CHAPTER - 4

MODES OF EXPRESSION: DRAMATIC DEVICES

Edward Albee has been internationally recognized as an ingenious creative artist. His dramatic art, as has been extensively discussed in the preceding Chapters, embodies most of the major social issues which define the nature and texture of modern American society. These issues in his plays are dexterously weaved through highly loaded linguistic and dramatic devices.

Albee employs myth, metaphor, symbol, and allusion in such a subtle way that these linguistic and generic devices appear to be natural and integral part of his text and dramatic production. He also, successfully employs the contrasting modes of fantasy and realism in order to project his holistic vision.

Albee’s dramatic techniques establish his distinguished creative position. The mode of silence he employs, for instance, is more eloquent than stark realistic speeches. The silence in his plays also indicates the failure of communication, religiously taken up by the entire range of absurd playwrights all over the world.

The silence indicates breakdown of communication, and conveys the emptiness that pervades familial relationships and elicits mystery around events in the past and the present. Albee’s dramatic strategies attribute his plays distinguished modes of presentation which leave ways open for the audience to freely access his plays and their richness drawing upon their own socio-cultural experiences.

Albee also incorporates certain linguistic and dramatic devices which signify the complex structural designs of an absurd play. This
chapter thus attempts a careful critical statement on the dramatic art of Albee with special reference to his selected plays like *The Zoo Story, The American Dream, Who Is Afraid of Virginia Woolf? A Delicate Balance, Seascape,* and *Three Tall Women.*

4.1. **Symbolism, Imagery, Metaphor and Irony in Albee’s Plays:**

   Albee employs several dramatic devices to dramatise his critique of the contemporary social issues. Animal images play a very important role in Albee’s plays. This imagery, on the one hand, corroborates with the modes of absurdity and on the other hand highlights the incisive nature of his irony. Albee incorporates to dramatise the grave contemporary issues discussed in the earlier chapters. He very strategically employs the images of dog, cat, lizard and the like. The animal imagery enables Albee to make a devastating critical statement on the ridiculous nature of reality, and consequently also on the ridiculous nature of interpersonal and social relationship.

   Symbolism means the representation of an idea, person; or thing by something else which recalls it by some analogy or association. It thus implies an indirect suggestion of ideas. Numerous symbols are employed by Albee to underscore the action and themes of his plays. For instance, in *The Seascape* the most obvious symbols are the lizard characters, Leslie and Sarah. Since lizards are anthropomorphic creatures (that is, animals with human qualities), they can be widely used to illustrate Albee’s ideas regarding humans and their relationships. Leslie and Sarah represent many things, including a literal depiction of evolution and progress and an ideal of a relationship that works in stark contrast to Nancy and Charlie’s relationship.

   In *The Seascape,* the setting itself is also symbolic. The beach, where land and sea meet, represents a place of progress. In the theory
of evolution, creatures emerged from the sea to live on land like Leslie and Sarah do in the course of the play. Changes for all four characters are taking place at the beach.

Another symbol in The Seascape is the jet planes that zoom overhead. The jets are another symbol of progress, but a more mixed one than those already discussed. The jets are described to Sarah as the mechanical evolution of the seagulls that fascinate her. Yet Charlie worries that a jet will one day crash into the dune, a temporary if not symbolic end to evolution. The jets also scare both Sarah and Leslie. But the jets continue to fly and never crash, and the lizards decide to embrace their evolution. Though feared by everyone but Nancy in The Seascape, change seems endorsed by the play's complex symbolism.

In The Zoo Story, a play which has a greater depth of feeling and experience, symbolism is part of the very fabric of the play functioning within, as well as enlarging its surface meaning. The zoo constitutes the central symbol of the play and is an image of human isolation and absence of contact and communication. It is an apt and poignant symbol. The Zoo Story is concerned with human isolation:

The world is a “zoo” with everyone separated by bars from everyone else ... that is, men are not only separated from each other, but from their own basic animal nature.¹

The play opens upon Peter, who is seated on a bench in the park. He is the modern version in middle-class stereotype who blends perfectly into the brightly-packaged emptiness of the modern landscape. The “bars” which separate Peter from his own nature and from other people are the material goods and the prefabricated ideas with which he surrounds himself.
While Peter is separated from the animal in himself and others, Jerry is an animal who fights separation from the other animals. He is determined to discover the essential nature of the human condition. He has a strong box without a lock, picture frames without pictures, and pornographic playing cards that remind him of the difference between love and sexual need.

The symbols of Jerry and Peter can also represent as traditional Christian’s symbols:

*This is Jerry or Jesus, a thirty-year-old outcast whose purpose is to establish contact “with God” who is a colored queen, who wears a kimono and plucks his eyebrows and there is Peter, St. Peter, an average world-ling who is stripped by the irresistible Jerry or his material goods and led toward a revelation of truth.*

Jerry’s failure to attain love by giving bribe to the dog with hamburgers symbolizes that we cannot buy love or understanding nor can we establish real contact by any easy means.

Jerry and Peter symbolize two different worlds, the world of success and prosperity, and the world of the caged and alienated souls whose lives are barely of any concern for anyone. Seifker notes that “Jerry’s interruption of Peter’s Sunday ritual of reading in Central Park escalates from a conversation with a stranger to a clash of two very different worlds.”

Jerry, a symbol of degradation and depravity, confronts the successful Peter in the zoo. This leaves the impression that as if Albee intended to say that those who came to enjoy watching the caged animals in the zoo are not aware of the animals’ suffering. In the same vein, people, like Jerry, are like those caged animals which are
watched but those who watch them are not conscious of the inferno those caged souls live in.

