After the Pulitzer Prize with *A Delicate Balance*, Albee seems to have reached a peak of sorts. That he was able to achieve surrealist effects and adeptly use the modes of the European avant garde, including the theatre of the Absurd through the façade of American realism ensured his popular success both on, and off Broadway. But the real, experimental nature of his oeuvre starts to make itself more evident in the later decade, where the plays that he wrote were not, obviously meant for mass consumption and became more and more esoteric for public taste. A series of flops, however, did not slow down Albee — indeed his experimentation increases, as does his preoccupation with the static situation and characters and their projection on stage. *Box* and *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse Tung* (1968) came as completely avant garde theatre, one without any human characters later to be partially repeated in *Seacape* (1975) and the other almost completely in quotes and used for theatrical effects, formulated by Albee. A vaudeville, a theatre of cruelty, a borrowing from Maeterlinck, and so on, the plays of the second decade show Albee’s restlessness with form, but always, the constant seems to be the stillness gripping the plays through the experimentations.
Box and Quotations from Mao Tse Tung (1968)

These are two plays that are said to be the inseparable companions of Albee and though they may be read / played independent of each other, they are best performed "enmeshed" in Albee's words. Quotations from Mao Tse Tung is, he says, "an outgrowth of and extension of the shorter play ... [having to do] with the application of musical form to dramatic structure, and the use of Box as a parenthesis around Mao is part of that experiment." Recalling his earlier experience with an equally dense play, Tiny Alice, Albee states at the outset that these are fairly simple plays in content, but require a shedding of preconceived notions about the nature of the dramatic experience. Articulate always, about his intent as an artist, Albee also makes some important statements on the "obligations" of the playwright -

...first, to make some statement about the condition of 'man' (as it is put) and, second, to make some statement about the nature of the art form with which he is working. In both instances he must attempt change.... art must move or wither - the playwright must try to alter the forms within which his precursors have had to work. And I believe that an audience has an obligation to be interested in and sympathetic to these aims.... Therefore, the audience has an obligation (to itself, to the art form in which it is participating, and even to the playwright) to be willing to experience a work on its own terms.

Albee has here interestingly demarcated the obligations, not only of the playwright, but also those of the audiences.
A highly unorthodox, unconventional play, *Box*, puts on stage just that—a box—a large cube, open towards the audience and taking up most of stage space. The cube is not symmetrical but slightly distorted, though not enough to call attention to the distortions. Bright lights focus on the box, and there is dead silence for five seconds before ‘The Voice’ starts talking from somewhere near the audience and states the subject—"Box" and hence carries on the play—sometimes deadpan, sometimes argumentative, sometimes conversational and so on. The Voice considers, among other things, the decline of art—its descent into craft, and Albee’s toying with various Platonic concepts that randomly seem to merge with contemporaneous art situations and problems. The situation is further problematized by the elongated pauses and dilution of relationships of one set of ideas with the next. C.W.E. Bigsby says that Albee is “intent on discovering the potential of words freed from their immediate contexts and released from their function of forwarding details of linear plot, delineating the minutae of character, and establishing the context and structure of conscious communication.” The surrealistic paintings of André Breton and Max Ernst, and John Cage’s music with its rigorous exclusion of conscious control and emphasis on indeterminacy in both composition and performance are cited as possible influences on the playwright. The viewer / reader is probably the most important factor—the ‘real’ (unconscious) creator. Critics such as Iser who have in the phenomenological mode, formulated theories of indeterminacy in literature might see in *Box (Mao Box)* interesting illustrations whereby the author and director only provide raw-materials to the readers / viewers who necessarily
‘create’ their own aesthetic effects of the play. Hence the Box means what it means to you: the viewer / the reader. It would of course mean different things to the viewer who is allowed more than one sensory perception – the audio-visual semiotic theatrical fillers that both enhance and curtail their liberty with the subject. The reader would have to provide his own imagined visuals from a text that offers next to no textual imagery, apart from the stage directions of Box.

Proceeding however, to Quotations from Mao Tse Tung again requires a plunge into multiple resonances that the play is made so dense with. The text is an amalgam of deliberately fragmented monologues. The political statements of a reasonable, often sad Mao are entirely what the title purports itself to be – quotations. The second voice mournfully parodies and recites the work of a nineteenth century sentimental poet, Will Carleton. The third voice – that of the old lady – is the only inscription by Albee to enter the mélange. The fourth figure – the priest – remains silent throughout the play. It is easy to see what Albee proposed to do with his quartet in Quotations from Mao Tse Tung parenthetized by Box (the fifth voice, for the quintet) in the song-like structure wherein Richard Amacher finds an A-B-A pattern, the use of the partita and the use of counterpoint. The musical structure as traced by Amacher is indeed part of Albee’s structural strategy that he uses to visualize his montage with – each of the characters talk of their own, not addressing themselves to the other actors on stage but directly to the audience. The silence of one of the characters speaks in its own way – but only visually, not aurally. Unlinked, these monologues nevertheless interpenetrate to generate.
their very own resonance. Their meanings, says Bigsby, lies not in logical coherence of interpretable formulations but "in the incompletions, caesuras, aporias which are generated by Albee's interleaved text".\(^8\)

Mao's doctrine is followed by the sentimental poetry of Carleton, followed by Albee's fiction about the decline of the human race; time and space lose their temporality and spatiality and genres dissolve. Occasionally overlapping voices interfere in and rupture the tone and rhythms and completely transform the emanating semiotic structure. Hence the Old Lady's account of someone's fall into the ocean is amplified by Mao's talk of the nuclear war and further magnified by the earlier allusion to the deaths of millions of babies in *Box*. Bigsby points out the near-borrowing of the Dadaist cacophony by Albee in the babel of voices.

The effect of this process is to draw attention to the individual texts' status as texts, constructions with their own rhetorical stance, polemical force and stylistic mannerisms. They occupy the same theatrical moment but not the same political, social or linguistic instant.\(^9\)

Albee finally moves away from Dadaist implosion, but looks at the contingent nature of all the voices. Albee's, Carleton's, and Mao's speeches as well as priest's silence all throng the stage simultaneously, constructions in language and the voice. The Voice from *Box* almost becomes a kind of interpreter whose post apocalyptic voice submerges in the failures at all levels. In the manner of a kaleidoscope, Albee arranges his montage, giving some very
resonant speeches to his characters (directly quoted) and that is that. Not even in the language do we really discover the proposed apocalypse – it after all is a hoax, a bluff, a static non-statement. Of theatrical action of course, there is no scope, and stage movement is totally cancelled. The priest, for all one hears of him, does not exist at all – performing what critics interpret as the reduction of the role of mute observer, devoid of functions, and with no contribution to make, except as a visual signifier of the same. Again, it is the priest’s presence that is almost always ignored in ‘readings’ of the play with obviously no lines to read. Visually, however, this figure becomes an important emblematic presence on the stage, poised on the brink of absence, and stasis. Students merely reading the text remain only vaguely aware of such a presence.

