CHAPTER - 1

EDWARD ALBEE
THE AMERICAN DREAM
If Edward Albee had not existed, he would most certainly have been invented.¹

The most polemical and ‘the most talked about’ playwright in the post-war era “Edward Albee came fully fledged as a playwright of international stature.”² His enviable position in the dramatic world has remained unchanged ever since he burst onto the America’s theatrical scene in the late 1950’s, when Eisenhower years gave way to the Kennedy era. The prominent playwrights disappeared from the scene: political persecutions and public conservatism paralyzed Miller, personal problems immersed Tennessee Williams into oblivion, and O’Neill was dead. These seemed to favor the new playwright, Albee.

As Bigsby says, “America needed a new playwright but the economics of Broadway were such that the financial risks were too
great to take a chance on untried talent." When Albee entered the theatrical world, people were dissatisfied with the institution of the theatre, the form of the theatre, the boundaries of the theatre and the very nature of theatre. The institution was Broadway which was a 'symptom of dissatisfaction'. They were not prepared to introduce anything new and the very word 'experiment' was anathema to them. Naturally people expected that some young ‘American’ might perform miracles to redeem the theatre world from the abyss. And Albee, took the American theatre by storm, never disappointed his countrymen all through his dramatic career.

Of the three socially conscious playwrights, who rose to the occasion, only Albee survived. The other two Jack Gelber and Jack Richardson failed because of presenting ‘fashionable European influence in the realist play’, but Albee set his roots so firmly and spread his shoots so widely with his theater technique in a short span of time that no one could shake him.

Albee must be credited with the reinventing of the American stage at a time when its originality and quality seemed to be fading. He revitalized the American theatre by introducing European dramatic influences in a uniquely American context. In fact, he uses the themes of all absurd playwrights of Europe to portray the human condition, viz. isolation, alienation and loneliness, truth and illusion in an American way with an exclusive American idiom. Albee’s plays startled the critics and the audiences with their intensity, their modern themes, and their experiments in form, while changing the landscape of American drama. He was unanimously hailed as the successor to Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, and Eugene O'Neill.
Albee’s plays which are around 25 form a body work that is recognized as unique, uncompromising, controversial, elliptical and provocative. Albee himself describes it as “an examination of the American scene, an attack on the substitution for real values in our society, a condemnation of complacency, cruelty, and emasculation and vacuity, a stand against the fiction that everything in this slipping land of ours is peachy keen”. His forty-year career has seen as many commercial failures as well as successes. Albee feels that “There is not always a great relationship between popularity and excellence, you must have to make the assumption you’re doing good work and go on doing it.” and the result is his non-stop experimental plays.

Albee’s somewhat paradoxical position in American culture was perhaps summed up by the Kennedy Center’s honors ceremony of 1996, at which he was lauded by the then President Clinton: “Tonight our nation ... born in rebellion ... pays tribute to you, Edward Albee in your rebellion ... the American theatre was reborn” Today he is frequently listed alongside Eugene O’Neill, Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller as one of the nations great dramatists of the twentieth century. In a fragmented, post modern theatre culture full of young pretenders and competing multicultural voices, Edward Albee himself was a controversial young writer. Throughout his long career, who consistently refused to do what was expected of him –and so has to face applauds and brickbats.

The life of Edward Albee reads like a Horatio Alger story. “In the late nineteenth century the Alger heroes of “Ragged Dick, Tattered Tom, Luck and Pluck, and Sink or Swim”—all poor boys—inevitable rose to fame and wealth after struggling with temptation and poverty. All these young heroes brilliantly exemplified the idea that virtue always receives an ultimate reward—preferably in cold cash.” In the twentieth
century, of course, everything is changed, and so have an alteration in
the saga of 'the lucky orphan'. Albee has termed the history of his
earliest years as a fascinating and wonderfully ironic tale of a rich boy
who rose from riches to riches in a single generation.

Edward Albee was born on March 12, 1928 to a woman called
Louise Harvey, whom he has not tried to trace. Though his natural
parents abandoned him in infancy, he was adopted by a multi-
millionaire, Reed Albee, and his wife Frances Albee of New York, within
an age of two weeks, thus thrown into a home of enervating plenty.
Nevertheless he ought to have enjoyed a golden childhood for he lived
in a luxurious Tudor mansion. But it was not spared from being painful,
owing to the fact that he was anxious, unstable, undisciplined, mediocre
in studies, and truant, mainly because of a complete absence of want in
all aspects of material luxury. Many critics suggest that the tense family
conflicts of Albee's dramas are derived from his childhood experiences.

