albee could not repeat the energy of such play. However, Albee continued to follow "his creative nose wherever it led," which was mainly an uncommercial territory. At the time, some of Albee's work was regarded "too formalistic or intellectually oriented to be popularly appealing" to the general audience. The play that fell into this category was *Box-Mao-Box* (1968). Other plays seemed to be too depressive, such as the play *All Over* (1971). Nevertheless, some of his middle-era plays were exceptional and wildly accepted by society. Even though those plays did not run on Broadway for long and faced negative reviews, *A Delicate Balance* (1966) and *Seascape* (1975) won the Pulitzer Prize. After such achievement, some people suggested *A Delicate Balance* won the prize only due to the memory of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, while others argued the play is somehow similar to it and was Albee's attempt to regain his former popularity. On the other hand, *Seascape* was accused of was accused of attempting to fit the commercial requirements, as Albee cut the three-act

[7] BOTTOMS, Stephen, ed. The Cambridge Companion to Edward Albee. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. ISBN 0521542332, p. 4.

script into only two during the rehearsals, suggesting his self-esteem has declined due to the constant criticism and immense pressure. [8]

Since the 1960s, Albee's creativity has decreased as he completed only two plays over the next decade (*Seascape* and *All Over*). In the 1970s, Albee struggled with alcoholism but seemed to have recharged at the end of the decade and "have facilitated a new burst of creativity," writing three new plays at the beginning of the 1980s: *The Lady from Dubuque* (1980)*, Lolita* (1981), and *The Man Who Had Three Arms* (1983). These plays faced harsh criticism, and hostile responses, that Albee's work is now considered outdated.[9]

2.3 Late Reestablishment of Albee

The 1980s marked the late stage in Albee's work, forcing him to restart his writing career again, reorganizing his life and reputation. Albee began to accept invitations from colleges and universities to teach and direct plays. Such practices encouraged Albee's further writing inspiration, mainly exhibited in small theatres. Those plays include *Finding the Sun* (1983), written for the University of Northern Colorado, *Marriage Play* (1987), written for the English Theatre in Vienna, and *Fragments* (1993), written for the Ensemble Theatre of Cincinnati. Despite those plays being relatively short, the audience found them intriguing and showed Albee's relief from the pressure to be a prominent American playwright. Bottoms implies that a "closer examination of these plays reveals all kinds of intriguing undercurrents in mood, characterization, as well as some ingenious formal games with scene structure." In the 1990s, Albee's reputation was re-established by his new play *Three Tall Women* (1990), which gained him another Pulitzer Prize and received highly positive reviews. *Three Tall Women* shattered Albee's reputation as a writer of cold and intellectual plays and replaced it with a sense of sentimentality.[10]

The *Three Tall Women's* popularity helped Albee revive other plays, such as *A Delicate Balance,* and thus put him back in the spotlight, gaining awards. Since the mid-

[8] BOTTOMS, Stephen, ed. The Cambridge Companion to Edward Albee. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. ISBN 0521542332, p. 5–6.
[9] ibid. p. 6.
[10] ibid. p. 7–8.

1990s, Albee wrote two new plays, *The Play About the Baby* (1998) and *The Goat, or Who is Sylvia?* (2000), which were considered to be "as distinctive and original as anything he had written previously." In 2004, Albee revived his successful play *The Zoo Story* (1958) and created a new play, *Homelife,* which is interconnected with the original play and its characters. In conclusion, it might be possible that Albee outclassed his early writing success of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* in his latest works.[11]

2.4 Edward Albee's Style and Innovations

Most of the significant 20th century American playwrights such as Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, and August Wilson had created a sort of aura, a characterization of their work, based on their most popular plays. O'Neill's famous plays *The Iceman Cometh* (1939) and *A Long Day's Journey Into Night* (1956) are characteristic of their realistic and autobiographical nature. Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) and *A Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955) reflect poetic realism. Arthur Miller's plays *Death of a Salesman* (1949), and *The Crucible* (1953) depict characters shuttered by society's values. In contrast, August Wilson in his plays *Fences* (1986) and *The Piano Lesson* (1987) concentrates on the centuries-long African-American experience. Each of these playwriters can be identified by their most profound writings due to their plays' shared subject, theme, and theatric similarities. However, creating such characterization for Edward Albee's work is hard. Such characterization would be primarily based on his most famous play, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*. His plays, both short and full-length, are too varied dramatically and theatrically, they are different in situation, character, and theatrical style, which makes it difficult to form a single type of characterization for Albee's plays. His theatrical style varies from play to play, from a "minimalist realism" in *The Zoo Story* to "nearly kitchen sink-realism in a living room" of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* to "fairy tale symbolism" in *Seascape*. Such approach and variation in theatrical style and dramatic subject label Edward Albee as a multilayered innovator.[12]

[11] BOTTOMS, Stephen, ed. The Cambridge Companion to Edward Albee. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. ISBN 0521542332, p. 8.
[12] CRESPY, David A. a Lincoln KONKLE, ed. New Perspectives in Edward Albee Studies: Edward Albee as Theatrical and Dramatic Innovator. Volume 3. Boston: Brill, 2019. ISBN 9789004394711, p. 1-3.

Although Albee's style is tough to categorize, Paolucci distinguishes three specific stage formats of his plays. The first is the "illusory realism" of plays such as *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, *Tiny Alice,* and *Three Tall Women*. The second one is "more experimental," including "a series of flashes into the past brought into the present," as in *The Man Who Had Three Arms* or *Quotations from Chairman Mao*. The third one suggests "art transcending itself" and can be classified as "*non-play*" in Albee's *Fragments*, including "a series of voices skimming the impersonal surface of things for permanence, order, and continuity."[13]

Albee presents himself as a very experimental playwright, boldly stepping over theatrical boundaries and constantly trying to alternate dramatic language and contexts. He keeps "reshaping theatrical conventions" based on instinct regardless of the possible commercial criticism.[14] His work synthesizes the new theatre and the American tradition. He is unafraid to experiment with various dramatic forms, including naturalism, surrealism, expressionism, symbolism, metaphysical allegory, tragicomedy, and satire. His theatrical style is unique only to him, as he fuses reality and daydream, combines life and play, and existence and theater.[15]

Edward Albee's plays are preoccupied with dialogs, specifically words, their sound, and the rhythm and energy they create combined with the stage images. Albee strives to create a musical, sculptural, and literary experience for the audience. He purposefully shocks, offends, and disturbs them.[16] His theatre stages are minimalistic and barely furnished, bringing primary attention to the performers and their little surroundings.[17] As a stage device, he frequently uses a narrative to enhance the dramatic effect.[18] Visually, Albee's plays are often boxed in a room, place, box, or frame,

[13] MANN, Bruce J., ed. Edward Albee: A Casebook. New York and London: Routledge, 2003. ISBN 0815331657, p. 29.
[14] ROUDANE, Matthew Charles. Understanding Edward Albee. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1987. ISBN 0872495027, p. 10–11.
[15] DEBUSSCHER, Gilbert. Edward Albee: Tradition and Renewal. Brussels: Center for American Studies, 1969, p. 84.
[16] STENZ, Anita Maria. Edward Albee: The Poet of Loss. The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1978. ISBN 902797764, p. 2.
[17] BOTTOMS, Stephen, ed. The Cambridge Companion to Edward Albee. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. ISBN 0521542332, p. 12–14.
[18] MANN, Bruce J., ed. Edward Albee: A Casebook. New York and London: Routledge, 2003. ISBN 0815331657, p. 23.

showing how we are trapped in roles that we create for ourselves.[19] His plays do not tend to be located in time and space. They are often based in a world that is theatrically, socially, and morally embodied as mere voices, detached from "personal and public histories."[20] In his plays, Albee repeatedly creates a "play-within-a-play effect."[21] The sets and their characters emphasize what they are trying to communicate without distraction by other effects, as the sets are supposed to represent the characters' inner state of mind.[22] Albee's plays are often open-ended, full of paradoxes, repetitions, and fractured language.[23]

Albee was highly inspired by the existentialist Albert Camus. Such interest can be spotted in the themes of his plays concentrating on human conditions, the responsibilities of a human being, and the courage needed to reach one's freedom and reevaluate reality. Albee's plays are, at core, existentialist and emphasize the examination of human consciousness. Albee examines the conflict between reality and illusion, the physical and psychological realm, and likes to explore the human soul from its darker sides. His plays typically address issues such as "betrayal, abandonment, withdrawal into a death-in-life existence," especially living semiconscious life. Such emphasis makes critics often label Albee as a nihilistic or pessimistic writer, implying Albee wants to inform society that the solitude they feel is never-ending, and the only thing that can save them from it is death. However, such claims seem false as Albee conveys a different message about life.[24]

Albee's work pinpoints the need for an individual to examine his consciousness fully and thoroughly to be fully conscious during our lives and face any obstacles

[19] BOTTOMS, Stephen, ed. The Cambridge Companion to Edward Albee. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. ISBN 0521542332, p. 14.
[20] BIGSBY C. W. E. A Critical Introduction to Twentieth Century American Drama. Vol. 2. Cambridge UP, 1984. ISBN 0521258111, p. 8-9.
[21] CRESPY, David A. a Lincoln KONKLE, ed. New Perspectives in Edward Albee Studies: Edward Albee as Theatrical and Dramatic Innovator. Volume 3. Boston: Brill, 2019. ISBN 9789004394711, p. 3.
[22] BOTTOMS, Stephen, ed. The Cambridge Companion to Edward Albee. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. ISBN 0521542332, p. 12–14.
[23] MANN, Bruce J., ed. Edward Albee: A Casebook. New York and London: Routledge, 2003. ISBN 0815331657, p. 20.
[24] ROUDANE, Matthew Charles. Understanding Edward Albee. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1987. ISBN 0872495027, p. 6-7, 18-19.

effectively.[25] Although Albee tries to avoid conventional stage realism, his plays are inherently realistic and attack daily life depicted by theatre and television, implying it is not the authentic depiction of reality but merely the outward perception of life.[26] As Albee's plays suggest, many people "go through their lives semiconscious," eventually panicking about the time they wasted on earth. Albee's characters face their physical, psychological, and spiritual struggles, which are characteristics of human experience. His plays strive to liberate human consciousness, which is depicted by the characters' inner drama and their persuasion of consciousness. "If O'Neill's, Ionesco's, Mamet's, or Beckett's characters seem aware of suffering, they also accept an attitude that precludes any significant growth. In contrast, Albee's heroes suffer, dwell in absurd world, but realize the opportunity for growth and change." Depending on the plays, they all point out that Albee's heroes and audience can be more honest with their inner and outer world. As critics labeled Albee as a pessimistic writer, such stance is untrue since he points out his characters and audience to cleanse their consciousness, examine their values, relationships, and lifestyle, and gain self-awareness. Albee wants to persuade his audience "to live honestly," liberate their minds and see the world for what it truly is, unstable as their entire existence.[27]

Beyond the visible image of the plays, Albee displays a positive approach to the human experience hidden under his contentious dialogues, and his interest in death lies in compassion for the human being. Such view can be observed in his interviews, where he emphasizes the need to live life fully, actively, and fearlessly to experience the richness of a life lived authentically. In his plays, the individual deliberately connects his intellect with emotions and creates a unit that forms an entirely awake individual capable of living consciously.[28]

[25] ROUDANE, Matthew Charles. Understanding Edward Albee. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1987. ISBN 0872495027, p. 20–22.
[26] BOTTOMS, Stephen, ed. The Cambridge Companion to Edward Albee. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. ISBN 0521542332, p. 12–14.
[27] ROUDANE, Matthew Charles. Understanding Edward Albee. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1987. ISBN 0872495027, p. 20–24.
[28] ibid. p. 8–9.

2.4.1 Albee's Characters and Audience

Edward Albee is particular in his approach and intersection of characters and audience, striving for profound and life-altering influence on his audience. His approach to the audience defines his style. Through the characters, Albee puts a mirror in front of his audience to make them face their deepest fears and make them act before it is too late to change their life.

Albee's characters function symbolically and are deeply individualized and psychologically motivated. Albee depicts "extreme situations, heightened language, long operatic monologues, and the conscious visual effect of the staging." The degree of realism fluctuates from play to play. Albee adapts the form of his plays based on their content, causing no two plays to look alike externally. However, Albee's plays internally share some interesting similarities, such as "the musicality of the structure of the play; the ritual quality of much of the action; and the sharp ironic humor."[29]

Albee is excellent at capturing his character's personal politics, perceptions, and values.[30] His characters are interrelated and united from play to play. They represent the "archetypal family unit" that compresses our society's hopes, dilemmas, defeats, and values and the author himself. Albee depicts how the "American family undergoes anxiety" and sterility and thus slowly collapses. Generations move towards emasculation, the immoral use of power, and the creation of "illusory values."[31]

Interestingly, there are no villains or heroes in Albee's plays, therefore the audience is unable to pick their winner or a loser. The audience can identify with any of the characters, which makes the theatrical experience deeply uncomfortable, causing the audience to regard the characters as indistinguishable human beings rather than a reflection of themselves.[32] Albee concentrates explicitly on the bond between a wife

[29] STENZ, Anita Maria. Edward Albee: The Poet of Loss. The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1978. ISBN 902797764, p. 2.
[30] KOLIN, Philip C., ed. American Playwrights Since 1945: A Guide to Scholarship, Criticism, and Performance. New York: Greenwood Press, 1989. ISBN 0313255431, p. 1.
[31] KERNAN, Alvin B., ed. The Modern American Theatre: A Collection of Critical Essays. Fourth Printing edition. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1967. ISBN 0135862892, p. 80-85.
[32] DEBUSSCHER, Gilbert. Edward Albee: Tradition and Renewal. Brussels: Center for American Studies, 1969, p. 82-83.

and a husband and exploring other destructive relationships across family members, no matter if they are female or male.[33] In Albee's plays, Paolucci sees an interest in the character's "moments of crisis, 'rites of passage,': marriage, death, separation, the inevitable change of human relationships, and the anguish of isolation." She suggests Albee inspects every aspect of the human struggle for control over external events and how such struggle influences us daily.[34]

He is preoccupied with the ways people waste their lives, with twisted human relationships, the impacts of materialism on relationships, and the deceptive and destructive nature of ambitions.[35] Characters surround themselves with lies that cut their contact with reality resulting in their destruction. The destruction of the illusion tends to be traumatic and fatal.[36] Albee's characters fail not because the cruel outside world hurts them but because they "reject, avoid or subvert their own free will and their communal responsibilities to other people."[37] Albee forces the audience to change the disfavored reality of what they see in their own life.[38]

Albee is highly demanding of his audience, who needs to concentrate on the characters and their conflicts and fully participate in the theatrical experience while responding directly to their emotions. Without a choice, his characters are forced to undergo a sequence of confrontation and violence before they can awake from their "death-in-life" state. Mainly, at least one of the characters in the play realizes the need for a change eventually. On the other hand, the spectator is supposed to leave "shaken into a state of heightened awareness and insight."[39]

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[33] STENZ, Anita Maria. Edward Albee: The Poet of Loss. The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1978. ISBN 902797764, p. 1-4.
[34] MANN, Bruce J., ed. Edward Albee: A Casebook. New York and London: Routledge, 2003. ISBN 0815331657, p. 22-23.
[35] STENZ, Anita Maria. Edward Albee: The Poet of Loss. The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1978. ISBN 902797764, p. 1-4.
[36] DEBUSSCHER, Gilbert. Edward Albee: Tradition and Renewal. Brussels: Center for American Studies, 1969, p. 82-83.
[37] BENNETT, Michael Y., ed. New Perspectives in Edward Albee Studies: Edward Albee and Absurdism. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2017. ISBN 9789004324961, p. 11.
[38] STENZ, Anita Maria. Edward Albee: The Poet of Loss. The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1978. ISBN 902797764, p. 1-4.
[39] ibid. p. 2.

Albee refuses to accept the audience as passive and regards it as an active participant in the play.[40] Including the audience and breaking the fourth wall is supposed to leave the audience unsettled and unnerved. Albee achieves so using direct addressing and thus "shattering the barrier between the character and audience," transforming the audience into "spect-actors," forcing them to change their behavior rather than "sleepwalk through life." [41] He wants his audience to be open to experience, change their values and views of the world, and raise their consciousness. Albee's characters try to reach the audience through their seemingly ridiculous conversations and drive it to increase their awareness and appreciation of life.[42]

2.4.2 The Role of Language in Edward Albee's Plays

The language of Edward Albee's plays is very specific and is an apparent feature of his work and a profound contribution to American literature.[43] Albee places enormous importance and value on language and the necessity for communication to work effectively among human beings. In his plays, Albee explores how the precision of language is crucial for understanding and creating our reality.[44]

Albee is considered to be a master of dialogue, revolutionizing the language of the American stage by spreading "verbal metaphor into visual settings of his plays," shifting from "major to minor moods," enhancing the meanings with a sudden shift in style, mixing "slang with archaic formality" and "hysterical fluency with monosyllabic exhaustion in dialogues" and thus "establishing a variety of rhythms" constantly astonishing the audience, all in one setting. Even though Albee's language pattern can vary from play to play, Paolucci summarizes it as an effort to expose and criticize things taken for granted for too long. However, he is not attempting to fix social injustice, reform family relations, or

[40] ROUDANE, Matthew Charles. Understanding Edward Albee. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1987. ISBN 0872495027, p. 11.
[41] CRESPY, David A. a Lincoln KONKLE, ed. New Perspectives in Edward Albee Studies: Edward Albee as Theatrical and Dramatic Innovator. Volume 3. Boston: Brill, 2019. ISBN 9789004394711, p. 4.
[42] ROUDANE, Matthew Charles. Understanding Edward Albee. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1987. ISBN 0872495027, p. 14–15.
[43] KOLIN, Philip C., ed. American Playwrights Since 1945: A Guide to Scholarship, Criticism, and Performance. New York: Greenwood Press, 1989. ISBN 0313255431, p. 1.
[44] BENNETT, Michael Y. The Cambridge Introduction: Theatre and Literature of the Absurd. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. ISBN 978-1107053922, p. 118.

"propose a solution to the emptiness of material prosperity." He simply transforms social criticism into an existential question.[45]

Albee is primarily interested in the semantics of the language, its limitations, and how people and his characters fail to use it effectively. "For Albee, language is the medium or meeting ground which exists between the interior and exterior worlds of the speaker and the listener." For him, language is a tool for transforming ideas into actions, a mediator where a word is only an imitation, entirely independent and separated from a specific sign it is supposed to represent.[46]

His plays' profound expressiveness creates a space for fragmented speeches, short snatches of language located in stretching silences, and dialogues containing only a small series of statements in which he tries to mirror the sense of loss in modern existence, which, however, can be redeemed. [47]

His characters often correct each other's use of language and try to determine the correct expression.[48] All of the characters' semantic debates over the proper names of the items are always insoluble due to their relative nature, causing the language to be means of avoiding proper communication rather than practicing it correctly. Conversations often transform into linguistic bickering over a particular use of expression or term, gradually evolving into a more general, abstract debate over the language function itself. Language through which the characters express their feelings is only a symbol for those feelings, instead hiding them than the other way around.[49] Such attitude to language signalizes Albee's conviction that language is a net trapping existence and thus reality. Albee is interested in people's attempts to gain control over their experience, either their own or of others, through their "fiction-making skills."[50]

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[45] PAOLUCCI, Anne. From Tension to Tonic: The Plays of Edward Albee. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1972. ISBN 0809305518, p. 15-16.
[46] WASSERMAN, Julian N., ed. Edward Albee: An Interview and Essays. Houston: University of St. Thomas, 1983. ISBN 0815681070, p. 29.
[47] BIGSBY C. W. E. A Critical Introduction to Twentieth Century American Drama. Vol. 2. Cambridge UP, 1984. ISBN 0521258111, p. 8-9.
[48] ibid. p. 10-11.
[49] WASSERMAN, Julian N., ed. Edward Albee: An Interview and Essays. Houston: University of St. Thomas, 1983. ISBN 0815681070, p. 30-35.
[50] BIGSBY C. W. E. A Critical Introduction to Twentieth Century American Drama. Vol. 2. Cambridge UP, 1984. ISBN 0521258111, p. 10-11.

Albee's emphasis on the relativity of the words stems from a linguistic assertion that people derive word meanings from three sources: the word in the mind of a listener, the word in the mind of a speaker, and the generally accepted meaning of the word. Albee examines relationships between those groups. He likes to put characters from different speech communities together, forcing them to find and create their way of communicating. However, even the characters from the same speech communities have problems understanding the personal meanings of the words. Albee often uses the lack of shared language to enhance the space between characters and uses language to unite or separate the characters. Same method Albee exercises on his audience. The audience can understand the meanings of the characters' language only after the audience ceases to be excluded from their speech community and becomes accepted into it, showing that language can serve as a bridge between the speaker and the listener only if both understand its rules.[51]

The listener is as important as the speaker, one must not only listen but pay attention, otherwise the language function will fail. The speaker and the listener must understand the general idea of the idea conversed between them and rely on indirect means such as symbols or words. The seemingly clear words frequently have private and specific meanings to the characters who use them on their own terms throughout the play.[52]

The language semantics is the place where reality and fantasy combat. The exchange between the speaker and the listener undergoes the inevitable translation of ideas and objects, which undergo ultimate alternation, marking the change from the movement from one location to the other. Even though Albee marks language as "mediating instrument between the abstract and the concrete," and emphasizes its necessity despite its imperfections. Without language, man would stand where Albee places his characters, unable to distinguish between illusion and reality.[53]

[51] WASSERMAN, Julian N., ed. Edward Albee: An Interview and Essays. Houston: University of St. Thomas, 1983. ISBN 0815681070, p. 36-38.
[52] ibid. p. 39-41.
[53] ibid. p. 41-44.

3 Theatre of the Absurd and its Specifics

Theatre of the Absurd was born as a reaction to the Second World War in the late 1950s. It was heavily influenced by existential philosophy and closely corresponds with the philosophy of Albert Camus and his essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), which describes the human existence as absurd and lacking purpose. Martin Esslin first coined the movement in his book *The Theatre of the Absurd* (1960), emphasizing the absurdity of the human condition, lack of meaning, and communication breakdown. As prominent absurdist playwrights Esslin listed Samuel Beckett, Arthur Adamov, Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet, and Harold Pinter, accompanied by other playwrights writing similarly like Edward Albee and Tom Stoppard.

Theatre of the Absurd expresses the search for a way to confront the universe and the world deprived of God. Such world has become purposeless and absurd, and the feelings of disillusionment, loss of meaning, and purpose in life struck people. [54] The universe has become chaotic and impossible to comprehend, alienating people. People could not adjust to the new reality absent of philosophical or spiritual background. Without it, they could not understand or explain happenings around or to them, marking their existence as absurd.[55]

The Theatre of the Absurd reacts to the humans' loss of explanation, meaning, and purpose of our existence. It expresses the loss of the fundamental certainties and increasing automatism of contemporary human society. Theatre of the Absurd exposes the absurdity of inauthentic human experience as well as the absurdity of human existence caused by the world with declining religious beliefs which secured human certainties. It criticizes the absurdity of "half-conscious lives," accompanied by a sense of "deadness," "unaware and unconscious of ultimate reality." Absurdist plays try to make man aware of his human condition by shocking him, thus showing him that his existence has become mechanical and deprived of awareness.[56] Theater of the Absurd tries to mirror contemporary man's attempt to come to terms with the world he lives in, forcing him

[54] ESSLIN, Martin. The Theatre of the Absurd. New York: Anchor Books, 1961, p. 266-267, 290–294.
[55] DOMINTE, Carmen. Re-Thinking Character in the Theatre of the Absurd. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2020. ISBN 978-1-5275-5787-1, p. 1–3.
[56] ESSLIN, Martin. The Theatre of the Absurd. New York: Anchor Books, 1961, p. 290–294.

to face his human condition at its core and free him from illusions that destine him for constant disappointment.[57]

Some writers, such as existential writers Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre, approach such themes rationally using logical reasoning. Others, such as absurdists Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter, refuse the rational means of discursive thinking in their literature.[58] Compared to the Theatre of the Absurd, existentialists like Sartre and Camus leave the audience with a rationally formulated philosophy or lesson formed after reading their work. However, Theatre of the Absurd does not provide the audience with intellectual concept but rather "poetic image," which do not fully describe the philosophical problem nor provide a straightforward solution to the problem.[59]

Absurdist plays pursue different aims from conventional plays. Theatre of the Absurd is not a movement, including writers who are outsiders and loners caught up in their private worlds. Absurdist writers have unique subjects, forms, roots, resources, and backgrounds.[60] Each writer uses different techniques, creating very different plays with different goals, themes, topics, concerns, and styles.[61] If they do have something in common, it is because "their work most sensitively mirrors and reflects the preoccupations and anxieties, the emotions and thinking in the Western world."[62]

In general, absurdist writers set their plays and characters in strange and challenging situations, making their plays abnormal, exceptional, astonishing, and tragicomical.[63] The central themes of absurd literature include the absence of values, the meaninglessness of human existence, and irrationality.[64] Absurdist plays have no clear plot or storyline. The characters are not very specific and seem like "mechanical puppets." The nature of the characters restricts the audience from identifying with them.