In various ways, Box-Mao-Box anticipates the breakdown of the logos and of language and the coming of deconstruction that was soon to enthrall linguistic and literary theory being practiced. That it is all the more performance oriented despite its lack of drama, more like a pastiche than any other Albee play, shows the attempt at moving beyond language to explore the stasis that consumes his world.

**All Over (1971)**

Albee’s working title for this play was flatly – *Death*, which he was working on along with a companion piece called *Life* that ultimately was rechristened *Seascape* (1974). Almost always, these two plays are regarded as companion pieces but completely antipodal in approach. *All Over* was first staged at the Martin Beck Theatre. New York City on 27th March 1991, and
deals all pervasively, blackly, with death, the dying and the living dead. As has often been shown as a general motif in most of Albee’s plays, death-in-life consumes this play, more than any other.

Robbie Odom Moses shows how death paradoxically becomes a metaphor for the quality of life, and how, the dying man (who never appears before us) seems more alive than all the other characters\(^\text{10}\). The existential problem of being and nothingness at death is, as Nelvin Vos shows, the recurring interest of the dramatist in all his plays\(^\text{11}\). Anne Paolucci is reminded of *A Delicate Balance* in a lesser suggestive and more static way –

*All Over* is the dying breath of an exhausted past. There is no meaningful future ahead. Only the heightened immediacy of the present moment…. … this monotonous subdued skirting of psychological reality may have been exactly what the dramatist intended; the death vigil is the unmistakable sign of impotence.\(^\text{12}\)

Gerry McCarthy points out that *All Over* “treats the subject at the moment of dying, as opposed to the moment of death: a distinction which first appears in *Quotations From Mao Tse Tung* … When one is dead, one is not”\(^\text{13}\).

Very often, *All Over* has been attacked for indulging in “murky metaphysics”\(^\text{14}\) and lacking “dramatic urgency”\(^\text{15}\). Too much is said within parenthesis, fogging the issues, and “all the characters speak in the same voice” confusing the audience in the “thicket of verbiage”\(^\text{16}\). Albee is too busy *writing* so that he completely ignores the action, hence centre-staging himself.
Henry Hewes and C.W.E. Bigsby have also noted the same deficiencies in the play, *All Over* being interpreted as the collapse of the spirit, the "slow extinction of those human qualities which might be used to counter the natural absurdity of man's condition"\(^{17}\). But they are not the "cosmic victims" of Beckett, but "self created victims of modern society"\(^{18}\). The relevant focus with Albee, says Bigsby, is not being, but civilization and its extinction, its vocabulary full of phrases like "winding down", "spinning back", and words like ‘withdrawal’, ‘diminishing’, ‘abandonment’ and ‘dying’.\(^{19}\) Henry I. Schvey, in a very interesting parallel to Albee’s play about the deathwatch, shows how Norwegian artist Edvard Munch, (1863-1944) preoccupied with images of sickness and the process of dying in his paintings, upset the usual manner of portraying such an event in his *Death in the Sick Room* (1892). None of the death watchers are looking at the subject / object of their vigil, and all of their faces remain contorted with nameless fears, each is cut off from the other, there is no communion, no compassion. The analogy with Albee’s play is unmistakably genuine, with the same tableau of characters, each in isolation, as per his stage direction\(^{20}\). There is no more witty repartee, as in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, rather the abstractions and ‘deathliness’ of *Box and Quotations from Mao Tse Tung*, Albee’s borrowing (self-confessed) of the musical form [the sonata allegro where point, counterpoint and themes and their variations return repeatedly] its “stately pacing”\(^{21}\), slow and stylized delivery, its ‘deadness’ are all deliberate as read in his stage directions – “the character will speak in a conversational tone, without urgency, more languorously than not.”\(^{22}\) Indeed, when Geilgud directed *All
Over, he used a minimum of colour and movement, and his characters spoke more to the audience than to each other, much like Albee’s earlier Quotations from Mao Tse Tung. The interspersed bursts of violence and explosive laughter seem to merely punctuate the inherent stasis of the play. Unnecessarily overreacting to the Wife’s comments, the Daughter “rises, almost languidly, walks over to where the wife is sitting, slaps her across the face, evenly, without evident emotion, returns to where she is sitting.” The Wife in turn, rises, “just as languidly,” walks to the Daughter and returns the compliment. Hence the action of the play merely reinforces its non-actions/stasis. The inevitable stasis of death, the stillness of being, death-in-life consumes all characters and movement of the play. An eminent, successful, and well known person lies dying, to his privilege, at home, to avoid the grotesque transformation that normally engulfs one dying in the hospital—

That’s what he had become, with all those tubes and wires: one more machine....

Or, an octopus: the body of the beast, the tentacles, electrical controls, recorders, modulators, breath and heart and brain waves, and the tubes!, in either arm and in the nostrils. Where had he gone!? In all that equipment. I thought for a moment he was keeping it.... functioning. Tubes and wires.
He is watched upon by the Doctor and the Nurse, both very detached from the scenario, functioning mechanically. The Wife, the Mistress, the Best Friend, the Daughter and the Son make up the rest of the vigil keepers, apart from the media people. The stage is suitably divided, but a hospital screen separates the dying man from the watchers, and the audience, and we never get to see him. Arguably the only vivifying person in the play, a kind of male ‘grandma’ he refuses to ‘be’ dead, because being is after all divorced from death or non-being. His wife, we find has stopped growing years ago, and stasis has gripped and stilled her life since – “I have been practicing widowhood for so many years that I do not know what effect the fact will have on me... I can’t predict. I know I want to feel something. I’m waiting to, and I’ve no idea what I’m storing up.” Her hysteria at the end of the play is far from cathartic, since it will only pull her deeper into the mire of non-happening.

The mistress seems to offer a few genuine recollections of her relationship, and for her too, the future is static and inert, similar to the sign that she thinks of “... may be. I’ll just go to Berlin and stare at the wall. We were there when they put it up. There’s so much one can do. And so little.” The son is the typically dead, ineffectual emblem of stillness – like the Bumble of The American Dream. “Aren’t you useless?” he is asked. “Probably” he answers. The daughter is obviously a take-off from the bitchy Julia of A Delicate Balance - unsure, ineffectual, insecure and completely confused. The Best Friend is the wife’s sometime lover, and now a husband who has driven his wife insane. Albee’s play, is in Schvey’s words, is a “mournful dirge directed not at the dying, but at the living, who must go on without hope or
love." All these characters are denied names by Albee - each has still a formidable ego, and each is alienated from the others. The movement of the play proceeds as though anaesthetized, 'out of focus'. And when death finally arrives, the mistress tells the wife - “Shhhhhhh; be a rock” and the wife flings back – “You be, you be the rock .... I've been one, for all the years: steady. It's profitless!” The rock emblem is a negative one – standing not for strength or rootedness but for the rigidity and stasis of her existence. Other words used repeatedly begin to resonate with semiotic signals such as ‘dozing’, ‘languid’, ‘langourously’ all suggesting the half lived, out of focus world of dreams and stillness. Albee recalls Camus' *Caligula* (1943) and its refrain – “Man dies and he is unhappy” in the wife’s lament. “Because ... I am unhappy”. The at first explosive wailing turns blank and expressionless in its final articulation and the wife sinks back into her apathy. This seems to be Albee’s own kind of existentialism – excluding the possibilities of revitalization, or release, even in death.