Edward Albee's resentment towards his natural parents was quite
strong. He could not bring himself to forgive them for mercilessly
discarding him and making him feel unwanted. This is quite apparent in
the contempt with which he treats the family unit in virtually all his plays.
As Debauccher points out, "the themes of the abandoned and adopted
infant and magnificent but solitary vagabond are treated in the six of his
first nine plays". Albee's childhood experiences at home and in school
resulted in his deep set of anger against the world in general and
women in particular. The basis for many a portrait of domineering,
aggressive and threatening women where he releases his pent of anger
at his mother and of the effete and cowed men in his plays has been his
own foster parents. His mother was twenty-three years younger and a
foot taller than her husband, was extremely vocal, on the contrary,
always ready to express her opinions in ringing tones of approbation or
denunciation. Reed Albee, even though a leading millionaire in U.S.A, was a small silent man, eager to please his second wife and had fallen into a habit of continual agreement with anything she said or did in order to avoid argument. A picture of his foster parents, a domineering mother and a submissive father, can be observed in Mommy and Daddy of The American Dream and The Sandbox.

The only person whom Albee loved and felt comfortable was Mrs. Albee’s mother. He dedicated his short play The Sandbox to her on her death bed in 1960. He says” I could communicate with her ... she was at the end of it and I was at the beginning so both of us were outside the ring”9 He presents Grandma Cotta as private humanity generating public harmony, contrasting it with that of his parents as a world of order and grace destroyed by human imperfection. Albee is of the conviction that Grandma Cotta stands at the verge of destruction of such perfection, and he at the end of such imperfection. By this Albee presents himself as an optimist of a perfect world. “We are nowhere near utopia anywhere on this planet but I do believe in the perfectibility of society. So I’m an optimist”10

Thus, being a liberal individualist innately, he could not contain himself to a stereo-type pattern of education that focused generally upon shaping students to a mass order. He was a bad school boy, and later a mediocre student, changed high schools three times, and ran away from the Military Academy at Valley Forge from where he was expected to learn discipline. Albee’s education was chaotic, like Julia in A Delicate Balance (1966) failing to distinguish himself and becoming increasingly difficult. He finally obtained a diploma from the Choate School where he attempted to write poems and novels, but all in vain except one or two which he got published in the local magazines. He worked sincerely; sometimes wrote up to eighteen hours a day. He
started his literary career by writing poems, short-stories, short plays and novels. Albee’s first literary efforts were largely confined to poetry and he continued to think of himself primarily as a poet until well into his twenties but he was not successful as expected and he could not get due recognition from the audience.

Thus began Albee’s ten year struggle for existence. These years have been called his ‘bohemian era’ but Albee calls them his ‘peddling years’. After leaving home he moved to New York’s Greenwich Village. To earn his livelihood, the adolescent vagabond ‘worked in a series of menial jobs’. Jerry Tallmer describes this period as “an era the very odor of which permeates the life and lines of Jerry the lonely psychotic in The Zoo Story.” The seed to become a playwright for Edward Albee was sown during this period. His outlook towards life was considerably influenced by his odd jobs. He wanted time to write, but also to absorb everything around him.

Albee met William Flanagan—the composer and musicologist who became his lover and his most important, most perceptive mentor with whom he was to spend the next nine years of his life. Friendship with him proved useful for Albee as he was introduced to and brought in contact with famous personalities in the literary and music worlds. With music Albee developed an everlasting relationship as he himself says “I have an extraordinary relationship with music … I go into a sort of training before I write a play.” Albee achieved limited success as an author of poetry and fiction before turning to drama.

On his thirtieth birthday, Albee started his career as a dramatist by writing a short play about an encounter between two strangers in Central Park, a terrible, moving vision of urban loneliness—The Zoo Story. It received its first performance in Berlin in 1959 on a double bill
with *Krapp’s Last Tape* after being rejected by New York producers who, though interested, considered it too explosive and too experimental. But when the play did open at Provincetown playhouse in 1960, it was so highly acclaimed by critic and the public alike that it established the young playwright in his native land. Edward Albee had found a way at last. There was no looking back now. With hopes of the public pinned upon him he decided to take up playwriting as a career. He had now achieved a sizeable inheritance and with the worry of finance off his mind he could devote full time to writing plays.