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[57] ESSLIN, Martin. The Theatre of the Absurd. New York: Anchor Books, 1961, p. 316.
[58] DOMINTE, Carmen. Re-Thinking Character in the Theatre of the Absurd. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2020. ISBN 978-1-5275-5787-1, p. 1–3.
[59] ESSLIN, Martin. The Theatre of the Absurd. New York: Anchor Books, 1961, p. 304–305.
[60] ibid. p. xviii.
[61] BENNETT, Michael Y. The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre and Literature of the Absurd. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. ISBN 978-1-107-05392-2, p. 45.
[62] ESSLIN, Martin. The Theatre of the Absurd. New York: Anchor Books, 1961, p. xviii.
[63] BENNETT, Michael Y. The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre and Literature of the Absurd. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. ISBN 978-1-107-05392-2, p. 41–43.
[64] DOMINTE, Carmen. Re-Thinking Character in the Theatre of the Absurd. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2020. ISBN 978-1-5275-5787-1, p. 41–43.

Such audience position helps them stay detached and critical, not accepting the character's values, emotions, and views. The plays often have a "circular structure," ending precisely where they began, or they gradually intensify the initial situation, aiming for gradual completion of the play's pattern at the end[65].

Absurdist plays express their critique of our flawed society by confronting the audience with a distorted and grotesque picture of the absurd world. It confronts the audience with actions that "lack apparent motivation." Characters undergo a constant cycle of change and participate in irrational events, forcing the spectator to think about what is happening rather than wondering what will happen next. [66] Absurdists do not use exposition and let their characters appear and develop the story without informing the audience about their background story.[67] Absurdist characters live in absurd conditions, only unauthentically passing through their existence experiencing alienation, incapable of communicating anything nor connecting with others or themselves.[68]

Theatre of the Absurd is characterized by its experimentation with language and bashing the realistic traditional use of language[69]. The plays tend to devaluate language radically and try to communicate through the concrete images of the stage itself. What happens on the stage "transcends, and contradicts the *words* spoken by the characters," thus forcing the play to be full of unpleasant and incoherent blabbering rather than pointed dialogues. Theatre of the Absurd depicts communication in "a state of breakdown" as a reflection of the reality of language. Absurd plays present the need for language to be altered into its proper function, communicating authentic and truthful content.[70]

Theatre of the Absurd presents the world as absurd, striving to answer what we should do to deal with the absurdity of our existence and how to make our lives

[65] ESSLIN, Martin. The Theatre of the Absurd. New York: Anchor Books, 1961, p. xvii., 300–305.
[66] ibid. p. 300–305.
[67] BENNETT, Michael Y. The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre and Literature of the Absurd. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. ISBN 978-1-107-05392-2, p. 41–43.
[68] DOMINTE, Carmen. Re-Thinking Character in the Theatre of the Absurd. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2020. ISBN 978-1-5275-5787-1, p. 4–5, 23.
[69] BENNETT, Michael Y. The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre and Literature of the Absurd. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. ISBN 978-1-107-05392-2, p. 41–43.
[70] ESSLIN, Martin. The Theatre of the Absurd. New York: Anchor Books, 1961, p. xviii., xxi., 299.

meaningful rather than asking why our lives are that way. The audience of absurdist plays needs to interpret the ambiguous meanings of the play and its contradictory situations and make sense of their own lives and its peculiarities. Theatre of the Absurd attempts to show its audience that life exists with contradictions, and "without a false God-like system or other false systems for imposing meaning upon the world," we are the ones who make our lives meaningful. It tells us that we are the ones who must make sense of our "contradictory situations" and life. We must contemplate and confront contradictions to create meaning for life and learn how to live it. That is the essential message of the Theatre of the Absurd.[71]

One of the most prominent absurdist writers is Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter, who also happened to have a vast influence on the work of Edward Albee. Both writers' works are vastly different yet similar but depict the diversity of the Theatre of the Absurd and its connection to existentialism and Edward Albee.

3.1 Samuel Beckett

Samuel Beckett is a writer known for the obscurity and difficulty of his work, often striking his audience with a depressive perception of life elevated by a sense of sarcastic humor. However, the obscurity and difficulty of his work do not necessarily mean his plays are unattainable or filled with the unknown. Beckett needs his audience to get rid of expectations and assumptions while he abandons familiarity and theatrical conventions. His plays inherently depict "radical and alienating simplicity." His minimal sets often include repetition, simple phrases, and rhythms.[72]

Beckett's plays evoke minimalism, scarcity, and the endless urge to expose the core and essence. A mythical aura surrounds his work as he refuses to explain his plays, claiming his works simply "mean what they say." His drama lacks specificity as the drama's sets seem deserted and lack any geographical or temporal clues about the sets and identification of characters or narrators. The absence of concreteness in the plays,

[71] BENNETT, Michael Y. Reassessing the Theatre of the Absurd: Camus, Beckett, Ionesco, Genet, and Pinter. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. ISBN 978-1-349-29520-3, p. 20-22.
[72] MCDONALD, Ronan. The Cambridge Introduction to Samuel Beckett. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. ISBN 978-0521547383, p. 1–5.

characters, and sets seems to represent "everywhere and everyone." Such attitude to playwrighting led the critics to believe Beckett tried to convey a more profound message about life and human existence, assuming he was an existentialist.[73]

Beckett's work does include some similarities and principles of existentialism. However, it is hard to determine whether Beckett was influenced by existentialism or if he came to similar conclusions. Beckett's work is preoccupied with pessimism and human suffering. He viewed the world and existence pessimistically and could not achieve happiness himself. However, Beckett said he was more interested in how we are "trapped by our genes, by our upbringing or by our social conditioning than to the existentialist idea of absolute freedom." On the other hand, when it comes to existentialism, Beckett might be fonder of the idea of absurdity than freedom.[74]

As well as Edward Albee, Beckett rejected any association with the Theatre of the Absurd, for whom such label was "too 'judgmental', too self-assuredly pessimistic." He distanced himself from philosophy and rationality and chose the baffled and anguished view of the world, which can be adequately expressed only through art and not philosophical language. Regardless of his affinity to existentialism or absurdism, post-war pessimism, and outlooks created a climate suitable for the acceptance and grounding of his work.[75]

Beckett was marked as a voice of the broken post-war world and immensely impacted post-war drama. Beckett's minimalistic sets featuring wasted creatures and aged, confused, and aching narrators and characters cause his work to significantly embody the world missing hope, God, morality, and value. Themes of "loneliness, solitude, alienation" are predominant in his later work. His plays explore deranged and borderline conditions as well as uncertainty and subjectivity.[76]

Beckett used to switch between writing drama and prose as it suited him as a way to find relief from the draining and immersive process of writing prose. The prose

[73] MCDONALD, Ronan. The Cambridge Introduction to Samuel Beckett. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. ISBN 978-0521547383, p. 1–2.
[74] ibid. p. 9, 23-24.
[75] ibid. p. 25.
[76] ibid. p. 1-2, 7.

was Becket's primary way of expression. In his fiction, in the sixties and seventies, such as *Imagination Dead Imagine* (1965), *Enough* (1967), *Bing* (1966), and *The Lost Ones* (1972), Beckett created minimalistic fiction (like his plays), impersonal, unpunctuated, spare and short prose. His other play *Endgame* (1957), captures the sense of loss, pain, dread, and ending. Another play capturing "an atmosphere of death and the end of relationships" is *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958).[77] However, one of his most influential plays is considered to be *Waiting for Godot* (1952). It is also a play most associated with existentialism and the Theatre of the Absurd.

3.1.1 Waiting for Godot

The scene of the play is simple: a desolate country road with a tree, and two older tramps, Vladimir and Estragon, waiting to meet a man called Godot who never comes. However, the play's meaning is uncertain, and the audience rightfully asks who Godot is, giving many possible answers to such questions. Godot might represent God since it is precisely Godot who gives Vladimir and Estragon a sense of direction and purpose in their lives, similar to a religious belief however, as the presence of Godot is missing, missing is the presence of God. Written after the Second World War, God seems to have deserted a world destroyed by barbarism and genocide. His absence has left a hole that human beings desperately attempt to fill. However, Beckett's work rejects simple explanations; thus, Godot's comparison to God is only a wild speculation. Beckett said himself that if he knew who Godot was, he "would have said so in the play." [78]

Regardless of Godot, the play is filled with biblical references and religious elements and "deals with fundamental issues of time, desire, habit, suffering." However, the play will not provide meaning for the audience, as Godot will not come. Aside from God, Godot can be seen as a tendency of human beings to live their life oriented toward a particular achievement, as most beings live in a constant state of desire or hope for the future. Once the desire is achieved, it moves towards a different object causing the being to be ultimately never fulfilled. Life then becomes about our future expectations of a

[77] MCDONALD, Ronan. The Cambridge Introduction to Samuel Beckett. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. ISBN 978-0521547383, p. 17-18.
[78] ibid. p. 29.

'Godot' who never arrives. Beings fill their days with habits and routines while expecting such arrival and not confronting the problem of scarcity and temporality of fulfillment, "the terrible destructiveness of time," and "the inevitability of death from the very moment of birth."[79]

The play is full of perplexities, with no apparent meaning or explanation provided. There is no explanation for these two men and their actions and whereabouts. As well the audience, the two main characters also lack certainty. The play withholds the knowledge of the cause and effect, complication, and resolution of the play. The development of the play is unclear, suggesting the two protagonists might be stuck in an endless loop. Events occur without an apparent cause or connection to the others, accompanied by jokes and stories without resolution. There is no clear indication of why the two made an appointment with Godot, why Estragon is beaten every day, why one of the thieves was saved and not the other, and why Godot is not arriving are questions that remain hopelessly unanswered.[80]

As well as the protagonists' actions, the memory is also unreliable, which is especially visible as Vladimir and Estragon cannot find out if they were there the day before or not: [81]

> **ESTRAGON**: We came here yesterday.
> **VLADIMIR**: Ah no, there you're mistaken.
> **ESTRAGON**: What did we do yesterday?
> **VLADIMIR**: What did we do yesterday?
> **ESTRAGON**: Yes.
> **VLADIMIR**: Why … *(Angrily)* Nothing is certain when you're about.
> **ESTRAGON**: In my opinion we were here.
> **VLADIMIR**: *(Looking round)* You recognize the place?
> **ESTRAGON**: I didn't say that.
> **VLADIMIR**: Well?
> **ESTRAGON**: That makes no difference.
> **VLADIMIR**: All the same … that tree …. *(Turning towards auditorium)* that bog...
> **ESTRAGON**: You're sure it was this evening?
> **VLADIMIR**: What?
> **ESTRAGON**: That we were to wait.

[79] MCDONALD, Ronan. The Cambridge Introduction to Samuel Beckett. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. ISBN 978-0521547383, p. 30–31.
[80] ibid. p. 31-32.
[81] ibid. p. 32.

VLADIMIR: He said Saturday. *(Pause)* I think.[82]

The only thing that is sure and understood is that they are waiting for Godot, the reason for their presence in the place and the only stable idea in all the confusion.[83]

Even though it seems like nothing happens in the play, it is not exactly true. We can observe a range of movements and activities throughout the play. Characters are running on and off, exchanging hats, their trousers are falling, and playing with the boots. However, lifelessness and trivial dialogues form a large part of the play. Physical exchanges and conversations between the two main characters form a dramatic activity. The repetition in the play suggests that the activities are part of "an ongoing cycle," and people's lives revolve in a cycle or series of routines.[84]

For Beckett, expressive language is not a tool for artistic impact; thus, he chose silence. The dissatisfaction with language and attempt for purification of his work is evident in *Waiting for Godot* as he attempted to find expressiveness in the silence between words, and thus the most expressive moments happen in the pauses and silences. In the moments the characters of Waiting for Godot cannot express themselves, stand the possibility of silence itself, or avoid the "dead voices," the meaning occurs:[85]

> **ESTRAGON**: In the meantime let us try and converse calmly, since we are incapable of keeping silent.
> **VLADIMIR**: You're right, we're inexhaustible.
> **ESTRAGON**: It's so we won't think.
> **VLADIMIR**: We have that excuse.
> **ESTRAGON**: It's so we won't hear.
> **VLADIMIR**: We have our reasons.
> **ESTRAGON**: All the dead voices.
> **VLADIMIR**: They make a noise like wings.
> **ESTRAGON**: Like leaves.
> **VLADIMIR**: Like sand.
> **ESTRAGON**: Like leaves.
> *Silence.*
> **VLADIMIR**: They all speak at once.
> **ESTRAGON**: Each one to itself.
> *Silence.*

[82] BECKETT, Samuel. Waiting for Godot. New York: Grove Press, 1954, p. 10
[83] MCDONALD, Ronan. The Cambridge Introduction to Samuel Beckett. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. ISBN 978-0521547383, p. 32.
[84] ibid. p. 34.
[85] ibid. p. 36.

VLADIMIR: Rather they whisper.
ESTRAGON: They rustle.
VLADIMIR: They murmur.
ESTRAGON: They rustle.
Silence.
VLADIMIR: What do they say?
ESTRAGON: They talk about their lives.
VLADIMIR: To have lived is not enough for them.
ESTRAGON: They have to talk about it.
VLADIMIR: To be dead is not enough for them.
ESTRAGON: It is not sufficient.
Silence.
VLADIMIR: They make a noise like feathers.
ESTRAGON: Like leaves.
VLADIMIR: Like ashes.
ESTRAGON: Like leaves.
Long silence.
VLADIMIR: Say something![86]

The language exchanges between Vladimir and Estragon often consist of one- or two-word utterances composed in repetition and variation. Estragon and Vladimir may try to keep their conversation going so they would not have to face uncomfortable and frightening silence, sounds of "dead voices," and the never-ending desire and fatality of time. Their behavior is just a habit protecting them from being aware of their solitude.[87]

Waiting for Godot from the beginning dramatizes the human condition of not knowing why we suffer. The ideas of punishment and damnation are presented for seemingly hidden reasons. Beckett's characters in Waiting for Godot are sufferers who feel a sense of guilt for the ambiguous crimes.[88]

3.2 Harold Pinter

Harold Pinter is generally recognized as one of the most influential dramatists of our century and is often known as a strange and challenging playwright. Pinter's plays often concern "power struggles, gender issues, or ritual structures, and family." In his family plays, like his first play, *The Room* (1957), to his later play, *Moonlight* (1993), Pinter focuses on "family constellations, disintegrations, and re-constellations." Pinter's crucial

[86] BECKETT, Samuel. Waiting for Godot. New York: Grove Press, 1954, p. 40.
[87] MCDONALD, Ronan. The Cambridge Introduction to Samuel Beckett. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. ISBN 978-0521547383, p. 37.
[88] ibid. p. 39-40.

success happened to be the play *The Caretaker* (1959), for which he won his first prize out of many awards he would get over the years.[89]

Beckett's first full-length play, *The Birthday Part* (1957), bewildered most critics. Since then, Pinter has written for the theatre, radio, and television while remaining an actor and a director. He also created many film scripts of adaptations of novels by other writers, such as *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1979) by John Fowles or *The Trial* (1992) by Franz Kafka. Pinter was a political activist, and even without him realizing it, he wrote quite a few political plays, such as *One for the Road* (1984), *Mountain Language* (1988), *Party Time* (1991), and *The New World Order* (1991).[90]

Pinter's early critics used to place Harold Pinter under the 'kitchen sink' drama label. Pinter's early plays shared some 'kitchen sink' characteristics, like depicting food or sinks and the working class characters' specific 'kitchen sink' language. His plays depicted naturalistic, repetitive mumbling, poor grammar, incomplete sentences, sudden changes of subject matter, and a refusal or inability to leave a conversation already left by an original character. However, the naturalistic part of his plays is somewhat muted, leaning more toward the characteristics of the Theatre of the Absurd than Kitchen Sink drama.[91]

Similarly to Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter does not feel pressured to provide the audience with an explanation or a resolution to his plays' final acts, he instead provides the spectator with a crossword puzzle. Pinter attempts to avoid commenting on the meanings of his plays. "He does not consider it part of his job to help audiences to understand them." It is not to be said that he does not want his audience to understand the plays; instead, he feels it is only his work through which the understanding can come through. In Pinter's plays, the characters and dramatic context are described. He does not create plays from abstract ideas, nor are his characters some representations or forces. Pinter's plays do not separate form from meaning, but Pinter rather embodies the meaning in

[89] BURKMAN, Katherin H. The Grove Press Guide to Harold Pinter: Harold Pinter: All in the Family. New York: Grove Press, 1995. ISBN 0802134173, p. 5–8.
[90] ibid. p. 6–8.
[91] DUKORE, Bernard F. Harold Pinter: Macmillan modern dramatists. 2nd Edition. London: Macmillan education, 1988. ISBN 9781349195626, p. 4.

its dramatic and theatrical form. Therefore, the play's meaning is not in an "explanatory character or discursive dialogue" but rather in what happens on the stage.[92]

Pinter's characters talk, but their words are somehow false, making their dialogues unreliable. The characters may have more than just one name, their words can be interpreted in various ways, and they may contradict themselves. The characters often refuse to communicate rather than fail to communicate. As they fear the explosion and revelation of themselves, they use words to keep others at a distance.[93]

Unreliability of memory is also a significant theme of Pinter's plays, as the characters have trouble verifying spoken information. Pinter depicts the human struggle, difficulty, and almost impossibility of verifying the truthfulness of the past, in means of not only years but days ago. Pinter points out that past moments are distorted and that people experience the experiences differently, causing no same memories to be the same. Therefore, characters in Pinter's plays are either uncertain about the truthfulness of their memory or cannot remember it at all. As the characters' past cannot be verified, the memories create a dramatic present. Pinter's characters are "inexpressive, giving little away, unreliable, elusive, evasive, obstructive, unwilling" just like ordinary humans. Pinter's approach to characters creates greater realism in the play as the real people are not neat but somewhat chaotic.[94]

3.2.1 The Birthday Party

The Birthday Party is a play about Stanley and his planned birthday party. Even though the plot can be summarized easily, not so much the subtext of Pinter's play as it is full of confusion, implications, and gibberish. According to Martin Esslin, the play "speaks plainly of the individual's pathetic search for security…of the tragedy that arises from lack of understanding between people on different levels of awareness."[95]

[92] DUKORE, Bernard F. Harold Pinter: Macmillan modern dramatists. 2nd Edition. London: Macmillan education, 1988. ISBN 9781349195626, p. 6-7.
[93] ibid. p. 8.
[94] ibid. p. 9-11.
[95] BENNETT, Michael Y. Reassessing the Theatre of the Absurd: Camus, Beckett, Ionesco, Genet, and Pinter. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. ISBN 978-1-349-29520-3, p. 53-54.

One of the main motives in *The Birthday Party* is the motif of interrogation which repeatedly occurs throughout the play. Even in the beginning of the play, we can observe the dialogue between Meg and Petey as Meg interrogates her husband about the newspaper details during breakfast. [96]

MEG: What are you reading?
PETEY: Someone's just had a baby.
MEG: Oh, they haven't! Who?
PETEY: Some girl.
MEG: Who, Petey, who?
PETEY: I don't think you'd know her.
MEG: What's her name?
PETEY: Lady Mary Splatt.
MEG: I don't know her.
PETEY: No.
MEG: What is it?
PETEY: *(Studying the paper)* Er----a girl.
MEG: Not a boy?
PETEY: No.[97]

Such conversation shows that even though words are spoken, the conversation is meaningless. The two characters are in a desperate need to talk, however, about something much more profound with emotion and personal attributes. The happenings are the result of the characters' lack of communication. In *The Birthday Party*, Pinter attempts to show the danger of not saying anything or everything and nothing, pointing out that our daily conversations may be filled with meaningless routine conversations that require no revelation from an individual.[98]

Stanley is a man who refuses to leave his house, shutting himself out of the real world. *The Birthday Party* depicts the destruction of Stanley's stable world and crushes his security through encounters from the external world. Stanley is endangered by the intruders from the external world who hold power over him, as they probably know his past. However, the spectator never finds out the truth behind Stanley, so Pinter shows that the most crucial information is often never known or fully revealed. A similar

[96] BENNETT, Michael Y. The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre and Literature of the Absurd. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. ISBN 978-1-107-05392-2, p. 159–161.
[97] PINTER, Harold. The Birthday Party and Other Plays. Reprint edition. London: Methuen & Company, 1964, p. 11.
[98] BENNETT, Michael Y. The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre and Literature of the Absurd. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. ISBN 978-1-107-05392-2, p. 159-161.

situation can be seen when McCann and Goldberg interrogate Stanley. It becomes brutal as he begins to question his own identity:[99]

> **GOLDBERG**: Where was your wife?
> **STANLEY**: In-
> **GOLDBERG**: Answer.
> **STANLEY:** *(Turning, crouched)* What wife?
> **GOLDBERG**: What have you done with your wife?
> **MCCANN**: He's killed his wife!
> **GOLDBERG**: Why did you kill your wife?
> **STANLEY**: *(Sitting, his back to the audience)* What wife?
> **MCCANN**: How did he kill her?
> **GOLDBERG**: How did you kill her?
> **MCCANN**: You throttled her.
> **GOLDBERG**: With arsenic.
> …
> **GOLDBERG**: Webber! Why did you change your name?
> **STANLEY**: I forgot the other one.
> **GOLDBERG**: What's your name now?
> **STANLEY**: Joe Soap.
> **GOLDBERG**: You stink of sin.
> **MCCANN**: I can smell it.[100]

Although Stanley does not know why he is being interrogated, he feels guilty and thinks he is guilty of something he does not remember. Pinter might be hitting on the idea that we all seem guilty for something in our lives with a suspicion that one day someone will expose or punish us for our misdemeanors.[101]

The Birthday Party also includes some aspects of the absurdity of the world. Stanley's fear of the intrusion and the danger he experiences suggests that the absurdity of the human condition is "unsafe and without certainties in his universe." The human being cannot rely on anything. Similarly, the interrogations in the play include combinations of completely meaningless questions and accusations suggesting the absurdity of the human condition. [102]

[99] HOLLIS, James R. Harold Pinter: The Poetics of Silence. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1970. ISBN 0809304503, p. 32–38.
[100] PINTER, Harold. The Birthday Party and Other Plays. Reprint edition. London: Methuen & Company, 1964, p. 52-53.
[101] HOLLIS, James R. Harold Pinter: The Poetics of Silence. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1970. ISBN 0809304503, p. 37-43.
[102] DUKORE, Bernard F. Harold Pinter: Macmillan modern dramatists. 2nd Edition. London: Macmillan education, 1988. ISBN 9781349195626, p. 30.

4 Existentialism and Elements of the Absurd

Existentialism is a philosophical movement capturing philosophers from the 19th to 20th century examining human existence and its value, meaning, and purpose, as well as feelings of anxiety, the authenticity of life, and the world's absurdity. Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche are considered to be 19thcentury fathers of existentialism.[103] The most prominent existentialists of the 20thcentury are Martin Heidegger, Simone de Beauvoir, Karl Jaspers, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Gabriel Marcel.