As implied by the title, the significant moment has passed. The energy drained, the entropy is all that is left of existence. In terms of stage presentation too, the voice / voices of the characters almost merges / merge, and Albee's interventions in the stage directions are to be looked at:

... not a rebuke, none too pleasant, not forceful, no urgency, not pressing, not unkindly, not hurt, not angry, not unpleasant, not sure, not loud, not sad, not hostile, not loud, no expression, without expression, without moving.... Faint distaste, faintly
ironic, mildly mocking, controlled rage, some delight, mildly biting.... a tiny laugh, a tiny pause, a little breathless...\textsuperscript{35}

The negatives, the diminutives, the playing down, almost putting everything under erasure suitable to Albee’s sense of a reduced world.

Nothing actually happens in the play in terms of action. “It is a play about waiting in which the process of waiting is synonymous with a deferral of meaning”, says C.W.E. Bigsby. “Each has surrendered an autonomy which was his or hers, a capacity to act and thereby to be. They stand around, witnesses to their own decline, collaborators in their own deepening irrelevance....”\textsuperscript{37}

Seascape (1975)

Albee’s next play, Seascape (formerly titled ‘Life’, the companion piece of All Over or Death) opened at Broadway, directed by the writer himself. After a relatively long spell, Albee hit bulls-eye, both commercially and in terms of critical approval. In what is generally regarded as his most positive comment \textit{per se}, among all his works, much has been made of the ‘optimism’ of the play. “I’m moving from writing about people to writing about animals”\textsuperscript{38} was his teasing appetizer to his questioners. Clive Barnes reviewed the play, enthusiastically declaring – “A major dramatic event.... fundamentally about life and resolution... A comedy rather than a farce.... a play of great density.... The resonances go much deeper than could be offered by science fiction pop-guns.... Even his chilliest wit has a saving grace of warmth to it....”\textsuperscript{39} The play won for Albee his second Pulitzer Prize.
This is again a play that has been generally accepted as a positive, optimistic "rose play" antipodal to *All Over*, the "black play". Samuel Bernstein shows how Albee employs absurdist techniques to make an ant- absurdist statement. "... the models of realism and absurdism appear like two hovering presences, essentially distinct, yet capable of intertwining, disengaging, and intertwining once more." As a play of symbols, *Seascape* lends itself to many fertile interpretations. Lucina P. Gabbard argues that the play's concern is the awareness of death with the onset of middle age, through the language of symbols – "acceptance of death is transendance." Thomas P. Adler shows how *A Delicate Balance* is the true companion piece, a "reverse mirror image" rather than *All Over*, and shares the same "parable like" quality. The play has its share of negative criticism too, condemning the loss of vigour of the dramatist.

The set is a sand dune – a beach – and the entire first act of the play is the inter change and beginning of an apparent conflict between Charlie and Nancy. They are a middle aged "retired" couple, having done with their careers and children, now grown up and gone. A roar of a jet plane is heard overhead, (this is a recurrent motif, obviously intended by the author) as the two finish a picnic lunch and start talking. She wants to do something – he wants to do nothing – this is their essential conflict: action vs. inertia / stasis. She wants to explore, feel, touch and fill her life with more experience. He has had enough. Meanwhile the sand stretches all around, and again the plane roars. Two man-sized lizards are sighted by Nancy emerging from the sea. The initial reaction is fear on both sides until contact is established, even as the
plane roars again. Then begins the classic strategy by Albee to literally 'strip' humanity of its many assumptions. Why shake hands? Why wear clothes? Why hands and legs? The exchange leads to a questioning of the very existence of man, of evolution and of progress. Leslie, the male lizard, and Sarah, the female, are obviously attached to each other. The exchange is made interestingly, however, between the two males, with the females piping in now and then. There is talk of sex, of reproduction and in the span of a single act, Albee attempts to reduce the entire gamut of human existence through a casual conversation between newts and humans. Obvious problems crop up. "What is brute beast"? asks Leslie. A creature not "aware that it alive, much less that its going to die."43 Tools, art and a sense of mortality separates human beings from them, decides Charlie. When death is sought to be explained, the play reaches a kind of a climax - Sarah is moved to tears at the thought of losing Leslie, who, furious with Charlie proceeds to strangle him. The females intervene, the newts decide to go back to the sea: Nancy offers help for their comeback to the land and Leslie challenges her - "All right. Begin."44 The play ends. It is the last, seemingly positive / optimistic word that encourages the positive interpretations of the play. But even a cursory reading of the play points in the other direction – the 'begin' begs the question – signifies within itself the impossibility of the completion of the task. It ends the play exactly where it began, in immutable stasis. It rejects all the preconceived notions and assumptions of 'evolved' man – its positive statement in Nancy's ‘beginning’ and its otherwise recumbent, static symbol embodied in Charlie's attitude. As Bigsby had pointed out, Albee seems to be saying that the cul-de-sac in which
we find ourselves is of our own making: the ‘progress’ of mankind is not something to be really proud of. The aching nostalgia of Charlie’s regressing to his boyhood fantasy – staying down in the bed of the sea and Nancy’s wish to be a pony – recall their wish to backtrack. Albee’s satire is combined with fantasy, and his panacea is left in doubt; the ‘begin’ is subverted in its very genesis.

On stage, three dominant signs figure in the set itself, the Sun, the sea and above all, the sand in the ambience of a lazy, sun drenched afternoon, and not a care in the world. The two humanoid lizards come in next to occupy the semiotic space and send out their own referents hence. They are separate, and yet the same, as Charlie and Nancy: emblems of the species. The sand, arid, sterile, and dead, takes up a lot of stage space and hence again we notice how important the visual impact of the sand dunes juxtaposed by the man-sized lizards would be to the semiotic signals they emit. In a reading of course, the reader responds to these signs as he would to a fantasy, or a fairy tale. Charlie further problematizes the lizards by relegating their existence to a mirage brought on the sands through consumption of liver paste –

we ate liver paste and died. That drowsy feeling ... the sun ... and the wine ... none of it: all those night thoughts of what it would be like, the sudden scalding in the center of the chest, or wasting away; milk in the eyes, voices from the other room; none of it.

Chew your warm sandwich, wash it down, lie back, and let the poison have its way.45
This is characteristically Charlie – always searching for the morbid. Then follows a bit of theatrical fun – rolling on the back; ‘submitting’ to the lizards. Humour in this play, however, is never morbid, or even grotesque, although resonant with complex philosophy, and dense in that it easily combines the domestic with it. Language is again used as in *All Over*, to show the unreliability of certain formulations; Nancy sharply tells Charlie that there is no way that he could possibly *do* nothing, the words themselves being at odds, incompatible. They discuss Descartes’s *cogito*; answering Leslie’s queries:

Leslie: Then I take it we don’t *exist*.

Charlie (apologetic): Probably not; I’m sorry.

Leslie (to Nancy): That’s quite a mind he’s got there. (…)

Leslie (to Charlie): You mean its all an illusion?