Jerry’s world of the caged souls seems to incorporate people who live on the margin of the society. They live and die and no one knows about that. Jerry informs Peter:

*I live on the top floor; rear; west. It's a laughably small room, and one of my walls is made of beaverboard; this beaverboard separates my room from another laughably small room, so I assume that the two rooms were once one room, a small room, but not necessarily laughable. The room beyond my beaver board wall is occupied by a coloured queen who always keeps his door open; well, not always but always when he's plucking his eyebrows, which he does with Buddhist concentration.*

He further goes on to say that:

*This coloured queen has rotten teeth, which is rare, and he has a Japanese kimono, which is also pretty rare; and he wears this kimono to and from the John in the hall, which is pretty frequent. I mean, he goes to the John a lot. He never bothers me, and never brings anyone up to his room. All he does is pluck his eyebrows, wear his kimono and go to the John. Now, the two front rooms on my floor are a little larger, I guess; but they're pretty small, too. There's a Puerto Rican family in one of them, a husband, a wife, and some kids; I don't know how many. These people entertain a lot. And in the other front room, there's somebody living there, but I don't know who it is. I've never seen who it is. Never. Never ever.*

In this play, Jerry’s “laughably small room” is bordered by other apartment living quarters dwelt by characters as single and pariah as
Jerry: a coloured queen, a Puerto Rican family, and someone else who is alienated even a step further than the others in the building. Jerry’s life outside the mainstream “doesn’t sound like a very nice place,”6 to Peter, who lives in an easily definable and average apartment.

Jerry describes very accurately his cage in which he lives with no human relations and understanding for each other. This in fact justifies his eagerness to speak with Peter. Even when Jerry asks Peter a question, he does not wait for the answer. He just wants to speak no matter about what. In fact most of the speech in the play is said by him. Peter speaks very little. Jerry wants to establish communication with Peter, because, as is seen above, he does not talk to anyone. Like the caged animals, he is just watched and his presence is felt, but no one talks to him or realizes what he wants and what he does not.

What Albee has written in The Zoo Story, is a modern morality play. He chooses old symbols, that carry with them a wealth of meaning but that yet do no violence to the naturalistic surface of his play. The theme is the centuries old one of human isolation and salvation through sacrifice. Man in bio-natural state is alone, a prisoner of self.

Pretending that he is not alone, he surrounds himself with things and ideas that bolster the barrier between him and all other creatures. The good man first takes stock of himself. Once he has understood his condition, realized his animality and the limitations imposed upon him by self, he is driven to prove his kinship with all other things and creatures. In proving this kinship he is extending his boundaries, defying self. Proving his humanity, since the kinship of all nature can be recognized only by the animal who has within him a spark of divinity. He finds at last, if he has been completely truthful in his
search, that the only way in which he can smash the walls of his isolation and reach his fellow creatures is by an act of love, a sacrifice, so great that is altogether destroys the self that imprisons him, that it kills him.

Albee, in recreating this theme has used a pattern of symbolism that is an immensely expanded allusion to the story of Christ’s sacrifice. But the symbolism is not outside of the story which he has to tell is the story of modern man and his isolation and hope for salvation. Jerry’s tragedy is not just an individual case. He is a universal symbol of the alienated modern man.

While waiting for their consumerist “satisfaction,” the would-be parents of *The American Dream* symbolically repeat the scene of the child-purchase and invent a fictional “van man.” This fictive character is supposed to take Grandma away if she does not behave the way Mommy and Daddy want her to. “There is no van man,” Mommy says, “we made him up” as the “little bugger” was made up in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf.*

The invention of the van man is the couple’s renewed attempt to have a child in the family. This new character is the Young Man, whom Grandma takes for the van man and who, at the end, surprises Mommy and Daddy with his appearance. He is “almost insultingly good-looking in a typically American way” who “ought to be in the movies.”

The Young Man in this drama is “the American Dream” impersonated and certainly not the “van man” the couple thought of. However, this character bears a striking resemblance to the dead child, who is the dramatic blind-spot of the drama. Even Mommy realizes that he has “something familiar” about him. The Young Man is a
homograph that encodes narcissistic love under the guise of fraternal love; he is the same-but-different child of the drama:

Young man! ... My mother died the night that I was born, and I never knew my father, I doubt that my mother did. But, I wasn’t alone, because lying with me... in the placenta ... there was someone else ... my brother ... my twin... But we were separated when we were still very young, my brother, my twin and I ... inasmuch as you can separate one being. We were torn apart ... thrown to opposite ends of the continent ... I suffered losses ... that I can’t explain. A fall from grace ... a departure of innocence ... loss ... loss.12

The Young Man goes through the same traumatic experience as the couple’s purchased child. Being twins, they are identical. He knows that he had a twin brother and feels his lost brother’s traumas.

In Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf, Alice herself admits that she is merely a symbol, an imperfect attempt to represent the abstract.13 Everyone is, as the lawyer notes, an "agent," a representative of a thing, rather than the thing itself. The wedding itself is a symbol of mediation or union. Julian as a lay brother is himself an apt symbol of the very kind of mediation which he has spent his life trying to reject. Yet Julian's rejection of such mediation has been his distinguishing characteristic throughout the play. The true extent of Julian's dualistic vision, as well as its dire consequences, is seen in his own account of the cause of his madness:

Julian: Oh ... (Pause.) I ... I lost my faith. (Pause.)
In God.

Butler: Ah. (Then a questioning look.)

Julian: Is there more?

Butler: Is there more?
Julian: Well, nothing ... of matter. I ... declined. I ... shriveled into myself; a glass dome ... descended, and it seemed I was out of reach, unreachable, finally unreaching, in this ... paralysis, of sorts. I ... put myself in a mental home.

Butler: (Curiously noncommittal.) Ah.

Julian: I could not reconcile myself to the chasm between the nature of God and the use to which man put ... God.

Butler: Between your God and others', your view and theirs.

Julian: I said what I intended: (Weighs the opposites in each hand.) It is God the mover, not God the puppet; God the creator, not the God created by man.

Butler: (Almost pitying.) Six years in the loony bin of semantics?

Julian: (Slightly flustered, heat.) It is not semantics! Men create a false God in their own image, it is easier for them!... It is not....

