



CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION



INTRODUCTION

ALBEE AND AMERICAN EXPERIMENTALISM

Dramatic experimentation during the twentieth century has had a different function within the American context than within that of European theatre. In Europe, experimentation with dramatic form has assumed a variety of distinctive characteristics that are associated with artistic movements such as futurism, symbolism, expressionism, surrealism, and absurdism. American dramatists have not been equally systematic about their experimentation. American drama of this century has evolved out of a pattern of experimentation which has placed emphasis on the individual character functioning within social patterns and rhythms of life that are peculiar to America. At times American dramatists have paralleled or borrowed European experimental models in their experimentation with character, but often as not American dramatists have been unresponsive to these European models.

Edward Albee, the American dramatist whose first play The Zoo Story opened in 1959, has written plays

that conform to the observable pattern of American Experimentation with character. Albee's plays, produced between 1959 and 1980, are the subject of this dissertation; the most dramatically successful of them use experimental techniques in order to reveal aspects of character that could not be revealed by a realism of detail that remains on the observable surface. While some of Albee's plays incorporate European models in patterns of experimentation with character and dramatic structure, all of the plays succeed in portraying their main characters as complex, motivated, and aspiring individuals.

Throughout the history of modern American drama, plays that are experimental have continued to be expressive of life in America because they focus on the individual. Characters in American plays are not abstracted as much as they are in many European experimental plays. Often in American drama, experimentation with form is undertaken in order to present a more complex picture of the characters as individuals than could be done with a less experimental structure. In American drama, experimentation is seldom an end in itself; rather, the experimental tech-

nique evolves out of the dramatist's search for a means expressive of the complexity and humanity of his characters.

The defining characteristics of the American drama-- particularly its focus on the individuality of its characters and its realistic portrayal of characters-- developed slowly. In the early nineteenth century, it was not character as much as setting that distinguished native American drama from the popular European, especially British, imports. During the last two decades of the nineteenth century, playwrights such as James A. Herne and Clyde Fitch began to write dramas that used American settings. Their characters had some easily recognizable characteristics. They were often simple people, pioneers whose qualities of resilience, stamina, and sense of fair play allowed them to survive.

Early in the twentieth century, the transitional dramatist William Vaughn Moody wrote two plays that contributed significantly to the kinds of characters his nineteenth century predecessors had begun to create for the American stage. In Moody's work, characters are grappling with the problems of individual self-

determination. The dramatic climaxes of his plays are striking resolutions by individual character of the problem of identity. Moody also advanced the use of American settings for his plays; he placed his characters in scenic environments that both correspond to and explain their psychological turmoil. In this regard, he prepared the way for Eugene O'Neill.

Throughout his long career, which stretches from 1916 to 1955, Eugene O'Neill developed characters and settings that reflected the increasingly distinctive aspirations of the American people. Usually, the settings in O'Neill's plays exteriorize his characters' psychological natures. The action of his plays most often involves a journey of self-discovery in which character and setting function complementarily. These highly controlled characteristics of O'Neill's plays convey the impression that he is an experimental dramatist. However, one must distinguish between his early and his latest plays. In late plays such as A Long Day's Journey Into Night, experimental techniques evident in and controlling the form of early plays such as The Hairy Ape or The Emperor Jones are subsumed in the fusion of form and content. However, even in the early

plays O'Neill's success in incorporating experimental techniques of dramatic exposition and character development is always evident. He undertook to reveal the complex individuality of his protagonist without regard for that protagonist's worldly position.

A clear example of how O'Neill interpreted the individual character through the use of experimental techniques is to be seen in The Hairy Ape (1921).¹ The play shows the development of the character Yank, a stoker on a ship. Initially, Yank is satisfied with the feeling of elemental power his Job of feeding coal into the ship's furnace gives him. One day, Yank is observed by a wealthy young woman whose father owns the ship on which he works. She finds Yank to be sweaty and uncouth and calls him a "filthy beast".² The remainder of the play involves Yank's search for a new identity, since his earlier self-pride has been shattered by the painful understanding that other people view his as no more than a "hairy ape."