Charlie : The whole thing? Existence?

Charlie • Um – hum!

Leslie (sitting down with Charlie): I don’t believe *that at all.*

As Julian Wasserman shows, the point of these arguments is that –

the existential situation of man is that he must, by nature of his being, attempt to define his terms and standards although he is also, by nature, incapable of doing so…. Albee’s concept of language is essentially Zen…. language as a temporal creation is rooted in the phenomenal while the ideas which it attempts to convey find their source in the ontological.
The paradox results in futile attempts to "cast the infinite in the garb of the finite and are of necessity doomed to failure."48 Hence the dialogues confound more than they explain, and all debates remain unsolvable, presenting partial or relative truths. In Albee’s words, language is the means for one to go to “great lengths to avoid communication…. Talk in order not to have to listen.”49 In some ways, Seascape is centrally concerned with this problematic nature of language, and the lizards merely tools that help to objectify it. Nancy positively inclined, trying; and Charlie, sure that there is really no way out of the situation, sunning himself in the sterile sands.

Ironically, for the sake of argument, Charlie nearly emerges from out of his static condition, inviting Leslie and Sarah to go on and stay in the land. Gerry McCarthy has pointed out that the play remains an “Unfinished Symphony.”50 Indeed, Albee had to remove the technically impossible third act to remain in control of its effect. This would have demanded a visually stunning underwater scene that would even entail a fight with an octopus! Albee himself reasoned – “At a certain moment part of the play took place at the bottom of the sea. This was not necessary, it was too fantastic, and it was very difficult to realize a changeable set. Finally it was becoming a play centered on set changes.”51

The unmistakable humour, the tongue-in-cheek quality of the dialogue remains reminiscent of the effervescence of a play such as Happy Days (1961) by Beckett and at the same time retains the ironies: and the stasis, the lethargy and the apathy that Nancy tries to shake Charlie out of. “The deeper your inertia went, the more I felt alive.”52 Time and again, Charlie and Nancy are
unable to answer satisfactorily — “Love is one of the emotions ...” But even the lizards were forced to look for newer worlds, and the scene is reminiscent of *Delicate Balance*, and Harry and Edna —

*Sarah:* and it wasn’t ... Comfortable any more. I mean after all, you make your nest, and accept a whole ... array ... of things ...

and ... We did not feel we belonged there any more. And... what were we going to do?! Suddenly terror-struck like the other couple, but gradually becoming swallowed by absurdity.

The sea, the other important sign on the stage and in the work (the text), and the nostalgia associated with it have obvious archetypal, mythical and psychic resonances. Going back to the sea is to submerge back into the natural cycle. Jung said, “Water is no figure of speech, but a living symbol of the dark psyche.” Hence descent into its depths, the ascent of the lizards and desire to return again, all show the Albeeian concern with existence itself, and mortality. Again and again he returns to these questions, and has Charlie rave and rant when unable to find a satisfactory answer —

*Leslie:* I think I exist.

*Charlie* (shrings) : Well, that’s all that matters : it’s the same thing...

*Charlie* : What?

*Leslie* : What you *said.*
Charlie: (Barely in control): DESCARTES!! DESCARTES!! I
THINK: THEREFORE I AM !! (pause) COGITO ERGO SUM!!
I THINK: THEREFORE I AM ...."

But when he decides that Death is a release, logic fails, and like in his other plays, so does language.

Finally, in terms of posture on stage, we have interesting exchanges. Throughout the first half of Act I, Charlie remains still, inert, and Nancy moves about restlessly. When the lizards arrive, there is the humorous show of submission – rolling on the back, feet up in the air. There is more humour at another physical stage act – Nancy baring her mammary glands to Sarah, and Charlie’s vehement objection to Leslie’s looking too; Charlie nearly strangulated by Leslie at the end, as the play peters to an end. Not anywhere do we find Albee’s intent as truly positive, ready to go, to get into dynamic action, especially not with the paradoxical ‘begin!’ In the tussle between restlessness and inertia, it is stasis that devours all in the sparse action of the play, and it remains in status quo: neither backward, nor forward.

**Listening (1977)**

Within parenthesis, Albee terms this play a ‘chamber play’. *Listening* was commissioned as a radio play for BBC Radio Three, aired first on 28 March 1976, and first performed by the Hartford Stage Company in January 1977, as a companion piece to *Counting the Ways*.

*Listening* is in twenty scenes, each announced by a voice. The signs in sequence and announcements are intrusions by the author on the space of the
stage, literally the voice (taped) of the author in the radio version. The problematization of various areas due to its being a radio play makes *Listening* a very interesting piece to approach, especially in that his pet concern with language is emphatically drawn forward.

"... my concern with language is getting a bit problematical for some people but that’s just tough ... My last play was *Listening* ... a fairly hermetic piece"\(^{58}\). The fact that the play was a radio piece, what Albee analogized with ‘chamber music’, further suggests that it has more to do with words than with the visual, although the allusion to music is difficult to understand.

The three characters are again, unnamed – the Man, the Woman and the Girl. The voice intrudes only to mention scene division. The man and the woman are both fifty, erstwhile lovers and the girl is a waif-like, fragile creature in soft coloured hue. They sit around a defunct Italianate fountain against a semi-circular wall, in a once formal *fin de siècle* garden, now run down. It is suggested the man is there at the instance of the woman who wants to ‘show’ him something. The girl is ‘schizophrenic’ according to many critics, and she talks disjointedly, non-logically, a completely obscure and baffling dialogue. The Woman in fact, refers to her as a “praying mantis” – “listening, planning, judging ... when it’s safe – to move; to jump.”\(^{59}\) The woman herself is cold, rational and not moved, the man is described as some kind of an “institutional cook.”\(^{60}\)

As in most earlier plays *Listening* too has its little stories, tales woven into the pattern of the play. It revealed that the girl had had a fist fight with another, catatonic patient who had stolen her ‘model’ – piece of *blue*
cardboard. In another story, the woman tells the man (with the girl, ‘listening’) how her grandmother killed herself when her husband returned after seven years. In yet another, progressively more gruesome narrative, she relates how the catatonic patient had bashed her baby’s head against the wall one afternoon. The man’s story grotesquely describes an erotic episode between the couple, and the woman’s next story narrates how a young girl had come up to her at a park bench, with slashed wrists which had sickened her. On cue, the girl jumps like the praying mantis that she is described to be – into the fountain and displays her own spurting, slashed wrists which slowly turns the fountain waters red. “Like this?”61, she asks the woman, finishing her story. The man is shell-shocked, but strangely, the woman is left completely cold, saying that there is nothing to do. “What is there to do? Lock the barn door after the horses are gone?”62

The women refutes the dying girl’s charge of not listening: many critics are wont to consider the woman’s attitude as that of the psychiatrist – the professional listener. “I can hear your pupils widen.”63 This is to be considered in the light of the medium of the radio for which the play was really meant. Time and again, the girl accuses the lady of not listening. And it is exactly ‘listen’ that is what the girls herself does throughout the play, even as the man and the woman talk. Perhaps it is their suggestivity through the bizarre stories that leads her on to suicide.