The impact of *The Zoo Story* was reinforced by the performance of *The Death of Bessie Smith* -1960 (another Berlin premier) and *The Sandbox*, commissioned by the Spoleto Festival, both performed in the same year in New York. Albee’s *The American Dream*, a play which has the characters of *The Sand Box* has been performed in 1961 and a full length play for which he had two titles in his mind: *The Exorcism*, or *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* was rapidly completed and performed in 1962. *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* produced on Broadway in 1961 won him number of awards but, short of the Pulitzer Prize. In four years of writing and two years of his New York debut, Albee had emerged as a dramatist second to none in United States. His works were beginning to appear in print, and his first full-length play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, was a smash hit in Broadway.

“Careers are mysterious things”¹³ Albee ruminated at the time, when his first plays were received. Albee continued to experiment with a variety of forms, subjects and styles in his succeeding plays. In his works there was a power of imagination, versatility and a sheer talent comparable with many critics with the pioneering genius of American Theatre, Eugene O’Neill. The effect of premature fame on a young dramatist might well prove very damaging to his creative growth. More
than one news writer said as much in print on the occasion of Albee's being 'littered over by the reviewers'-even before the tumultuous success of Virginia Woolf.

All these factors definitely point towards one important aspect. Personal experience is intrinsically built through the trope of the child in the world of Albee's plots and characters. Albee's personal life, his childhood, his experiences in the society, his association with friends did affect his writing, no matter how vehemently Albee tried to segregate his childhood and adolescent experiences from his works, the influences undeniably existed. The love and bondage between a parent and a child could not be seen in his plays because he never enjoyed it.

There are frequent suggestions of themes which are very personal obsessions in the dramatist. The fondling child appears in play after play. Jerry in The Zoo Story, who tries desperately to make human contact, is abandoned, and has in his room an empty picture frame but no photograph of his lost parents. The adopted child in The American Dream is treated as an unsatisfactory piece of merchandise and as a consequence is progressively mutilated to diminish its ability to annoy Mommy and Daddy. "That's the way things are today: you just can't get satisfaction, you just try." In one form or another loss of the child or parent is behind Albee's play from fantasy child in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? to the substitute-mother Elizabeth in The Lady from Dubuque. The other play that has been considered until now to be explicitly autobiographical is Three Tall Women which was 'conceived' as an act of reconciliation with his adoptive mother Frances (Frankie) Albee. In his introduction to the Three Tall Women, Albee confessed that it took him all his life to write the play where he emphasized —the schizophrenic ability and of writing both —the lived and living.
Albee stressed on the theme of alienation in almost all his plays which reveals his experiences in his childhood where he never enjoyed companionship, love or affection of his parents. He led a solitary life and he was alienated in every aspect which was expressed in his plays. Frustration, loneliness, alienation, lack of communication, lack of love in his relationship with his adoptive mother—and also with his biological mother—became converted into textual form in many of his dramas. Albee's shattering personal experiences and perilous upbringing taught this rebellious restless spirit of America to look at life like a lost soul seeking faith. Throughout his mature life Albee remains a searcher.

He prefers the public to judge a work for itself rather than search the author in it as he feels that "no worth-while piece of literature is any good if it has to be related to some biographical factor in the author's life." Edward Albee claims that there is very little in his life of 'such great apparent significance or of earth shaking importance that would lead to this or that play.' This statement clearly indicated that Edward Albee, the introvert, hates the very idea of exposing himself to the public. He would like to retain his reputation as Flanagan refers to Albee as a 'chronically ambivalent man' and a 'widely reputed mysterious number.' This ambivalence can be found in his works also where he refrains from giving a definite solution to any problem.

Every writer whether a poet, novelist or a dramatist is subject to various influences of which literary influences is an important one which shapes and moulds the writer. Apart from biographical influences Edward Albee has been influenced by many writers, as Albee himself remarked, "I've been influenced by everybody, for God's sake. Everything I've seen, either accepting or rejecting it." Critics have identified numerous and diverse influences from Unamuno to Strindberg.
to The Tatler to Tennessee Williams to medieval moralities to Vaudeville to Piano Pieves by Satie to humorous sketches by Thornton Wilder. He mainly used the savage ironical world of Samuel Beckett and Eugene Ionesco as his subject matter in almost all his plays. Albee placed his faith in the 'absolute need for an opening on to the intimate reality of others.'