The passage is the key to Julian's thinking as it clearly shows that to Julian the difference between the First Cause and its emanations, between an object and the perception of that object, is both real and irreconcilable. Furthermore, the movement is essentially Neo-Platonic since the contrasting movement from experience to abstraction, namely man's creation of God, is rejected out of hand. Because the distinction is real, it is not in Julian's eyes "semantic," that is, without substance. Julian then is rejecting what he believes to be the relative in favor of the Absolute. Animal imagery in this way enriches Albee’s dramatic world and underscores his engagement with the central problem of the thesis.
4.2. Myths in Albee’s Plays:

One more dramatic devise employed by Albee in his plays is the use of myths. The American Dream for instance, sharpens and develops the themes of the shorter piece, creating a savage satire of bourgeois society. The play features the incessantly chattering, domineering Mommy and the spineless Daddy, who want to put Grandma into a nursing home, but this time the main theme is that of their consumer attitude towards their child. They bought a child but were unsatisfied with it, first of all because “the bumble of joy” did not look like either one of them and later because it only had eyes for its Daddy. So Mommy gouged its eyes out. When it called Mommy a dirty name, they cut its tongue out. And because “it began to develop an interest in its you-know-what,” they castrated it and cut its hands off at the wrists. When it finally died, they asked for their money back.

Fittingly, the name of the Bye-Bye Adoption Service is a pun on Buy-Buy. Albee explains, having experienced this in his own childhood:

“You go out and you buy a kid and you expect it to become a mirror image of yourself. And if the goods are damaged you are not too happy with them.”

Mommy and Daddy are afflicted with the illusion that they can apply merchandise policy even to living creatures and get a refund any time the purchased human being does not meet their expectations:

“You can imagine how that made them feel, their having paid for it, and all. [...] They wanted satisfaction; they wanted their money back.”

The episode perfectly captures the true nature of Mommy. She describes how, after buying a beige-colored hat, she walked out of the
store wearing it and met the chairwoman of her women’s club, who told her it was a wheat-colored hat. She went back into the store to make a scene, arguing with the sales staff about the different effects of daylight and artificial light on the color, and finally accepted a hat from them which they said would look beige in daylight. It was of course the same hat, but Mommy succeeded in achieving what she wanted: satisfaction.

The prelude of the hat is soon magnified into the dimensions of a living creature. When a mysterious Young Man, who personifies the American Dream, appears, he is embraced with enthusiasm as a better son than the first one. Mommy proclaims him to be “much better than the other one.” The Young Man is obviously just the same as his twin brother would have become but Mommy is delighted with him. She and Daddy want to call him by the same name as the other boy but neither of them can remember what it was. Thus, the point about Mommy’s accepting the same hat as an adequate replacement is balanced by the fact that she later accepts the identical twin as being totally different from the boy she rejected.

In a confessional monologue, the Young Man tells Grandma of a twin “torn apart” from him, so that it seemed his heart was “wrenched from his body,” draining him of feeling. As his twin brother was mutilated physically, the American Dream is mutilated emotionally.

Young Man is described as “clean-cut, Midwest farm boy type, almost insultingly good-looking in a typically American way. Good profile, straight nose, honest eyes, wonderful smile.” Grandma is the only one who realizes that the young man who has arrived at their home is not the embodiment of the American Dream, but simply a pretty face with no substance. Inside his handsome shell there is
nothing but a void. He actually fits perfectly into his new family, since he claims that he would “do almost anything for money.”

With her insight, Grandma is in fact the most astute of the trio, even though the couples have concluded she is senile. The Young man replaces her in Mommy’s and Daddy’s house and is going to occupy her room. They got rid of an old lady and acquired a young handsome man instead: the hollow Young Man with his vapid smile who joins the household at the end of the play is a fitting complement to the values which Mommy and Daddy represent.

The myth of the *American Dream* was ridiculed by other writers as well, most famously by Arthur Miller in *The Death of a Salesman*, 1949 and four years later by Tennessee Williams in *Camino Real*, 1953. As their heir, Albee produces angry attacks on the mainstream American family. In his hands the polemic against the American family values becomes a commentary on all human relationships. Moreover, Albee ridicules stereotype and shows the family unit as dysfunctional. Albee’s characters are prone to illusions, but the playwright has no illusions about family whatsoever. His “main area of inquiry is failures in human relationships in whatever combination they occur.”

Albee’s characters do have families, but the relationships between family members are hopelessly emptied. Everyone ends up being alone, since nobody can be sure about feelings towards his or her dearest people. All the family members have been solitary and even though they congregate at the occasion of the death of the patriarch, they cannot escape their inner loneliness.

Most critics have recognized the presence of mythic symbolism in Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* but few have done
little more than to mention in passing that Martha is a self-confessed Earth Mother, and that George might be a comic Dionysus.\textsuperscript{26} 

The symbolism is usually seen as an absurdist counter to the action on stage rather than as an essential embodiment of that action and some critics apparently feel, as does Daniel McDonald, that:

\begin{quote}
The danger in reading Albee's Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf is becoming too involved with the symbolism". The individual who is largely concerned with [the symbolism] will miss the point of a fine drama. Essentially, the play is not an allegory about Godot, or Good Deeds, or the American Dream; it is a story of real people and their illusions. . . . [Albee's] theme is the necessity of illusion to sustain one in such an environment [of futility].\textsuperscript{27}
\end{quote}

Martha's name comes from the Aramaic \textit{Martha}, which means simply "lady". During the last part of the play, after Nick discovers what Martha really is, he appropriately refers to her only as "Lady". The two appellations are interchangeable, for Martha is the Archetypal Feminine in her many roles. She is "destructive", "Voluptuous", "wicked", a "monster", a "sub-human monster", a "Monstre!" a "Bête", a "Putain!" and a variety of repulsive or brutish animals and insects. She is "limitless" because she is the Earth Mother:

\begin{quote}
You're all flops. I am the Earth Mother, and you're all flops. (More or less to herself) I disgust me. I pass my life in crummy, totally pointless infidelities . . . (Laughs ruefully) would-be infidelities. She is "the only true pagan on the eastern seaboard", "paints blue circles around her things" (i.e., her nipples), and understands the rhythm of Sacre du Printemps (i.e., sexuality). Like all Mother Goddesses, she is a perpetual Virgin although a Harlot: "Anyway, so I was revirginized.\textsuperscript{28}
\end{quote}
Martha is also a dragon. George, who in this context should be called Saint George, plucks a bunch of snapdragons in the moonlight, and hurls them "spear-like" at her, shouting "snap went the dragons!!" in his attempt to destroy her.\textsuperscript{29} By the end of the play, he has effectively succeeded in destroying her illusions, and has thereby destroyed the dragon, the Circe, the Bitch, the Satanic, the destructive aspects of Martha, thus making way for the positive, creative aspects of the Mother Goddess to manifest themselves. Martha's Dianic moon has set, but it will reappear, just as the moon in the play:

\begin{quote}
Martha: (With finality) \textit{There is no moon; the moon went down.}
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
George: (With great logic) \textit{That may very well be, Chastity; the moon may very well have gone down ... but it came back up.}
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
Martha: \textit{The moon does not come back up; when the moon has gone down it stays down.}
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
George: (Getting a little ugly) \textit{You don't know anything. If the moon went down, then it came back up.}
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
Martha: \textit{Bull!}
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
George: \textit{Ignorance! Such ... ignorance.}\textsuperscript{30}
\end{quote}

Sometimes, however the surrogate would be the king's son. George not only allows Nick, as surrogate, to rule temporarily and then be deposed; he also sacrifices his illusory son his stead. After George tells Martha that their son is dead, a scene occurs which indicates George's god-like powers.

\begin{quote}
Martha: \textit{You cannot. You may not decide these things.}
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
Nick: \textit{He hasn't decided anything, lady. It's not his doing. He doesn't have the power ...}
\end{quote}
George: That's right, Martha; I'm not a God. I don't have the power over life and death, do I?

Martha: You can't kill him! You can't have him die.\[32

This son, whom George does indeed have the power to kill, is a little Apollo:

He loved the sun! ... He was tan before and after everyone ... and in the sun his hair ... became ... fleece"; he is called sunny-Jim, and he used to keep "the bow and arrow" under his bed. He is also "the Lamb", and George is "going to make [Martha's] performance tonight look like an Easter pageant", a ritual in which the sacrifice of the Son brings atonement for the living.\[32

By symbolically eating the eucharistic telegram containing the news of the death of his son on the day of that divine Son's Birthday, George is reborn, resurrected, and reunited with Martha the Mother Goddess at sunrise on Sunday. On the symbolic level, George and Martha are not really uncreative. The son in every archetypal family is always in a sense superfluous; he has no separate personality, but is simply a reincarnation of his father. His purpose is to be a renewed manifestation of his father, or to die so that his father may be reborn. George and Martha will no longer live a life of manifold illusions; they will live a life of eternal reality. They will play no more games, for they have reached the Center of the labyrinth. They have been purged by the exorcism. At the end of the play, George tells Martha that it is "time for bed", and that it will be "Sunday tomorrow."\[32

It may be, if Jungian psychology is correct in its assertion that myth is instinctive rather than traditional, that these underlying mythic patterns account for the intense dynamic effect of Albee's drama in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*
Myth and reality is another dramatic devise employed by Edward Albee in *A Delicate Balance* play. In this play, most of its characters try to escape. The most obvious escape route is through alcohol. Its presence is so entwined in the dialogue that it becomes almost a character itself. Every scene revolves around the bar and decanters of brandy, cognac, anisette, and gin. Claire is alcohol’s most wounded victim, but she is also the one who, although she has the most trouble dealing with reality, sees reality the clearest. Tobias is not as ruled by alcohol but uses it to calm himself enough to maintain his patience and usual silence. Agnes, on the other hand, has a preprogrammed script in her head that contains all the social rules of conduct. She is easily embarrassed and uses most of her energies attempting to keep others from saying or doing things that go against her rules. In other words, she escapes the nasty or difficult parts of life by defining them as taboo subjects.

Agnes hides from reality behind the rules. If the rules do not offer shelter, she then escapes reality through pure avoidance. She does not want to talk about things that are unpleasant, unless, of course, she is discussing her sister’s poor excuse for a life. She avoids her daughter’s temper tantrum, assuming that her daughter will eventually work things out on her own. Agnes, in the meantime, does not have time to deal with all those emotions. Even though she suspects that her husband had an affair, she only asks the people whom she knows will not confirm her suspicions.

Another character Julia escapes from reality by marrying men on a whim and then abandoning them when things do not work out. She then runs home and wants to crawl back into the womb.\(^{34}\) She has not evolved into a mature woman although she is in her mid-thirties, she
would rather go home to her parents and reclaim the room in which she grew up. Her energies are used in fighting for her right to return home rather than in fighting for a life of her own.\(^3^5\)

Other interesting characters Harry and Edna are the most obvious escapees as they run from their own home and set up camp in the home of Agnes and Tobias. They run from a general sense of fear or dread, not even knowing what they are afraid of.\(^3^6\) All they want to do is escape by hiding, all day if they must, in a bedroom in their friends’ home.

4.3. Illusion in Albee’s Plays:

Illusion is another devise that is diligently employed in the plays of Edward Albee. In *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, both George and Martha state this theme explicitly as the line between the real and the imaginary is blurred, particularly for Martha. Their marriage, possibly their lives, had been held together by an illusion- the imaginary child that they have created together and that must now be “destroyed” if they are to face reality. Admitting this illusion to themselves and to Nick and Honey calls into question other things George and Martha say in the play. For example, did George really cause the death of his parents, or is this, too, a myth that has become real for them?

Other elements underscore the theme: Honey’s imaginary pregnancy; the shotgun that turns out to be a toy; the chimes accidentally struck, that George uses to herald the pretended arrival of the telegram. Throughout the play the characters use many devices to keep from facing the real world: alcohol, sex, and constant verbal assaults on one another.

Also, the surface “truth” of the characters masks their real selves; the characters are not what they seem. The brash and vulgar
Martha is truly vulnerable, the one who may need the most protection from the real world. George, seemingly passive and dominated, is the one who finally takes control of his and Martha’s lives. Nick, an apparent “stud,” turns out to be impotent in bed with Martha. And Honey, the seemingly simple and ingenuous personality, has been deviously using birth control to prevent a pregnancy. This is the play’s most important theme: that people today have been forced to create illusions for themselves because reality has become too difficult and too painful to face.