1- Engene O'Neill, The Hairy Ape, In Nine Plays (New York : Modern Library, 1954) pp. 37.38

2- Ibid, p- 38

There are realistic and nonrealistic scenes in The Hairy Ape. The nonrealistic scenes are used by O'Neill to show the process by which Yank gropes for a new sense of identity. One of them involves Yank's confrontation with wealthy members of society in New York City. All of Yank's brute power is unable to disturb these people. He charges like a bull into one of the wealthy gentlemen, but the man is unhurt and seemingly ignorant of Yank's existence. No one notices Yank. In this scene, O'Neill makes it clear that Yank's role as a stoker is his only important asset. So far as wealthy people are concerned, he does not exist. This stylized scene symbolizes Yank's inability to "belong" anywhere in civilization.

Another stylized scene in The Hairy Ape occurs when Yank's friends, the other stokers, act as a chorus by reinforcing single words such as "think" and "love" in Yank's speech of outrage and animal hurt immediately after he is insulated by the young woman on board ship; there is a similarity between this scene in the play and the German Expressionist plays Humanity by Walter Hasenclever and Man and the

Masses by Ernst Toller.³ Other plays by Eugene O'Neill written in the 1920s also show the influence of European experimental dramatic techniques on their forms. Despite this similarity to European experimental dramas of the same time period, O'Neill's dramatic objective was to present his characters as complex and aspiring individuals.

Eugene O'Neill is one of several American playwrights to incorporate European experimental dramatic techniques in his form. Such experimentation was also characteristic of the work of Elmer Rice, another important American playwright of the 1920s. Elmer Rice's The Adding Machine is a nonrealistic drama which was produced in a striking expressionistic setting by the Theatre Guild in 1923. Rice's play shows the effect of an urban environment on an American citizen, but, unlike O'Neill in The Hairy Ape, Rice builds few realistic environmental details into the work to account for or to motivate his protagonist's abnormal psychology. Furthermore, while O'Neill's vision of democratic society vested his common man (Yank)

3- Walter Sokel, ed-An Anthology of German Expressionist Drama (Garden City, NY : Anchor, 1963) pp 172 - 201.

with nobility, Rice's common man (Mr. Zero) shrinks from the task of upholding democratic principles. Mr. Zero is a character of less than heroic dimensions. His murder of his employer, for example, is not treated as an act of premeditation and desperation. Rather, it is a passionless event, equal in Zero's mind to going to work or visiting with friends.

Mr. Zero is amoral; he does not possess a tortured consciousness as does Yank or as does, for example, the protagonist of the German Expressionist play From Morn 'till Midnight.⁴ Rice has created an antihero who is close to the antiheroes of absurdist drama, for Mr. Zero has exiled himself from all cultural, intellectual, moral, and emotional ties. The extremity of Rice's vision and his relentless degradation of Mr. Zero indicates that in this play he is making use of nonrealistic dramatic styles for a pedagogic intent. Apparently, Rice wished to warn his audience of the importance of maintaining one's individuality and moral integrity.⁵ While in this respect it would

4- R. C. Roby & B. Wanov, editors, *Introduction to Drama* (New York, 1962)

5- Horst Frenz, *American Playwrights on Drama* (New York : Hill and Wang, 1965) p. 133

seem that Rice was also interested, as was O'Neill, in praising the responsible and self-aware individual. It is evident that both of these playwrights chose different dramatic means to demonstrate their praise.

By contrasting the uses Rice and O'Neill made of European experimental techniques during the 1920s, it can be seen that major American dramatists have remained highly individualistic in their approaches to form. O'Neill and Rice each used these techniques for their own dramatic ends and, unlike their European counterparts, did not associate themselves with a particular stylistic school.

By the early years of the 1930s, the depressed economic situation of the country and its sociological effects were enough to provide stimulation in one form or another for many American playwrights of that era. During the 1930s, some playwrights, such as William Saroyan and Thornton Wilder, wrote plays that were intended to convey a sense of optimism; others such as Clifford Odets and Elmer Rice wrote realistic dramas that portrayed how dispirited the American people were in the 1930s. Maxwell Anderson, on the other hand, tried to infuse the depressed American situa-

tion with poetry. Each playwright was writing from a context of social consciousness in which an effort was being made to bring greater respect to the individual, regardless of his or her sex, country or origin, level of education, or religion. While the characteristics that individualized the style of each of the playwrights writing during the 1930s were used to give expressive form to democratic sentiments, each playwright did, nonetheless, employ experimental techniques in their dramas. Wilder was experimenting with temporal abbreviation as early as The Long Christmas Dinner and Pullman Car Hiawatha, both from 1931. Saroyan experimented with character spontaneity in his 1939 plays My Heart's in the Highlands and the Time of Your Life. Odets experimented with naturalism in his play Awake and Sing! which was written in 1933 and produced in 1935. Anderson experimented with language in his romantic plays of the 1930s. Elizabeth the Queen (1930), Winterset (1935), and High Tor (1937). The experimentation in which each of these playwrights was engaged did not, however have its primary source in European drama.