The influences on Albee are foreign particularly those of French avant-garde for which Albee professes a strong attachment. "Albee has absorbed from the French Playwrights all there is to absorb—the Ionesco like fragmentation of a language no longer functional, the Beckett-like economy of plot, the symbolic suggestions of Adamov, the raw exposures of Genet, the sensitive portraits of Giraudoux."

Albee followed some of the playwrights like Eugene Ionesco, Samuel Beckett and Jean Genet. He along with the American playwrights has succeeded in assimilating rather than copying their techniques and in molding these techniques in such a way that his work emerges as both integral and original in itself. Albee was able to excel some of his contemporary playwrights and he was successful in the use of language and in replacing Eugene Ionesco clichés and 'artificial assimil language'. As Martin Esslin says, "The language of The American Dream resembles that of Ionesco in its masterly combination of clichés. But these clichés, in their euphemistic, baby talk tone, are as characteristically American as Ionesco is French. The most disagreeable varieties are hidden behind the corn-fed cheeriness of advertising jingles and family magazine unctuousness."

The Sandbox is the closest that Albee has ever come to produce as an absurd play in the European sense. There are clear indications that his personal vision stops short of Samuel Beckett's Nihilism. It is
also seen that in *The American Dream* the divergence between Albee’s and Beckett’s particular visions become more immediately evident. It is said that *The American Dream* was a direct importation from an experimental European theatre. Gilbert Debausscher calls it, “Albee’s frankest incursion into the theatre of the Absurd.” The idea of *The American Dream* itself had in fact provided the subject for Eugene O'Neill’s *Marco Millions*, Clifford Odet’s *Awake and Sing*, Arthur Miller’s *The Death of a Salesman* and Tennessee Williams, *Camino Real*. Albee has also used means in describing the shallowness of the family and the disappearance of individualism in a mechanized society, themes which Ionesco continually developed from *The Bald Soprano* to *Rhinoceros*. *A Delicate Balance* is a classic study of American family life in the mode of O'Neill’s *Long’s Day’s Journey into Night*. Albee used a good number of props and the symbolism which was present in Ionescan theatre. Even though Edward Albee has followed some of the techniques of Ionesco and Samuel Beckett, his plays are more accepted. The short plays of Samuel Beckett and Ionesco were failures but Edward Albee proved his real talent in this aspect.

Albee is quite categorical about the influences on him. He does not agree with the fact that he is very much influenced by the contemporary playwrights. As a playwright, he feels that he has been influenced by every single play he has ever experimented. According, to him, ‘influences is a matter of selection of acceptance and rejection.’ What he wants to impress upon critics is that when there is an influence of a particular author one should not jump to the conclusion that he has borrowed a particular author or imitated that particular author. He wants that people should know that ‘similarities of people writing in the same generation, in the same century’ are inevitable. What is important is that the borrowed idea and principle should be properly fused. What Albee has been attempting all through his works is an exploration of
possibilities of ideas which may be found in others also. After all, the theatre of the Absurd also represents a group of dramatists who "seem to be doing something vaguely in similar ways at approximately the same time through out the continent" 20 to which Albee is no exception.

It is imperative that a writer be affected by the prevailing conditions of his age. Edward Albee is no different from this. In and around Albee's period the social, literary and intellectual climate activated the young and impressionable mind of the playwright. The early twentieth century was an age in which the need for the change in the mode of writing in every sphere was felt. An age as complex as the twentieth century could no longer be portrayed faithfully though the earlier dramatic conventions.

American Drama in the mid-century and afterwards reflected the resultant changes in the people's outlook behavior and the patterns of society due to the devastating effects of the Second World War. The Americans were self-reliant individuals, filled with patriotic spirit, after the war, were less sure and less hopeful of their future. The World's peace was threatened and it affected the individuals in families in America too and that in an insidious way. The American society and the family unit encountered profound changes; the family values tended to change and the society moved towards material and commercial advancement. Dollars and cents usurped the position of love and affection in the family and in society. Commercialism, lack of love, and loss in values in the family land, the failure and difficulty of human communication symbolized the absurdity of existence. The post-war generation, which escaped the depression through the skin of its teeth, was left with disillusionment and a sense of loss of the past and an awareness of the emptiness of the present. Despite the economic freedom, the age, as the aged Father in Micheal V Gazzo's *A Hatful of
Rain remarks, "is the age of the vacuum. The people-they don't believe any more." A grim mood prevailed; people were troubled by the depressing and insecure life of the period. They attempted to adjust themselves to the external world, which could hardly be comprehended. Hence, the American individuals, being alienated and baffled, struggled to maintain both identity and dignity.