Albee’s *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf* as noted above introduces two married couples, where the younger one barely manage to be onlookers to an engrossing spectacle of a domestic battle which the older couple presents to them in a brisk rhythm until the final denouement. The play takes place during one night of drinking and of verbal combat between George, a quiet middle-aged history professor, and his foul-mouthed wife, Martha. Their passionate argument escalates when they invite a young couple new to the college, Nick and Honey, over to their house. The biggest surprise of the play is the revelation that the son about whom George and Martha have been talking at great length does not exist at all. A series of hints suggested that there is some secret about the child; these begin with the initial reference, “just don’t start in on the bit about the kid, that’s all.” George thus gives Martha a warning that she should not break their tacit agreement about not mentioning the son to anybody. Yet they elaborate all details about their son, who is turning twenty-one at the time of the action. Martha even recalls all details about bringing him up and thus Nick and Honey never know what to think, being constantly puzzled until the child proves a product of the imagination.

On the surface, the fantasy child is an item that brings George Martha apart from each other, something about which they quarrel
endlessly. The imaginary child is a weapon they use against each other; yet at the same time the son brings them together as well. Although they seem irreconcilably hostile to each other, the nurturing of the son-myth requires cooperation between them. While standing in a constant opposition, the shared secret of a non-existent son is what unites them; this bond may prove in the end to be firmer than in conventional marriages. It actually plays the same role as a live child would: it brings the parents together.

Martha has long criticized her husband for not having attained similar success as her father, the college president. She destroys George a little more each day for not having lived up to her expectations, while she seeks consolation in alcohol and love affairs which leave her unsatisfied. Gradually, this life of hell has diminished their hold on reality, and they have created for themselves a new world where they enact the laws, a universe of fun and games where they make the rules. Martha and George have woven a plot, a net of illusions, around their existence. They live in a dual world and seek refuge in unreality. They live in a permanent lie which is a defense mechanism against both their own deficiencies and an exterior world they fear or reject. Their illusionary world, the life-lie they live in, is their defense mechanism against the world which has disappointed and beaten them. Martha says literally:

“tis the refuge we take when the unreality of the world weighs too heavy on our tiny heads.”

The invented child is actually used to solace their loneliness. Although Martha seemed to be the stronger partner in their marriage (the model taken from the Albee family again), it is George who finally resolves to have the child killed. He makes the decision to proclaim the
son to be dead, committing this “murder” as a punishment for Martha who had been provoking him during the whole night. He explains to her plainly that she went too far:

“You broke the rules, baby. You mentioned him to someone else.”

George has more insight than she and is able to grasp the necessity of getting rid of the unhealthy illusion. Although Martha claimed:

“Truth and illusion, George; you don’t know the difference.”

It becomes evident that George is better aware of the two of them what is necessary in order to preserve their sanity. The death of the illusion is a cruel blow for Martha, but this radical cut was vital for their redemption and mental balance. After having scorned her husband for impotency, Martha finally recognizes the man of her expectations and then, frightened to face alone the desolate emptiness of her life stripped of its fantasy, terrified by reality, she cowers against George like a child afraid of darkness:

Martha: Did you ... have to?
George: It was ... time. [...] It will be better.
George: Who’s afraid of Virginia Woolf
Martha: I ... am ... George ... I ... am.

While their world of illusion has only permitted a bond of relentless mutual scorn between them, the destruction of the myth brings back the possibility of tenderness and love. There is at least hope for their marriage. At the end of the play Martha, exhausted and heart-broken, is subdued and submissive, for the first time willing to let herself give in to George’s control. George forces Martha to let go of “the one light in all this hopeless ... darkness ... our son,” yet this
exorcism suggests a new state of emotional honesty and a new beginning of their lives.

The childless couple in their frustration had indeed made themselves parents, parents of a dangerous illusion. Once they have recognized the destructiveness of their creation, however, a new relationship between themselves and with the world becomes possible. By the conscious exercise of a willed choice, George finds it possible to dispel the undesirable illusions, to reconstitute the world in which he lives, not merely by subjectively assuming a role or adopting a new illusion, but objectively, by finding a meaning in the human relationships which surround him.  

As George and Martha bicker and tear into one another, they shatter dearly held illusions, until the emotional exchange finally resolves itself in an exhausted catharsis. Cruel murder is a necessary stage along the path to an increasing acceptance of reality. Asked whether the myth of the alive child has now only been replaced by the myth of the dead child, and thus the original illusion remains intact, Albee answered:

*No. Certainly they’re left with the core of the memory of having created a myth and having destroyed it. The awareness of that is the important thing they’re left with. They’re not self-deluding people by the end. They’re not even self-deluding people at the beginning of the play. They are always totally aware that they are dealing with a myth and not reality.*  

Moreover, he stresses it also on a different occasion:

*“The loss is doubly poignant, because they are not deluded people. At no point they have deluded themselves about the fact that they’re playing a game.”*
The nonexistent child may be explicated as another symbol as well. It is well known that Albee named the leading characters after George and Martha Washington. Although he claimed at first that by doing so he had no hidden symbolism in mind, he was forced by incessant questions about this topic to come up with at least one connection between the first presidential couple and the fierce spouses in the play. According to him, this private myth can be extended to universal meaning as well, because “there might be an allegory to be drawn and have the fantasy child the revolutionary principles of this country that we haven’t lived up to yet.”

Out of the ruins, new strength comes. George is offering new tenderness to Martha, assuring her that the time had come for the fantasy to die, forcing her, no longer maliciously to admit that she is afraid of Virginia Woolf. As if the rejuvenation were not clear enough from the last scene, there is the confirming testimony in Honey’s tearful reiteration:

“I want a child” and Nick’s broken attempt to sympathize, “I’d like to.”