Richard Amacher suggests a mythical setting to the play with the virgin-sacrifice ritual being enacted according to pagan traditions. On the other hand, she might be an existential heroine prone to ending the whole
show, a stock Albeean character teetering on the brink of being and non-being, in stasis and completely alienated from everyone else.64

The pejorative criticism that came was only to be expected. It was said to be a play "soggy with Symbolism and Significance"65 But Albee remains remarkably uncompromising, and is not straightforward in his methods, asking his 'listeners' to be interactive with the performance as a performance, not real life. Gerry McCarthy points out the distinct similarities of this play with another - Box - and its concerns. It evokes nostalgia in its setting: and a sense of a lost culture and mismatched architecture.66 “Oh, turn of the century? Or brought over - stone by stone, numbered, lettered, misnumbered, mislettered? No question of it: personal, once. Once the walls were for the curious - to keep them out ... Now they keep them in...”67 The whole edifice (of the mental home?) has been imported, but wrongly rebuilt, on perhaps a wrong base. Which is the 'sane' world? The semiotic signals sent to both the listener and the viewer are problematized both ways. The audience (viewer/listener) makes out its meanings that are immediately problematized by the author's voice. These speech acts achieve their effect through the listener's convictions.

The Beckettian snap of the fingers arouses the girl out of her trance like Lucky in Waiting for Godot. Likewise, the woman talks in stocatto rhythm - almost in a stupor, "I cried the first time I realized someone had lied to me ... I cried at all the things; I cried when my parents died, I cried when my cats died, I cried when I ... died."68 The death-in-life, the stasis remains in place. As does the deliberate absurdity, the difficulty of the play. It must be understood that the difficulty in understanding / interpretation is itself the
desired quality of audience experience. There is no chain of action-reaction, cause-effect, motive-character pattern that one is trained to seek. Albee had tried much the same thing in Quotations from Mao Tse Tung. No generalized performance or projection of emotions, but deliberate, intense mental exactitude, designed to elicit the same response from the audience. If the play is to succeed, then the actors must be competent enough to bring out the processes of thinking and reacting together. Time and again we find the woman making comments that question her own existence: she is dead, "I do not exist, you know." One wonders then, as to who is psychotic – the girl or the woman. There should be no simple, reductionist interpretations, and the ambiguities invite a complex response. Whatever the case may be, through this web semiotic signals, comes the staged death – eminently theatrical, every bit like the earlier Albee plays – and silently, matter of factly, shocking. As the fountain water turns red, the outer and inner narratives mingle, they again submerge into the same stasis that earlier existed. Psychotic, catatonic portrayals are useful devices to achieve Albee's effects.

Blood and to some extent, tears form the basic semiotic structure of the play. Menstrual blood, blood – "the colour of pain" recurs both as the negative and affirmative emblem and links the self to its physical reality, even as the blood motif again appears in a grotesque fashion when the man talks of his earlier sexual encounters with the woman.

In Listening, we find Albee obsessively concerned with the dissolution of form, collapse of order, the decay of metaphor: his play witnesses this loss. Bigsby remarks – "What remains? The answer seems to be, very little, beyond
voices modulated like instruments in a chamber piece\textsuperscript{71} Indeed, the plotless, static piece is reminiscent of the many parallel themes that chamber music is structured with. "Life has become performance, style has replaced substance."\textsuperscript{72}

Counting The Ways [A Vaudeville] (1977)

*Counting the Ways* was premiered, along with *Listening* in 1977 in Hartford to enthusiastic reviews. However, it opened in New York, directed by Albee himself to mostly negative reactions. Clive Barnes pronounced the play to be meticulously directed, but had a mixed view of the play itself. Opening in London, it was called a "sixty minute, second rate doodle."\textsuperscript{73} Most people were completely baffled by the plays. Thomas P. Adler, however, found *Counting the Ways* to be a "diversion", but charming, delightful and witty, bound for neither critical, nor commercial success.\textsuperscript{74} In what seems to be a whimsical borrowing from Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s poem\textsuperscript{75}, the play is self-professedly a vaudeville, a double act, a man and a woman debating on love and its decline.

Albee is here trying also to lay bare the very mechanisms of the theatre that he works with, and the actor and actress suspend placards and signs with details of the author / director’s intent. This is a world of parody, veiling the darkness and absurdity of man’s situation very thinly, if at all.

He and She are the two characters in the play, and in twenty one scenes, they discuss or ‘count the ways’ of love, its decline and death. There is no centrality of any particular in the play and a great variety of domestic
situations are traversed, at home, out shopping, and the conversation ranges from sexual impotence to spiritual love at varying times of the day and the night. About six scenes show them picking off petals from daisies, or roses. At one point He eats up the flower which reads "she loves him not" at the last petal because as he says, the audience was watching. He starts off with another flower waving off his wife's "Ask me! I'll tell you" in scene seven. In scene nine, She picks up the petals and tries to relate them with the stem, saying in reverse order - "Not me loves he? Me loves he?" She grabs a new rose that he brings and in scene ten, he brings forth another, and pours forth nostalgia about daisies and dandelions. Her voice off-stage prompts him to grimace and speak through clenched teeth "Between-the-teeth tone". She comes, takes the rose, He exits. Now She remembers — only to be interrupted by his bellowing on about shirts. "Thousands have lived without love . . . but none without shirts" This pull off on W.H. Auden brings the touch of comedy into the play which is fast changing tracks toward tragedy, when as a revelation to him, She mentions two, separate beds. "When did it happen? ... When did our lovely bed ... split and become two?"

Between scenes fourteen and fifteen, Albee's entre scene allows the real personas of the actors to speak to the audience — as themselves, addressing the audience as audience. The next is a tongue-in-cheek, serious discussion of protocol vis-à-vis a seating arrangement at a dinner party. The effect of these very heterogenous scenes are indeed yoked together almost by force, it would seem. The next scene is a take-off on Ionesco's The Bald Prima Donna (1956); the married couple cannot remember the number of children
they have had. Is this satire or pathos? Albee pours forth a motley flow of existential rhetoric, without much enthusiasm, or liveliness. Confusion seems almost the deliberate effect that Albee seems to target. She burns the Crème brulée (already, ironically, a desert consisting of Burnt Crème Caramel) and offers to make up by offering a replacement: 'Raspberry Fool', which he grudgingly agrees to but she returns saying there were no raspberries to make them with. Does he still love her? The last scene repeats the same question, asked by He. She is uncertain now, "I don’t know .... I think I do." Their roles are now reversed, without any addition, or loss to the meaning of the play, which ends thus.

It is interesting that Clive Barnes had this observation to make of the play — "As Mr Albee progresses, he gets more and more interested in mechanics, the special workings of the theater. The play rejects the fiction of the essential theatrical transaction that is meant to take place in a vacuum." In particular, the play has been castigated for being quite 'centre-less'; a loosely tied, random collection of skits — what P.C. Kolin has suggested — "Counting the Ways is a play turned inside out... the play seems centripetal rather than centrifugal..." Often decried as 'meaningless', the form of Counting the Ways is extolled.