America, after mid-century turned out to be a success oriented society. The word 'success' has a unique meaning peculiar to America. It is associated with material wealth and opulence. Success in life was equated to financial success. It is seldom referred to spiritual or metaphysical goals. The dichotomy between the actual and the popular, the truth and illusion, the ideal and practical is beautifully synthesized in European dramas by bringing a spiritual purgation with the illusion of love, power and dignity in life. But the American illusion of success-is totally materialistic. This is American contribution to the modern drama. The American, living in a highly technological civilized world which offers him an unlimited expectation of material welfare-a promise yet to be fulfilled for millions-looks depressed, harassed and alienated. He is anxious or avaricious to earn more money, success and social status devoid of grace, dignity and kindness, ready to stake or risk anything for it. Man’s sense of value as Eric Fromm observes in The Art of Living, "depends upon his success: whether he can sell himself favorably ... If the individual fails in a profitable investment of himself, he feels that he is a failure, if he succeeds he is a success".22

The radical changes that came about in the society prompted the emergence of the Beat Movement, which protested against Man’s condition in society. The works of Kerouac, Ginsberg and other writers of the movement brought out the emptiness of conventional society. Following Ginsbag’s "Howl" the Beats, in order to demonstrate their
protest against conventional society, adopted unconventional ways in
dress and living and also in their attitude toward life, which they have
condemned as a "howl".

In the fifties, the absurd plays from abroad ... Genets No Exit, Ionesco's Rhinoceros and Beckett's Waiting for Godot ... which attacked the loss of moral and spiritual values in an absurd, war-ridden world were received with interest. They greatly influenced the American stage of the fifties and after. American literature seems to cater to the needs of the people for a change occurred in almost every walk of life. The dissatisfaction seen in politics and society is found reflected in American Drama. The dissatisfaction seen in politics and society is found reflected in American drama by O'Neill-the only representative to feel the pulse of this and provide a remedy for it. By inclinations and circumstances, Eugene O'Neill concerns himself with the inner conflicts, a searching for meaning and order, an awareness of the controlling forces for the expression of these troubles. Eugene O'Neill applies expressionism in spite of realism which fails to probe deeper. In the qualities mentioned above there seems to be a sense of crawling for some experiment unknown in American theatre which in course of time takes the form of a characteristic quality of the drama of the 'absurd'. The sense of freedom that O'Neill stimulates is immediately found reflected in his plays.

Although American Drama at mid-century is a recognized force in the world of drama, it is unfortunately true that American dramatists with international reputation are only a handful. Describing the condition of American stage and that of the leading playwrights of the time Meserve says:
Miller upholds the dignity of man, Williams denies it; one concerned himself with man's soul, the other with man's organs. One searches for meaning, the other assumes a void and creates a sensation to compensate for man's sorrowful loss. One tries to find man in a real world the other sees man as a part of a romantic vision.\textsuperscript{23}

After the fifties we enter the sixties, a period of great upheaval from different points of view. The Eisenhower administration saw the end of McCarthy era as well as the conclusion of fifties. John Kennedy's assassination cast a shadow over sixties. Lyden Johnson became the President and the Americans were in the Mire of the Vietnam War. But in spite of all these changes in the political life of America, American dissent had again grown strong and vocal-strong in the sense that it was not to be silenced easily. The 1960's seemed to be dedicated to a variety of adventures in the new theatre of the so called 'absurd'. This theatre is however, a significant expression of the frustration which has entered modern man's life due to various reasons-political, social and individual. This frustration is seen in the wailing and gnashing of teeth or subdued grief in the plays of the representative writers.

Frustration leads, finally, to revolt or sometimes to protest. This revolt or protest, whatever it is, got expressed in the drama of the 'absurd'. The 'absurd' drama has nothing to be either a weapon to use in class struggle or in the war against poverty or unemployment or for class or racial oppression which the drama of the Thirties had been. The 'absurd' drama rarely cares for the subtleties of characterization because the larger issues are at stake. The drama of the 'absurd', it must be said, presents an awareness of absurdity of life. It means that though absurdity was in extent already present, but it has recently come to the notice of the playwrights. The absurd drama which only raised questions without demanding answers, was congenial to the intellectual
atmosphere of the sixties that was disturbed by the social unrest, revolt, and uncertainties raised by the developments in nuclear science and space research.