During the whole play, Nick and Honey have been used as a means of reinforcing the central theme of the ruthless older couple. Firstly, the problematic attitude of parents towards children and the motif of a non-existent child are echoed in the story of the younger couple: Nick married Honey not only for her money, but also because she thought she was pregnant. Yet Honey is panic-stricken with the thought of giving birth to a baby:

“I don’t want any children, I’m afraid! I don’t want to be hurt.”

More importantly, both couples are examples of sterility and deception rather than productive relationships. Nick and Honey, an
equally mismatched couple as George and Martha, habitually retreat to the comfort of denial whenever things get too real.

As George and Martha peel away the illusion of family to reveal the emptiness of their lives and as they mask their need for each another with vicious attacks, Nick and Honey reveal that they are also not the close, loving, childhood sweethearts they appear to be at first. However, they have a chance to get enlightenment from the experience, as they are becoming unwitting pawns in the ruthless verbal war. The deterrent example which they watch in the gloomy night gives them a lesson of what they do not want to become. They are the spectators onstage, who, together with the audience, receive Albee’s warning against the dangerous illusions that provide a comfortable, but not full life. It is only a seeming paradox that having expelled one person from their family, albeit a nonexistent one, Martha and George do not suffer from a greater loneliness now, but they feel a relief instead. Thus, the removal of illusion means a cure for solitude as well in the plays of Edward Albee.

As in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, Tobias in the *Delicate Balance* is a man who has been an excellent provider for his wife in their lives. After a busy and remunerative career in the city, Tobias has retired to the suburbs to enjoy his life. He employs a gardener and several other servants and belongs to a country club, where he plays golf. There is a conservatory with potted palms in his well-appointed home. His living room is adorned with crystal chandeliers and shelves filled with leather-bound books. He is “proud of his wines” and reads Horizon magazine. On the first glance, one might exclaim, “How successful his life has been.” Yet, there has been a deep and private sorrow between Tobias and his wife Agnes, an emotional estrangement of many years.
In the course of a weekend, which is also the exact duration of the play itself, Tobias will be compelled to face the truth about himself as a husband, as a father, and as a friend. Tobias and Agnes had two children, but Julia’s brother, Teddy, died when Julia was still a child. This event severely altered the relation between the couple. Since then, Tobias decided to sleep in a separate room, as he was frightened and emotionally scarred by Teddy’s death; thus, he has protected himself from any further pain connected with being father again. Potter says that his sexual withdrawal from Agnes became therefore emblematic of his withdrawal from any of life’s risks.

As Honey says “Never mix--never worry”, Tobias chooses the way of his life: “nothing ventured, nothing lost”. Agnes would like to round things out with her husband before it is all over. Protesting in vain, she devoted herself to preserving the outward forms of stability. Moreover, she would like to clear the mentally and physically unlivable situation with her sister Claire, who is a parasite and a burden. She would also to live without hangers-on--her daughter Julia, who is coming back, home repeatedly, as her marriage has always failed.

Furthermore, Agnes and Tobias’ friends, Edna and Harry arrived at their household looking for the warmth and the sense of belonging, which they have failed to create between themselves in their marriage. Even though the emotional relationships are improved by Sunday morning, the patterns of their lives have not been radically altered. It is too late for that.

In *A Delicate Balance* the illusion that there is freedom of choice after a certain time is destroyed. Albee comments on it:
The point of the play is that we lose ... we develop a kind of arthritis of the mind, of the morality and change becomes impossible finally ... not whether we live up to our responsibilities of friendship.⁵³

Unlike Martha, Agnes accepted the male role as primary. She lets her destiny be controlled by Tobias. Stenz says that Agnes loved sincerely; she did not marry for what this man would make her in the eyes of others.⁵⁴ Yet, as she approaches sixty, she realizes that her life is full of hollowness.

The American Dream was a significant concern of Albee's. In Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, he explores the illusion of an American dream that masks a core of destruction and failure.⁵⁵ Writing during the Cold War, Albee was responding to a public that was just beginning to question the patriotic assumptions of the 1950's. His George and Martha reference patriotic namesakes George and Martha Washington. Albee uses this symbolic first couple's unhappy marriage as a microcosm for the imperfect state of America.⁵⁶

When George and Martha's marriage is revealed to be a sham based on the illusion of an imaginary son, the viewer is led to question the illusions that similarly prop up the American dream.⁵⁷ Nick and Honey, a conventional American dream couple, are also revealed to be presenting a falsely happy façade. They too secretly take advantage of and lie to each other. What's more, Nick's name is a direct reference to Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev, and his threat to George and Martha's marriage references the Cold War turmoil of America.

The above analysis therefore shows that Edward Albee has employed several dramatic devises in his plays which in reality affect the daily lives of people in the world including the Americans. Over the past few years, there has been a serious debate over exactly what
genre of play *The Seascape* is. Some believe it is a comedy, while others see it as absurdist, satirical, or allegorical. Most agree that there is an element of fantasy involved.\(^58\)

In *The Seascape*, while Nancy and Charlie are humans and act accordingly, Leslie and Sarah are fantastic creations.\(^59\) They are human-sized lizards that have left their life in the sea to live on land. They speak perfect English and understand some aspects of human life. Charlie has a hard time accepting that they are real. He wants to believe that he and Nancy see them because they are suffering from food poisoning or are dead.

In terms of the play, however, Leslie and Sarah are very real, a fact that Nancy immediately grasps and embraces. The fantasy aspect of the play creates dramatic tension and allows issues such as progress, values, and differences to be discussed in the play.