An impetus for experimentation was given by the

Federal Theatre. Indeed, Cheryl D. Swiss describes the Federal Theatre Project as a vast experiment.⁶ The Federal Theatre, a project of the Works progress Administration, came into existence on 6 May 1935 under President Roosevelt, as an attempt to wrest the country from the grips of the Depression. The Federal Theatre Project produced many experimental plays and, on occasion, classical plays in experimental settings. The most successful of these experimental plays were the well-attended Federal Theatre "Living Newspaper" productions such as Triple-A Plowed Under and One Third of Nation which interpreted significant social issues of the day.

The Living Newspapers' experiments with dramatic form were pragmatic in intent, but they also excelled as dramas. However, they were anonymously authored productions and are seldom revived.

Insofar as the Broadway theatre is concerned, it is the work of the playwright Clifford Odets, especially his Awake and Sing !, which is most remembered from the mid-1930s. Awake and Sing ! opened, along with

6- Cheryl D. Swiss - An Experiment in Form (Madison, 1982)

the more polemical Odets play Waiting for Lefty, in a Group Theatre production in 1935. The play realistically portrays individuals caught living in a metropolis undercut by economic instability. In this play, Odets shows the same kind of concern with the individual seen earlier in the plays of Eugene O'Neill. However, Odets' vision differs in some important ways. In Awake and Sing ! the boundaries of observable reality are not extended to the degree they are in O'Neill's plays of the 1920s, particularly in The Hairy Ape. Nor is the scenic environment made to complement the characters' attributes as it does in the plays of William Vaughn Moody. Rather, Odets experimented with naturalism. In his play, reality is sufficiently intrusive to force his characters into sharp, survival maintaining language and actions. Heroism becomes difficult in Awake and Sing ! because existence is too pressing and complex to allow any one unequivocal action to emerge.

In Awake and Sing !, Odets experimented with an individualized dramatic form, one capable of reflecting the national state of social upheaval. Odets increased the range of experimentation previously evident in American drama by creating an environ-

ment for his characters that was hostile to their happiness and well-being. The characters of his dramas are oppressed individuals who find economic problems and urban lifestyles too much to tolerate psychologically. Odets' new oppressed character becomes an important addition to the American stage. He emerges again in the drama of the 1940s and can also be found in as recent a drama as Edward Albee's The Zoo Story, which was produced in 1959.

While the dramatic structure of Lillian Hellman's plays is well-made in nature, her work is experimental in its attempt to create new characters for the stage. In her nonpolemical plays, Hellman created characters with wealthy backgrounds whose proper manners hide the passions of lust and greed. There is a sense of sexual repression in her outwardly conforming characters. Sexual passion is the motivation for the action in *The Children's Hour* (1934) and *The Autumn Garden* (1951). Nearly all of Hellman's plays feature a protagonist who achieves his or her ambitions because of worldly and sophisticated character attributes. Hellman's work, with its mingling of morally and socially traditional with worldly character types

within a traditional dramatic structure, is transitional.

Similarly transitional is Michael Gazzo's play A Hatful of Rain (1955). The play portrays how members of an economically deprived class survive in a metropolitan environment in America. Johnny, the protagonist, is a drug addict. The blame for this antisocial habit is placed on the pace and anonymity of modern life, and not on Johnny. Even the drug pushers are portrayed with sympathy. Gazzo's tempering of realistically harsh situations in his play puts a romantic gloss over the action. However, the playwright has attempted to portray complex and sophisticated characters caught in a web of events over which they have no control.

The most experimental of the dramatists working in the 1940s was Thornton Wilder. Wilder did not concentrate on portraying tough, worldly characters but was more interested in portraying universal human situations. In Our Town (1938) and The Skin of Our Teeth (1942), Wilder began with distinctively American settings and realistic characters. Nonetheless, these plays have universal dimensions. They disavow specificity of place and time. Our Town takes

place in Grover's Corners, New Hampshire, but the earnest characters and the poignant dramatic action that portrays a courtship, a wedding, childbirth, and a death could have happened in any small village in America. In The Skin of Our Teeth, Mr. and Mrs. Anthrobus experience a sequence of cataclysmic events such as a flood, a frost, and a war; all of these events have threatened and continue to threaten the whole of the human race.