In the American society the conflict of opinion between old and young is seen in the differences of belief and attitude where the generation gap gapes. The disturbed world with social and political evils and devastating effects of the nuclear energy made the people of America lose faith in moral and social values. Dope addiction was found to be common among teen-agers and the last graders in schools. The younger generations' protest against the traditional ways of the society led to free exploitation of sex, nudity and vulgar and dirty words in both plays and films. This impact is found in most of the Albee's plays.

In a success oriented and money based society, material possessions were viewed as the standards of an ideal living; the people discarding the conventional values substituted them with artificial values, which resulted in the ruin of harmony in the family and society.

Albee, who appeared on the American theatre scene with his exciting contribution to the American theatre world found himself trapped in a 'demoralized nation that has been eroded by futile war, economic disaster, political corruptions, drugs, hatred and other evils'. The ideals of American community as foreseen by them have been destroyed by the racial strife, decentralization of family, decline of human relationship, substitution of artificial for real values, inclination to isolate and withdraw oneself and the tendency to seek shelter in illusion. Albee's plays found expression of a sense of loss at the collapse of a model community, or a social vision that dominated the world in the past. Through the presentation of moral and social problems of his time, he aimed at making the audience confront the real
situations and mediate on the possibility of remedies. Albee likes to think that his audiences are influenced by his plays and as a result of sharing the life experience with his characters they leave the theatre, changed. The purpose of writing for Albee is "to present the world and the people in it as he sees it and say 'Do you like it? If you don't like it change it".24

Since, Edward Albee laments the loss of cultural and moral values, he has been dubbed a pessimist and defeatist. The intensity of Albee's view of American society and his passionate attack on complacency did not prove congenial to all his first critics. He indicated a futile materialism in a witty and abrasive style which made the underlying feelings all the more convincing and disconcerting. He seemed to hold up a distorting mirror to society, showing its values to be incoherent and inhuman. With the appearance of The American Dream the playwright was anathematized as nihilist, immoral and defeatist. He was too clearly identifiable with the un-American complications of the new European writing for him not to be assigned immediately to the Theatre of Absurd. However, the bleakness of Albee's vision was not absurdism nor any species of philosophical nihilism, but the result of a commitment to values he saw neglected or ignored. He was as much an 'angry young man' of American theatre as an absurdist.

Albee, indeed, emerges as an optimist, an ardent moralist who attacks the false values of human life in order to honor the real values that will enhance the dignity of man; the deeper the level of despair that is struck in his plays, the deeper is the hope implied in them. Like his Julian in Tiny Alice he has been dedicated to reality rather than to appearance. The responsibility of a playwright, for Albee is to present a true-to-life picture, to bring about amelioration. He attempts to shake
the audience out of their complacency into a revelation. Against the criticism that he tears things down and never builds up, Albee justifies himself by saying, "you can't build on the previous structure, you can't build on rubble, you've got to build on level ground, you've got to raze something before you raise."  

Albee shocks his audience with his apocalyptic vision of the stark realities of the human existence. Albee being angry and indignant at the society grows impatient and satirizes relentlessly as Strindberg, Ibsen and Shaw. Since, Edward Albee is considered to be an absurd dramatist; his plays naturally deal with the themes of despair, frustration, suffocation, tyranny and cruelty of society. They reveal the pointlessness, the meaninglessness of life and the difficulty of communication. Edward Albee has pointed out and exposed various aspects of social evils existing in the American society during his time like alienation and lack of communication, fantasy and realism, loss of relationships between family members, racial discrimination between Whites and Negroes. Albee's main intention in revealing all these social evils is only to bring out social change and to better the moral standards of people. It is apt to quote in his own words from his preface to *The American Dream*, "The purpose of the play is, to offend-as well as amuse and entertain; and every honest work is a personal private yowl, a statement of an individual's pleasure and pain."  

