CONCLUSION

In the present study, I have tried to 'read' the plays of Edward Albee as literary artifacts sans performance. We have traced, through the absurdist and existentialist backgrounds, his assimilation of the condition of stasis in his plays. Stasis is explored both as the method and as content and in this, we come up against certain problematic situations. These are in relation to the question of hermeneutics – interpretation and the 'understanding' of the texts.

I have first tried to locate Albee’s own context and historical situation in regard to the methodology he follows in his plays, along with the intellectual and philosophical grounding that one has to encounter in them. Here I have placed him within the traditions of the European avant garde, rather than with the mainstream American drama.

Time and again, almost with habitual monotony, the reader / audience is made to face the condition of inertia, stasis and non-happening in almost all his work. It becomes clearly established that this stasis is part of his technical instrumentation in exploring the ontological stasis that lies within, which envelopes the human condition per se. Hence, Edward Albee’s debt to the existentialists and absurdists are considerable and invariably found in any reading of the plays. Action is often forfeited for dialogue; characters for ‘props’ or dehumanized beings. His borrowings from Antonin Artaud and Luigi Pirandello are also directly relevant. Many of Albee’s later plays see him trying to break the audience / actor (or text / reader) boundaries and trying to communicate directly with the audience.
All of these theatrical and experimental conventions / non conventions are in constant play as one reads the drama of Albee. One is frequently made aware of the absence of a vital element of drama. The various questions pertaining to the text-performance divide therefore, become important issues to be discussed and analysed. I have tried to show, through my readings of Albee’s plays, as well as in a separate chapter, this problematic relationship between the written text and the play in performance. The situation is fraught with difficulties at various levels. The plays of Albee, in this special sense; for readers of his work, are seen to be in a condition of stasis-within-a-stasis, without any ‘livedness’ as experienced on the stage. The plays are read without the sounds, the visuals or any possibility of actor-audience interaction. The ‘reading’ is done from an immense cultural distance which would have benefited tremendously with visual help. Hence this leads us to question our own interpretation of Albee’s work that would, in turn become problematized. This hermeneutic situation is addressed in one of the chapters and the problem of ‘understanding’ and relatedness of the text to its receivers is looked into. After the analysis of a range of critical discourse on drama / performance theory, we find that the problems we face still elude a satisfactory solution.

In this context, our own pedagogical situation can not be separate, taken for granted, especially where one is searching for meanings situated within the text as well as ‘within’ the readers. The immense criticism ‘industry’ thrives precisely because of this need to interpret a text in the classroom. For example, the Shakespearean interpretation industry aids the teacher and the student with various readings of the text, the subtexts and so
on. We all know of the rampant proliferation of what we call bazaar notes', along with the 'bonafide', 'accepted' critical texts. The classroom can only generate an exercise in hermeneutics as opposed to what has been earlier referred to as 'felt life', immediate and seen in actual sensory terms on stage. It becomes a hunting ground for all manner and form of meanings, if not a mundane discourse only aired at passing the examinations. Meanings that one is culturally unfamiliar with, meanings that one is not able to empathize with – and drama being a basically visual medium – can pose special problems.

For example, we can see the case of Samuel Beckett [who is prescribed more often than not for both the major (B.A.) and the post-graduate (M.A.) levels] without some kind of contextual, background 'indoctrination,' no average Indian student will empathize with his œuvre. Waiting for Godot may have seemed extremely relevant to the post-war westerners (and that only after an initially shocked reaction) or to the convicts in San Quentin. It merely puts the confounded Indian student to sleep if she / he does not process the rigour to assimilate and be receptive to the philosophy and content of the play: without actually seeing it. The same is true of Edward Albee's theatre, which even his own compatriots sometimes fail to grasp, as we have shown earlier in this study.

Our small survey showed certain very significant results through the data that was collected from the students. Where the western contexts, avant garde movements and even basic notions of American popular culture was concerned, there was a general lack of awareness. The average Indian student (especially – as in our case – from non-metropolitan cities) we find, is
completely unable to relate to the foreign literature that he is supposed to be studying and has little or no visual idea about his area, and sometimes even gross misconceptions. The quandary of the teacher, then, is easy to understand. To further look at the complex picture, the teacher herself has undergone possibly the same problems as a student that she is now to grapple with in the capacity of a teacher.

Keeping these findings in mind, we try to look for a possible panacea / corrective measure for our problem. Visual knowledge, I have tried to show throughout this study, is a basic necessity for the foreign student to even begin grasping at the meanings generated by the dramatic text that she/he faces. Especially texts that throughout emit visual images that she/he has no clue about, or direct performance-related issues when she/he deals with drama and its polyphony. Hence I have explored the opportunities / options available at hand to fill such a deficiency -- a recourse to film and television. These would effectively provide us with material to fill up the vacuum of visual understanding of a culture whose literature and drama we are set to investigate study. In the present Indian context, no other remedy seems so easily available to us, and we are reduced to the farcical condition of the episode cited earlier -- the Indian teacher thinking that the daffodil was a kind of a bird.