In Our Town, Wilder concentrated on the individuality of his characters in their states of simplest emotion and within family units. While he continued the work of Eugene O'Neill in such an early play as The Hairy Ape by treating the individual with respect, Wilder's experimentation with dramatic form is unique; it has had no European or American counterpart.

Pule Green continued the tradition of experimentation with the first of his symphonic dramas, The Lost Colony (1937). Green, like Wilder, began with American characters in his plays but quickly gave them universal significance. He did so, however, in his own way, for he combined various modes of presentation in his symphonic dramas. In The Lost Colony, for ex-

ample, he dramatized the establishment of the Jamestown Colony by combining dance, music, and procession with drama. His pageant emphasizes the experimental structure of the play and the celebratory nature of humankind. Less emphasis on the individual is placed in Green's symphonic dramas than in the universal dramas of Wilder. However, their experimentalism is obvious.

Both William Saroyan in his The Time of Your Life (1939) and Arthur Miller in his Death of a Salesman (1949) experimented with dramatic form. These playwrights, however, did not attempt to write dramas that seemed to be universal. Rather, their plays tend to portray the worldly American characters seen in Hellman's and Gazzo's plays reacting to particularly American social forces.

William Saroyan's The Time of Your Life is an experimental drama where the characters are caught at moments of decision in life to which they react with spontaneity. The play depicts the friendships and hostilities among persons frequenting a bar in San Francisco. These characters unite against an overly harsh policeman who seems to them to represent the force

of evil. Because of Saroyan's experimental technique and the complexity of the forces working on his characters, large-city alliances in modern America are portrayed in such a way as to make it appear justifiable for the characters to challenge traditional concepts of right and wrong. Saroyan's play is not as strikingly original as are the dramas of Thornton Wilder, but it shows the transition in the American drama to a combination of complex characters and experimental form.

A more important contribution to this newly evolving American experimental drama is Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman. In this play, the protagonist Willy Loman believes absolutely in the materialistic measure of success which Miller suggests is the basis of the modern and malformed "American Dream." At the end of his working life, Willy Loman's tenacious belief in material success destroys his will to live. To demonstrate the collapse of his protagonist, Miller had recourse to expressionistic and flashback episodes during the play.

The stage presence of a ghost figure who is the exteriorization of a hallucination of Willy's, as well as many memory scenes in the play during which Willy

seems unable to distinguish the past from the present, were used by Miller to dramatize the unreality "inside Willy Loman's head".⁷ Miller's fusion of Willy's inability to distinguish between truth and falsehood with his increasing inability to live on the plane of observable reality puts the play within the tradition of O'Neill, in that nonrealistic episodes are used to reveal the inner nature of the protagonist so that his individuality can become apparent. As well, Miller's Willy Loman in Death of a Salesman combines a preoccupation with the economic and social conditions of the 1930s that was evident in Odet's plays with a use of European nonrealistic dramatic techniques intended to portray character psychology. In addition, Miller chose to emphasize psychology. The characters of all of his plays are guilt-ridden, tortured, driven and fallible.

A similar preoccupation with character psychology, although expressed by a far different method of experimentation with dramatic form, is also evident in the plays of Tennessee Williams. The characters of Williams' plays have guilts and doubts which make

7- Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, (Viking, New York, 1957). P. 23

them feel different from other people. They live on the outskirts of established American social systems. As well, the Williams character is usually stigmatized by some kind of asocial behaviour, sexual orientation, or addiction. Tennessee Williams was able to portray worldly characters in truly theatrical language. He exaggerated the psychological attributes of his characters and placed them within an expressive scenic context. Experimental methods were used by Williams, as they were used by O'Neill and Miller, to expose the interior, troubled consciousness of the protagonist, Williams' characters are unique in that they are searching for a way to live. Unlike Hellman's characters or Gazzo's all of whom have a lingering memory of a traditional social and moral code, Williams' characters live within a sensually verifiable and hence highly personal reality. His characters are portrayed at moments of sexual crisis which are usually powerful and overwhelming enough to destroy the character. The harshness of Williams' concept of reality eliminated those traces of romanticism apparent in the plays of Hellman and Gazzo. Further more, Williams' plays are experimental in the sense that he created a

scenography that complements his characters' search for a resolution to their emotional disturbances.