Despite the similarities between existentialism and the Theatre of the Absurd, the two 'movements' differ monumentally in their approach. The existentialist writers depict the irrationality of the human condition using highly explicit and logically constructed reasoning, while the Theatre of the Absurd avoids using rational devices and logical discourse. The Theatre of the Absurd has abandoned the quarrel about the absurdity of human condition and dedicated itself to merely presenting it using specific stage images depicting the absurdity of existence.[104]

It is not easy to define existentialism or existentialists in itself. Similarly to absurdist writers, existentialist writers hardly create philosophical unit. Any of the existentialist writers did not initially adopt the label existentialist. Gabriel Marcel created the label in 1943 in his review of Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*. The label itself was only accepted by Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir a few years later. Existentialists like Martin Heidegger and Albert Camus strictly rejected the existentialist label altogether. Therefore, it is hard to depict existentialism as a united philosophical movement. However, there is a certain degree of unity between the existentialist writers despite the disputation about the label.[105]

Existentialists share a great amount of overlapping thematic traits common in their writings. Such themes include: "a focus on concrete lived experience as opposed to academic abstraction; freedom; death, finitude and mortality;" emphasis on authentic living

[103] FLYNN, Thomas R. Existentialism: A Very Short Introduction. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. ISBN 9780192804280, p. 3.
[104] ESSLIN, Martin. The Theatre of the Absurd. New York: Anchor Books, 1961, p. xix.-xx.
[105] JOSEPH, Felicity, Jack REYNOLDS a Ashley WOODWARD, ed. The Bloomsbury Companion to Existentialism: Bloomsbury Companions. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014. ISBN 9781472567857, p. 3–4.

experience or its lack; anguish; responsibility; "nausea and boredom;" and pessimism about human relationships. Existential writers also often rejected the concept of God, rejected the emphasis on rationality, and suggested that the traditional customs of society often conceal human individuality.[106] For many existentialists, our existence results from our choices rather than the other way around. Human beings are beings bound by time. Our perception of time differs from person to person in meaning and value. As there is no destiny, we are simply what we make of ourselves. [107]

Existentialism focuses on an individual and the pursuit of his identity, meaning, and purpose against social and economic pressures and their superficiality. The writers try to make people examine the authenticity of their lives and society.[108] They emphasize the finitude and mortality of our lives and bash inauthenticity.[109] Existentialists also often point out that human beings often experience alienation from their world.[110]

To grasp existentialism and its possible relations to the Theatre of the Absurd, we must concentrate on specific existentialist writers, focusing mainly on the themes connected to absurdism and Edward Albee's work.

4.1 Søren Kierkegaard: Leap of Faith and Stages of Life

Existentialism is closely linked to Søren Kierkegaard as one of the founding fathers of existentialism primarily due to his texts such as *Either/Or* (1843), *Philosophical Fragments* (1844), and *Concluding Unscientific Postscripts* (1846), where Kierkegaard attacks rationality.

As a Christian philosopher, Kierkegaard believed that faith in God always must involve "an individual choice, and an individual 'leap of faith.'" Kierkegaard points out that if

[106] JOSEPH, Felicity, Jack REYNOLDS a Ashley WOODWARD, ed. The Bloomsbury Companion to Existentialism: Bloomsbury Companions. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014. ISBN 9781472567857, p. 3–4.
[107] FLYNN, Thomas R. Existentialism: A Very Short Introduction. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. ISBN 9780192804280, p. 8.
[108] ibid. p. 8.
[109] REYNOLDS, Jack. Understanding Existentialism: Understanding Movements in Modern Thought. Routledge, 2014. ISBN 9781315712147, p. 2.
[110] CROWELL, Steven, ed. The Cambridge Companion to Existentialism. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. ISBN 978-0521732789, p. 29–30.

we do not need logical reasoning to explain faith, then we do not need it for existential thoughts. He proclaims it is the human being who must give the world a meaning, a meaning he wants to live in. For Kierkegaard, the individual choice is necessarily connected with experiencing dread in which we realize that the rational cannot answer our lives' religious or existential issues. We are bound to withdraw into uncertainty that is most probably accompanied by despair.[111]

Kierkegaard also concentrates on the difference between an authentic and inauthentic life. He states that human beings are primarily living an inauthentic existence since they tend to run into it to avoid the despair and anguish of making decisions. In his book *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard distinguishes three stages of life. "A transition from one stage to the next stage again requires a leap, or a radical change in direction." The first one, the aesthetic stage is trivial, embracing pleasure, beauty, and the sense. The second stage is ethical, concentrating on blindly following moral standards created by society. Both the aesthetic and ethical stage represent an inauthentic mode of existence. The third stage is religious,[112] "it contains the ethical but in a modified form"[113] depicting an independent individual freed of his reliance on social customs and dogmatism of the ethical stage. Only the religious stage marks an authentic living experience. The individual is on his own, obtaining genuine morality absent of lies, without the influence of others or any external values (including "God, wealth, power, or even rationality").[114]

4.2 Martin Heidegger: Temporality and Authentic Existence

Martin Heidegger is one of the most prominent atheist existentialists of the 20th century with his major work *Being and Time* (1927). His work concentrates primarily on phenomenology. Heidegger emphasizes that temporality and time are essentially

[111] REYNOLDS, Jack. Understanding Existentialism: Understanding Movements in Modern Thought. Routledge, 2014. ISBN 9781315712147, p. 4–6.
[112] ibid. p. 6–7.
[113] KIERKEGAARD, Søren. Either/Or: A Fragment of Life. Revised edition. London: Penguin Classics, 1992. ISBN 0140445773, p. 145
[114] REYNOLDS, Jack. Understanding Existentialism: Understanding Movements in Modern Thought. Routledge, 2014. ISBN 9781315712147, p. 6–7.

related to human existence. Our human existence is incomplete and primarily inauthentic because it has not accepted itself or its temporality. Often we live incompletely and with full consciousness of our lacking. We avoid ourselves, and we do not want to be ourselves. Heidegger says that our existence becomes whole when we accept our finitude. Death concerns our existence, belongs to our being and brings us closer to the authenticity of our being:[115] In anticipating death the being "understands itself unambiguously in terms of its own most distinctive possibility."[116] Death and finitude of man must be accepted if a man wants to be whole. Our existence becomes authentic, whole, and honest only after accepting this fact. Only after accepting death is our existence authentic because only then can man understand and have insight into his life possibilities, and not live in self-deception and compare himself to others when he knows his ultimate possibility, death. However, authenticity brings up feelings of anxiety and necessary responsibility, without which we cannot live an authentic life.[117]

4.3 Gabriel Marcel: Human Being as a Function

Gabriel Marcel is a Catholic existentialist thinker who held a relatively optimistic view of the world.[118] Gabriel Marcel argues that contemporary humans are like a 'function' or a set of functions. As Marcel describes "a function is, by its very essence, something that one has; but in proportion as my function swallows me up, it becomes me, and substitutes itself for what I am."[119] Humans perform various functions in their everyday lives, such as social functions. However, humans cannot fully identify with their functions and therefore experience, at least occasionally, a sense of emptiness amid a 'full' life. Marcel says that a life rooted in 'functioning' leads to despair. Nevertheless, people resist hopelessness in the world of functions.[120]

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[115] PETŘÍČEK, Miroslav. Úvod do (současné) filosofie: [11 improvizovaných přednášek]. 4. upr. vyd. Praha: Herrmann, 1997, p. 80–82.
[116] HEIDEGGER, Martin. Being and Time. Seventh Edition. New York: HarperCollins, 2008. ISBN 9780061575594, p. 435.
[117] PETŘÍČEK, Miroslav. Úvod do (současné) filosofie: [11 improvizovaných přednášek]. 4. upr. vyd. Praha: Herrmann, 1997, p. 80–82.
[118] REYNOLDS, Jack. Understanding Existentialism: Understanding Movements in Modern Thought. Routledge, 2014. ISBN 9781315712147, p. 13.
[119] MARCEL, Gabriel. Being and Having. Westminster: Dacre Press, 1949, p. 150
[120] PETŘÍČEK, Miroslav. Úvod do (současné) filosofie: [11 improvizovaných přednášek]. 4. upr. vyd. Praha: Herrmann, 1997, p. 86–87.

As functionaries, we cannot recognize or understand the fullness of life. Marcel presents our world as functionalized in which something is missing, and we, as function-doers, are also missing something.[121]

The functionalized world makes us question why we do what we do and the meaning behind it all. Behind this question and the 'despair' which makes people ask such questions, Marcel sees 'hope.' Such happens because even at the bottom of our despair, we cannot believe everything is meaningless. People need something that transcends their despair, and through this need, we automatically participate in something more profound than the automatism of the world of functions. According to Marcel, being desperate means we are at least hoping. In the automatized world, people are in captivity but long to break free and become complete beings. Such longing creates hope in our lives. When we can hope, we are also in contact with our complete being, at least through hope. In Marcel's philosophy, becoming a complete being is not fully obtainable, but we can only participate on it and be interested in its 'mystery.'[122]

4.4 Emmanuel Levinas: The Other and Otherness

Emmanuel Levinas was a prominent French and Jewish philosopher of the 20thcentury known for his work within existentialism and phenomenology. His major philosophical works are *Existence and Existents* (1947) and *Time and the Other* (1947). He was particularly interested in ethics in relation to ontology and metaphysics, criticizing the dominance of ontology.

Levinas' ethics is based on the experience of encountering 'the Other'. As human beings, we long for something different (the Other). It is a longing directed away from our world for the unknown. This longing for the Other creates a relationship and an indispensable distance between 'the Self' and the Other. If the Self desires the Other, then the Self can never overcome the distance between him and the Other. The one who longs to meet the Other finds himself in the 'totality' of which he is a part of and

[121] PETŘÍČEK, Miroslav. Úvod do (současné) filosofie: [11 improvizovaných přednášek]. 4. upr. vyd. Praha: Herrmann, 1997, p. 89.
[122] ibid. p. 89-90.

wants to immerse the Other too. Everything in the totality is known to the Self. The Other as the unknown is therefore unthinkable and thus breaks the totality.[123]

The Other shows himself to the Self through his 'face' and is entirely and infinitely other. The difference and distance between the Other and the Self is impossible to be changed. The Other is thus the one who problematizes the Self and cannot be possessed by it. The Self can never make the Other to be like him but can only kill the Other.[124] "To kill is not to dominate but to annihilate; it is to renounce comprehension absolutely. Murder exercises a power over what escapes power."[125] It is an expression of surrender of the Self and his inability to accept, understand and appreciate otherness. The encounter with the face of the Other enables the Self to overcome its egoism. The Other, who challenges the Self's possession, opens up a whole new dimension to the Self, the dimension of the 'unpredictable' without totality. The face of the Other does not harm the Self in any form. It only calls out its freedom to responsibility.[126]

4.5 Jean-Paul Sartre: Freedom of Choice and Authenticity

Jean-Paul Sartre was an existentialist who concentrated on "the fundamental problems of human existence: death, anxiety, political, religious and sexual commitment, freedom and responsibility, the meaning of existence itself."[127] His most notable works are *Existentialism and Humanism* (1946) and *Being and Nothingness* (1943), accompanied by psychologically motivated philosophical works such as *The Transcendence of the Ego* (1936) and *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions* (1939).[128]

Sartre's existentialism, philosophy, and psychology of the human condition are based on the idea of a fundamental choice influencing man's primary life aim. From an

[123] PETŘÍČEK, Miroslav. Úvod do (současné) filosofie: [11 improvizovaných přednášek]. 4. upr. vyd. Praha: Herrmann, 1997, p. 149–158.
[124] ibid. p. 159–161.
[125] LEVINAS, Emmanuel. Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority. Reprint edition. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969. ISBN 0820702455, p. 198.
[126] PETŘÍČEK, Miroslav. Úvod do (současné) filosofie: [11 improvizovaných přednášek]. 4. upr. vyd. Praha: Herrmann, 1997, p. 160–163.
[127] PRIEST, Stephen, ed. Jean-Paul Sartre: Basic Writings. London and New York: Routledge, 2001. ISBN 0203129644, p. 1.
[128] CHURCHILL, Steven a Jack REYNOLDS, ed. Jean-Paul Sartre: Key Concepts. London and New York: Routledge, 2013. ISBN 9781844656356, p. 1–2.

early age, Sartre was aware of his pointless and absurd existence. He soon realized he was the only one who could give his life a purpose.[129]

Sartre suggests that human beings are "burdened with constant responsibility of having to choose" and infinitely "condemned to be free" and thus responsible for making their own choices. Facticity that is unchangeable to us, such as "our body, our immediate physical situation, our mortality" do not limit our freedom but rather make us choose what to do with one's body, life span, and circumstances, suggesting that man should give meaning to his life. Such pressure to constantly choose what to make of ourselves makes human beings anxious. Humans strive to achieve what can never be achieved and therefore try to fool themselves or obtain 'bad faith' in their unchangeability and incapability to choose. And thus, man uses his freedom to abandon his ability to choose.[130] However, Sartre states, "not to choose is, in fact, to choose not to choose."[131] A person abandoning choice and living in bad faith lives in denial and refuses his freedom. The authenticity of human existence comes from overcoming his bad faith and facing the fact that beings are free to choose and live accordingly. In practice, such life means living without regrets and facing life situations straightforwardly. However, according to Sartre, achieving authenticity in human existence is very hard to achieve due to their deep flaws.[132]

4.6 Albert Camus: The Absurd and the Revolt

Albert Camus was writing amid the 20thcentury crisis of values supported by totalitarianism, world-scale war, and loss of religious beliefs.[133] His reputation is based on his philosophical essays, novels, and short stories rather than his theatre plays. His works are primarily short, including *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), *The Rebel* (1951), and

[129] CHURCHILL, Steven a Jack REYNOLDS, ed. Jean-Paul Sartre: Key Concepts. London and New York: Routledge, 2013. ISBN 9781844656356, p. 9–10.
[130] ibid. p. 10.
[131] SARTRE, Jean-Paul. Being and Nothingness. Reprint edition. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993. ISBN 978-0671867805, p. 481.
[132] CHURCHILL, Steven a Jack REYNOLDS, ed. Jean-Paul Sartre: Key Concepts. London and New York: Routledge, 2013. ISBN 9781844656356, p. 10.
[133] HUGHES, Edward J., ed. The Cambridge Companion to Camus. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. ISBN 9781139827348, p. 5.

even the short stories *Exile and the Kingdom* (1957).[134] Camus's writing has two pivotal aspects: the absurd and revolt. These two aspects are mutually dependent upon one another.[135]

Most of his works concentrate on unavoidable philosophical subjects such as "the legitimacy of violence, the nature of philosophy, politics, tyranny, the absurd, suicide, the justifiability of murder, capital punishment, deceit, communication, dialogue, freedom, revolt and revolution, the Greeks, Christianity, modernity and democracy." Other themes explored in Camus's work are solitude and solidarity, especially in his work *Caligula*. In *The Rebel*, we can observe themes like rebellion and revolution.[136]

Camus organized his novels, essays, and plays based on the emphasis on such themes. He dedicated his earlier philosophical essay, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, the plays *The Misunderstanding* and *Caligula*, and the novel *The Outsider,* to the theme of the absurd. The theme of the absurd then follows up with his concentration on revolt entangled with political, social, and moral issues of the human condition. Such themes Camus explored in his works like *The Rebel*, *The Plague,* and plays *The Just Assassins* and *The Stage of Siege*. The last set of themes, including moderation, balance, a sense of limits, love, and reconciliation after violent history, are significant for his works written during the 1950s.[137]

Aside from refusing the existentialist label, Camus is labeled as one of the movement's representatives due to his essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*, which greatly impacted the Theater of the Absurd as well as Edward Albee.

4.6.1 The Myth of Sisyphus

In *The Myth of the Sisyphus,* Camus claims the absurd originates from the man's confrontation between himself and the incomprehensive world. However, human

[134] THODY, Philip. Albert Camus: Macmillan Modern Novelists Series. London: The Macmillan Press, 1989. ISBN 9781349199068, p. 6.
[135] FOLEY, John. Albert Camus: From the Absurd to Revolt. London and New York: Routledge, 2008. ISBN 9781844651412, p. 3–4.
[136] SHARPE, Matthew, Maciej KAŁUŻA a Peter FRANCEV, ed. Brill's Companion to Camus: Camus among the Philosophers. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2020. ISBN 978-90-04-41924-7, p. 4, 22.
[137] ibid. p. 7.

beings strive for understanding and purpose in their life as well as in the world as portrayed by religious and philosophical systems. According to Camus, the world nor human existence are absurd themselves. However, it becomes absurd as the world rejects man's need for intelligibility. Human beings want the world to make sense, but it simply does not, and this conflict creates the absurd in man's universe. Camus suggests that man is confronted by the absurdity of his condition by becoming aware of his mortality. Awareness of the absurd is a rational realization based on man's recognition of the difference between his expectations of the world and its reality.[138]

In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus is especially interested in the fact that the world is unintelligible in meaningful ways for humankind. Human beings strive for clarity and understanding of the world. Despite such conditions, Camus believes certain aspects of the world are universally certain: "my existence as a conscious being and the existence of the world I can touch." Everything else is uncertain.[139]

The Myth of Sisyphus explores ways to respond positively to the absurd. He poses an essential question of whether life is worth living if the world is filled with the absurd. Since there is no actual coherence in life or death, Camus suggests that man should accept the absurd rather than attempt to suppress it by suicide.[140]

For Camus, suicide is a rejection of all human values and freedom. The absurd is stressful for human beings. Amid absurdity, they can still form relationships and enjoy "beauty, friendships, heath, satisfying work and creativity." Relative happiness is still possible. Thus, Camus advocates for a revolt against the meaninglessness and absurdness of life. Revolt represents an acceptance of the absurdity of the human condition filled with suffering, rebellion, and mockery. The mythical Sisyphus is the incarnation of such responses to the absurd.[141]

[138] FOLEY, John. Albert Camus: From the Absurd to Revolt. London and New York: Routledge, 2008. ISBN 9781844651412, p. 6–7.
[139] ibid. p. 7–8.
[140] ibid. p. 8-9.
[141] ibid. p. 10.

Furthermore, Camus concludes that "one must imagine Sisyphus happy"[142] as he relentlessly pushes his rock up to the top of the hill for nothing, only to start his task again filled with scorn and commitment. In the end, Sisyphus is the absurd hero determined to reject suicide and revolt against his absurd condition implying human beings should do the same, as[143] "the struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. "[144]

4.7 Karl Jaspers: Authentic Existence and Existential Communication

Karl Jaspers is a 20thcentury German academic philosopher and psychiatrist. Jaspers is a major representative of Christian existentialism, interested in the philosophy of history and phenomenology. He also emphasized the importance of the authenticity of the individual and communication. *Philosophy of Existence* (1938) is one of his major philosophical works.

Karl Jaspers describes human beings as living in a naive existence that does not question their existence. Their consciences are in tune with others, having the same goals, fears, and joy, not asking about the origin of their being. Beings living in such community cannot truly communicate and thus begin to be aware of and get to know themselves. Existential communication questions self-existence and fulfills it. A being without existential communication is a mere existence.[145]

4.7.1 The Loving Struggle of Communication

Only through interacting and communicating with others who strive for existential communication and true existence can beings become genuinely human. Communication requires both beings to meet half-way, "the other's action must match it,"

[142] CAMUS, Albert. The Myth of Sisyphus: Penguin Modern Classics. New ed. London: Penguin Classics, 1975. ISBN 978-0140039351, p. 111.
[143] FOLEY, John. Albert Camus: From the Absurd to Revolt. London and New York: Routledge, 2008. ISBN 9781844651412, p. 11–12.
[144] CAMUS, Albert. The Myth of Sisyphus: Penguin Modern Classics. New ed. London: Penguin Classics, 1975. ISBN 978-0140039351, p. 111.
[145] JASPERS, Karl and E. B ASHTON. Philosophy: Volume 2. 5th edition. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1970. ISBN 0226394913, p. 48-49, 75–76.

and be mutually responsible for each other. Only mutual meeting and recognition allow both beings to become themselves. Another being with which the being is communicating is inherently unique. Therefore, each communication and each time is completely unique and unrepeatable. It is in this communication that the being becomes himself. The being cannot become free unless the other also wants that for himself. Therefore, if a being withdraws from existential communication, he is betraying himself and the other.[146]

True communication is a loving struggle, presenting the other being with challenges as well as challenging himself. Beings come to communicate with the other out of solitude in which they are not yet themselves. "Communication always takes place between two people who join but remain two, who come to each other out of solitude and yet know solitude only because they are communicating." Without being solitary, the beings would be unable to come into communication.[147] An individual has to overcome his solitude by continuously entering communication revealing his loneliness in order for him to "enter into the deepest communication."[148] In communication, the being becomes a manifestation of the other and himself. This manifestation is the actualization of him as a Self. Such manifestation and actualization can only happen together with the other in a loving struggle of existential communication.[149]

The struggle in communication is the struggle of love; it is energetic and challenging. It requires the "elimination of all kinds of power and superiority." The struggle of communication allows even the most extreme questioning. Superiority or victory are not wanted in such exchange but are perceived as a disturbance. What existential communication strives for is mutual transparency. Each being dives into himself together with the other. The two do not struggle against each other but against oneself for the sake of truth and complete equality. Nothing relevant is left unaddressed in such

[146] JASPERS, Karl and E. B ASHTON. Philosophy: Volume 2. 5th edition. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1970. ISBN 0226394913, p. 52–55.
[147] EHRLICH, Edith, Leonard H. EHRLICH a George B. PEPPER, ed. Karl Jaspers: Basic Philosophical Writings: Selections. Athens: Ohio University Press, 1986. ISBN 9780821407127, p. 73-74.
[148] JASPERS, Karl and E. B ASHTON. Philosophy: Volume 2. 5th edition. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1970. ISBN 0226394913, p. 56–57.
[149] EHRLICH, Edith, Leonard H. EHRLICH a George B. PEPPER, ed. Karl Jaspers: Basic Philosophical Writings: Selections. Athens: Ohio University Press, 1986. ISBN 9780821407127, p. 76–77.

communication. The loving struggle of communication, asking and answering questions, bounds the two being together in truth.[150]

Communication has to occur repeatedly without worrying about making mistakes and failures. Communication of being blooms when they share their ordinary ideas, intentions, and experiences. Even the most "mundane contents" of conversation have to be taken seriously for existential communication to occur. Through communication, beings can express the complex realities they have to get over. It brings them to feel belonging to each other in their individual incomprehensiveness of the world.[151]

4.7.2 Indignity, Loneliness, and Silence in Communication

Indignity is an unavoidable experience of existential communication caused by flexibility. Through indignity, a being becomes aware of itself by overcoming and undergoing defeats. We "must risk being misunderstood and placed into false positions" to become ourselves truly. By misunderstandings, a being risks a position of the indignity of his manifestation. Through communication, the being can be laughed at, misunderstood, exploited, and perceived as someone he is not. Such pain is necessary for the growth of communication. However, if the being uses indignity in communication to show off in front of others, to get appreciation, or to manipulate others, he is not executing existential communication. On the other hand, shyness is also incapable of creating existential communication with the other, as it keeps distance between the beings.[152]

Loneliness is also an inseparable part of communication. Loneliness is the being's "lack of communicative ties to others" and fear of its unchangeability. When the being does not expose himself to others and finds himself in a place of collapse or doubt, especially in relationships, the being can become lonely and close to possible nonbeing. However,

[150] EHRLICH, Edith, Leonard H. EHRLICH a George B. PEPPER, ed. Karl Jaspers: Basic Philosophical Writings: Selections. Athens: Ohio University Press, 1986. ISBN 9780821407127, p. 59–61.
[151] JASPERS, Karl and E. B ASHTON. Philosophy: Volume 2. 5th edition. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1970. ISBN 0226394913, p. 61–66.
[152] ibid. p. 70–71.