In almost all his plays Edward Albee tells that the world being desperate and ugly, people also are desperate and ugly. Albee's view is that life has no content, life is nothing and one must have courage to face the emptiness without fear. His plays are mainly about people and their life. In the words of Diana Trilling, "Albee's plays are about people who cared very deeply about each other and who tried hard to be decent, people whose hopes were right for themselves and each other,
but who here for reasons beyond their control because they truly reside in the human situation, had defeated their decency, their love and hope." Edward Albee, considered as an outraged social critic, taking sides with the victimized and the oppressed, protested against social injustice. Michael E. Rutenberg says, "Albee turns his social microscope on the very essence of our civilization, revealing immorality, opportunism, cruelty, hypocrisy, and sterility in the private of those whose job it is to shape and guide the tastes and morals of this country's next generation."28

The human condition becomes the nerve centre of each of his plays. His vision is testimony to the ways by which men and women seek in bad faith, to avoid their responsibilities as human beings. Albee said in 1959, "My plays examine people who are not living their lives fully, dangerously, properly."29 His plays are concerned with the plight of the man in the modern age. The major absurdist themes like "the failure of verbal communication; the falsity of apparent reality; the inability of human beings to discern meaning in the world or purpose in their lives; are present in his plays"30 He attempts to portray these themes by portraying realistic characters striving to fit their lives into meaningful patterns.

What Edgar Allen Poe has wished of playwrights, Albee fulfils in his plays ... to create new forms and develop new techniques ... so that he could express the American way of life better. The influence of O'Neill and European writers has encouraged him to experiment in various dramatic techniques and adopt various forms from naturalism to symbolism, from expressionism to surrealism and from absurd to avant-garde.

Albee's career was characterized by a long apprenticeship of trail and error experimentation, followed by a sudden, almost meteoric rise
to success and notoriety. He has shown a fascination for a wide variety of theatrical styles and subjects throughout his career. The Zoo Story, which received its American debut on a double bill with a play by Samuel Beckett and which was favorably compared with the elder playwright's work, conveyed the alienation and disillusionment of the existentialist drama. Drawing on the poverty of his own life at that time and on his own experience while working in 'the city of people, Albee later described the experience of writing the play as a kind of revelation for him; it was the first time he felt as if the characters' language and rhythms were simply flowing, unforced from his subconscious. The Zoo story also proved a revelation in the context of the American theatre of the time, embodying onstage the restless, youthful energy of the disenfranchised 'Beat' generation, as well as providing a homegrown response to the recent innovations of European 'absurdist' playwrights such as Samuel Beckett.

In 1960, Albee explored American race relations in the southern Gothic atmosphere of The Death of Bessie Smith. Albee continued to build his reputation as an innovator in the absurdist manner with such one-act plays as The Sandbox (1959) and The American Dream (1960). Mainstream success came with the production of Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? on Broadway in 1961, won him a number of awards. In the following year his next original play the unorthodox Tiny Alice (1964)-a metaphysical dream play in which Albee explores his persistent theme of reality versus illusion, this time out in mystical, abstract and even religious terms, became the talking point of the season. A Delicate Balance (1964) in the mode of O'Neills Long Day's Journey into Night shows classic studies of American family life. It was widely faulted by critics for lacking action and cohesive ideas, it nevertheless garnered approval for its synthesis of dramatic elements and was awarded the Pulitzer Prize. In January 1966, however, Albee's
second novel adaptation, based on James Purdy’s *Malcolm*, closed on Broadway inside a week, after receiving universally dismissive reviews, it was clear that the honeymoon was over. Over the next decade and a half, Albee’s star went into decline with critics and public alike, as show after show closed on Broadway after runs that were modest at best. Part of the problem was that critics tended to compare every new play unfavorably to *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

Albee continued to experiment in his succeeding plays; and while several of them failed commercially and elicited scathing reviews for their abstract classicism and dialogue, many scholars have commended his commitment to theatrical experimentation and refusal to pander to commercial pleasures. Though, Albee was doing what he had always done, following his creative nose wherever it led—which was often into distinctly un-commercial territory, some of his works proved too formalistic or intellectually oriented to be popularly appealing. After a series of set backs, in, 1975 Albee won his second Pulitzer prize with *Seascape*, which combined theatrical experiment and social commentary in a story about the retired vacationing couple who meet a pair of sea lizards at the beach. This play was regarded by some as pretentious but was commended overall for its lyrical quality and insights into the human condition. Albee seems to have relished the chance to write unassuming ‘chamber pieces’ for more intimate spaces, just as he had with *Listening* and *Counting the Ways*—two companion one-acts that first appeared together in 1977 at the Hartford Stage company, in Connecticut.