Williams was aware of his role as an experimental playwright. He announced experimentation as his method in his first successful play The Glass Menagerie (1944). He called this work a "memory play" and incorporated experimental devices such as projection screen with requests that the lighting and the set be unrealistic or "expressionistic".⁸ The entire play has been filtered through the memory and imagination of the protagonist Tom Wingfield. In the act of recreating the drama, Tom is searching for a way to expiate his feelings of guilt and sorrow for having abandoned his sister and mother.

Tom's recollection of his sister Laura and of his mother Amanda is infused with sensual touches. His crippled and abnormally shy sister is equated in his mind and for the audience with her glass menagerie : "She is like a piece of her own glass collection, too exquisitely fragile to move from the shelf".⁹ Music plays

8- Tennessee Williams - *The Glass Menagerie* (Hott, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1960) p. 613

9- *Ibid*, p- 559.

softly beneath key conversations. The final image is of Laura blowing out candles.

The sensuality of Williams' world in The Glass Menagerie is present in all of his plays. As in The Glass Menagerie, the scenic environment of his plays- in particular of A Streetcar Named Desire (1947), Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (1950), and Suddenly Last Summer (1958)- is the subjective extension of the main character's perceptions, However, the world Williams recreates becomes increasingly more brutal, and sensuality becomes explicitly sexual. In A Streetcar Named Desire the protagonist Blanche Dubois is portrayed as psychologically disturbed; she retreats eventually to an asylum. The play's crucial scene portrays her being sexually assaulted by her brother-in-law.

Despite the progressive coarsening of Williams' subject matter in his dramas, his artful technique of imbuing his plays with a poetic imagination prevents conventional judgments being passed on his characters. In A Streetcar Named Desire, for example, Williams transforms the stage so that instead of seeing a room realistically portrayed it becomes

expressionistically portrayed; this transformation occurs at the scene in the play that is critical to Blanche's future sanity. The extension of Blanche's psychological state to her scenic environment allows the audience to empathize with her. By his use of expressionism in this play, as by his use of experimental techniques in other plays, Williams pleads convincingly for understanding of deviancy from social, psychological, and in some cases moral norms.

Williams' initial focus on social deviancy and later focus on sexuality and sexual and psychological deviancy in his characters seemed often to create more compelling characters than those of Miller, O'Neill, and Wilder. While Williams retained the interest in the individual evident in the works of his predecessors, the characters he portrayed expressed their individuality in psychological and social behavior that never coalesced into national and geographical traits. The Williams character was to remain alienated from society.

The next playwright to gain national importance was Edward Albee. Initially, Albee was welcomed, along with Jack Gelber, Jack Richardson, and Arthur

Kopit, as the "hope" of the American theatre.¹⁰ Of these playwrights heralded as the new leaders of the American theatre, only Edward Albee continued to write successful plays throughout the 1960s and 1970s. His move from off-Broadway to Broadway in 1962 with the play Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? put him in a position of leadership. During this decade, furthermore, he was considered an experimental dramatist who was the sole American who had managed to translate the European idiom of what was called "the theatre of the absurd" into an American context.¹¹

One reason for Albee's initial reputation as an experimental dramatist who used the techniques of the European absurdists was his active encouragement of productions of European experimental dramas. With his co-producers Richard Barr and Clinton Wilder, Albee's Cherry Lane Theatre presented plays by Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet, and

10- C. W. E. Bigsby's-*Confrontation and Commitment* (Missouri University Press : Missouri, 1967). P- XV

11- Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (Garden City, New York : Doubleday, 1969).

Fernando Arrabal during the latter 1960s.¹² In 1964, he was directly responsible for the production of Beckett's *Play* and Harold Pinter's *The Lover*.¹³

It would be inaccurate, however, to claim that Albee restricted his interest to European experimental dramas. During the 1960s he was responsible for the production at the Cherry Lane Theatre of such plays as *The Long Christmas Dinner* and *The Happy Journey from Trenton to Camden* by Thornton Wilder (both 1967) and *The Front Page* (1969) by Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur. Nor was he the only person in New York at that time who was interested in experimental drama. During the 1960s Broadway audiences saw productions of plays by Jean Anouilh, Harold Pinter, Charles Dyer, Arnold Wesker, Friedrich Durrenmatt, Peter Shaffer, Peter Weiss, and Bertolt Brecht. Judith Malina and Julian Beck founded and directed The Living Theatre, where some of their most important productions included the experimental plays *The Connection* and *The Apple* (1959 and 1961) by

12- Kerjan, *Who's Who in the Theatre* (Pitman Publishers, 1972), p. 447.