"the abysmal loneliness of nonbeing is frightening enough to arouse every communicative impulse" and thus motivate the being to communicate again.[153]

Silence is a suspension of communication. In existential communication, silence is not a tool to make a being more heard, superior, avoidant of answering a question, or simply an expression of uncommunicative behavior to insult the other. In existential communication, "silence expresses a strong self-being's readiness to communicate." Jaspers points out that people who cannot share silence are incapable of straightforward and honest communication since silence is ever present, either expressing the readiness for communication, absence of expression, or lack of feeling.[154]

4.7.3 Fear of Communication

The fear of communication is based on our inherent desire to be the way we are without change. From such desire grows a desire for material goods, pleasure, and prestige, isolating the being from even the closest to him. Through such, the being attempts to preserve its self-existence in a way that does not allow space for communication. On the other hand, flatly denying self-existence also prevents communication. A person who does not want anything for himself and does not want to live is incapable of communication. Only the self-existence which preserves itself but links itself with the other being is open for existential communication. [155]

However, communication is often bound to fail, driving the being back into himself. A being locked in himself cannot grasp the sense of life or himself. Not communicating and being afraid to show itself makes the being live in mere existence, close to vanishing from reality. A person afraid of uncovering himself in communication evades his freedom and becoming himself. The failure to communicate "does not mean a final break even if it looks like one; all it takes to heal is time", but it means a break of communication might be needed. The break of communication causes the being to feel guilty as he leaves the other to himself, tied up and unfulfilled. Thus, the being is

[153] JASPERS, Karl and E. B ASHTON. Philosophy: Volume 2. 5th edition. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1970. ISBN 0226394913, p. 71–72.
[154] ibid. p. 66-67.
[155] ibid. p. 75–76.

challenged "to remain prepared, not to stop at reproaches" in communication, no matter the past encounter. Communication can be renewed when the beings admit that their knowledge is limited and attempt to clarify and agree even after the most hurtful encounters. [156]

4.7.4 Rupture and Impossibility of Communication

Numerous behaviors are preventing and rupturing existential communication, deceiving the other, and blocking his manifestation. Existential communication is prevented when the being:

1. forces the other to accept him without any necessity to grow
2. avoids clarity in communication
3. relies on interpretation of the situation he claims to interpret correctly
4. avoids making decisions as a response to a lack of knowledge
5. refuses to listen to others' enriching opinions when making decisions
6. proclaims himself incompetent and has emotional outbursts in order to keep his reasoning
7. refuses to talk about a particular matter
8. refuses to talk or hear out the other in fear of becoming exposed out of pride or dignity

Such behaviors take from us the responsibility to act or communicate.[157]

There are also certain states of mind making communication completely impossible. A man immersed "in a world of materialized contents" makes him in inaccessible to himself and others. Such people talk impersonally without genuineness which makes it impossible to communicate truly. Likewise, "a man whose morality is rationalistically fixed" without authentic decision-making and living is also incapable of communication. The being only bluntly applies moral rules to situations without truly feeling through them. And last, a stubbornly prideful individual who "wants nothing but

[156] JASPERS, Karl and E. B ASHTON. Philosophy: Volume 2. 5th edition. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1970. ISBN 0226394913, p. 52, 73–78.
[157] ibid. p. 78–80.

to be himself" refuses to change and accepts himself as he is incapable of communication. He only wants to possess the world and others without showing his weakness and may never be able to communicate.[158]

4.7.5 Society against Existential Communication

Social relations are a necessary part of our existence. "Without the forms of social conventions, not even existential communication can unfold in time." Society creates premises for existential communication by enabling beings to meet each other. However, a man cannot always communicate truly with everyone. Jaspers emphasizes that "existential communication occurs in a sphere which no society can reach," and where social norms are overcome. Society puts beings in a position where they have to fight for themselves. It influences the beings profoundly, assigning opinions and roles to them. They must fight the tendency to become what others think of them and expect them to be. It is a lifelong fight against society, similar to the struggle for existential communication. If the beings rebel against the general requirements of society placed upon them to achieve their true existence, society will exclude them. Hence existential communication and structured social life are inherently incompatible.[159]

However, the being must not be afraid of the struggle of communication in society and must not self-isolate from it or despise it. The beings should be ready to engage in existential communication even if society perceives them unkindly. Human beings are fulfilled by entering social relationships enabling them to communicate, but they must not forget to struggle for existential communication, which makes them achieve authentic existence.[160]

[158] JASPERS, Karl and E. B ASHTON. Philosophy: Volume 2. 5th edition. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1970. ISBN 0226394913, p. 81-82.
[159] ibid. p. 84–88.
[160] ibid. p. 84–88.

1 Analysis of Edward Albee´s Theatre Plays

The following chapter analyses four of Edward Albee's plays *The American Dream* (1961), *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* (1962), *Marriage Play* (1987), and *The Play About the Baby* (1998) in terms of their characters' relationships and their failure to form genuine connections. The analysis concentrates on the individual personalities of the characters and what prevents them from forming authentic, meaningful relationships and experiences. Each character or its relationship is connected to the philosophies of chosen existentialists. The analysis also focuses on their search for identity, the meaning of loss, and alienation from themselves, others, and the world around them caused by adaptation to the established social constructs.

1.1 The American Dream

The American Dream is a short one-act play published in 1961 that depicts a married couple, Mommy and Daddy, living with Mommy's elderly mother, Grandma. One day the family gets a visit from Mrs. Barker, whom they invited unknowingly why, later accompanied by the visit of Young Man, changing their lives completely.

The play begins with Mommy and Daddy sitting in a living room discussing a hat Mommy bought. Mommy also talks about wanting to put Grandma into a nursing home. Grandma arrives with nicely wrapped boxes, dropping them by Daddy's feet during their conversation. Suddenly, Mrs. Barker arrives, not knowing the reason for her arrival and nor does anyone else. When Grandma has a chance, she tells Mrs. Barker a story of Mommy and Daddy adopting a child twenty years ago, who became a monstrous creature and eventually died. Soon after, Young Man arrives, a handsome, muscular man looking for a job, who turns out to be the child's twin. Grandma then persuades Mrs. Barker to give Young Man to Mommy and Daddy as a new adoptive child and leaves them in a household.

The American Dream depicts a severe emotional problem in a family, especially the void between a husband, wife, and child. The play also depicts the rejection of older people due to the absence of their youthful competencies. The family in The American

Dream represents the attitude of the whole contemporary society, its preoccupation with the artificial, destroying the real values, and refusing to face the human condition.

1.1.1 Mommy and Daddy

In The American Dream, marriage is an economic system where a man is entitled to sex and a woman to money, as Mommy proves when she says, "I have a right to live off of you because I married you, and because I used to let you get on top of me and you're your uglies…"[161]. Based on the American social constructs, anything can be bought, from sex to children which you can also refund. Sex and money that Mommy and Daddy strive for in the relationship are alienating yet necessary.

Aside from fulfilling social values, Mommy and Daddy struggle to fulfill their individual needs; however, we are incapable of knowing what these needs are. The family's dysfunction is depicted by the loss of meaning in anything they do, in their conversations and actions. Mommy and Daddy play the roles assigned to them by society without thinking. The characters' names only embody their assigned roles, which are empty or filled with societal functions rather than the characters' true identities. They have filled their lives with meaning and values that society wants them to follow, including the need for 'perfect' children to get satisfaction.[162] For Mommy and Daddy, marriage is only a social and economic function, serving for a certain public appearance. As a child they adopted did not meet their requirements for praise, it had to be dismembered.

It seems for Mommy, the idea of fulfilling her needs and wants lies in getting married to a wealthy man and having children, as Grandma discloses when talking about Mommy's childhood: "When she was no more than eight years old she used to climb up on my lap and say, in sickening little voice, "When I gwo up, I'm going to mahwy a wich old man…"".[163] Such fulfillment should have made her happy existentially; however, the fulfillment never happened. Mommy is empty, constantly looking for the satisfaction her husband cannot provide her except for his money. There is no emotional connection

[161] ALBEE, Edward. The American Dream and Zoo Story. New York: Signet, 1963. ISBN 0451143302, p. 67.
[162] cf. Kierkegaard 1992
[163] ALBEE, Edward. The American Dream and Zoo Story. New York: Signet, 1963. ISBN 0451143302, p. 69.

between the couple, let alone a sense of self for any of them. When Mommy tells Daddy a story of her buying a hat, she repeatedly asks him if he is paying attention, forcing him to prove it:

> **MOMMY**: I said, I went to buy a new hat yesterday.
> **DADDY**: Oh! Yes…yes.
> **MOMMY**: Pay attention.
> **DADDY**: I *am* paying attention, Mommy.
> **MOMMY**: Well, be sure you do.
> **DADDY**: Oh, I am.
> **MOMMY**: All right, Daddy; now listen.
> **DADDY**: I'm listening, Mommy.
> **MOMMY**: You're sure!
> **DADDY**: Yes…yes, I'm sure, I'm all ears.[164]

Daddy is not genuinely paying attention to what Mommy has to say. He is only forced to pretend to do so. On the other hand, Mommy is not interested in being honestly heard but in being superficially listened to while she speaks her heart out, disinterred in her husband's actual needs. Their marriage has no love; they only concentrate on getting through life half-consciously, suggesting they are very far from each other mentally and physically, as Daddy does not listen to Mommy, and she does not respect him.

Mommy's disrespect for Daddy and her ability to manipulate him is particularly obvious when Mommy and Daddy wait for Mrs. Barker to purchase a new adoptive child. As Daddy is to open the door to Mrs. Barker, he has some doubts about the purchase and wants to reconsider the decision with Mommy:

> **DADDY**: I think we should talk about it some more. Maybe we've been hasty…a little hasty, perhaps. *(Doorbell rings again)* I'd like to talk about it some more.
> **MOMMY**: There's no need. You made up your mind; you were firm; you were masculine and decisive.
> **DADDY**: We might consider the pros and the…
> **MOMMY**: I won't argue with you; it has t be done; you were right. Open the door.
> **DADDY**: But I'm not sure that…
> **MOMMY**: Open the door.
> **DADDY**: Was I firm about it?
> **MOMMY**: Oh, so firm; so firm.
> **DADDY**: And was I decisive?

[164] ALBEE, Edward. The American Dream and Zoo Story. New York: Signet, 1963. ISBN 0451143302, p. 58-59.

MOMMY: SO decisive! Oh, I shivered.
DADDY: And masculine? Was I really masculine?
MOMMY: Oh, Daddy, you were so masculine; I shivered and fainted.
…
DADDY: I shall now open the door.
MOMMY: WHAT a masculine Daddy! Isn't he a masculine Daddy?[165]

Mommy refuses to talk to Daddy about the decision and manipulates him to agree by telling him how masculine and firm he is when he is decisive. Decisive for her means doing what she wants without questions. When he fails to do so, Mommy begins to punish him for his behavior:

DADDY: *(Backing off from the door)* Maybe we can send them away.
MOMMY: Oh, look at you! You're turning into jelly; you're indecisive; you're a woman!
DADDY: All right. Watch me now; I'm going to open the door. Watch. Watch![166]

Such humiliation motivates Daddy to prove Mommy his worth and do as she pleases. It is visible that the opinions of Mommy create Daddy's identity, she is the one who controls him and the household, and he is forced to accommodate her wishes to keep at least a small amount of his dignity.

Mommy's character, on the other hand, is shaped by the perception of others outside of her family. Such can be seen when Mommy returns the beige hat she bought, not because she did not like the hat or its color but because the chairwoman of the woman's club told her the hat was wheat color, and thus Mommy was tricked. In order to be seen as someone who cannot be deceived, Mommy comes back to the store and requires justice. Her behavior proves her pursuit of societal approval rather than her happiness.

As previously depicted, Mommy gets satisfaction from other people doing what she wants. The hat she managed to return and exchange for another one only satisfied her need to be heard and respected, even though they gave her the same hat she bought before:

[165] ALBEE, Edward. The American Dream and Zoo Story. New York: Signet, 1963. ISBN 0451143302, p. 73-74.
[166] ibid. p. 75.

> **MOMMY**: And I made an absolutely terrible scene; and they became frightened, and they said "Oh, madam; oh, madam." But I kept right on, and finally they admitted that they might have made a mistake; so they took my hat into the back, and then they came out again with a hat that looked exactly like it. I took one look at it, and I said, "This hat is wheat-colored; wheat." Well, of course, they said, "Oh, no, madam, this hat is beige; you go outside and see." So, I went outside, and lo and behold, it *was* beige. So I bought it.
> **DADDY**: *(Clears his throat)* I would imagine that it was the same hat they tried to sell you before.
> **MOMMY**: *(With a little laugh)* Well, of course it was!
> **DADDY**: That's the way things are today; you just can't get satisfaction; you just try.
> **MOMMY**: Well, *I* got satisfaction.[167]

It does not matter if they gave Mommy the same hat; what matters is that she could make a scene, and they did admit she was right, so she got her satisfaction. Mommy's argument about the hat represents the vacuity and superficiality of her values and life. She is very much immersed in her selfishness; she fails to experience authentic existence. Mommy needs to control everything around her and only listens to high-status people like Mrs. Barker (the chairwoman), who behaves similarly to Mommy.[168]

Mommy never sees anyone apart from herself. The adoptive child, Daddy or Grandma, are not considered to be people with needs and desires independent of her own. For Mommy, they are only instruments for satisfaction. However, without them, she loses any sense of self or a way to satisfy her needs or fuel her identity.

Daddy is also not in a good place of mind and cannot find a compromise with his wife or keep his individuality and connection with her. He is unable and perhaps lazy to achieve something more for himself in the relationship. It is his fault for agreeing with the type of life Mommy establishes for him, even though he seems to be the one floating along. Daddy's attitude toward a manipulative, controlling Mommy is to be apathetic, nonengaging, and not resistant, leading him to live in isolation. Mommy describes Daddy's attitude herself, being grateful for her husband's defenselessness:

> **MOMMY**: Oh, I'm so grateful to have such a husband. Just think; I could have a husband who was poor, or argumentative…[169]

[167] ALBEE, Edward. The American Dream and Zoo Story. New York: Signet, 1963. ISBN 0451143302, p. 61.
[168] cf. Jaspers 1970
[169] ALBEE, Edward. The American Dream and Zoo Story. New York: Signet, 1963. ISBN 0451143302, p. 92.

Daddy is only useful when he provides money, listens, says, and does what he is supposed to. Doing so, his existence, realization, and possibility of authentic existence slowly fall into emptiness and nothingness. Daddy rejects acting on his desires and wants "to get everything over with,"[170] thus robbing himself of experiencing anything aside from habit. He probably would have lived a completely different life if he had not acted as others wanted him, as a function.[171] Daddy has no reason to live aside from serving his wife, which he cannot fully satisfy because of his surgery. Similarly to Mrs. Barker's husband, Daddy is psychologically in a wheelchair as he is incapable of making decisions for himself, constantly needing Mommy's approval. Daddy's masculinity and identity are shaped by Mommy's satisfaction with his capability to please her, and thus he survives in his marriage as a second wheel, misused and disconnected from actual existence.

Mommy and Daddy live together only out of habit and status. Their characters point out that it is a choice of the individuals to give meaning to their lives. Mommy and Daddy chose to be preoccupied with superficial matters rather than create a fundamental purpose for their lives. Thus, they get what they asked for and what they are, the empty yet superficially perfect Young Man.

1.1.2 Grandma

The character of Grandma cannot do much about the saddening state of the family; however, she provides an important inside into the family relationships. She is the one who shares with Mrs. Barker the devastating story of dismembering the adopted child. Grandma observes others and attempts to speak the truth differently from the other characters. That causes Mommy to constantly silence her and tell her, "nobody is interested"[172] in what she has to say.

However, Grandma seems to have a close relationship with Daddy. She tosses her nicely wrapped boxes hiding her memories around Daddy's feet. Daddy often

[170] ALBEE, Edward. The American Dream and Zoo Story. New York: Signet, 1963. ISBN 0451143302, p. 70.
[171] cf. Marcel 1949
[172] ALBEE, Edward. The American Dream and Zoo Story. New York: Signet, 1963. ISBN 0451143302, p. 87.

defends Grandma, tells Mommy to "leave Grandma alone,"[173] and wants to hear what Grandma has to say while Mommy denies it:

> **DADDY**: Maybe Grandma has something to say.
> **MOMMY**: Nonsense. Old people have nothing to say; and if old people *did* have something to say, nobody would listen to them.[174]

Grandma seems to sympathize more with Daddy than her daughter, as she warned him not to marry her:

> **GRANDMA**: … it's Mommy over there makes all the trouble. If you'd listened to me, you wouldn't have married her in the first place. She was a tramp and a trollop and a trull to boot, and-she's no better now.[175]

However, it is not to say Grandma always hated Mommy. It seems only she became disappointed by her behavior as she aged, not meeting her expectations. As presented earlier, Mommy tended to be selfish even early in her childhood. Apart from planning on marrying for money, she repetitively tricked her classmates into giving her their lunchboxes as she never purposely opened the lunchbox Grandma prepared for her:

> **GRANDMA**: … Grandma always filled it up, because she never ate the dinner she cooked the evening before; she gave me all her food for my lunch box the next day. After school, I'd take the box back to Grandma, and she'd open it and eat the chicken legs and chocolate cake that was inside. Grandma used to say, "I love day-old -- cake." That's where the expression day-old cake came -- from. Grandma always ate everything a day late. I used to eat all the other little boys' and girls' food at school, -- because they thought my lunch box was empty. They thought my lunch box was empty, and that's why I wouldn't open it. They thought I suffered from the sin of pride, and since that made them better than me, they | were very generous.[176]

In Mommy's deceit, Mommy did not realize that while she was eating from others rather than eating what she had, Grandma stayed at home hungry as she packed all the food for Mommy in her lunchbox. While Mommy was deceiving others for attention, Grandma could have peacefully eaten her lunch rather than wait the whole day for her daughter to return with the same food she prepared. It seems Grandma loved her daughter deeply and cared for her well-being.

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[173] ALBEE, Edward. The American Dream and Zoo Story. New York: Signet, 1963. ISBN 0451143302, p. 89.
[174] ibid. p. 85.
[175] ibid. p. 69.
[176] ibid. p. 66.

However, such attitude changed, and Grandma's behavior has become quite nasty, reflecting her daughter's behavior towards her. Grandma accuses her daughter of misusing her when Mommy needs her, using her for house chores, and avoiding sleeping with her husband by sleeping with her in Grandma's room. She tells her daughter to shut up and disrespects and humiliates her even though she should defend her. The poor perception of her daughter and their relationship can be seen when Grandma describes Mommy's early development:

> **GRANDMA**: … Mommy comes from extremely bad stock. And besides, when Mommy was born ... well, it was a difficult delivery, and she had a head shaped like a banana.
> **MOMMY**: You ungrateful---Daddy? Daddy, you see how ungrateful she is after all these years, after all the things we've done for her? *(To* GRANDMA*)* One of these days you're going away in a van; that' what's going to happen to you![177]

Grandma keeps degrading her daughter while Mommy does the same to her. However, with more power in her hands, Mommy threatens to put her in a nursing home for her ungratefulness. It seems Mommy dismisses, disregards, and does not accept her mother as well as Grandma did not accept Mommy for who she is. It seems Mommy did not fulfill Grandma's expectations, and so she rejected Mommy. As if in a cycle Mommy did not accept her adoptive child or her Grandma. One of the only times Mommy shows deeper emotions of affection for her mother is when Mommy realizes Grandma indeed left, possibly taken away by the van man:

> **MOMMY**: *(Shakes her head)* No, that's impossible.
> **MRS.BARKER**: Why, I saw him with my own two eyes.
> **MOMMY**: *(Near tears)* No, no, that's impossible. No. There's no such thing as the van man. There is no van man. We…we made him up. Grandma? Grandma?[178]

Her reaction shows that despite their cruel behavior toward each other, Mommy loved her mother and did not truly mean to send her away.

Even though Grandma's nasty behavior can be viewed as a way to present the truth and to attack her daughter for her emptiness of character, it seems Grandma might not be aware of the emptiness and deceitfulness that might be coming from herself.

[177] ALBEE, Edward. The American Dream and Zoo Story. New York: Signet, 1963. ISBN 0451143302, p. 88.
[178] ibid. 122.

When Grandma tells Young Man she won the first prize in a baking competition that year, she reveals:

> **GRANDMA**: … it wasn't any trouble, either. All I did was go out and get a store-bought cake, and keep it around for a while, and then slip it in, unbeknownst to anybody.[179]

She is as deceitful as her daughter by saying she won a cake competition by sliding in a store-bought cake instead of baking it. Young Man's answer to such behavior, however, is quite different from the initial reaction of Daddy to Mommy's lunch box deception. Daddy calls Mommy "a very deceitful little girl,"[180] while in Grandma's case, the Young Man calls Grandma "a very resourceful person."[181] Grandma is then depicted in a more plausible light.

However, Grandma is way more in tune with her past, identity, and fate than any other character in the play. Grandma is accepting of her future, being taken away by a van man and eventually dying.[182] Grandma is constantly aware she might be "leaving soon,"[183] and that is why she had to wrap the boxes filled with her memories: "I didn't really like wrapping them; it hurt my fingers, and frightened me. But it had to be done."[184]

Most of Grandma's monologues are filled with her commentary on the treatment of older people. Grandma keeps talking about how older people see the world and how others perceive them:

> **GRANDMA**: … When you're old you gotta do something. When you get old; you can't talk to people because people snap at you. When you get so old, people talk to you that way. That's why you become deaf, so you won't be 'able to hear people talking to you that way. And that's why you go and hide under the covers in the big soft bed, so you won't feel the house shaking from people talking to you that way. That's why old people die, eventually. People talk to them that way …[185]

[179] ALBEE, Edward. The American Dream and Zoo Story. New York: Signet, 1963. ISBN 0451143302, p. 111-112.
[180] ibid. p. 66.
[181] ibid. p. 112.
[182] cf. Heidegger 2008
[183] ALBEE, Edward. The American Dream and Zoo Story. New York: Signet, 1963. ISBN 0451143302, p. 99.
[184] ibid. p. 71.
[185] ALBEE, Edward. The American Dream and Zoo Story. New York: Signet, 1963. ISBN 0451143302, p. 65.

She captures how people behave badly to old people because of their societal position. Her dialogues and actions are justified by or connected to her higher age. Due to such treatment, Grandma is very lonely and excited at any opportunity of experiencing affection, especially through interaction with Mrs. Barker, who is disgusted by her cry for affection, or Young Man, who is yet another man providing Grandma with the attention and understanding she craves.

The character of Grandma ultimately attacks society's perception of older people as useless for the functioning society and thus not deserving to be respected. The older people are viewed more in a position of a child who needs to listen to the younger and more profitable ones.

Grandma's character leaves Mommy and Daddy at Young Man's arrival, who somehow replaces her position in the family and refreshes the relationships after losing his unsatisfactory twin brother. Even though Young Man and his perfection amaze Mommy and Daddy, the last Grandma's lines in the play suggest their dissatisfaction with the adoptive child will repeat:

> **GRANDMA**: … let's leave things as they are right now … while everybody's happy … while everybody's got what he wants … or everybody's got what he thinks he wants …[186]

The ending of the play and Grandma's remark concerning happiness suggests Mommy and Daddy have not learned from their past and are destined to fail. However, as the ending is open, there is hope for mutual change and acceptance of the whole family.

1.1.3 The Child

The adopted "bumble of joy,"[187] which Mommy and Daddy ordered to satisfy their need for a respectful position in society, was a profound disappointment. Adoption seemed to be the only solution for the pair as they could not have a child themselves and thus did not meet the requirements for reaching the American dream. However,

[186] ibid. p. 127.
[187] ibid. p. 97.

Mommy and Daddy could not accept it, and thus they chose to order the child of their dreams. The child itself is only described through the Grandma's narrative, describing the slow death of the child's body and mind due to its parents' urge to alternate the child to fit their expectations.

The problem was that the child developed differently and separately from his parents' expectations and needs, which they could not satisfy in their marriage or within themselves. As Grandma describes, the dissatisfaction started early as the child "didn't look like either one of its parents,"[188] "cried its heart out"[189] and soon after "only had eyes for its Daddy"[190] to which they "gouged those eyes right out of its head."[191] The child "kept its nose up in the air"[192] and started developing interest in its genitals, so they "cut off its you-know-what,"[193] however, the child "*still* put its hands under the covers *looking* for its you-know-what"[194] so they "cut its hands off at the wrists."[195] Then the child "called its Mommy a dirty name,"[196] forcing them to "cut its tongue out"[197] and as the child "got bigger, they found out all sorts of terrible things about it, like: it didn't have a head on its shoulders, it had no guts, it was spineless, its feet were made of clay."[198]

As Grandma describes the child's development, it was a horrendous experience for the parents as the child grew differently and individually from their liking.[199] The child might have lost his heart as it cried out of lack of affection from his parents, who did not accept him as he was. Having eyes for Daddy might have indicated to Mommy that her child might be homosexual, and as the child grew, the interest increased. However, it was unacceptable, resulting in his mutilation. Without eyes, tongue, and hands, the child could not interact with the outside world, see things to begin to like them, nor talk to express himself and touch to act as he wishes. The organs taken from him completely

[188] ALBEE, Edward. The American Dream and Zoo Story. New York: Signet, 1963. ISBN 0451143302, p. 99.
[189] ibid. p. 99.
[190] ibid. p. 99.
[191] ibid. p. 99.
[192] ibid. p. 100.
[193] ibid. p. 100.
[194] ibid. p. 100.
[195] ibid. p. 100.
[196] ibid. p. 100.
[197] ibid. p. 100.
[198] ibid. p. 101.
[199] cf. Levinas 1969

prevented the child from connecting with the world. Mommy and Daddy could not allow their child to develop an authentic identity independent of their own. Thus, unable to live in such conditions, the child died. Parents' reaction to the child's death was very similar to their attitude in raising it:

> **GRANDMA**: … for the last straw, it finally up and died; and you can imagine how *that* made them feel, their having paid for it, and all. So, they called up the lady who sold them the bumble in the first place and told her to come right over to their apartment. They wanted satisfaction; they wanted their money back. That's what they wanted.[200]

The dismembered child represents the inner death of a child's dreams and aspirations after the parents' infliction of their expectations, in this case formed by the idea of the American dream. Mommy and Daddy did not lose a baby but rather a satisfaction they paid for and expected certain qualities from. Not only did the child not fit in those qualities, but he also died, and thus as a broken good, the owners deserve a refund to fill their satisfaction to at least a little extent.