### 4.4. **Realism, Absurdism, Expressionism, and Existentialism in Albee’s Plays**

One of the most fascinating characteristics of modern American drama is the combination of the dissimilar dramatic modes in it. The dramatic modes are realism, expressionism, existentialism and absurdity. These modes come together in the works of the same period and in the works of the major playwrights. Every mode cannot characterize the works of the major playwrights like Eugene O’Neill, Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, and Edward Albee. The developments of the dramatic modes is visualized in the realistic plays of Henrik Ibsen, then to the expressionistic plays of August Strindberg, and last but not the least, the absurdist plays of Samuel Beckett. With the changes in the dramatic modes, the changes occurs in the concept of character, which further leads to the changes in dialogues, scheme development and dramatic illustration as well.
Characterization plays a vital role in the progress of modern drama. In Ibsen’s realistic plays there appears to be a strong relationship between an individual and his social existence. Arthur Miller says “society is inside of man and man is inside society, and you cannot even create a honestly drawn psychological entity on the stage until you understand his social relations and their power to make him what he is and to prevent him from being what he is not”. Again, in Strindberg’s expressionistic plays, the characters are something much less rational and complex than in the realist tradition, something moving rather than rational, and something dangerously disjointed and indistinct. In absurdist plays, the characters are imprisoned in alienation and isolation, where there is no outlet except in the existence of real and powerful human needs to interaction, communication and contact. No real communication takes place and the characters live in a void cut off from historical and societal contexts.

Thus, there occurs degeneration of dialogues, and even plot of the play. Martin Esslin is quite right when he says that in theatre of the absurd there occurs “the depression and breakdown of language” In absurd drama, meaningful order is abandoned, but it may be metaphorical as Waiting for Godot is a metaphor for the meaninglessness of life. In Edward Albee, there is the medley of dramatic modes. What makes The Zoo Story (1959) and The Death of Bessie Smith (1960) dense and difficult to define is the style in which it is written. It does not fit into the purely realistic or the totally absurd genres that were both popular in 1958 when Albee wrote the play. Albee uses the absurd style and combines it with sensitive realism in his plays in order to comment on American society in the 1950s. The playwright is also drawing from existential philosophy in his plays.
Absurdism as well as expressionism is found in *The Sandbox* (1960) and combination of Dramatic Modes in Albee’s Plays such as *The American Dream* (1961), realism in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1961), symbolist expressionism in *Tiny Alice* (1964), realism again in *A Delicate Balance* (1966), surrealist expressionism in *Box and Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-Tung* (1968), expressionism with some hues of realism in *All Over* (1970), a realistic framework in *Seascape* (1975), something between absurd and expressionistic drama in *Listening* (1976), and absurdism in *Counting the Ways* (1977). The researcher would like to pay no heed to the chronology in this paper, but rather would like to amalgamate the plays based on their thematic concerns. In this chapter Albee started his career as a realist playwright with *The Zoo Story*, the including of realist plays together. Brian Way in "Albee and the Absurd: The American Dream and The Zoo Story," argues that *The Zoo Story* partly belongs in the tradition of the theatre of the absurd because the action and the dialogue are dislocated and arbitrary, and because it uses the technique of pseudo-crisis (in Jerry's long story about the dog). Albee’s first play *The Zoo Story* successfully gave birth to American absurdist drama.

The theme of isolation and alienation representative of the human condition in this play. The characters lack simple social skills and go on alienating themselves from the rest of the world. Pain follows this isolation, thus compelling an individual to embrace death. In this play, the theme of wealth and poverty, and the illusions that are created between the social and economic classes. It is closely related to isolation and separation because Albee establishes the societal pressures of class as the cause of his character’s (Jerry) sufferings. With *The Zoo Story*, Albee points to the French playwright Eugene Ionesco’s idea that human life is both fundamentally absurd and
terrifying, therefore, communication through language is equally absurd. The playwright uses various literary devices in his plays – the first device is that of the anti-hero. Along with the anti-hero, he uses satire and black humor also.

Albee uses both of these devices in *The Zoo Story* to comment on the way different social classes choose to view and ignore each other in American society. Particularly, he highlights the way in which members of the upper classes deal with members of the lower ones. This is illustrated with the character of Peter, who Albee uses as an example by having Jerry systematically bring him down to an animalistic level in order to show that he is just like everyone else. *The Sand Box* as well as *The American Dream* shows isolation taking place within the social arrangement, the family in the context of the period’s excessively consumerist society. It also shows individuals isolated from responsibility and reality. As Albee himself said: “...it is an examination of the American scene, an attack on the substitution of artificial for real value in our society, a stand against fiction that everything in this sleeping land of ours is peachy-keen. These two plays do not use replication and circularity like that of absurd drama, but have plot development leading to culmination at the end of the play. Thus, in and out these two plays cannot be considered as absurdist, whereas they may be termed as expressionistic plays. The obliteration of language and break of communication amongst the characters put forward the elements of absurdism in these plays. These features are purely absurd, but they function within a specific social context in the plays, which makes them part of a meaningful rather than a hollow worldview.

Throughout *The Sand Box* and *The American Dream*, Albee dramatizes the damage of human understanding and accepting it
through specific social attitudes that are savage and dehumanizing. In Edward Albee’s plays there seem to be a deconstruction of human privilege over animals. The plays seem to be a proof of civilization’s decadence or may be even possessing the breath of apocalypse. In *The Zoo Story*, *The American Dream*, *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, the primary conflict is observed in the theme of language and communication breakdown and Albee positions his characters into specialist discourses against one another for a countless of purposes, specifically as a way to make sense of their position within a society. The animal, an entity that humans have tried to alleviate as inferior and unsophisticated is very much within human beings, within one-self. In the plays of Albee, it seems that the animal has transformed into a philosophical centre of discourse, where the mark of Derrida can be used. The animal is placed by the human outside the borders of the human through the distinctive and extremist strategies that the binary of Animal/Human has begun to collapse upon itself. In fact, these strategies have become so overtly extreme that the human, in fearing the loss of civilization, has animalized the human and, in this act of animalizing the subject, the hierarchy of human over animal has been upturned. Even in the 21st century, when the theatre community has come to view Albee as a hoary playwright of the past, his play *The Goat: Or Who is Sylvia?*, a play centered entirely on an animal and the theme of bestiality. The animal exists in Albee’s plays as a theatrical effect, a literary technique to render emphasis to the breakdown of human and American society altogether.

4.5. Eloquence of Silence:

Edward Albee has also adopted ‘silence’ as a devise in his plays. In his very first play, *The Zoo Story* Albee built a monument to the
acuteness of human loneliness which can drive the person to attempt communication even at the cost of the most valuable thing he has: his own life. The unbearable sense of solitude may amount to such intensity that even the highest sacrifice is worth it.