This play being one that seeks to fully explore the metatheatrical possibilities, continues, in a more radical fashion the process that Albee began in his early plays like Box-Mao-Box. As a corollary to this, the obvious requirement of paramount importance is visualization in order that the interpretation and understanding be made possible. The overt use of stage
paraphernalia (placards, spotlights, roses, et al.) demands performance to fill up the gaps and clarify its stance: all of which is unavailable to the reader. As to the problems that a culturally unfamiliar foreign student of the text is to face upon such a reading divorced from performance of the play, one can only begin to conjecture the difficulties. Minus the visual signs of the play, it would remain within the vacuum; the stasis-in-stasis that the student is to encounter would remain firmly in place.

The parodic nature of the vaudeville, the slapstick love affair, the nameless individuals, determined only by gender (much like Mommy, Daddy and so many other recurrent Albeean characters), the dissolving, fluid family; the games they play, the rituals they enact all return to themselves in further burlesque. The couple stands, lifeless in the end, as static as they began, mouthing their lines, and aware of their condition, not wallowing in any misplaced pathos, or overt satire.

Albee’s play (as director) had a set that was in the traditional vaudevillian sense — stark and sparse with chairs, a table, and a “series of greyish textured trapezoidal screens” \(^86\) that gave *Counting the Ways* the look of a set for television. The bareness of the set itself is emblematic of the barenesses of their life, and its dark, empty meaninglessness. This is a stage representation of the inward states of the characters. The blackouts that intersperse the scenes frequently also contribute to this effect. The beginning of the play itself opens on an empty stage until the sign announcing the play descends. As the characters appear, they change their positions from scene to scene sometimes resembling boxers sparring with each other, verbally, and
then, with a very definite semiotic ‘prop’ – a rose which they proceed to pull apart, petal by petal. The interesting downgrading of the symbolic value of the rose is to be noted as it is used as a vaudevillian prop and then pulled apart. Both the characters are likewise shown strictly separate, culminating in the evocation of the two separate beds. They spar with each other, but never make any discernible contact. The stage directions on stage lighting also point to this separateness, each, singly on focus, never together, one swallowed up by the yawning blackness of the backstage: always emphatically apart.

“The only model I have is music”\textsuperscript{87}, Albee has often been quoted as saying, and many critics have shown his use of repetition, parallelism, and counterpoint. “Meaning for the play is searched for with the help of such structural “themes” analogues to certain pieces of music: the leitmotifs, contrapuntal orchestrations or movements. But resemblances with music may be true in form, not in meaning. As no harmony or unity is achieved in terms of a contrapuntal musical score, the couple remains as estranged as they began. Despite a great deal of talk, no real communication is possible, only repetition and stasis.

A good deal of the dialogues contain references to itself – the language, their linguistic idiosyncracies, its ‘correctness’ and of course, its meaning. “See you... Does ‘see you’ mean something more? Does ‘See you’ mean ‘I suspect you’re inviting me, subtly, of course, and naturally I accept’?”\textsuperscript{88} She tries to project exactitude in her speech, yet wryly parodies it. He is never sure of his own language, and like most males in Albee’s plays, too reticent to make an effort at all. Both consistently remain insincere in their
communication, what Mark Boyer describes as allusion-filled speech, "an elevated and epigrammatic version of small talk." As Albee himself put it, "All my people are terribly articulate, they could communicate if they chose to. But they don't choose to." Forever they are seen hunting for the allusion — but all the literate throwing around ends up for what it is, insincere and superfluous. It affects his characters like a sort of amnesia — He has cried thrice in his life, he says, once, at Auden’s death, again at a cat’s death, and "at something to do with civilization." "Nevermore as the bird said"... "The sudden void" These kinds of failed resonances that crowd the play ad nauseam, leading in no specific direction have often enraged critics —

The territory is familiar — the brittleness of Coward, the allusiveness of Pinter ... The distancing of Brecht Or is it Pirandello ... two characters in search of their elusive author?

Albee used to be available, but now he seems to be locked in a monkish cell populated only by theatrical quotation and decorative words.

Perhaps, however, that is exactly the point. Albee uses both literary and theatrical staleness and inane vacuity in all their emblematic and semiotic decipherability / undecipherability to his purpose — to show the deadness of, or the process of dying of an entire world that his characters inhabit. He uses no pathos or overt emotion as usual, to make his point, which is both absurd, comic and obviously tragic. It remains a play whose medium is insubstantial, leading to a failure which is in itself the intent of the work.
The Lady From Dubuque (1979)

This play sees Albee into his third decade as a playwright. The Lady from Dubuque, however, was neither a critical, nor a commercial success instantaneously, although later critical opinion has begun to elevate the stature of the play. It was removed from Broadway after merely twelve performances. In terms of style, structure, thematic concerns, it resonates with the typical Albeean subjects. The game-playing from Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, the death watch from All Over, the family-friend interactions of A Delicate Balance are all obviously present in the play. Albee again seemingly deals with death and dying; and the nature of reality and the self. But a process that he had begun much earlier – the audience-actor interaction, the blurring of borders between the two, and the effects achieved thus here come to a peak, as Albee experiments with the very nature of his art, and the “problem of knowing” as Thomas Adler has shown in an analysis of the play.95

It is Saturday night and three young (?) couples play a game of twenty questions trying to discover the identity of one of the players. While the couples play “Who Am I?”, Jo, the chief character plays at telling all the others who they really are – she herself is dying – and hence can afford to be ruthless. Sam, her husband is the initiator of the other game. Seemingly inane, the obviously loaded connotations of the game-playing are significant in their ontological implications. Carol and Fred, and Lucinda and Edgar are the other two couples of the play, later to be joined by our Lady from Dubuque – Elizabeth, accompanied by Oscar, a black. The play’s title alludes to Harold
Ross's famous comment that he wasn't editing the New Yorker for "the little old lady in Dubuque." 95 Elizabeth is now and then referred to as Jo's mother, but we are not too sure. Oscar towards the end ties up Sam and carries Jo upstairs, to death, and the play closes.

Like the rest of Albee plays, this play, too evoked extreme reviews from critics over time. "So what, one might ask, (is new)?" asks Amacher, calling it a "drawing room tragedy" with the same "hackneyed" themes of death and lack of communication, already overworked by the existentialists like Sartre and Camus. 97 Brendan Gill found it particularly unsatisfying - "Our intelligence is taken advantage of when Death is depicted as a creaky knight in armor, or a nice old man in a tree or ... a lady from Dubuque who is neither a lady, nor from Dubuque." 98 Naturalistic characters are, he says, unnecessarily fused with metaphorical allegorical ones - "embodiments of Death", or Life-in-Death, or one of a hundred other tiresome hand me down literary abstractions. 99 In Germany too, when the play was put up, it received lukewarm reviews, despite Albee's standing in that country.