1.1.4 Mrs. Barker

Mrs. Barker is the outsider representative of a society driven by the American dream. She is a well-respected chairwoman of the women's club and engages in other socially productive activities that she cannot even remember why she came to Mommy and Daddy's house:

> **MRS.BARKER**: … But that still leaves me puzzled. I know I'm here because you called us, but I'm such a busy girl, with this committee and that committee, and the Responsible Citizens Activities I indulge in.[201]

Mrs. Barker is as empty and preoccupied with the American dream as Mommy and Daddy. Her life is merely a depiction of success, a socially prosperous individual with no identity or capacity to feel. Her heartlessness is especially visible as she continuously comments on the Grandma's story describing the child's dismemberment, ultimately depicting the child's individual development as "Ufggh! How disgusting!"[202] completely

[200] ALBEE, Edward. The American Dream and Zoo Story. New York: Signet, 1963. ISBN 0451143302, p. 101.
[201] ibid. p. 90.
[202] ALBEE, Edward. The American Dream and Zoo Story. New York: Signet, 1963. ISBN 0451143302, p. 100.

agreeing with Mommy and Daddy. As a provider of adoption services, Mrs. Barker is a part of the cycle of preventing individuals from living an authentic experience and fulfilling a prescribed role in society.[203]

Mommy and Mrs. Barker get along well, talking and sharing behavioral traits and superficial, inauthentic attitudes towards life, themselves, and their husbands. Mrs. Barker's husband is in a wheelchair, compared to Daddy, physically incompetent to act for himself and is under the control of his high-functioning wife. Men in the lives of Mrs. Barker and Mommy are a driving force in achieving the ambitions stated by the American dream.

1.1.5 The American Dream – Young Man

Young Man is a cure for his parents' flaws and a key to their unfulfilled fantasies. Young Man became precisely what Mommy and Daddy wanted to achieve by dismembering their child's body. As the child dies, so dies an essential part of his twin, Young Man, his unique identity. Young Man described such transition to Grandma as an utterly painful and life-altering process:

> **YOUNG MAN**: … Once … it was as if all at once my heart … I became numb … almost as though I … almost as though … just like that … it had been wrenched from my body … and from that time I have been unable to love. Once … I was asleep at the time … I awoke, and my eyes were burning. And since that time I have been unable to see anything, *anything*, with pity, with affection … with anything but … cool disinterest. And my groin … even there … since one time ... one specific agony … since then I have not been able to love anyone with my body. And even my hands … I cannot touch another person and feel *love*. And there is more … there are more losses, but it all comes down to this: I no longer have the capacity to feel anything. I have no emotions. I have been drained, torn asunder … disemboweled.[204]

The twin of the killed child suffers similarly through the dismemberment of his brother and cannot perform the tasks his parents disabled him to perform. Young Man thus developed into the American dream, beautiful on the outside but empty inside. Upon seeing Young Man, Mommy is immediately filled with delight:

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[203] cf. Marcel 1949

[204] ALBEE, Edward. The American Dream and Zoo Story. New York: Signet, 1963. ISBN 0451143302, p. 114-115.

> **MOMMY**: *(Herself again, circling the* YOUNG MAN, *feeling his arm, poking)* Yes, sir! Yes, siree! Now this is more like it. Now this is a great deal more like it! Daddy! Come see. Come see if this isn't a great deal more like it.
> **DADDY**: I…I can see from here, Mommy. It does look a great deal more like it.[205]

The parents speak and treat Young Man like he is a thing. Mommy proves such attitude as she is poking Young Man as if she was testing a new purchase. Mrs. Barker immediately requires payment for her services. Mommy further evaluates Young Man: "He's very nice. Really top, notch; much better than the other one."[206] It seems Mommy finally got her satisfaction and acquired a child, seemingly obtaining the qualities and functions she wished for,[207] even though Grandma suggests such happiness could be only temporary.

Grandma was equally excited when she met Young Man, she was completely smitten, but Young Man was already used to such reaction:

> **GRANDMA**: I said, my, my, aren't you something.
> **YOUNG MAN**: Oh. Thank you.
> **GRANDMA**: You don't sound very enthusiastic.
> **YOUNG MAN**: Oh, I'm… I'm used to it.
> **GRANDMA**: Yup … yup. You know, if I were about a hundred and fifty years younger I could go for you.
> **YOUNG MAN**: Yes, I imagine so.
> **GRANDMA**: Ung-hunh -- will you look at those muscles!
> **YOUNG MAN**: *(Flexing his muscles)* Yes, they're quite good, aren't they?[208]

Young Man already shows how his superficial qualities do not compensate for the emptiness inside but provide him with a wide range of possibilities. Grandma tells Young Man he "ought to be in the movies"[209] and calls him the absolute "American dream,"[210] and as this American dream will "do almost anything for money"[211] and has "no talents at all,"[212] it makes him a perfect child for Mommy and Daddy, that Grandma

[205] ALBEE, Edward. The American Dream and Zoo Story. New York: Signet, 1963. ISBN 0451143302, p. 124.
[206] ibid. p. 125.
[207] cf. Marcel 1949
[208] ALBEE, Edward. The American Dream and Zoo Story. New York: Signet, 1963. ISBN 0451143302, p. 106.
[209] ALBEE, Edward. The American Dream and Zoo Story. New York: Signet, 1963. ISBN 0451143302, p. 107.
[210] ibid. p. 108.
[211] ibid. p. 109.
[212] ibid. p. 113.

decides to leave the family and replace her presence with the perfection of Young Man. What is "incomplete"[213] in Young Man is perfection for Mommy and Daddy.

However, Young Man and Grandma seem to share a unique bond. Young Man seems to understand her and is eager to listen to her and share why he is incomplete.[214] He says Grandma can understand him precisely because she is old:

> **YOUNG MAN**: I think I can explain it to you, partially because you're very old, and very old people have perceptions they keep to themselves, because if they expose them to other people … well, you know what ridicule and neglect are.[215]

Young Man is the only character who understands Grandma and her stage of life in detail and seems to grasp the motives for her behavior completely. Compared to Grandma, Young Man seems to be completely self-aware of his identity, flaws, wishes, and abilities he is capable of providing, as well as the process he got into such state of existence:

> **YOUNG MAN**: I have, now, only my person ... my body, my face. I use what I have ... I let people love me ... I accept the syntax around me, for while I know I cannot relate ... I know I must be related to. I let people love me ... I let people touch me ... I let them draw pleasure from my groin … from my presence … from the fact of me … but, that is all it comes to. As I told you, I am incomplete ... I can feel nothing. I can feel nothing. And so … here I am ... as you see me. I am … but this … what you see. And it will always be thus.[216]

The character of Young Man attacks society in its pursuit of the American dream and its emptiness. *The American Dream* depicts the danger of accepting the societies' values in relationships, especially in marriages or parenting, resulting in the inauthenticity of existence. The play forces the audience to realize that an authentic living experience is more important than fitting into society's expectations and shows that these two states are incompatible.

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[213] ibid. p. 113.
[214] cf. Jaspers 1970
[215] ALBEE, Edward. The American Dream and Zoo Story. New York: Signet, 1963. ISBN 0451143302, p. 113.
[216] ibid. p. 115.

1.2 Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?

The three-act play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf,* published in 1962, depicts an evening night at the home of middle-aged married couple George and Martha, who invited newlyweds Honey and Nick for a night full of fun and games. During the visit, the characters reveal the personal and upsetting stories of their marriages, full of lies and illusions, leaving them shattered by the truth by the end of the evening.

The play's first act, *Fun and Games,* starts with Martha and George arriving from Martha's father's late-night party, which he hosts as a college president. Martha tells George the evening has not finished as she invited a new young biology professor Nick and his wife, Honey, to come to their house for drinks. After Nick and Honey's arrival, Martha begins to mock George and reveal the dysfunctionality of their marriage. The breaking point comes when Martha shares with Honey that she and George have a son. George defends himself from Martha's mockery and strikes back, while Honey and Nick want to leave as they do not want to be a part of their violent quarrel. George and Martha offend each other over their disappointing twenty years of marriage. At the end of the act, George is humiliated by Martha, who calls him a 'flop,' and Honey becomes sick, accompanied to the bathroom by Martha.

The second act, *Walpurgisnacht*, starts with Nick and George talking about themselves and their relationships with Honey and Martha while Martha takes care of Honey in the bathroom. Upon their arrival, the married couples begin to play games. In the first one, *Humiliate the Host,* Martha shares that the story George told Nick about a young boy unintentionally killing his parents is about George. The second game, *Get the Guests,* George exposes Nick and Honey's secret of Honey's false pregnancy, which led to their marriage. The fact that Nick told the others about the matter makes Honey sick again. The last game they play is called *Hump the Hostess,* during which Martha attempts to have sex with Nick in order to hurt George.

The last act, *The Exorcism*, begins with Martha announcing Nick's impotence as he could not have sex with her because he was drunk. Soon after, George brings Martha flowers to prepare her for a horrendous act he is about to commit. George begins to attack Martha and Nick verbally. George establishes the final game, *Bringing up Baby,* in

which he motivates Martha to tell their guests about their son and later reveals that their son died. Martha argues that George has no right to decide without her consent, and George replies that she has gotten too far, revealing that their son is only an illusion they created years ago to cope with the fact that they cannot have children. After the revelation, Nick and Honey leave shaken, as George comforts Martha and says she is afraid of 'Virginia Woolf,' a life without illusions.

1.2.1 Martha and George

Martha and George's relationship is immensely different from Mommy and Daddy's. The marriage is filled with genuine emotions, even though such affection is realized through shouting and offenses. However, the dynamic of a dominant woman and a quite submissive man prevails in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* too. Martha is more aggressive in her humiliation than Mommy, and George is more active in his defense against the attack than Daddy. However, George remains humiliated and disrespected.

The married couple in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* fights for power, aggressively attacking each other verbally and physically. Verbal violence is everywhere in their marriage. As the physical one, it expresses their frustration with each other. However, the pair is united by reciprocity of love without apathy. Thus, their dialogues mix immense love, cruelty, and hate hiding deep love. The way they can assault each other effectively shows they know each other's weaknesses and pains. However, they gave up on accepting each other, drowning in their disappointments. Martha and George chose to stay in their created fictional world in fear of facing reality.

They would rather play mind games than honestly face each other in existential communication, expressing their loneliness and disappointment with themselves and their life.[217] Their games are attempts to make the other understand his condition and discuss their disintegrating marriage. Having guests witness their fights gives them a reason to communicate and the energy to express the most challenging issues.

[217] cf. Jaspers 1970

Martha communicates through her entire body, its movement, as well as her screams and attitude. She is frustrated by what a failure her husband has become and how he failed to fulfill her expectations. Martha's violent speeches make her look like a complete and irredeemable villain. However, her actions have a rational explanation and roots in her childhood and relationship with her father. As George says, Martha has a "father who really doesn't give a damn whether she lives or dies, who couldn't care less what happens to his only daughter."[218] The biggest issue is that it was not always like this, and Martha grew up having a very close relationship with her father:

> **MARTHA**: … Mommy died early, see, and I sort of grew up with Daddy. *(Pause—thinks)* …I went away to school, and stuff, but I more or less grew up with him. Jesus, I admired that guy! I worshipped him…I absolutely worshipped him. I still do. And he was pretty fond of me too…you know?...[219]

Martha was abandoned by the only man she was fond of, whom she admired and trusted. Her father is a disappointment, and so is her husband, through which she tried to recreate the perfect image of her father, and for a while, she thought George could be precisely who she wanted him to be, functioning as someone who would make her rise in her father eyes again and please him.[220] However, such attempt was unsuccessful, and thus she scolds George for his incompetence in taking over the History Department after her father and the fact "he wasn't particularly…aggressive"[221] and "didn't have it in him"[222] to achieve something more:

> **MARTHA**: So, here I am, stuck with this flop… who's married to the President's daughter, who's expected to *be* somebody, not just some nobody, some bookworm, somebody who's so damn…contemplative, he can't make anything out of himself, somebody without the *guts* to make anybody proud of him…[223]

Martha's anger stems from her low self-esteem and hopelessness to satisfy her father by becoming 'somebody' and George's refusal to satisfy her ambitions. Martha wanted to build her self-esteem and identity through her marriage, her husband, and his career, as she felt she could not achieve it alone but only through a man. She wanted

[218] ALBEE, Edward. Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?. New York: Signet, 1983. ISBN 0451140796, p. 225.
[219] ibid. p. 77.
[220] cf. Marcel 1949
[221] ALBEE, Edward. Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?. New York: Signet, 1983. ISBN 0451140796, p. 84.
[222] ibid. p. 84.
[223] ibid. p. 85.

her husband to bring her success, attention, admiration, and acceptance from others and her father. During the years of marriage, Martha realizes her romanticized dreams of success will never be achieved since George is simply different, and thus her hopes and ambitions are lost. Martha feels cheated by George, yet she loves him. However, instead of accepting the harsh reality and working through pain, she screams at everybody, choosing to deal with her frustration without an effort to make her life authentic and fulfilling on her own.[224]

Martha was more engaged in imagining her future than considering her husband's dreams, forgetting to realize he might have dreams of his own and not the same aspiration as she does. However, she despises anything George sees meaning in, such as writing a novel or his "stupid papers."[225] Martha has wasted her life waiting for the perfect life and her husband to create her identity. Incapable of doing so, she spends most of the time punishing him and trying to change him into what she wants him to be by constantly verbally abusing him:

> **MARTHA**: George is bogged down in the History Department. He's an old bog in the History Department, that's what George is. A bog…A fen…a G.D. swamp. Ha, ha, ha HA! A SWAMP! Hey, swamp! Hey, SWAMPY![226]

Such attempts are utterly ineffective, only causing George to want to "kill"[227] her rather than upgrade his ambitions. George had no ambition to take after Martha's father. He just fell in love with Martha, similarly as she fell in love with him. Despite Martha's constant put-downs, George kept his inner world almost intact.

Martha has a complicated relationship with George. Despite the profound offenses towards George, Martha realizes that the only man who could ever make her happy was George. Her saying so suggests she can be genuinely happy with George even without fitting in the standards she has created for her marriage. George recognizes her dissatisfaction and love towards him and tries to accommodate her but is still incapable of fully handling her behavior. However, he is the only one capable and willing to understand Martha and stay with her despite her wrongdoings. Martha is very aware of

[224] cf. Camus 1975
[225] ALBEE, Edward. Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?. New York: Signet, 1983. ISBN 0451140796, p. 156.
[226] ibid. p. 50.
[227] ibid. p. 137.

the fact that it is only George who truly loves her for who she is, and she is the one who can truly hurt him:

> **MARTHA:** … George who is out somewhere in the dark … George who is good to me, and whom I revive; who understands me, and whom I push off; who can make me laugh, and I choke it back in my throat; who can hold me, at night, so that it's warm, and whom I will bite so there's blood; who keeps learning the games we play as quickly as I can change the rules …[228]

George reminds Martha of the disappointment her father caused her. George reflects her lost dreams, failures, and the truth she refuses to accept. Martha tries to materialize those dreams of an ideal masculine man by behaving so aggressively, showing how incompetent her counterpart is and how he should be. However, her insight into her mind did not stop her from killing him with her domineering and placing high expectations on him. Even after years, Martha could not accept that George was not someone she dreamed of but was a completely different and unique person.[229]

Aside from George, Martha strives for admiration from others, especially men. By changing her clothes early after Honey and Nick arrive, she is trying to allure someone other than her husband:

> **MARTHA**: … Martha is changing…and Martha is not changing for *me*. Martha hasn't changed for *me* in years. If Martha is changing, it means we'll be here for…days. You are being accorded an honor …[230]

By changing her clothes, Martha is trying to appear younger to Nick and, through his attention to her, prove to George and herself that she still looks young and attractive. Martha deals with her disappointment in George through love affairs, alcohol, and their imaginary baby, leaving her empty. As Martha is about to sleep with Nick, she tries to hint to George what is going to happen, hiddenly begging him to stop her from doing so while he is reading a book:

> **MARTHA**: We're going to amuse ourselves, George.
> **GEORGE**: *(Not looking)* Unh-hunh. That's nice.
> **MARTHA**: You might not like it.
> **GEORGE**: *(Never looking up)* No, no, now … you go right ahead … you entertain your guests.

[228] ALBEE, Edward. Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?. New York: Signet, 1983. ISBN 0451140796, p. 190-191.
[229] cf. Levinas 1969
[230] ALBEE, Edward. Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?. New York: Signet, 1983. ISBN 0451140796, p. 46.

> **MARTHA**: I'm going to entertain myself, too.
> **GEORGE**: Good…good.[231]
> …
> **MARTHA**: *(Her anger has her close to tears, her frustration to fury)* … Now, you pay attention to me! You come off this kick you're on, or I swear to God I'll do it. I swear to God I'll follow that guy into the kitchen, and then I'll take him upstairs, and …
> **GEORGE**: *(Swinging around to her again…loud…loathing)* SO WHAT, MARTHA?
> **MARTHA**: *(Considers him for a moment…then, nodding he head, backing off slowly)* O.K … O.K … You asked for it … and you're going to get it.
> **GEORGE**: *(Softly, sadly)* Lord, Martha, if you want the boy that much … have him … but do it honestly, will you? Don't cover it over with all this … all this … footwork.
> **MARTHA**: *(Hopeless*) I'll make you sorry you made me want to marry you. *(At the hallway)* I'll make you regret the day you ever decided to come to this college. I'll make you sorry you ever let yourself down.[232]

Martha does not honestly want to sleep with Nick. She wants to be close to her husband, who is unresponsive to her needs. Martha continuously tries to hurt George not only for his weaknesses but also for his gracious acceptance of her horrific character, mistakes, behavior, and anything she hates about herself:

> **MARTHA**: … whom I will not forgive for having come to rest; for having seen me and having said; yes, this will so; who has made the hideous, the hurting, the insulting mistake of loving me and must be punished for it. George and Martha: sad, sad, sad.
> …
> **MARTHA**: … who tolerates, which is intolerable; who is kind, which is cruel; who understands, which is beyond comprehension …
> …
> **MARTHA**: Some day … hah! Some *night* … some stupid, liquorridden night … I will go too far … and I'll either break the man's back … or push him off for good … which is what I deserve.[233]

Martha cries for her punishment and damnation. She is destructive towards herself as well as others. Martha hates George also for his allowance of creating the illusion of a child and being unable to make it true. She insults him for letting her go so far with her attitude, being too weak to make her face the harsh reality of life. In the

[231] ALBEE, Edward. Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?. New York: Signet, 1983. ISBN 0451140796, p. 169-170.
[232] ibid. p. 173-174.
[233] ibid. p. 191.

end, however, he satisfies her need for masculine guidance and breaks her heart by killing their son and thus finally makes her face reality.

George deals with Martha's behavior by ignoring her affairs and assaults, reacting to her attitude through passive aggressiveness, and later by a cruel murder of their son. George would be completely satisfied with his position in the university without the need for higher ambitions, except for the novel he wanted to publish, which was mocked by Martha's father, breaking his spirit. George seems disconnected from the conversations, becoming increasingly numb to Martha's offenses and her attempts to be intimate with him. George worsens Martha's condition as he often withdraws from the confrontations, and as Martha expresses, he truly lets her go too far. His response to her aggression is either ignorance of her words, verbal persuasion to stop, and close or actual physical violence, which most vividly depicts his profound frustration with Martha's constant assaults. As Martha is describing her and George's wrestling match during which she 'accidentally' punched him in the jaw, George pretends to attempt to shoot her with a gun:

> **MARTHA**: And it was and accident…a real, goddamn accident! *(*GEORGE *takes from behind his back a short-barreled shotgun, and calmly aims it at the back of* MARTHA'S *head.* HONEY *screams…rises.* NICK *rises, and simultaneously,* MARTHA *turns her head to face* GEORGE. GEORGE *pulls the trigger)*
> **GEORGE**: POW!!! *(Pop! From the barrel of the gun blossoms a large red and yellow Chinese parasol.* HONEY *screams again, this time less, and mostly from relief and confusion)* You're Dead! Pow! You're dead![234]

Even though the whole situation is laughed off, there is no doubt George is mentally close to killing Martha out of desperation with her behavior. During his physical fights with Martha, it is visible that George is devastated by his life as Martha is. However, he tries to hide it and does not say it out loud, choosing to live in their fantasy like Martha.

The breaking point for George comes when Martha tells Honey about their imaginary son, whom they promised they would not speak of with outsiders. The secret of the imagined child was a tool that held their marriage together by a thread. George

[234] ALBEE, Edward. Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?. New York: Signet, 1983. ISBN 0451140796, p. 57.

realizes he can no longer ignore the state of their marriage, as Martha seems to have lost the ability to distinguish between reality and illusion. George's state of mind during the marriage and his later decision-making is well depicted by his speech to Martha:

> **GEORGE**: *(Calmly, matter-of-factly)* I'm numbed enough … and I don't mean by liquor, though maybe that's been part of the process -- a gradual, over-the-years going to; sleep of the brain cells -- I'm numbed enough, now, to be able to take you when we're alone. I don't listen to you ... or when I do listen to you, I sift everything, I bring everything down to reflex response, so I don't really hear you, which is the only way to manage it. But you've taken a new tack, Martha, over the past couple of centuries -- or however long it's been I've lived in this house with you -- that makes it just too much ... too much. I don't mind your dirty underthings in public … well, I do mind, but I've reconciled myself to that … but you've moved bag and baggage into your own fantasy world now, and you've started playing variations on your own distortions, and, as a result …[235]

George realizes now is the time to change the course of their marriage by killing their son and thus hurting Martha, stopping her from her toxic behavior but guiding her to a new episode of life, the real life. The closer George reveals their son's death, the more aggressive he becomes, suddenly exchanging positions with Martha, who is now begging him to stop. George seems to compare peeling off the illusion to going through the skin, getting "down to the bone"[236] to get to the core of a being, Martha. George also performs an exorcism to clean Martha from the illusion so she can live in reality.[237] Compared to Martha, George had hours to prepare himself for the crime he planned to commit while Martha was playing around, unaware of what would come and in desperate need of being cleansed. By giving Martha flowers in the last act, George prepares Martha for killing their son and motivates her to tell Honey and Nick about him. George wants them to witness the reveal and thus support the outcome of his actions.

By killing the son, George suddenly gets power over Martha and destroys her present identity, exposing her loneliness as well as his own:

> **GEORGE**: *(Long silence)* It will be better.
> **MARTHA**: *(Long silence)* I don't … know.
> **GEORGE**: It will be … maybe.

[235] ALBEE, Edward. Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?. New York: Signet, 1983. ISBN 0451140796, p. 155.
[236] ibid. p. 212.
[237] cf. Sartre 1993

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.
GEORGE: *(Puts his hand gently on her shoulder; she puts her head back and he sings to her, very softly)* Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf, Virginia Woolf, Virginia Woolf,
MARTHA: I … am … George …
GEORGE: Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf …
MARTHA: I … am … George … I … am …[238]

As the couple abandons the illusion, it is visible that George is suddenly manly and strong, protecting Martha while she loses her anger and need to drink alcohol, perhaps finally appreciating her husband for taking the lead and making the hard decision. Martha confides in George that she is afraid of living without illusion, and even though George is not confident that he can do it, he is determined to do so. At the end of the play, it seems Martha and George realize their power to change their lives and make their own choices that could make them happy and accept the truth instead of living in an illusion and starting over together. [239]

1.2.2 The Imaginary Child

The imaginary child of Martha and George was killed just a day before his 21st birthday, which would mark his complete independence from his parents. Even though Martha speaks beautifully about her son's childhood, as she describes his childhood from birth to college, it is visible that childhood was not as idyllic as Martha describes it. The child slept on a bed "with a cane at the headboard,"[240] supposedly because of his 'nightmares.' He also had a "bow and arrow"[241] under his bed "for fear."[242] George suggests Martha was dangerous to the child, maybe even sexually, as she was "climbing all over

[238] ALBEE, Edward. Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?. New York: Signet, 1983. ISBN 0451140796, p. 240-242.
[239] cf. Sartre 1993
[240] ALBEE, Edward. Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?. New York: Signet, 1983. ISBN 0451140796, p. 219.
[241] ibid. p. 219.
[242] ibid. p. 219.

the poor bastard, trying to break the bathroom door down to wash him in the tub when he's sixteen."[243]

Both Martha and George claim their primary role in parenting was to protect their son from the other parent:

> **GEORGE**: … A son who would *not* disown his father, who came to him for advice, for information, for love that wasn't mixed with sickness -- and you know what I mean, Martha! -- who could not tolerate the slashing, braying residue that called itself his MOTHER. MOTHER? HAH!!!
> **MARTHA** *(Cold)*: All right, you. A son who was so ashamed of his father he asked me once if it -- possibly -- wasn't true, as he had heard, from some cruel boys, maybe, that he was not our child; who could not tolerate the shabby failure his father had become …[244]
> …
> **MARTHA**: … A son … a son who spends his summers away … away from his family … ON ANY PRETEXT … because he can't stand the shadow of a man flickering around the edges of a house …
> **GEORGE**: … who spends his summers away … and he does! ... who spends his summers away because there isn't room for him in a house full of empty bottles, lies, strange men, and a harridan who …[245]

They projected onto their son the dislike of his parents' qualities they hate about each other the most and vowed to protect him from such. George protected the son from Martha's drunkenness, manipulation, and sexual advances and Martha from George's weakness. George claims Martha turned the child into a "weapon against his father"[246] she uses whenever she pleases.