*The Zoo Story* is a parable of a dejected man who, consumed with loneliness, starts up a conversation with a stranger in a park and eventually forces him to participate in an act of violence. It is a short one-act play, but Albee managed to concentrate in it the multi-leveled issues of human isolation. It tells the story of a drifter who acts out his own murder with the unwitting aid of an upper-middle-class editor.

Two strangers meet on a bench in Central Park. Jerry, a lonely man desperate to make some kind of connection with another person, spills out his life story to the other man, Peter, a reserved, respectable, middle-aged family man. Jerry longs so fiercely to communicate that, when he does make the attempt, he alternately frightens and repels his listener. His efforts are not welcomed by Peter, and their conversation soon escalates into a bitter argument during which Jerry impales himself upon a knife which he placed into Peter’s hands.

It can be noticed that in *The Zoo Story* Jerry starts to narrate a series of shorter stories, before enacting the story of his life. The aim of these stories is to prepare Peter for the final story in which Peter is an audience as well as an actor. The most serious and moving story Jerry narrates is the story of the dog. This dog belongs to the gatekeeper lady. It is this same story that forces Jerry to come to the zoo to put an end for his caged existence:

“*But, it's why I went to the zoo today, and why I walked north ... northerly, rather ... until I came here.*”

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Jerry narrates his account of the dog story describing how the dog used to attack him whenever he came back home. Jerry thought of poisoning the dog to get rid of it. He put a poisonous piece of meat to the dog and it ate it, the second day the dog became sick, but it recovered. Jerry thought that he must establish a relationship with the dog because he is so hopeless to have any relation with the human beings. He tells Peter:

“It's just that if you can't deal with people, you have to make a start somewhere, with animals.”

Jerry hopes to find in his relation with the dog what he does not find in his relation with man:

Now, here is what I had wanted to happen: I loved the dog now, and I wanted him to love me. I had tried to love, and I had tried to kill, and both had been unsuccessful by themselves. I hoped ... and I don't really know why I expected the dog to understand anything, much less my motivations . . .
I hoped that the dog would understand.

But to Jerry’s misfortune, the dog never loves Jerry. Jerry remains in his solitary life, like an animal in the zoo. He fails to make a communication with neither a man nor an animal. Martin Esslin argues about Jerry’s “inability to establish genuine contact with a dog, let alone a human being.”

Jerry wants desperately to communicate with someone, but he fails and he fails not only with people but with animals as well. Albee himself comments on the affinity between these two stories in an interview:

“I suppose the dog story in The Zoo Story, to a certain extent, is a microcosm of the play by the fact that people are not communicating, ultimately failing and trying and failing.”

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Thus, after Jerry fails to achieve his aim with the dog, he decides
to come to the zoo to put an end to his life. He loses the chance to
communicate with someone, so, nothing in his life is worth living for.

The Zoo Story conveys the alienation and disillusionment of the
existentialist drama, and stands at the beginning of a series of plays
that Albee has ever written. The story proves that Albee’s interest lies
in a fundamental sense of alienation, but the urgent need for
communication, even at the price of death, was most poignantly
expressed in this play.65

In Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf, the characters are constantly,
but unsuccessfully, attempting to communicate on a deeper level with
each other. Martha and George trade competitive insults and verbal
cruelties until the last scene, when they finally achieve some sense of
mutual understanding. Yet their attempts to communicate seem more
genuine than those of Nick and Honey, who seems to know each other
only superficially and who deliberately deceive each other- Nick with
his adulterous act with Martha, and Honey with her secret use of birth
control.

The usual social communication is parodied throughout the play
through the use of trite remarks and common phrases that suggest the
emptiness of language. Early in the play, George seems determined to
confuse Nick with wordplay, rapid shifts of subject, and deliberate
obtuseness. Violence as a form of communication is demonstrated
through the tale of George and Martha’s boxing match, his fake rifle,
and the physical scuffles between George and Martha. Psychological
violence as a form of communication is evidenced by George and
Martha’s repeated attempts to humiliate each other, and by George’s
decision to “get the guests.”

The Three Tall Women is a family drama and an exorcist play.
The character A and her unnamed husband, who likes only tall women,
stand for Reed Albee and Frances (Frankie) Albee. The son of A not only bears the trademark of the playwright Albee but is closely identified with him. Bigsby draws attention to the fact that the silent young man, who is the fourth figure in the play, is “plainly Albee, observing, present yet not a full player in a drama in which the old woman is the primary actor, staging her death as she has her life.”

The child figure of *Three Tall Women* is the silent Young Man, or the Boy, who is 23 years old and wears a preppy dress. This character is described by C, who is the younger version of B and A. In act 2 the Young Man appears as “the son” who is “how nice, how handsome, how very…” The sentence is not finished, nor is the characterization finalized and the image of the Young Man fades into silence. A and B cannot forgive the Young Man. They “play the game” but “never forgive him” because he “never belonged.” They reject his homosexuality, and accordingly, taboo the subject.

The Young Man does not talk, and he does not even utter a word, his presence is only physical, not verbal. Bigsby sees here another autobiographical connection between the figure of the Young Man and the playwright:

*No wonder, then that the young man never speaks. There is nothing he can say that will interest her [...] . It was, presumably, why the young Albee had left home. His parents had no interest in granting him autonomy. That came when he sat down to write a play in which what he had seen and heard was reshaped into a drama in which he could finally speak the woman who effectively silenced him.*

A brief analytical statement made above clearly shows Albee’s masterful handling of dramatic devices and the crucial role they play in rejecting his social vision.
ENDNOTES:


6. Id., at 659.


19. Ibid., p. 7.

22. Ibid., p. 340.


25. Ibid., p. 132.


29. Ibid., p. 344.


31. *Id.*, at 61.


33. Ibid., p. 25.


36. Ibid., p. 27.


47. *Ibid.,* p. 566.


61. Ibid., p. 566.

62. Id., at 66.