Apart from death, dying and communication, another Albee vintage - waste - is also explored as a theme in the play. Jo is dying, physically, but all the others are debilitated by a paralysis that has engulfed them in stagnation and stasis. The two act structure of the play has the first act define the self-centred, vacuous characters, and their norms and values. The second act challenges the given norms and subverts them through the introduction of two outsiders - who completely take over the play and its dynamics, although they hardly "enliven" it, but merely usher in death more smoothly.
In act I, the Pirandellian echoes are clear, (to which we shall return later) as each character self-consciously explains himself/herself directly as it were, to the audience. “Who Am I” is the game-playing ritual where the characters do not interact amongst themselves. Fred is crudely naïve, aggressive and vulgar – unable to restrain his violent instincts. “… just plain dirt common”\textsuperscript{100} is the way Jo describes him, in her parallel commentary of the game playing. Carol is young, ‘ripe’ and confused about marriage – “I don’t know, I don’t now, I don’t know! I know its late and I got the itch, but beyond that I’m not sure.”\textsuperscript{101} She is comic, matter of fact and voluptuous, somewhat like Claire in \textit{A Delicate Balance}, and yet also, a part of the waste around. She thinks independently, does not play the game, and openly declares that the confusion in her life is her reason for marrying Fred. “He’s on his way downhill; he’s a barrel of laughs, he’s a lush, he’s a great fuck; I’m not doing anything else this week; I’m not twenty-two anymore, and I’m scared? Take your choice; they ‘re all true”\textsuperscript{102}. All of which rings with hopelessness and absurdity – the need to fill the gaps, the void.

Lucinda and Edgar are again a couple one feels a sense of \textit{déjà vu} with, recalling Harry and Edna, and their ineffectualities in \textit{A Delicate Balance}. The woman seems to float through existence, without a ripple, carried along. But she is unable to stomach the acid comments of Jo after at first being totally ignored – “You’re lucky you’ve got anybody living in the same house as you, much less talking to you.”\textsuperscript{103} – and she behaves insanely, pulling out grass and scattering it all over and around her. This is her reaction to her failed communication with an old friend, on her death bed; after which she
pompously declares – “I’m going to forgive you because I assume that the pain is very bad.” Edgar is a detailed character, intelligent, aware and sensitive about Jo’s ailment. He clashes virulently with Sam and a good deal of the dramatic tension of the play derives from their arguments. He almost breaks through to Sam when he offers to help, but Sam declines, “nobody can help.” But Edgar is unable to cope with Jo – face to face – he chooses to speak to Sam not to her. He also misplaces his concern for her; thinking more of her behaviour than the reasons and the motivation behind them. Hence, he too sinks into the morass of waste and debris of unutilized potential for communication. He too, fails – and the couple leave their old friends at the real hour of need.

Jo herself, seems to stand out as perspicacious, intelligent and sensitive woman and set against the social backdrop of friends visiting, the relationship between her and her husband reveals itself as also a wasted relationship – their love often turning into ridicule even as Jo’s acid tongue drips sarcasm, “we simply accept Jo as a somewhat obnoxious but pitiful woman who, unlike the others, has an excuse for her nastiness.” This comment by June Schlueter seems rather apt, if not acid itself – seeing Jo’s brasque behaviour with everyone. Sam busies himself placating everybody’s ruffled feathers, but only messes up the situation more. The couple seems to care for each other genuinely enough –

Jo (Instinctively, they run to each other and embrace): Oh, my

Sam, my Sam! I’d marry you in a minute!
Sam (Picks her up in his arms): shhh, shhh, shhh, shhh

Sam clings to Jo, physically manacling her, as it were, refusing to let her die, he refuses to accept her non-being, and has to be tied to free Jo. As she howls in pain, he watches numbly, unable to react, emotionally paralyzed. He cannot talk about Jo’s death, evasions are his defence against the prospective loss.

His authority is then snatched away with the coming of Elizabeth (Jo’s mother?) and Oscar, her black companion and all activity, if any in the play, is now subverted by their presence – Sam’s world is completely reversed, and he now has to bear the brunt of his own fabrications. Elizabeth hardly fits the earlier description about her mother but she declares herself to be so. Jo, already passing into haziness accepts this. She and Sam are left separate, unable to communicate, even as their friends too, sink into their own stasis. The two outsiders are the only ones able to create a few ripples in an otherwise stagnant world as messengers of death. Sam and his friends remain as ‘dead’ as they always were, “who hear nothing; who remember nothing; who are nothing.” Death actively encompasses all – the living and the dead – anaesthetizing their inner and outer worlds into stasis.

All the while, of course Albee keeps drawing the audience’s attention to the theatre as a medium even as he abandons naturalistic pretensions to make direct addresses to the audience. The audience itself comes to figure in the embarrassment of the performers –
Jo (to the audience, a little rueful herself): Death's door and all.

And ... he had one of my breasts, and he was sort of bouncing it around a little ... 

Sam (embarrassed, therefore cold): I don't recall: I was occupied.

(Refers to the audience) for God's sake, Jo! The interactions are reminiscent of Albee's experimentation with plays like Seascape. The blurring of these demarcations lead to a special kind of rapport build up with the audience without the actors / actresses actually abandoning their roles. The relationship is never a constant, and is used in a variety of ways.

Often, there are attempts at action, which soporically sink back into stagnancy and ineffectively Fred's violence and virulence keeps on surfacing; he punches Sam, smashes the cups and saucers but ultimately makes no impact. Death seems to be the only emblem of something 'happening' in the play. This play, along with Tiny Alice seems to share features with Pirandello's work, constantly focussing on fragmented people, multiplicity of personality, the interaction between theatre and real life ; role playing and reality, the mask and the face behind it, and the psychology of the audience that partakes of the action. The audience is aware of itself as audience, watching a play in the modernist convention. They are addressed directly about eighty-odd times in the play, without actually hampering the flow of the action - not as in asides - or having the action go out of the character. The audience then, nearly becomes a 'character' in the play: Waiting for the coming of death, all dichotomies collapse. Jo lies on her deathbed, and Sam
cries, “I'm dying”. In Elizabeth Kübler-Ross’s *On Death and Dying*, one finds the suggestions that the survivors must undergo the same stages as the victim as she/he eventually accepts death; but Sam cannot. Albee’s logic is found in another play – the Long-Winded Lady in *Box-Mao-Box*. “But what about me! .... I am left ... his dying is all over, all gone, but his death stays ... he had only his dying. I have both.”

The surface action of *Lady from Dubuque* revolves a great deal on game playing, and we are repeatedly reminded of the life/theatre, stage/world metaphors and the blurred dichotomy between them. Indeed truth itself is considered as Carol says – “Things are either true, or they’re not.” Elizabeth insists that “Everything is true.” Albee himself seems to suggest the solipsism of such stances – if everything is true, perhaps *nothing* is.