The son in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* is what kills the relationship between his parents and justifies their anger with each other. He holds them in an illusion, a cycle, stopping them from an authentic experience.[247] It distracts them from painful reality, revealing they cannot have children. The child for them, especially Martha, is anything she wants him to be. He can have any eye or hair color, quality, or demeanor. He is not his own; he is Martha's reflection of a perfect child and young man, without possibility of creating his otherness.[248] The son represents her dream of a perfect life, a masculine

[243] ALBEE, Edward. Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?. New York: Signet, 1983. ISBN 0451140796, p. 215.
[244] ibid. p. 225.
[245] ibid. p. 226.
[246] ibid. p. 225.
[247] cf. Sartre 1993
[248] cf. Levinas 1969

ambitious man with high social status, a complete, happy, perfect family, and the American dream.

As the son divides them, he also holds their marriage together. He is the responsibility they share, protection from the outside world, and loneliness in their marriage. The child was created to battle their life's absurdity to give it meaning. He is the compensation for their failures and a reality they cannot control. Because Martha exposed the son, reality got out of control and thus needed destruction. At the end of the play, Martha and George are forced to accept their loneliness and the world's absurdity.[249] By encountering the death of their son, they are forced to live a life without illusions.

1.2.3 Honey and Nick

Nick and Honey's relationship mirrors Martha and George's, primarily due to their backgrounds. Honey and Martha come from a wealthy and socially highly valued background and had ambitions to keep and upgrade their status through their husbands. Their desire to have children differs at the beginning of the play but unites them in the end. The most profound difference in those couples is the nature of their relationships, as Martha and George are full of emotions towards each other, while Honey and Nick seem to have a relationship based on logic.

Even though Honey looks innocent, she is a rich woman who tricked her husband into marrying her by faking a pregnancy. Honey based her marriage on an imagined child, similar to Martha maintaining her marriage through the imaginary son. Honey controls the marriage socially through money and mentally through her false pregnancies and sicknesses. She gives her life meaning based on her husband's reputation and function and cannot create her identity separate from her husband.[250] Honey talks about Nick's academic achievements and his strengths all the time. She was the one who decided Nick and her should go to the party at the president's daughter's apartment. Honey also praises Martha's father and Martha herself with an obvious

[249] cf. Camus 1975
[250] cf. Marcel 1949

intent to get her favor. Nick tends to take after her behavior, praising anything Honey praises:

> **HONEY**: Well, I certainly had fun … it was a wonderful party.
> **NICK**: *(Attempting enthusiasm)* Yes … it certainly was.
> **HONEY**: *(To Martha)* And your father! Oh! He is so marvelous!
> **NICK**: *(As above)* Yes … yes, he is.[251]

Honey and Nick seem to have a very superficial relationship without a capacity to communicate with each other aside from superficial topics.[252] Even though Martha and George also have a hard time communicating, they have their way of expressing themselves, while Nick and Honey have no such tool. Nick has no idea that Honey is terrified of having children, and she cannot tell Nick. Instead, she screams it in the presence of George when she is drunk:

> **HONEY**: NO! ... I DON'T WANT ANY … I DON'T WANT THEM …. GO 'WAY… *(Begins to cry)* I DON'T WANT … ANY … CHILDREN …. I … don't … want … any … children. I'm afraid! I don't want to be hurt …. PLEASE![253]

Honey is also weak, constantly sick, needing attention and consolation, and incapable of encountering anything harsh, such as childbirth. Nick tries to be caring, but his behavior seems superficial, without a deep sense of emotion. Honey and Nick entered the marriage for social benefits and perhaps to avoid loneliness, leaving them to create an emotional bond in the existing marriage. Nick and Honey can either repeat a similar cycle Martha and George has been through or learn from what they witnessed during the visit and choose to live an authentic life.

At the end of the play, as Honey observes Martha's storytelling about her son and her love for him, she changes her mind about having children and, in tears, desperately screams: "I want a child. I want a baby."[254] Honey realized she should face her fears and perhaps create a more authentic life in her marriage, with a need for her husband to approach life equally authentically.

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[251] ALBEE, Edward. Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?. New York: Signet, 1983. ISBN 0451140796, p. 25-26.
[252] cf. Jaspers 1970
[253] ALBEE, Edward. Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?. New York: Signet, 1983. ISBN 0451140796, p. 176.
[254] ibid. p. 223.

Nick is handsome, intelligent, dominant, and self-absorbed, without needing to learn from others but afraid to fail. He is cold as the materialistic world he lives in. Nick is as opportunistic as Honey as he tries to sleep with Martha precisely because of her father's position. He despises George and does not understand Martha and George's love-and-hate relationship, signaling he does not have a deep love in his marriage. There is also a lack of passion in their marriage as Nick admits himself to George:

> **NICK**: I wouldn't say there was any … particular *passion* between us, even at the beginning … of our marriage, I mean.[255]

Even though Nick was tricked into the marriage by Honey's fake pregnancy, he was well aware of its falseness and intended to marry Honey for her father's money and position in society:

> **GEORGE**: …Things are simpler with you … you marry a woman because she's all blown up …
> **NICK**: There was more to it than that!
> **GEORGE**: Sure! I'll bet she has money, too!
> **NICK**: *(Looks hurt. Then, determined, after a pause)* Yes.[256]

Despite Nick and Honey knowing each other since their early childhood, Nick has been unable to marry Honey for any other reason than money and a fake pregnancy. He essentially behaves as a gentleman to Honey, but it only depicts his obligation to be polite to her, not the real feeling behind it.

Their marriage is emotionally empty and filled with lies from its very beginning from both sides. Their marriage only gave them the social roles they wanted to obtain and appear as a perfect, handsome couple.

However, Honey adores Nick and wants to be with him overlooking his cold attitude. Honey is very naïve and looks up to her husband, defending him any chance she gets, while Nick seems to be using Honey for his benefit. Honey is aware of that side of him but chooses not to bring it up as any other of her secrets and hopes for a change.[257] After Nick attempts to sleep with Martha, which in his case represents a

[255] ALBEE, Edward. Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?. New York: Signet, 1983. ISBN 0451140796, p. 105.
[256] ibid. p. 102.
[257] cf. Marcel 1949

complete lack of faithfulness or respect for Honey, Honey willingly chooses to forget he cheated on her in order to keep the superficial couple facade:

> **HONEY**: *(To* GEORGE*)* I've decided I don't remember anything. *(To* NICK*)* Hello, Dear.
> …
> **GEORGE**: *(To* HONEY, *referring to* NICK*)* You do know that's your husband, there, don't you?
> **HONEY**: *(With great dignity)* Well, I certainly know *that.*
> **GEORGE**: *(Close to* HONEY'S *ear)* It's just some things you can't remember…hunh?
> **HONEY**: *(A great laugh to cover; the quietly, intensely to* GEORGE*) Don't* remember; not *can't. (At* NICK*, cheerfully)* Hello, Dear.
> **GEORGE**: *(To* NICK*)* Well, speak to your little wifelet, your little bunny, for God's sake.
> **NICK**: *(Softly, embarrassed)* Hello, Honey.[258]

By forgetting the cruel reality, Honey supports her and her husband in an inauthentic relationship and poor communication. Nick seems to be regretful of his behavior, but it is only after witnessing the murder of Martha's son and realizing their son is an illusion that Nick recognizes the necessity for change in his marriage.

At the end of the play, Nick and Honey seem moved by the whole evening with Martha and George. Thus, they seem motivated to salvage their relationship and inauthentic existence.

[258] ALBEE, Edward. Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?. New York: Signet, 1983. ISBN 0451140796, p. 211-212.

1.3 Marriage Play

The *Marriage Play* is a one-act short play published in 1987, following a conversation between a married couple in their fifties, Jack and Gillian, and their dialogue about their thirty-year-old marriage, which Jack attempts to leave. They ruminate about their marriage and its neglect and affection, resulting in verbal and physical fights. The play depicts the collapse of their marriage and contemplating their existential crisis.

The play begins with Jack coming home to Gillian, who is reading a book. He declares he is leaving her. However, Gillian does not take him seriously. As she is mocking him, Jack attempts to leave and return to the room three more times, repeating the phrase he is leaving to bring her to a different reaction, only for Gillian to mock him further. Eventually, Jack gives up and asks Gillian what book she is reading. She informs him she is reading her *Book of Days*, a record of each time they had sex. He then asks Gillian to read some parts of the book and comments on her style, which is written similarly to the style of different writers. Gillian tells him she could not keep his attention when she was herself. The couple then argues, mocking each other and playing their mind games. Jack then attempts to tell Gillian how he realized his life was dissatisfactory and desperately needed change. Gillian mocks him again, parodying his realization in an office with her realization in a kitchen. Jack becomes furious, and Gillian and Jack get into a serious physical fight. After the fight, they continue recollecting their marriage, Gillian saying she tried to be a perfect wife for Jack while it was never enough for Jack as he had multiple affairs that she accepted. Ignoring Gillian, Jack talks about how he was attractive and glowing. Gillian then tries to recollect their good times, talking about their time in Venice, later realizing she was there with another man. Jack then starts to talk about the absurdity of existence, the meaninglessness of life, and endless dissatisfaction with what we have. The play ends with Jack saying he is leaving while the couple sits together in the living room.

1.3.1 Jack and Gillian

The marriage of Jack and Gillian hosts no illusion or weapon to guard them against the outside, aside from themselves. Despite the rapid decline of love and affection in their marriage, the couple stays together. Their children are grown up, and Gillian and Jack are alone in their suburban home, isolated from each other. What holds the couple is the cycle of their repetitive, predictable behavior. One of those behaviors seems to be Jack's threats to leave Gillian. However, Gillian must have heard such claims many times as she does not seem to be impressed by his claims:

> **GILLIAN**: *(Looks up from her book; fairly friendly.)* Hello.
> **JACK**: *(Pause.)* Hello.
> **GILLIAN**: You're home early. *(Gillian reads, giggles. Jack puts his briefcase down, look at her, looks back to his briefcase.)*
> **JACK**: Yes. I'm leaving you.
> **GILLIAN**: *(Thinks about it, frowns.)* What do you mean?
> **JACK**: I'm leaving you. *(Are you an idiot?)* I'm leaving you!
> **GILLIAN**: *(Back to her book; dismissive.)* Of course.
> **JACK**: *Laugh* if you *want.*
> **GILLIAN**: I wasn't. Not right then. Earlier, *yes.* Before you came in.
> **JACK**: Laugh if you *want.*
> **GILLIAN**: *(Cheerful.)* Did you have a bad day?[259]

A similar situation must have happened many times before, and thus Gillian does not seem to believe him. She also does not truly listen to what he has to say.[260] Similarly, when Gillian reads Jack her *Book of Days*, not only does Jack not even know she has been writing and reading such book for years, but he also concentrates on the style she has written the book in than the content:

> **GILLIAN**: Twenty-six? All right; twenty-six. *(Seeks it.)* Twenty-six. *(Reads to herself a little; giggles.)* Oh … all right. *(Reads.)* I am selfish by nature, I think, or self-aware, certainly, to a degree not entertained by many. I have always been so. I am not ashamed of it; it sets me apart form -- above, I think -- many.
> **JACK**: James.
> **GILLIAN**: What?
> **JACK**: Henry James; an attempt at Henry James.[261]

[259] ALBEE, Edward. Marriage Play. New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1995. ISBN 0822214229, p. 5.
[260] cf. Jaspers 1970
[261] ALBEE, Edward. Marriage Play. New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1995. ISBN 0822214229, p. 16-17.

The major problem of the marriage of Gillian and Jack is the lack of interest in each other and not paying proper attention to each other's needs, wants, and interests. Jack's uninterest in Gillian's activities is particularly visible when she tells him about her *Book of Days*, he has no idea about and wants to see it:

> **JACK**: ... *What* are you reading?
> **GILLIAN**: My book.
> **JACK**: *(Long pause.) What…book?*
> **GILLIAN**: *(Overly casual; looks at the cover as if she had never seen it before.)* Oh … *The Book of Days*; *my* book; *The Book of Days.*
> **JACK**: Never heard of it.
> …
> **JACK**: I want to *see* it!
> **GILLIAN**: You haven't wanted to see it for years! All the years it's been right there and you haven't wanted to see it.[262]

The fact that Jack had no idea the book existed illustrates how profoundly disconnected he has been from his wife. Gillian is aware of such disconnection and calls him out on it as he is shocked by the book's content, asking her, "What kind of woman *are* you?!"[263] She replies, "You tell me!"[264] knowing he has no idea.

The couple only lives in the same apartment but do not live with each other, unable to truly connect. In order to keep their lives at least half-alive, Gillian reads her *Book of Days* to remind herself of the good times with Jack or read something interesting from the past while Jack engages in extramarital affairs and from time to time feels there is something magnificent waiting for him outside of the relationship, but he is unable to leave for good. Their relationship depicts hopelessness and the impossibility of making a choice of either going forward in their marriage or leaving it.[265]

Both Gillian and Jack seem to wonder if what they have in the relationship is enough, wondering whether or not they have made a mistake marrying each other and have not missed out on something that would have made them happier. Gillian realizes that feeling would prevail no matter her life decisions, while Jack copes with such feelings with occasional determination to leave and find for himself the better life he

[262] ALBEE, Edward. Marriage Play. New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1995. ISBN 0822214229, p. 11.
[263] ibid. p. 13.
[264] ibid. p. 13.
[265] cf. Sartre 1993

deserves. However, Gillian knows Jack will not leave her as he is afraid to lose everything for the uncertainty of life outside of marriage and the humiliation accompanying divorce. Divorce is only a weapon to threaten Gillian with and not an actual possibility.

Similarly to George and Martha in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, Gillian and Jack continuously disrespect, mock, and offend each other. Gillian is the more aggressive one, leading the household as almost a mother, while Jack is often a moody child needing attention. Their relationship dynamic is evident when Gillian is sick with Jack's demands for attention for his statement that he will leave her:

> **GILLIAN**: *(Rising to it now.)* What do you want? What do you expect … riveted attention? Hand-folded, eye-wide, mouth-ajar attention!? And then what!? A hand out to pat you sympathetically on the wrists!? "I understand; I understand." Yes? Fuck you!
> **JACK**: You *are* drunk.
> **GILLIAN**: "Don't leave me, precious; I … I'll be nothing without you."
> **JACK**: Forget it.
> **GILLIAN**: Fuck yourself! "Don't weave poor widda me! What wid I be wivout great big wu!?"
> **JACK**: I said: forget it!!!
> **GILLIAN**: "Tell me 'u wuv me! Tell me I am your own." Hah! *(Heave mock.)* Walk with me; talk with me; tell me I am your own. Hah! Asshole![266]

Jack does not realize that while Gillian never "listened at all,"[267] he has been utterly blind to her persona in the relationship. Preoccupied with himself and what he needs, he forgot to think about Gillian and the things that upset her. As Gillian seems never to express her thoughts of leaving, Jack assumes there are none, and thus his speech about his life "undergoing the profoundest change"[268] seem essential to explain to her as if she never thought of profoundly changing her life as well.

As the cycle of Jack's threats to leave repeats, the couple repeatedly attempts to save their marriage and its course. Salvaging the marriage is difficult since they seem to make the same mistakes. Jack is stuck in the future, imagining what his life would look like without Gillian, while Gillian is stuck in the illusion of the past, reminiscing the days of their marriage and not concentrating on improving her present relationship with

[266] ALBEE, Edward. Marriage Play. New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1995. ISBN 0822214229, p. 22.
[267] ibid. p. 22.
[268] ibid. p. 20.

Jack.[269] Gillian attempted to save the relationship in the past, while Jack is weakly trying to fix it now. When Jack repetitively leaves and enters the room to start his departure speech again, he allows Gillian to start restoring the relationship by simply paying attention:

> **JACK**: I'll try it once again; I'll give you one more chance!
> **GILLIAN**: *(Mock supplication.)* Weawy? You're gonna give me one more chance?
> **JACK**: To pay *attention*! To be *serious* about it![270]

However, his attempt at communication is mocked by Gillian and by no means taken seriously and not viewed as an attempt for the redemption of the relationship but rather a selfish outburst:

> **GILLIAN**: Jesus Christ, you didn't come home here this afternoon to share anything; you didn't come home here this afternoon to be understood; you came home here this afternoon to make an announcement and get out as fast as you could![271]

Gillian is fed up with Jack's threats to leave and her past attempts to salvage the marriage, so she gives up on making her relationship meaningful. Both Gillian and Jack fail to focus on the other and what they have to say, talking profoundly about meaningless aspects of language instead of talking about what is important to them. Such approach to communication alienates them from each other as well. Thus, they are stuck in a cycle of constant and never-ending preparation for a divorce that will never happen.

Gillian and Jack have time and opportunities to fix their issues in themselves and the other but choose not to make an action.[272] Even though Jack realizes he is only half-conscious in his life and lives detached from himself, he is unable to move from such point into actions and only talks about such realization over and over again:

> **JACK**: *(Smile.)* Now, now. *(Pause.)* You look up one day from your desk; you are sitting there in your usual manner, doing your usual things -- and they are neither boring nor exciting; whatever they may have been they no longer are; they are merely your usual things. Well, you look up from them, are amazed by your familiar surroundings, are startled by the stranger who has been your

[269] cf. Sartre 1993
[270] ALBEE, Edward. Marriage Play. New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1995. ISBN 0822214229, p. 10.
[271] ibid. p. 23.
[272] cf. Sartre 1993

> secretary for fifteen years. You realize your life is about to change … profoundly; either that or you are mad.[273]

Gillian attacks his speech for lacking any action by mocking him through her example of inaction:

> **GILLIAN**: I look up from my familiar burners and am startled by the object has been my refrigerator for fifteen years. I realize my cooking is about to profoundly change …[274]

Jack recognized that his life was not worth living as he was living it without examining it and living authentically. However, he does not realize such 'profound change' does not occur outside with someone else but in his own home with Gillian and their existential communication[275]. Jack has to realize that he is truly leaving in the sense that he will die one day and does not have unlimited time to redeem his life. At the end of the play, however, Jack seems to realize the limitations of time and upcoming death,[276] and proclaims that "nothing is enough … for a life…"[277] and despite the course of the life choices, the outcome is still an absurd existence:[278]

> **JACK**: … We come to the moment we understand that no matter what we have done -- forget not done, forget the ... avoiders! -- no matter what we have done, no matter how satisfying, how brave, how ... "good," no matter what, or where, or with whom, we come to the moment we understand that nothing has made any difference. We stare into the dark and know that nothing is enough, has been enough, could be enough, that there is no way not to have ... wasted the light; that the failure is built into us, that the greatest awareness gives to the greatest dark ….[279]

The play's ending does not provide a clear answer whether Gillian and Jack will choose to change the course of their marriage and instead provide alternatives that they will either repeat the cycle or Jack will leave but find himself in a similar state of mind as in his marriage. However, with proper care, their marriage would have a great chance of being revived. As Martha and George, they still share a spark of attraction and a significant amount of emotion between each other. The amount of emotion is not just

[273] ALBEE, Edward. Marriage Play. New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1995. ISBN 0822214229, p. 6.
[274] ibid. p. 8.
[275] cf. Jaspers 1970
[276] cf. Heidegger 2008
[277] ALBEE, Edward. Marriage Play. New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1995. ISBN 0822214229, p. 38.
[278] cf. Camus 1975
[279] ALBEE, Edward. Marriage Play. New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1995. ISBN 0822214229, p. 38.

visible in their emotional bickering, but also the physical one, as when Gillian tries to block Jack from leaving:

> **GILLIAN**: *I'll* block you!
> **JACK**: *(Grabs her by the shoulders.)* Get out of my …
> **GILLIAN**: *(Fights to get his hands off of her.)* God … damn … you! *(NOTE: Now begins a serious physical fight, during which* GILLIAN *slaps him hard,* JACK *slaps her hard,* JACK *pushes her out of the way,* GILLIAN *grabs him from behind, they struggle, they fall on the floor, they roll over on top of one another,* JACK *rises,* GILLIAN *grabs him by the leg, dragging him down again,* GILLIAN *gets on top of him, pummels him,* JACK *strikes her,* GILLIAN *falls,* JACK *sits on her arm,* GILLIAN *knees him in the groin, they try to strangle each other, striking at each other, throwing each other around, trying to escape, trying to kill …)*
> **JACK**: I'm leaving you!
> **GILLIAN**: You will not leave me!
> **JACK**: It's over! Get it through your head!
> **GILLIAN**: You can't take a life together …
> **JACK**: When things are done they are done!
> **GILLIAN**: You stupid, vapid -- OW!
> **JACK**: OW!
> **GILLIAN**: I'll kill you rather than let you …[280]

As Jack's proclamations of his departure repeat, Gillian starts to question its validity and becomes afraid he might mean it. The detailed description of their fight and its emphasis on intensity suggests the two carry a deep sense of emotions towards each other. Gillian loves Jack and does not want him to leave. She is also afraid of loneliness and emptiness coming from divorce. Even though Gillian and Jack lost their knowledge of each other, they also lost the knowledge of themselves. Without each other, they would lose a sense of their identity, no matter how inauthentic it might be in itself.

Jack and Gillian's verbal and physical battles are also a tool to keep their marriage active and alive. They even praise each other for their performance and ability to retaliate. As Gillian says, "passion in a marriage never dies; it changes."[281] Thus, the passion in their marriage only needs to transform into a different expression. Gillian and Jack could have used the repetitive habit of threatening to leave as a starting point for reconstructing their marriage and reviving their romance. The threat of departure reminds them that they need an adequate reason to stay and continue their marriage.

[280] ALBEE, Edward. Marriage Play. New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1995. ISBN 0822214229, p. 25.
[281] ibid. p. 37.

It is clear though their marriage is dysfunctional and in a horrible moral state. Gillian is well aware of Jack's extramarital affairs and his proclamations he cannot prevent himself from cheating as it is his instinct:

> **JACK**: No! I *expect* it from me. I know what I am, how I am. You know I cheat; I know you know I cheat. It hurts me that you know it; it hurts me that when I'm off you think I'm cheating; it hurts me that you hurt, that you have enough experience of me to suspect, whether I am or not…hurt by probability.
> **GILLIAN**: *(Simple, nonrancorous truth)* Once is all it takes.
> **JACK**: And it means nothing! None of it means … it means nothing! None of it! What kind of animal *are* we!? We do what instinct tells us -- all of us. There *are* monogamous creatures -- a few birds, I think, one type of something-or-other, some type of … weasel, or something, but that's what instinct tells us when the mind and the appetite get together it's then time to do it, and with or to whatever is nearby and to be fancied.[282]

Jack labels his adulterous behavior as instinctive and hard to prevent, done only "to pass the time less emptily"[283] and to feel a "relief and comfort and company."[284] However, when Gillian accidentally mistakes a sexual encounter in Venice with some of her past lovers for a sexual encounter with Jack, he is devastated, saying, "I can't stand it when it's you."[285] Jack admits that as he cannot find satisfaction in his current state of marriage, he can no longer find it in his affairs, which leave them emptier than ever before:

> **JACK**: The joy is all gone from it. The relief, the pleasure of the relief, of the moment, all that's still there, but no joy. Joy is all gone. I do it by habit … reflex. Sometimes I look up from it and say, "Why am I here? Am I … am I doing this for pleasure? Or by rote. Rutting by rote?"[286]

Such statement suggests the only possible reform and achievement of joy and fulfillment lies in the internal reform of his being and rebuilding the love relationship with his wife, whom he still loves yet "sadly and deeply"[287] rather than looking for it outside of the marriage.