Throughout the 1970s Albee also struggled with alcoholism, but through his “drying out” period toward the end of the decade, he seems to have facilitated a new burst of creativity with three new plays appearing in the four years at the start of the 1980s—the critical
responses to his work proved more hostile than ever. The Lady from Dubuque (1980), Lolita (1981, adapted from Nabokov’s novel), and The Man Who Had Three Arms (1983) were all assaulted with a ferocity out of all proportion to whatever crimes against taste or dramaturgy they might have committed. Albee, it seemed, was now yesterday’s man, a remnant of the 1960s completely out of place in the new, Reaganite.

Although he suffered through a decade of plays that refused to yield a commercial hit in the 1980’s, Albee experienced a stunning success with Three Tall Women (1994) which won him his third Pulitzer Prize as well as Best Play awards from the New York Drama Critics Circle and Outer Critics Circle. He had previously won Pulitzers for A Delicate Balance (1966) and Seascape (1975). Other awards include an Obie Award (1960) and a Tony Award (1964).

It was nearly two decades before another new Albee play was premiered on Broadway. The 1980s marked the beginning of Albee’s a new phase, during which he had, in effect, to start again from scratch, gradually rebuilding a life and reputation for himself. Regarded as a failed has-been in the New York theatre world, Albee decided to go where he was wanted, and began accepting invitations from colleges and universities to speak, to teach, and to direct plays. He developed, for example, a longstanding relationship with the University of Houston, in Texas, where he still regularly teaches a spring-semester playwriting class–thus continuing his commitment to mentoring new writing talent. Yet Albee’s own writing benefited, too, from this period in the theatrical “wilderness.” Various new plays were written to commission for small low-profile theatres, including Finding the Sun (1983) for the University of Northern Colorado, Marriage Play (1987) for the English Theatre in Vienna, Austria, and Fragments (1993) for the Ensemble Theatre of
Cincinnati. At first glance, these relatively short pieces might also seem fairly insubstantial: indeed, Fragments is subtitled “A Sit-Around,” in self-deprecating recognition of that fact that the characters simply sit around and talk, without apparent purpose or “thorough line.” Yet closer examination of these plays reveals all kinds of intriguing undercurrents in mood and characterization, as well as some ingenious formal games with scene structures The Play about the Baby was received coolly by the viewers, and was regarded as one of Albee’s most important plays in 2001. Released from the pressure of being a “major American playwright,” writing “major plays” for Broadway, still sufficient to rebel and evolve as the first playwright to provide a sympathetic treatment of bestiality on the Broadway stage—with 2002’s The Goat, or who is Sylvia?—Albee seems to delight, even now, in prodding and unsettling conventional sensibilities, often with a kind of vaudevillian glee. And yet he is also a deeply serious, highly erudite figure, very much a member of the literary establishment. He is in short, a writer with many faces, many moods.

Albee’s latest play to appear in New York in 2002 The Occupant concerns the life of sculptor Louise Nevelson, played by Anne Bancroft. The playwright and Ms. Nevelson, who died in 1988, were friends, and their conversations and friendship form the narrative, which concerns her marriage and subsequent abandonment of her husband and child, as well as her creative years. Ms. Bancroft comments of the play: “It’s about a woman fighting the traditions and conventions she was forced into, in order to find her own path in life.” When Edward Albee’s one-act two-hander The Zoo Story shook up the New York theater scene in 1960, the character of Peter was a blank slate of a man, provoked to animalistic life by a stranger. The playwright revisits the character in his new work, Peter and Jerry, (2004) a one-act being presented alongside that seminal play. Albee has said in recent interview that he
felt Peter needed to be explored in more depth than he had been in *Zoo Story*. He envisions Peter's life before he takes the fateful trip to the park, returning to one of his favorite subjects—marriage. The deft and engaging new play adds depth to a classic.

Albee's work has been a continuous theatrical experiment, exploring and expanding the boundaries of American drama. Albee resists any attempt to label or categorize his work, arguing that all his plays are realistic, although some may be more stylized than others: "I think every experience we have is both, real and a metaphor. I don't see why this shouldn't be true for art. Most writers write in the hope that the problems they write about will disappear one day. What I hope is that my plays will encourage people to participate in their lives more."\(^32\) The outspoken playwright, teacher and social critic is known for his fierce integrity, continuing to write despite any negative response to his work.

In spite of being thematically similar, all his plays are marked by distinctive and diverse characteristics, the colors and contours of which set one play apart from the other. These features shall be highlighted in detailed analyses in the forthcoming chapters.
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