The ‘truth’ about Elizabeth’s identity remains unsolved. She declares herself to be Jo’s mother, but the descriptions do not fit. She remains to the last akin to the model of the mansion in *Tiny Alice* – unresolved, an enigma, forever a mystery that she was intended to be. As Elizabeth ‘plays’ the mother, Oscar ‘plays’ Sam himself – helping Jo pass from dying to death – a role Sam himself is unable to perform. He asks, “Am I not ... am I, indeed, not Sam?” They remain metaphors, because to actually realize the answer to ‘Who am I?’ is an impossibility: existence being multi-levelled and literal reality only a façade. As Thomas Adler puts it, “To know metaphorically, symbolically, archetypally is ... What humankind in Albee has instead of God. Toast may be just toast, but it might also be heaven.”
The Man Who Had Three Arms (1982)

Opening in October 1982 at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago, later opening at the Lyceum in 1983, The Man Who Had Three Arms is a vitriolic attack on the viewer / critic or the theatergoer - accused of sensation-seeking, and hero-worship but essentially fickle. The hero here is savagely ruptured between his self and his world. Named ‘Himself’, the protagonist is perhaps one of Albee’s most repulsive characters. Fixed behind the podium, he keeps lashing out against the audience – trying to account for his sudden (undeserved) fame and the equally sudden loss of it. The media makes a celebrity of him when he mysteriously grows a third arm, and forgets him when the arm disappears.

This fierce interaction with the audience shows how the hitherto blurred barriers of the early Albee plays with their spectators gradually vanishes. The objective distance with the audience seen in Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf? and A Delicate Balance till even Seascape, Albee had not attempted crossing conventional dramatic borders. In The Lady from Dubuque, however, Albee diminishes these barriers between actors/audience but the demarcations remains clear enough. Pirandellian techniques of self-discovery had already begun to emerge. In The Man Who Had Three Arms, the boundaries disappear as Himself lectures both the ‘imagined’ and the ‘real’ audience – attacking both. The entire content is a metatheatrical experience in action. It focuses on its own artificiality, its mechanisms and forces the audience too, to gaze at its nakedness. It calls attention to the meaninglessness of its own medium of communication. Himself assumes various roles – actor,
director, writer all rolled into one. Truth and illusion, and the stage action is subverted by the text and vice-versa. The audience – not Man and Woman becomes the major character in the play – it is both the imaginary ‘audience’ for Himself’s lectures and the actual theatergoer that assumes this role. Man and Woman speak minimally with Himself, changing into various characters as required. All the while, self-consciousness informs the play and one is acutely aware of the sense of artificiality. Albee even goes beyond Pirandello in reducing radically, the audience / actor divide – his script provides the freedom.

(To someone in the front): Do you remember what I said? ... do you remember?

(Note: If the person says “yes”, say: “You do!” If person says “no”, Say “You don’t!” If person fails to respond, wing it, choosing what you like)\textsuperscript{116}

This is an aggressive text, and Albee is aware of his treatment of theatre as a collective spectacle.

I don’t like the audience as voyeur.... I want the audience as participant. In that sense, I agree with Artaud: that sometimes we should literally draw blood. I am very fond of doing that because voyeurism in the theatre lets people off the hook. \textit{The Man Who Had Three Arms} is a specific attempt to do this. It is an act of aggression. Its probably the most violent play I’ve written.\textsuperscript{117}
Draw blood he does, with both acts having Himself verbally assault the audience with his monologue of cruelty as also his continuous recall of the most important iconic emblem: his third arm. Obviously, the icon is a verbal one too – only recalled, never seen – on stage. Having made the man famous, it disappears. Himself is shown to be a grotesque figure grovelling to set his world in order. Albee himself says that the play is about American ‘hype’ and its opposite. Celebrityhood, the great, the near-great, and the pseudo-great are all charted and both material and spiritual bankruptcy empty Himself of his ‘self’. In all aspects, in all the roles he evokes for himself, Himself remains a ‘freak’, but longing to be ‘normal’.

(Out; pleading alternating with hatred): I’m no different from you;
I’m just like everyone you know; you love them: you love me.
Stop treating me like a freak! I am not a freak! I am you! I have always been you! I am YOU!! Stop looking at me!! Like that

Himself is so unrelentingly angry and antipathetic that he will never win over the audience’s sympathy, hence one wonders whether Albee’s involvement of the audience as a means to ‘empathize’ with the individual’s public and private worlds is at all successful. But if Albee was trying to show the total alienation of the audience with the character’s being, he was somewhat able to achieve his effects through the very stasis of the stage/page relationship. The reader of the play will ultimately never get intimately involved with this stage mechanism, calling for intense viewer participation.
And the audience then, for all its participation, remains only an audience watching Himself strip himself of absurd illusions. "The entire structure of what happens to Himself is based totally on absurdity; and it is precisely the absurdity that he's railing against."\(^\text{119}\)

On the whole, then, the play remains an illustration of Albee's avantgardeism and his continued need to experiment with form and the theatre, barring commercial considerations. Dramaturgically, its success is questionable, but in that it explores static themes on fame and the artist, it may be seen to have its links with even early Albee experiments like Fam and Yam.

Notes


2. Emmet Weaver quotes Albee saying in an interview that "in many ways a play is akin to a string quartet" in "Money is the Route to All Evil in Theatre" Birmingham Post-Herald Kudzu Section (17 October 1980) 7.

3. Edward Albee, Introduction to Box and Quotations from Mao x.

4. Ibid. 1.


6. Critics like Wolfgang Iser who have expostulated on indeterminacy in literature would find this an interesting example of their theory of the reader / viewer being the ultimate necessity to the aesthetic of a play.


9. Ibid. 142.


15. Ibid. 161.


18. Ibid. 171, 173.

19. Ibid. 172.


21. Ibid. 356.


23. Sir John Geilgud directed the production of *All Over* in New York in April 1971. The play received mainly negative reviews.


25. Ibid. 32.


27. Ibid. 119.

28. Ibid. 118.

30. Schvey, 362.
34. Albee, *All Over* 110.

50. Gerry McCarthy, Edward Albee 127.


52. Albee, Seascape 21.

53. Ibid. 87.

54. Ibid. 87.

55. Ibid. 116.


57. Seascape 108.

58 Edward Albee, in an interview with Peter Adam, The Listener (7 February 1980).


60. Ibid. 122.

61. Ibid. 150.

62. Ibid. 151.

63. Ibid. 77.

64. Amacher, Edward Albee 171-174.


67. Albee, Listening 11.

68. Ibid. 152.

69. Ibid. 152-3.


75. Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806 – 61). The poem, “How do I love thee?/ Let me count the ways …” is one of her best known love lyrics.

76. Albee, *Counting the Ways* 16.


78. *Ibid.* 77


80. The reference is to W.H. Auden’s poem “Thousands have lived without love, but none without water.” This is parodied by substituting ‘shirts’ for ‘water’


86. Albee, *Counting the Ways* 45.


91. Albee, Counting the Ways 27.

92. Ibid. 88, in an obvious reference to Poe’s The Raven.

93. Ibid.


97. Amacher, Edward Albee 175. He considers the links between Ibsen and Strindberg’s naturalism and existentialism explored by Martin Esslin, and also on Max Frisch and existentialism in Reflections 18-19, 93-94, 100-105.


99. Ibid.


110. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (New York: Macmillan, 1970) 50-57. Albee admits to her influence in the making of this play. She traces the progress of the dying person through the various stages as he/she approaches death. The second stage appears when the patient is filled with “anger, rage, and resentment.”

111. Albee, *Box-Mao-Box* 40.