Each other's behavior hurts both Gillian and Jack. Jack even suggests that aside from his instinct, his affairs were caused by Gillian's behavior towards him. As Gillian asks Jack if he knew he was hurting her by having affairs, Jack responds, suggesting she

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[282] ALBEE, Edward. Marriage Play. New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1995. ISBN 0822214229, p. 35.
[283] ibid. p. 36.
[284] ibid. p. 36.
[285] ibid. p. 34.
[286] ibid. p. 35.
[287] ibid. p. 35.

was hurting him equally. They both expose how overlooked they feel in their relationship, and that is what alienates them:

> **JACK**: You never listen; you humor me; you think you know what everything means -- everything I say. I suppose I mean you think you've heard all the resonances …
> **GILLIAN**: No! *You* never listen! Your mind is always cocked for something else, something; you don't know what, but something. I see it in your eyes; I see you not listen.[288]

For their marriage to be revived, Gillian and Jack must begin to listen to each other and others honestly. Despite the state of the marriage, it still emotionally and socially validates both of them as they are afraid to lose everything they have had to uncertainty.

Gillian tries to find the meaning of her life in *The Book of Days* and her past physical encounters with her husband. The book provides her with reasons to stay while paying no attention and acting indifferent to her husband. However, Gillian tried for years to salvage their marriage but was unsuccessful. When Jack tells Gillian to be herself, she has been, and it brought her where she is now:

> **GILLIAN**: I've *been* trying that. No good. It leads to … boredom, middle-age panic, dalliance, threats of departure. Perhaps we should put in a turnstile -- make some money while we're at it. *(Gets no reaction.)* No? I've tried myself: thirty years. Don't you … recall? Is the mage not familiar to you? "Who *is* that lady reading when I come home from wherever." *(Terrible butch imitation.)* "Stopped off for a coupla beers with the guys; you know -- coupla laughs, coupla beers." *(Parenthical.)* … reeking of bizarre perfume, worn, we take it, by one of the more … advanced guys. *(Back to simple imitation of him.)* "Who *is* that lady? I see her everywhere -- answering the door when guests arrive, in my bed when I wake up in the morning, legs in the air or butt up when I'm in the mood. Who *is* she!? She's next to me when I fall asleep -- when I'm home, that is. Who can she be?" I've tried that, sweetie; it doesn't work. I've tried it for thirty years. Give me another suggestion.[289]

Gillian suggests that while she was trying to be herself and care after their marriage, Jack was the one who was indifferent and did not pay any attention to her so much that he did not even know who she was. Thus, she lost interest in trying to work

[288] ALBEE, Edward. Marriage Play. New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1995. ISBN 0822214229, p. 37.
[289] ibid. p. 17-18.

on their marriage, becoming indifferent as well, living in her world, the past, calling her husband a "foolish memory of the man"[290] she desperately wanted to want her.

Gillian and Jack entered their marriage with different expectations of themselves and each other. The couple often talks about not truly knowing each other before and after the marriage. When Jack tells Gillian he would not marry her if he knew who she is, Gillian replies that he would still marry her. There is a sense of inevitability in their relationship as no other different relationship would make them any happier. At the same time, Gillian and Jack admit they have not been themselves at the beginning of the relationship and wanted to be with the fake versions of themselves. They describe such situation when they talk about their first date:

> **GILLIAN**: Why *did* we ever date? – all I knew about you?
> **JACK**: Because *of* it, probably. There were four of us on that date.
> **GILLIAN**: Oh?
> **JACK**: You; me; and the people we pretended to be – were pretending to be. Crowded in that little car, jockeying and all.
> **GILLIAN**: I think we probably should have married *them* – the two we were pretending to be.
> **JACK**: Or, they should have married each other? Perhaps they did.[291]

Jack and Gillian did not expect their marriage to develop the way it did, from "honeymooners"[292] into "empty entities."[293] They are both internally preoccupied with the idea that they were too good for each other and could have been with someone better. Gillian says if she was "to be left alone,"[294] she should be left by someone she "shall *miss*"[295] and not by someone "whose value is so *little*."[296] It is visible that Gillian, despite her feelings, lost any sense of respect and value for her husband. As she puts it, she has been a good wife, better than a man like him would deserve:

> **GILLIAN**: *(Relentless.)* I have lived my life reasonably well. I have been a better wife than you have deserved. I have "hewn" to you far more than you have "hewn" to me. I have seen and denied seeing; I have comforted you when I thought you were despicable and unworthy of comfort. I have smiled

[290] ALBEE, Edward. Marriage Play. New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1995. ISBN 0822214229, p. 18.
[291] ibid. p. 32.
[292] ibid. p. 16.
[293] ibid. p. 24.
[294] ibid. p. 27.
[295] ibid. p. 27.
[296] ibid. p. 27.

> at your side when I thought you were a fool and deserving of abandonment.[297]

On the other hand, Jack does not defend himself by saying he was a dutiful husband as well as he was not and instead says he was a desirable man who "used to glow"[298]:

> **JACK**: I *did.* I was very special; dogs would fall in love with me, leave home, lie about my family's house and moon, wait for me; bicycles would appear, wheel themselves into yard … Oh, *God*, I have memories![299]

Even though his whole monologue is ridiculous, it is visible that he only concentrates on his persona and the superficial values he acquired from others' attention instead of concentrating on his actions strengthening his marriage with Gillian.

At the end of the play, Gillian and Jack ruminate about their further options in life and relationships. It seems Jack is going to leave Gillian. However, their thoughts are inconclusive, insinuating they will perhaps stay together. As Jack feels like he can start a new life over again, Gillian feels she has no such options even though she has "some half-life"[300] left in her and knows "what marriage is all *about* – and what it is *not* all about"[301] as she cannot have children anymore and thus "can't make a full marriage"[302] as she is "shaped"[303] to Jack. It suggests that Jack as a man has more options in his future life compared to Gillian, who seems to sacrifice the majority of her energy by accommodating Jack's needs while Jack was enjoying himself outside. The play's ending leaves it up to the audience to decide whether they will choose to change or repeat the cycle of their behavior.

[297] ALBEE, Edward. Marriage Play. New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1995. ISBN 0822214229, p. 27.
[298] ibid. p. 28.
[299] ibid. p. 29.
[300] ibid. p. 39.
[301] ibid. p. 39.
[302] ibid. p. 39.
[303] ibid. p. 39.

1.4 The Play About the Baby

The Play About the Baby is a two-act play published in 1998 about a young couple, Boy and Girl, who just had a child. The older couple, Man and Woman, came to their home to steal their newborn baby from them to cause them wounds to learn from.

The first act begins with Girl giving birth. After the birth, the couple talks about the pain of childbirth, which Boy compares to when he had his arm broken by a man from a group of guys he had stopped sneaking into a gig without buying a ticket. He adds that one of the guys would probably take advantage of him sexually. As Boy talks about his horrendous encounter, Girl comforts him by giving him her breast to drink the milk. At that point, Man enters, talking to the audience about numerous topics, especially how our feelings can create our reality. Meanwhile, Boy and Girl are having sex. After Man leaves the stage, Woman arrives, talking to Boy after his intercourse about sex until Girl calls him back, and Woman then talks to the audience about her relationship with Man and her failed attempt to watch a writer create his work. As she talks, Girl and Boy run naked across the stage. Then Man arrives, talks to Woman about Boy and Girl, and leaves. Boy and Girl discussed their first encounter when Girl was unconscious, and Boy followed her to the hospital. The young couple then talks about Gypsies as fortunetellers and stealers of babies. Girl and Boy keep noticing these mysterious strangers. Girl is terrified, while Boy begs for no suffering and loss to come upon his family. Man and Woman finally join Girl and Boy, talking to them and later saying they have come to take their baby away as Girl cannot find the baby, later confusing them about the whole existence of a baby.

The second act opens with Man talking to the audience about many topics and how good things happen to good people only in movies. Then he proceeds to repeat the last lines of the first act. Throughout the whole act, Woman and Man keep confusing Boy and Girl, persuading them they had no baby at all, switching the necessary details in their stories, and presenting the memories of Girl and Boy as mixed with their causing the young couple to be desperate and confused about reality. As they plead for the baby, Boy begs Man not to take their happiness away and give them more time which Man refuses. Woman brings on a stage a baby blanket which Man throws in the air and later

shows there is no baby in the blanket. Girl and Boy insist on having a baby, but after Man and Woman's continuous persuasion, they think their memories are false, and there is no baby. At that point, Man and Woman claim their aim to be fulfilled, to create wounds to learn from, and then they leave the stage, leaving Boy and Girl devastated on stage. Girl and Boy hope to have a baby later in life when they can face pain as they hear the baby crying in the distance.

1.4.1 Boy and Girl

Boy and Girl are quite a different couple compared to the previous three plays. As the name suggests, they are a young couple whose primary interest in each other is based on sexual chemistry and blind emotional bond rather than deep personal connection. Their dialogues seem filled with nonsensical topics, not because they would avoid certain topics but simply because their relationship is superficial, based on looks and sexual desire. The most important dialogues are spoken at the moments when the other character leaves the stage, signaling a significant gap in connection.[304] The couple avoids a vital aspect of life that Woman and Man aim to throw them into, pain, which they cause them by taking their baby from them, no matter if it is a real or imaginary baby.

Boy and Girl created a world according to their needs, without needing to face pain, loss, and especially reality, to stay innocent and happy. The couple is simply rejecting to face the cruel reality of the world and its hardships, only delaying that acceptance to later.[305] Such is visible in Boy's speech talking to himself:

> **BOY**: … I can take pain and loss and all the rest *later.* – I *think* I can, when it comes as natural as …sleep? But …now? We're *happy*; we love each other; I'm hard all the tine; we have a baby. We don't even *understand* each other yet! … Give us some time. *(Pause)* O.K.?[306]

The couple lives in a dreamlike state, rarely encountering pain, not knowing each other, and thus not understanding themselves or the other deeply. However, the acceptance of pain might be exactly what they need to make their relationship authentic

[304] cf. Jaspers 1970
[305] cf. Camus 1975
[306] ALBEE, Edward. The Play About the Baby. New York: Overlook Press, 2003. ISBN 1585673536, p. 38.

and establish self-awareness. However, Boy says they are "too young"[307] to be injured "beyond salvation,"[308] claiming he will protect his family from such threats of pain and loss, including stealing the baby.

However, Boy's brave determination to protect his family is the only brave action he is determined to do. Boy is childlike, self-centered, weak, and yet sexually perverted, reminding of a pubescent boy. He seems to be more afraid of pain than Girl. He disregards Girl's pain during childbirth and compares it to the time when he had his arm broken by a mysterious man. His childishness is also depicted by his repetitive feeding of Girl's breast milk, especially when confronted by something uncomfortable. When Boy talks about the incident during which the man broke his arm, Girl automatically attempts to comfort him by giving him her breast to feed on:

> **GIRL**: *(She kneels in front of him, baring a breast.)* Shhhhhhh.
> **BOY**: *(Softly; almost pleading)* He hurt me so.
> **GIRL**: Come toward *me.*
> **BOY**: *(His left hand on her breast, his right arm hanging limp; still on his knees)* … and the other one came toward me …
> **GIRL**: Here. Do this.
> **BOY**: *(His words becoming mumble as he fastens his mouth on her breast)* …[309]

Girl, compared to Boy presents herself as a motherly figure, and she is the one in the end who accepts Man and Woman's claims that their baby is nonexistent, deserving Woman's and Man's comment on her behavior as "What a wise girl"[310] and "What a brave girl."[311] However, her love and attraction to Boy are as superficial as his feelings toward her. Boy and Girl have a habit of interrupting each other talking to in order to comment on the physical attraction of the other, indicating that the physical chemistry they have between each other is more important than what the other is saying:

> **GIRL**: *(To* BOY*)* I love your body; I really do.
> **BOY**: *(Little wiggle of eyebrows)* I know; I know you do. *(Back to the previous tone)* … and I was walking back to the dorm, and I had my gym bag and my stuff and I was …
> **GIRL**: When you let me lick your armpits I almost faint, I really do.

[307] ALBEE, Edward. The Play About the Baby. New York: Overlook Press, 2003. ISBN 1585673536, p. 38.
[308] ibid. p. 38.
[309] ibid. p. 12-13.
[310] ibid. p. 92.
[311] ibid. p. 92.

BOY: It tickles.
GIRL: *(Smiles)* You start getting hard.
BOY: Yes; it tickles. *(Previous tone)* And I was in the alley between the gym and the science building and there were these guys I'd seen at the Hopeless Mother gig at the arena when I was taking tickets there? And I'd spotted them trying to sneak in and I'd called the guard on them …
GIRL: I like your left armpit better than the other.
BOY: Well, the other arm got broken; I was *telling* you.[312]

Evidently, their love for each other is only superficial, based on sexual desire and perhaps some false romantic ideas. The perverseness and yet blind romanticism suggest that communicating or knowing each other's personalities or thoughts is unnecessary for establishing a relationship. Boy describes such approach as he recalls how he followed Girl into a hospital, claiming he is her brother, staring at her while she was asleep with the possibility of her never waking up again:

BOY: … I always *aim* for you; you *are* a destination - my destination. I remember when I saw you for the first time—when I was biking along -- I saw you lying there on the stretcher, all unconscious -- I said -- well, to myself, more than anyone -- "That's the one; *that's* my destination."
GIRL *(She's heard this before.)*: That's sweet.
BOY: … and I said to myself, "When she wakes up -- if she wakes up -- I'm going to be there, and I'll be the first person she sees, and she'll love me; she'll want me and she'll love me; she's my destination."
GIRL: Yes; sweet. *(More interested)* Did you *really* tell them at the hospital you were my brother? You told them you were my brother and that's why they let you in? Let you sit by me?
BOY: Yes. I wanted you very much and being your brother made it even more intense -- made me hard.[313]
…
BOY: You could have had a stroke for all *I* knew; you could have been *dead*. But you were so beautiful -- so thrilling -- I assumed you weren't -- wouldn't be. I got off my bike -- didn't even look at it, left my clips on -- and saw you there and my heart sang, as the song sings. She won't be dead, I said to myself; she'll wake up and I'll be hard and she'll love me and she'll marry me.[314]

Accompanied by the prevailing sexual context of the play, it seems that he regards Girl as his destination predominantly from a sexual perspective, perhaps romantic as well. Boy's thought process suggests he has a naïve and perverted fantasy approach to reality and their relationship in the present. Boy followed Girl into the

[312] ALBEE, Edward. The Play About the Baby. New York: Overlook Press, 2003. ISBN 1585673536, p. 9-10.
[313] ibid. p. 28-29.
[314] ibid. p. 30-31.

hospital based on a desperate need to be with Girl assuming she will love him in the same manner as he fell in love with her, completely ignoring any need to know each other. Girl is equally submerged in fantasy as she does not find his story of falling in love with her while unconscious, claiming to be her brother to get to her, disturbing at all but rather romantic.

The relationship between Girl and Boy is a void, as is at the beginning of relationships where the attention is not put on the proper connection and communication but on the physical and superficial attributes of the individuals, hoping to achieve a particular dream, to satisfy themselves[315]. The void prevails as Boy and Girl are stuck in an illusion of perfect existence with sexual gratification.[316] Their behavior is sometimes reminiscent of the Garden of Eden, as they innocently run naked across the stage giggling and sweetly chasing each other without worries. Boy and Girl live in a "fairy tale"[317] in which they allow no pain to occur but know they will have to face it one day but not at the moment due to their youthfulness and desire for happiness. Nevertheless, they are in continuous expectation of this pain and specifically in the form of someone coming "to steal the baby"[318] as a tool to hurt them "beyond salvation."[319]

Man and Woman seem to be the characters destined to pull them into reality by causing them the most profound pain possible by taking the baby from them. Boy and Girl are predestined to leave their innocence behind by experiencing loss and thus create their own identity and self-awareness. Man and Woman seem to be their future selves, destroyed by the pain of life, cruelly trying to pull Girl and Boy into the cycle as well.

1.4.2 Man and Woman

Man and Woman are omnipresent characters with very different identities and relationship compared to Girl and Boy, and yet they seem to represent their future selves. Man and Woman embody individuals who lost their innocence, emotional

[315] cf. Kierkegaard 1992
[316] cf. Sartre 1993
[317] ALBEE, Edward. The Play About the Baby. New York: Overlook Press, 2003. ISBN 1585673536, p. 31.
[318] ibid. p. 36.
[319] ibid. p. 38.

vulnerability, and compassion. They represent the couple destroyed by time spent in the absurd world. However, Man and Woman do not accept such conditions as they do not seem to live authentic and honest lives.[320]

Man and Woman are a divorced couple who came to Boy and Girl to assist their encounter with pain. Even though they are on the stage together, they are mentally far away from each other similar to Gillian and Jack from *Marriage Play*. Woman is there only to be, help and assist Man during which she uncovers her past with Man as well as herself:

> **WOMAN**: I am a very good cook, among other things. I became that to please my husband, my then husband, who was in the habit of eating out, by which he meant … alone … without me. It occurred to me that if I … well, it was no good: alone, to him, meant specifically not with me, though with others, with lots of others. And the great feasts I'd prepare … would be for me. Alone. I became quite heavy, which I no longer am, and unmarried, which I am to this day. I trust he is still eating alone ... all by himself … facing a wall. *(Pause)* …[321]

As Woman reveals, she and her husband were remarkably disconnected, unable to share meals, and thus have genuine existential communication and time with each other.[322] Woman suggests that Man preferred to be alone or with his lovers, which caused her to gain weight out of frustration.

The detachment from their relationship caused them to divorce and stay on their own. Despite their divorce, their relationship has not improved, and the two did not manage to find themselves or understand each other. During one of their collective speeches, Woman tries to tell Man she was once desirable, wanted by a "young polo player"[323] and "the painter"[324] who committed suicide because she broke up with him. During her story, Man does not believe her, tells her to finish the story, and degrades her:

> **WOMAN**: …I *belonged* with the polo players and such, the healthy animals.
> **MAN**: *(*Back in. Sarcastic*)* Of course you did!
> **WOMAN**: I was young and fabulous.
> **MAN**: *(Ibid)* Yes Of course you were!

[320] cf. Camus 1975
[321] ALBEE, Edward. The Play About the Baby. New York: Overlook Press, 2003. ISBN 1585673536, p. 19.
[322] cf. Jaspers 1970
[323] ALBEE, Edward. The Play About the Baby. New York: Overlook Press, 2003. ISBN 1585673536, p. 42.
[324] ibid. p. 40.

> **WOMAN**: And I suddenly knew that I hadn't gained the days, but I'd merely lost the nights. Do you understand? *(Waits; he merely shakes his head.)* Where was I?
> **MAN**: Not gained the days but merely list the nights, or some such rubbish.[325]

Man completely disregards Woman's attempt to look wanted in the eyes of Man and continues to disrespect her. As it seems, Man failed to be authentically present in the marriage for Woman as she tried to hold it together. He looked for what he was missing, refused to communicate, and instead spent time outside. The only unifying element they share after their marriage is making Boy and Girl experience pain and accept life's absurdness and meaninglessness when "time's up."[326]

As Woman spends quite a significant amount of time talking about her or her relationship with Man, Man never talks about their past relationship and instead concentrates on the unreliability of memory, nature of loss, and instability of reality as if hiddenly teaching Boy and Girl, and perhaps the audience, about the hardships of life. During his first appearance, Man talks about how he can smell the young people here and how difficult it is to navigate a place where "you've not been before,"[327] perhaps indicating he has come here to navigate Girl and Boy to the place they have never been before, pain. Man also thinks of a party he was at, forgetting the identity of his mother, talking about how adult it is to forget the memories and create our reality:

> **MAN**: Ahhh! How things fade -- memories, photo-memories, sometimes, last, though, usually … *(Sad now)* All fades, all dissolves, and we are left with…invention; *re*invention … *(brisk)* well, first we *invent*, and then *re*invent. As with the past so the future -- reality, as they laughingly call it? Who said "Our reality -- or something -- is determined by our need? The greater need rules the game?" The reality I guess it was *me* …[328]

Man presents how the need for happiness and enjoyment brought Girl and Boy into creating their fantasy and foreshows how they will reinvent their reality after losing the child. Man presents memories and their power to create a current reality, so by manipulating the memories of Girl and Boy, he could persuade the couple that they never had a baby at all. He also implies that, in reality, good things do not happen to

[325] ALBEE, Edward. The Play About the Baby. New York: Overlook Press, 2003. ISBN 1585673536, p. 43-44.
[326] ALBEE, Edward. The Play About the Baby. New York: Overlook Press, 2003. ISBN 1585673536, p. 88.
[327] ibid. p. 13.
[328] ibid. p. 15.

good people, justifying why the happiness of Girl and Boy has to be destroyed in order to live in reality:

> **MAN**: I must tell you something here: I have a troubling sense of what should be -- rather than what is. It chokes me up at simpleminded movies -- where good things happen to good people? My throat clots, and I think I'm going to cry. Because I know it can never happen in what they call "real life"? Good things to good people and happy endings? That it's all … fantasy? Is that what allows me to believe? To weep in relief? If I saw it really happening -- all good things to all good people? -- would I turn away in horror? Yes, probably: because it could all … stop, could go away, be a single instant of glory, desperately cruel. We can't take glory because it shows us the abyss. That is why we cry at movies -- because it's safe to; it's all so … beautifully false.[329]

Man and Woman are determined to take the young couple's optimism, innocence, naivety so they would create an identity corresponding with their reality. Such aim is depicted after Man reveals there is no baby in a blanket he threw into the air, persuading the young couple they do not have a baby:

> **MAN**: I said: time's up. Wounds, children, wounds. If you have no wounds, how can you know you're alive? How can you know who you are? ...[330]

Man and Woman try to help Boy and Girl to become mature and accept life's painful reality Man and Woman have not accepted themselves. If they had, they would not have inflicted pain on others with pleasure and instead accepted their wounds and presented the reality to Boy and Girl with compassion and empathy. Thus, Man and Woman are the reality of the world themselves as they are.

Throughout the play, Man and Woman wait for the right time to confront Boy and Girl, leaving them time to enjoy their sexual joys while providing them with short encounters, signaling the upcoming pain.

Torturing Boy and Girl is intense and confusing as Man and Woman shift the reality into every possible angle, telling Boy and Girl everything they remember is a lie. They know all of Boy's and Girl's private secrets and experiences, mixing them into their memories, completely confusing Boy's and Girl's sense of self. They claim to be Gypsies as Girl came to them with the baby, Man claims to be Girl in the hospital, and Woman

[329] ALBEE, Edward. The Play About the Baby. New York: Overlook Press, 2003. ISBN 1585673536, p. 49-50.
[330] ibid. p. 89.

claims Boy is her lover, the painter, and the polo player. The combination of their memory scenarios and the abduction of their baby drives Boy and Girl close to insanity:

> **MAN**: *(To* BOY; *explaining)* I was one of the Gypsy boys who stopped you on your way back from the gym-gym.
> **WOMAN**: *(Nods happily)* And I was another.[331]
> …
> **MAN**: … He was only one of your lovers, no?
> **WOMAN**: Hm? Oh! Oh; right. *(To* BOY*)* You were a *splendid* lover, though … slow, patient, thoughtful, but always in command, and driving…
> **GIRL**: *(To* BOY; *still weeping)* You *know* her!
> **BOY**: *(Pounding his fists on his knees)* I do *not*! I do *not* know her!
> **MAN**: *(To* WOMAN*; but so* GIRL *will hear)* When *was* all this? When were you two lovers?
> **WOMAN**: *(With a toss of her hand)* Oh … last year, last month, last week, on his way to seeing her at the hospital, on his way from seeing her at the hospital –her and the baby. Earlier today.[332]
> …
> **MAN**: You came to *see* me; I was in the stretcher; I was unconscious…
> **WOMAN**: *(To* MAN; *of* BOY*)* … and he said to himself; "When he wakes up – *if* he wakes up – I'm going to be there…"
> **MAN**: ... and I'll be the first person he sees, and he'll love me; he'll want me and he'll live me; he's my destination.[333]
> …
> **MAN**: *(To* BOY) And I woke up, and you were hard.
> **GIRL**: It was me!
> **BOY**: It was her![334]

Their knowledge of the events suggests the two are the future selves of Boy and Girl, enjoying despising their younger counterparts, preparing them to recreate their reality by manipulating them to question everything they know. Man mentions they are Gypsies, men who broke Boy's arm but also Gypsies who steal babies, which Girl visited for fortunetelling. Their connection to Gypsies marks them as the ones who inflict pain, steal, and viciously rob Girl and Boy of their happiness, ultimately making them the messengers of suffering.