13- *Ibid*, p- 447.

Jack Gelber, the trilogy America Hurrah! (1966) by Jean-Claude Van Itallie, and The Brig (1963) by Kenneth Brown.

These plays experiment with striking visual images. At one point in the action of The Apple, one of the characters wears a fox mask and chases another character "across the stage" while two other characters enter with a spastic person "wearing a dog mask, in a baby stroller". In The Brig, there is a powerful scenic image of a white line painted on the stage over which the characters, who are prisoners, may not cross. In Motel, the last play in Van Itallie's trilogy, a motelkeeper and two guests are enrobed with garish huge papier mache bodies and heads. In all of these dramas, the emphasis on character development and the theme of respect for the individual which hitherto characterized American experimental drama is often nonexistent. These plays are structured so that the form is itself an expression of the experimental techniques which the play incorporates.

While Edward Albee helped to produce European experimental dramas during the 1960s and eclectic American dramas during this same decade, his own

plays were not imitative of these dramas. Albee's plays are not to be confused with dramas of the theatre of the absurd. His The American Dream and The Sandbox resemble some of Eugene Ionesco's absurdist plays, but these two plays by Albee are not characteristic of the general patterns of his work. Much the more representative is Albee's first play The Zoo Story (1959). This play follows in the tradition of Williams and O'Neill in that those episodes that are nonrealistic in the play are used to explain the disturbed internal state of the protagonist. By using expressionistic episodes within a realistic play, Albee was able in The Zoo Story to emphasize the development of the individual consciousness of his protagonist.

Nor are Albee's plays markedly similar in form to those of the American experimental dramatists that were produced by The Living Theatre, or those of other dramatists of the 1960s in America, such as Megan Terry or Leroi Jones, who relied on strong visual images. While some plays such as The American Dream, The Sandbox, Tiny Alice, and Box use one or two striking visual figures, except perhaps for Box these plays still do not experiment with imagery to the extent that

the experimentation renders the work nonrealistic. In Albee's other full-length plays, language, setting or character interactions are sometimes nonrealistic, yet, as was the case in the plays of Williams and the early plays of O'Neill, the characters and settings are always also explainable on a realistic level.

Edward Albee emerged during a period of extensive experimentation with dramatic styles and themes in the 1960s. During the early 1960s, Albee seemed identified with- if not a leader of- the experimental theatre movement, because the styles of two of his earliest one-act plays seemed to be clearly influenced by French absurdist drama, and because Albee was himself involved in importing European experimental dramas and in encouraging young American playwrights.

However, Albee's work distinguishes itself in many ways from the American experimental dramas of the 1960s. He is the only one of the major dramatists of the 1960s who continued to write plays which were produced on Broadway through the 1970s. In this period he experimented with a range of dramatic styles and had even written many adaptations. Rather

than a writer adept at capturing striking visual images on stage (as were experimental dramatists such as Arthur Kopit and Jean-Claude Van Itallie), Albee is a playwright whose ear for dialogue and talent at character portrayal are unfailing. Moreover, Albee's dramas are not polemical. Criticism of American society is only an aspect of Albee's distinctive dramaturgy. He exaggerates his characters and their settings by making both the distillation of contemporary attitudes and values; while criticism is explicit in the distorting mirror he holds up to his audience, this criticism is secondary to Albee's dramatic vision.

Albee's dramatic vision is akin to that of his predecessors Tennessee Williams, Eugene O'Neill, and Arthur Miller. Albee interests himself in exploring how the responsibilities of individuality are accepted by his main characters. His characters are often figures who suffer as much as do O'Neill's Yank, Miller's Willy Loman, or Williams' Blanche from the fact that there is a painful tension between their self-concepts and the manner in which others perceive them. Albee adds, as well, another source of anguish to the consciousness of his characters. Because his characters

are most often affluent, they can frequently hide their internal torments behind the facade of a leisurely and well-organized life. Albee's choices of social and economic backgrounds for his characters distinguish his works from those of other major American playwrights. Still, as do his three most important predecessors, he resorts to experimental techniques in order to render his protagonists' internal conflicts public. It is this fundamental link between Albee's vision and that of earlier playwrights such as O'Neill that places him in the American tradition of experimentation.