The breaking point comes when Man throws an empty baby blanket in the air and tries to persuade Boy and Girl that they have no baby, taking away their happiness and innocence. As the two transform into thinking they had no baby at all and the

[331] ALBEE, Edward. The Play About the Baby. New York: Overlook Press, 2003. ISBN 1585673536, p. 70.
[332] ibid. p. 74-75.
[333] ibid. p. 81.
[334] ibid. p. 81-82.

memories of their baby are nonexistent, Man and Woman proclaim they are done here, destroying Girl's and Boy's self-deception. The young couple is devastated, and their relationship is shaken. Meanwhile, Man and Woman are united through achieving their aim, leaving the scene hand in hand. Perhaps, Boy and Girl will learn from their wounds, accept the absurdity and harshness of reality, and strive for authentic existence joined in by Man and Woman.[335]

1.4.3 The Baby

The baby in *The Play About the Baby* is very different from children in the plays *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* and *American Dream*. Even though the baby is again used as a tool, it is used differently from the analyzed plays. From the beginning of the play, the baby is presented as something to be taken away to cause pain. Such is visible when Man is about to prove to Boy and Girl that the baby is not in the bundle. Boy, instead of worrying for the safety of the child, worries about what pain the loss of the baby will cause them:

> **GIRL**: Please. My baby.
> **MAN**: *(Pause; brisk now)* Well, time for the old blanket trick.
> **WOMAN**: Oh; right! *(Exiting right; to* BOY *and* GIRL*)* I'll be right back. *(Out)* I'll be right back.[336]
> …
> **BOY**: … Have you come to hurt us? Beyond salvation? Hurt us to the point that ... if you want to do this to us, hurt us so, ask why! Ask what we've done. I can take pain and loss and all the rest *later*; I think I can -- *we* can -- when it comes as natural as … sleep? But … now? Not now. We're happy; we love each other; I'm hard all the time; we have a baby; we don't even understand each other yet. So … give us some time. *(Pause)* Please?[337]

Man and Woman could have done many other things to hurt them profoundly, but Boy automatically connects that kind of pain with losing their baby. As the play continuously proposes the loss of the baby, it seems Boy expected the necessity of such pain to happen one day. When Man is about to expose the empty baby blanket, he describes what exactly he is taking from Boy and Girl:

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[335] cf. Camus 1975
[336] ALBEE, Edward. The Play About the Baby. New York: Overlook Press, 2003. ISBN 1585673536, p. 87.
[337] ibid. p. 87-88.

> **MAN**: *(To* BOY *and* GIRL*)* I know what I'm doing. *(Out again; in when necessary)* The old baby bundle -- treasure of treasures, light of our lives, purpose -- they say – of all the fucking, all the … well, all the everything. Now the really good part, the part we've all been waiting for! *(He takes the bundle, snaps it open, displays both sides; we see there is nothing there.)* Shazaam! You see? Nothing! No baby! Nothing! *(*GIRL *goes to blanket;* MAN *gives it to her; she searches it, cuddles it; weeps. To* GIRL*)* You see? Nothing.
> **BOY**: *(Pause)* You *have* decided then: you have decided to hurt us beyond salvation.
> **MAN**: *(Objective)* I said: time's up.
> **BOY**: No matter how young we are? No matter how …
> **WOMAN**: *(Gentle)* He said: time's up.[338]

He took the purpose of their lives that they put into their baby away and thus left Boy and Girl with nothing to live for. Boy suggests that such pain changes them for life, pointing out they are too young to face such pain, while Man proposes it does not matter as it is the time for them to face reality.

The fact that the baby is not described in any aspect suggests it was only a tool to hurt Boy and Girl. However, the baby was real and not illusionary, as in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*.[339] Girl truly gave birth to the baby and breastfed him. Woman and Man cruelly took away the baby as an act of service for the young couple to grow up and face the harsh reality of the absurd world.[340] At the end of the play, as Boy and Girl persuade themselves there is no baby at all, they realize they are not capable of having a baby at the moment but rather when they are strong enough to face the cruelty of life:

> **BOY**: *(Defeat)* No baby.
> **GIRL**: *(Begging)* No. Maybe later? When we're older … when we can take … terrible things happening? Not now.[341]

The state of mind Boy and Girl have been maintaining prevented them from achieving self-awareness, which can be achieved through the experience of loss and suffering. By avoiding suffering, they avoided the world itself. As Boy and Girl realize they cannot take the pain of the baby being taken away from them, the baby stops

[338] ALBEE, Edward. The Play About the Baby. New York: Overlook Press, 2003. ISBN 1585673536, p. 88-89.
[339] BOTTOMS, Stephen, ed. The Cambridge Companion to Edward Albee. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. ISBN 0521542332, p. 246.
[340] cf. Camus 1975
[341] ALBEE, Edward. The Play About the Baby. New York: Overlook Press, 2003. ISBN 1585673536, p. 94.

existing and thus alters reality based on Boy's and Girl's greatest needs.[342] The baby, for them, was their unifying principle bringing them together and making them happy without the baby living for itself.[343] As Man says, "*Everyone* wants his baby"[344] to give his life meaning, often seeking that meaning outside of himself and projecting his needs onto his baby to satisfy them.

After the loss, Girl and Boy keep hearing the baby's cries:

> **BOY**: *(More a wish than anything)* I hear it crying!
> **GIRL**: *(Please)* No; no, you don't.
> …
> **BOY**: *(Pause)* I hear it crying.
> **GIRL**: *(Pause; same tone as* BOY*)* I hear it too. I hear it crying too …[345]

The fact that Boy and Girl hear the baby crying even though they now believe it does not exist embodies that suffering is an inevitable part of our lives that can never be undone. As Man says, without wounds, we cannot know who we are and face the absurdness of our existence. Perhaps Girl and Boy will face themselves and the life in which they will be able to accept their wounds and build their life on authentic existence.

[342] cf. Sartre 1993
[343] cf. Levinas 1969
[344] ALBEE, Edward. The Play About the Baby. New York: Overlook Press, 2003. ISBN 1585673536, p. 55.
[345] ibid. p. 94.

5 Conclusion

Edward Albee was adopted into a family owning chain of vaudeville theatres, greatly impacting his work and literary style. Albee's career was full of up and downs, making it hard for him to match the success after releasing *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962), turning him to small theatres due to the specificity of his plays unsuitable for the general audience, until his subsequent major success of *Three Tall Women* (1990) and the revival of *A Delicate Balance* (1966). His latest works, The Play About the Baby (1998) and *The Goat, or Who is Sylvia?* (2000) renewed the energy of his previous successful plays and attracted attention due to Albee's original and unique style.

Edward Albee's style is complicated as it varies from play to play, from minimalistic realism to fairy tale symbolism. Albee is considered a highly experimental playwright, often overcoming theatrical conventions, often fusing reality and illusion, and life and play. His plays are often minimalistic and barely furnished, boxed in a place without a particular location or time to emphasize the message that are Albee's characters trying to convey. They are open-ended and full of repetitions, and fractured language, depicting characters' failure to use language effectively to achieve meaningful conversations. The themes of his plays concentrate on the absurdity of the human condition and address issues such as alienation, loss, and living semiconscious lives. Characters often surround themselves with illusions and lies and reject to make painful yet vital life decisions. His plays aim to prevent his audience from living semiconsciously and push them to reexamine their values and relationships and live authentically while accepting the absurdity of human existence.

Edward Albee's approach to playwrighting reflects both Theatre of the Absurd and the philosophy of existentialism. Theatre of the Absurd is heavily influenced by existential philosophy, emphasizing the absurdity of the human condition, lack of meaning, devaluation of language, and the danger of living half-conscious and unaware of the harsh reality of existence. The Theatre of the Absurd attempts to shock its audience by showing them how mechanical and unconscious human existence has become. The plays tend to have a circular structure with characters acting with no apparent motivation, placed in absurd and shocking situations, and engaged in

incoherent dialogues, reflecting how inauthentically human beings pass through their existence alienated and unable to communicate correctly. Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter are the two most prominent playwrights of the Theatre of the Absurd.

Samuel Beckett's plays include minimalistic unspecified sets, simple phrases, and repetitions while emphasizing solitude and human suffering. His characters and sets seem to represent everyone and everywhere. His play *Waiting for Godot* depicts the underlying issues of routines, habit, suffering, time, and the inevitability of death. Harold Pinter's plays often concern ritual structures, family, and power struggles, accompanied by inexpressive and unreliable characters who often refuse to communicate. Pinter's play *The Birthday Party* is full of confusion and implications, depicting a motif of interrogation, unreliability of memory, and guilt for unknown crimes.

Existentialism concentrates on similar issues as the Theatre of the Absurd, such as finitude, death, anguish, freedom, responsibility, and authenticity of human experience, however using rational devices and logical discourse and varying based on a specific philosopher. Søren Kierkegaard proclaimed that a being must make his life meaningful and face the feelings of dread and despair to live authentically. Martin Heidegger emphasized the importance of human realization and acceptance of our temporality in order to be able to live authentically. Gabriel Marcel suggests that human beings live as functions for society; however, they never cease to hope, which connects them to authentic existence. Emmanuel Levinas speaks of the Other, whom we desire to make like us, instead of accepting his otherness and thus growing. Sartre shows that the free and responsible individual must give his life a purpose to achieve authentic existence and not hide in illusions. Albert Camus describes human existence as absurd, meaningless, and full of suffering. He proposes that the individual has to accept those facts and enjoy his life regardless.

Karl Jaspers implies that human beings must engage in genuine communication to reach an authentic existence. Only through honest and challenging communication with the other who is in solitude, shows no superiority, and is ready to communicate transparently, can existential communication occur. In authentic communication, beings should not be afraid to communicate but be ready to be defeated and misunderstood,

as it is a natural risk in existential communication and a necessary step to growth. Existential communication is ruptured or impossible, especially when a being refuses to communicate to keep his opinions, dignity, and materialistic orientation or societal values. Society provides beings the space to meet and practice existential communication, but its values are incompatible with establishing authentic existence.

The analyzed plays of Edward Albee reflect all the aspects of the mentioned topics. *The American Dream* depicts the relationship between Mommy and Daddy, where Daddy lives only as a social function for the family, and Mommy, as well as Mrs. Barker, live to satisfy the needs of society to create a successful family. Mommy and Daddy are incapable of authentic communication and existence as they do not honestly know themselves. As their adoptive child is different from their liking, does not fulfill their quest for perfection, and does not fit into society interested in superficial values, the child is dismembered and later replaced by Young Man, who emptily yet perfectly fits their shallow expectations. Young Man and Grandma are the only characters close to authentic existence and communication as they are mostly transparent and self-aware of their identity and finitude. Ultimately, the characters Mommy and Daddy seem not to reform their lives and thus remain in inauthentic existence, repeating the same mistakes.

The main characters of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?,* Martha and George, created an illusion of a son not to face the harsh reality of them not having a baby, incapable of creating a purpose for their lives. George failed as a function and did not create Martha the life she dreamed of, while she did not attempt to create it for herself. Martha also failed to accept George's otherness who was satisfied with the life he had. George and Martha have a strong, affectionate relationship buried under mind games and unspoken pains. They were only refusing to communicate truthfully. Their illusionary child is only a tool not to face the absurdness of the world and their existence, fulfilling their failed dreams. Honey and Nick based their relationship on the social benefits coming from marriage. They lack genuine affection and are incapable of authentic communication out of politeness. However, in the end, all the characters desire to pursue authentic communication and existence.

Marriage Play depicts the marriage of Gillian and Jack, where Jack constantly threatens to leave while Gillian chooses to stay in the past of their relationship. While Gillian chooses to live the past and not act to revive their marriage, Jack is incapable of actually leaving, which he believes would give his life meaning. None of the characters realize that the fulfillment and authenticity they seek to resides in their relationship and a choice to work on it. Instead, Gillian and Jack refuse to participate in existential communication and mock each other. Finally, Gillian seems to recognize she does want to stay in a relationship out of love, and Jack seems to realize the difficulty of obtaining happiness, and authenticity is as hard on the inside of the relationship as the absurd outside world. Despite the realization, they seem to be stuck on their persisting path without the willingness to choose to genuinely communicate and reach authentic existence despite craving it.

The Play About the Baby depicts Boy and Girl living in an illusion of a world without pain and suffering. Despite knowing that encountering the absurd and cruel world is inevitable, they attempt to delay it, living a perfect life with their baby, which brings them happiness. The relationship between Girl and Boy is highly superficial, built on a fantasy of love and sexual desire which lacks any signs of authentic communication or existence. Man and Woman are the characters who realize they live in an absurd world but do not seem to pursue authentic life and instead deal with the harsh reality by crashing the dreamlike reality for Boy and Girl. Even though Man and Woman claim to steal their child and confuse their sense of reality to bring them closer to an authentic life, they seem to do so with the enjoyment of pain placed upon the young couple. Ultimately, all the characters seem to seek authentic existence and accept the suffering accompanying life in the absurd world.

6 Resumé

Edward Albee byl adoptován do rodiny, která vlastnila síť vaudevillových divadel, což výrazně ovlivnilo jeho tvorbu a literární styl. Kariéra Albeeho byla plná vzestupů a pádů. Po uvedení hry *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962), která se těšila obrovskému úspěchu, jemuž se nicméně jeho další hry kvůli své přílišné specifičnosti nedokázaly vyrovnat, byl Albee donucen obrátit svou tvorbu na malá divadla, což se změnilo až velkým úspěchem *Three Tall Women* (1990) a znovuuvedení hry *A Delicate Balance* (1966). Jeho poslední díla *The Play About the Baby* (1998) a *The Goat, or Who is Sylvia?* (2000) navrátila energii jeho předchozím úspěšným hrám a přitáhla si pozornost diváků díky autorovu originálnímu a jedinečnému stylu.

Styl Edwarda Albeeho je nelehké vystihnout, protože se v jednotlivých hrách liší, a to od minimalistického realismu až po pohádkový symbolismus. Albee je považován za velmi experimentálního dramatika, který překonává divadelní konvence, často spojuje realitu a iluzi nebo život a hru. Jeho hry jsou často minimalistické a sotva nábytkově zařízené, uzavřené do prostoru nereprezentující konkrétní místo nebo čas, aby vynikla zpráva, kterou se jeho postavy snaží předat. Jeho hry mívají otevřený konec a jsou plné opakování a roztříštěného jazyka, který zobrazuje neschopnost postav efektivně používat komunikaci k dosažení smysluplného rozhovoru. Témata jeho her se soustřeďují na absurditu lidské existence a zabývají se otázkami, jako je odcizení, ztráta a život v polospánku. Postavy se často obklopují iluzemi a lží a odmítají činit bolestivá, ale v životě zásadní rozhodnutí. Cílem jeho her je zabránit divákům žít v polovědomí a přimět je, aby přehodnotili své hodnoty a vztahy, začali žít autenticky a zároveň přijali absurditu lidské existence.

Přístup Edwarda Albeeho k dramatické činnosti odráží charakteristiku tvorby absurdního dramatu i filozofie existencialismu. Absurdní divadlo bylo silně ovlivněno existenciální filozofií, která zdůrazňovala absurditu lidské existence, ztrátu smyslu, znehodnocení jazyka, nebezpečí prožití života v polospánku a neuvědomování si absurdní reality existence. Absurdní drama se snaží šokovat své diváky tím, že jim ukazuje, jak mechanická a nevědomá se stala jejich lidská existence. Hry mají zpravidla cyklickou strukturu, postavy jednají bez zjevné motivace, jsou postaveny do absurdních

a šokujících situací a vedou nesouvislé dialogy, jež odrážejí, jak neautenticky proplouvají lidé svou existencí, odcizeni a neschopni upřímně komunikovat. Samuel Beckett a Harold Pinter jsou dva nejvýznamnější dramatici absurdního divadla.

Hry Samuela Becketta zdůrazňují samotu a lidské utrpení a jsou typické svými minimalistickými a neurčitými prostory, svými dialogy, jež jsou plné jednoduchých frází a opakování. Postavy a prostor mají reprezentovat všechny a všechno. Jeho hra *Waiting for Godot* se soustředí na motivy stereotypu, zvyku, utrpení, času a nevyhnutelnosti smrti. Hry Harolda Pintera se často zabývají tématy přechodových rituálů, rodiny a boje o moc a jsou doprovázené nemluvnými a nespolehlivými postavami, které často odmítají komunikovat. Pinterova hra *The Birthday Party* je naopak plná zmatení a naznačovaných důsledků jednání, což je zjevné na motivech hry, jako je výslech, nespolehlivost paměti a vina za nevědomé zločiny.

Existencialismus se soustředí na podobná témata jako absurdní drama. Jsou jimi například konečnost, smrt, úzkost, svoboda, odpovědnost a autenticita lidské zkušenosti. Existencialismus se ale danými tématy zabývá s využitím racionálních prostředků a logického diskurzu a liší se v závislosti na konkrétním filozofovi. Søren Kierkegaard tvrdil, že pouze samostatným rozhodnutím může bytost dát svému životu smysl, ale zároveň musí čelit pocitům strachu a zoufalství, jež jsou spjaté s autentickým životem. Martin Heidegger zdůrazňoval důležitost uvědomění si naší dočasnosti a jejího přijetí, protože až tehdy jsme schopni žít autenticky. Gabriel Marcel naznačuje, že člověk funguje ve společnosti pouze jako funkce, nikdy však nepřestává doufat, což ho spojuje s autentickou existencí. Emmanuel Levinas hovoří o Druhém, kterého chceme učinit nám podobným, místo abychom jeho jinakost přijali, a tím se vyvíjeli jako osobnost. Jean-Paul Sartre ukazuje, že člověk je svobodný a odpovědný jedinec, který jako jediný může dát svému životu smysl, aby dosáhl autentické existence, a který se nesmí skrývat v iluzích. Albert Camus popisuje lidskou existenci jako absurdní, nesmyslnou a plnou utrpení. Navrhuje ale, že jedinec musí tyto skutečnosti přijmout a užívat si svého života bez ohledu na ně.

Karl Jaspers naznačuje, že lidské bytosti musí praktikovat existenciální komunikaci, aby dosáhly autentické existence. K existenciální komunikaci může dojít

pouze prostřednictvím upřímné a podnětné komunikace s druhým, který je v osamění, nevyjadřuje známky nadřazenosti a zároveň je připraven upřímně komunikovat. V autentické komunikaci by se bytosti neměly bát promluvit, ale naopak by měly být připraveny narazit na prohru svých názorů a nepochopení druhým, protože to je v existenciální komunikaci přirozené riziko a nezbytný krok k růstu bytosti. Existenciální komunikace je částečně přerušena nebo naprosto znemožněna zejména tehdy, když bytost odmítá komunikovat, aby si zachovala své názory, důstojnost a materialistické hodnoty nebo společenské přesvědčení. Společnost sice poskytuje bytostem prostor pro setkávání a vytváření existenciální komunikace, ale její hodnoty jsou neslučitelné s uskutečňováním autentické existence.

Analyzované hry Edwarda Albeeho odrážejí velké množství aspektů uvedených směrů. Hra *The American Dream* zobrazuje vztah mezi postavami Mommy a Daddy, které žijí pouze pro potřeby společnosti. Daddy je ve svém životě a pro domácnost důležitý pouze kvůli společenské funkci a zajištění rodiny. Mommy, stejně jako Mrs. Barker, žije tak, aby uspokojila potřeby společnosti a vybudovala navenek obraz úspěšné rodiny. Mommy a Daddy nejsou schopni upřímné komunikace ani autentické existence, protože neznají sami sebe ani své touhy. Jejich adoptivní dítě je zohaveno, protože se liší od jejich představ dokonalosti, a tím nezapadá ani do představ společnosti, která se zajímá o povrchní hodnoty. Později je dítě nahrazeno Young Man, který dokonale odpovídá jejich povrchním očekáváním a nabízí jim krásnou prázdnotu. Young Man a Grandma jsou jediné postavy hry, jež se přibližují upřímné komunikaci a autentické existenci, protože jsou povětšinou upřímní a jsou si vědomi své identity a konečnosti. Ke konci hry je zřejmé, že postavy Mommy a Daddy svůj život nezmění, a tudíž setrvají ve své neautentické existenci a budou opakovat stejné chyby jako s předchozím dítětem.

Hlavní postavy hry *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, Martha a George, si ve svém životě stvořili iluzi toho, že mají syna, aby nemuseli čelit kruté realitě nemožnosti počít dítě. Zároveň nebyli schopni vytvořit si opravdový smysl svého života. George selhal ve své funkci uskutečnit Martě život, o jakém snila, a zároveň se ho ani ona nepokusila zformovat sama pro sebe. Martha také nedokázala přijmout Georgeovu jinakost a jeho spokojenost se životem, který si pro sebe vybudoval. Mezi Georgem a Marthou je silný, láskyplný vztah, který je ale pohřbený pod urážkami a nevyřčenými bolestmi. Co jim v

posilování jejich vztahu brání, je pouze odmítání upřímně a otevřeně komunikovat. Jejich vymyšlené dítě je jen nástrojem, jak vzdorovat realitě jejich nenaplněných snů a absurdnosti a nesmyslnosti své existence a okolního světa. Honey a Nick založili svůj vztah na společenských výhodách manželství, a tudíž jim chybí opravdový partnerský cit a vztah. Nejsou schopni ani upřímné komunikace, ve které jim brání společenský odstup a slušnost. Na konci hry však všechny postavy touží po vzájemné komunikaci a autentické existenci a vypadá to, že o ni budou i usilovat ve svém dalším počínání.

Hra *Marriage Play* zobrazuje manželství Gillian a Jacka, který Gillian neustále vyhrožuje, že ji opustí, zatímco Gillian zůstává zasněná v minulosti jejich vztahu. Gillian se rozhodla soustředit na jejich manželskou minulost místo toho, aby se snažila oživit a zachránit jejich manželství. Jack není schopen uskutečnit kroky k tomu, aby Gillian skutečně opustil, což by podle něho dalo jeho životu smysl. Ani jedna z postav si neuvědomuje, že naplnění a autenticita jejich života, po které touží, se ukrývá v jejich vztahu a rozhodnutí na něm pracovat. Místo obnovování svého manželství se Gillian a Jack odmítají podílet na existenciální komunikaci a vzájemně se zesměšňují a ponižují. Koncem hry si ale Gillian uvědomuje svou lásku a touhu ve vztahu zůstat, zatímco Jack uznává, že získat opravdovost a naplnění v jeho existujícím vztahu je stejně tak obtížné jako v okolním absurdním světě. Navzdory tomuto uvědomění se ale zdá, že manželský pár stále zůstává na stejném místě a Gillian a Jack nejsou ochotni rozhodnout se pracovat na upřímné komunikaci a snažit se o dosáhnutí autentické existence, přestože po ní touží.

The Play About the Baby ukazuje vztah Boy a Girl, kteří žijí v iluzi světa bez bolesti a utrpení. Přestože vědí, že je nevyhnutelně čeká setkání s absurdním a krutým světem, snaží se tento střet oddálit. Dokonalý a bezbolestný život je jim poskytnut prostřednictvím jejich dítěte, které jim přináší štěstí. Vztah mezi Girl a Boy je velmi povrchní a postrádá jakékoliv známky upřímné komunikace či autentické existence, protože je postavený na romantické představě lásky a sexuální touhy. Man a Woman jsou postavy, které si uvědomují tvrdou realitu světa a jeho absurditu, ale stejně jako Boy a Girl spolu upřímně a otevřeně nekomunikují a ani se zdánlivě nepřibližují autentické existenci. Krutou realitou světa vnitřně nepřijali a vyrovnávají se s ní pomocí zničení snového světa Boy a Girl. Přestože Man a Woman tvrdí, že mladému páru odcizí

potomka a zboří jejich realitu s úmyslem jim zpřístupnit reálný svět, a tedy i autentickou existenci, zdá se, že tak činí spíše s potěšením z bolesti, kterou Boy a Girl přivodí. Na konci hry se ale zdá, že jsou všechny postavy odhodlány k hledání autentické existence a přijímání utrpení provázející život v absurdním světě.

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