T. C.
DOKUZ EYLÜL ÜNİVERSİTESİ
SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ
BATI DİLLERİ VE EDEBİYATLARI ANABİLİM DALI
AMERİKAN KÜLTÜRÜ VE EDEBİYATI PROGRAMI
YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ

145258

ABSURD TRADITION IN DRAMA AND AMERICAN THEATRE OF THE ABSURD: EDWARD ALBEE'S WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF?

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145258

Danışman
Yrd.Doç.Dr. Yeşim BAŞARIR

İZMİR
2004

Yüksek Lisans Tezi olarak sunduğum "Absurd Tradition in Drama and American Theatre of the Absurd: Edward Albee's Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" adlı çalışmanın, tarafımdan, bilimsel ahlak ve geleneklere aykırı düşecek bir yardıma başvurmaksızın yazıldığını ve yararlandığım eserlerin bibliyografyada gösterilenlerden oluştuğunu, bunlara atıf yapılarak yararlanılmış olduğunu belirtir ve bunu onurumla doğrularım.

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III. Tez/Proje No: **Konu Kodu:** **Üniv. Kodu**

- Not: Bu bölüm merkezimiz tarafından doldurulacaktır.

Tez/Proje Yazarının
Soyadı:**TİKE** Adı: **MELİKE BAHAR**

Tezin/Projenin Türkçe Adı:**Dramada Absürd Geleneği ve Amerikan Absürd Tiyatrosu: Edward Albee'nin oyunu Kim Korkar Virginia Woolf'tan?**

Tezin/Projenin Yabancı Dildeki Adı: **Absurd Tradition in Drama and American Theatre of the Absurd: Edward Albee's Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?**

Tezin/Projenin Yapıldığı
Üniversitesi: Dokuz Eylül Üniv. Enstitü:Sosyal Bil. Enst. Yıl: 2004

Diğer Kuruluşlar:

Tezin/Projenin Türü:

Yüksek Lisans: ☒ Dili: İngilizce

Doktora: ☐ Sayfa Sayısı: 87

Tıpta Uzmanlık: ☐ Referans Sayısı: 125

Sanatta Yeterlilik: ☐

Tez/Proje Danışmanlarının

Ünvanı:Yard.Doç.Dr. Adı.YEŞİM Soyadı BAŞARIR

Ünvanı: Adı. Soyadı

Türkçe Anahtar Kelimeler:
1-Absürd Tiyatro
2-Varoluşçuluk
3-Amerikan Absürd Tiyatrosu
4-Edward Albee
5-Kim Korkar Virginia Woolf'tan?

İngilizce Anahtar Kelimeler:
1-The Theatre of the Absurd
2-Existentialism
3-American Theatre of the Absurd
4-Edward Albee
5-Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?

Tarih:22.09.2004
İmza:

Tezimin Erişim Sayfasında Yayınlanmasını İstiyorum Evet ☒ Hayır ☐

ÖZET

Absürd Tiyatro, bireyin evrendeki konumunun farkına varmasını sağlar. İnsanoğlunun iç dünyasının görüntüsü olarak da düşünülebilir. Bu anlamda, Absürd Tiyatro insanın varoluşunun gerçeğinin en doğru resmidir.

Tarih boyunca insanlar hayatın anlamını araştırmıştır. Birinci ve İkinci Dünya Savaşları yıkıma, depresyona, Tanrı'ya ve geleceğe olan inancın, güvenin yitirilmesine neden olmuştur. Bu durum içerisinde, Dadaizm, Gerçeküstücülük ve Varoluşçuluk gibi yeni avant-garde akımlar ortaya çıkar. Tüm bu akımlar Absürd Tiyatro'nun gelişimini ve özelliklerini etkilemiştir.

Yirminci yüzyılın başında, Amerika Birleşik Devletlerinde de tiyatro dünyası bu yeni avant-garde akımlardan etkilenmiştir. Eugene O'Neill, Tennesse Williams ve Arthur Miller gibi önde gelen oyun yazarlarının ardından Absürd Tiyatro'nun temsilcisi olarak Edward Albee, Amerikan sahnesinin yeni lideri olmuştur.

Bu çalışmanın amacı, Absürd Tiyatro'nun Avrupa'daki geçmişini, temelini ve tarihçesini, Amerikan Absürd Tiyatrosu'nun yükselişini ve ilerleyişini göstermek ve bu akımın Amerika'daki öncüsü Edward Albee'yi incelemektir. Edward Albee'nin oyunlarındaki teknik ve biçemin üzerinde durarak Kim Korkar Virginia Woolf'tan? adlı ilk uzun oyununu çalışmayı amaçladım.

Sonuç olarak, bu çalışmada Absürd Tiyatro'nun Amerikalı temsilcisi Edward Albee'nin Absürd Tiyatro tekniklerini kullanış biçimini Kim Korkar Virginia Woolf'tan adlı uzun oyununda göstermeyi amaçladım.

ABSTRACT

The Theatre of the Absurd makes man aware of his position in the Universe. It can be considered an image of the human being's inner world. The Theatre of the Absurd shows a truer picture of reality itself.

Throughout history people have been searching the meaning of life. The First and Second World Wars brought frustration, depression, loss of faith and trust in God and future. Under these circumstances, the avant-garde movements such as Dadaism, Surrealism and Existentialism appeared. These new avant-garde trends are said to influence the Theatre of the Absurd, its progress and characteristics.

In the United States of America, playwrights were also influenced by these movements at the beginning of the twentieth century. As the representative of the Theatre of the Absurd, Edward Albee became the new leader of the American stage after major playwrights such as Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller.

The objective of this study is to demonstrate the background of the Theatre of the Absurd, the origins of the Absurd and its early history in Europe, the rise and progress of American Theatre of the Absurd. In order to achieve this objective, I presented a detailed analysis of Edward Albee, focusing on his first long play Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? I also aim at examining the progress of The Theatre of the Absurd by studying Albee's technique and style in his works.

CONTENTS:

YEMİN METNİ	**i**
TUTANAK	**ii**
Y.Ö.K. DOKÜMANTASYON MERKEZİ TEZ VERİ FORMU	**iii**
ÖZET	**iv**
ABSTRACT	**v**
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	**viii**
INTRODUCTION	**1**
I. ORIGINS OF THE THEATRE OF THE ABSURD	**5**
A. Luigi Pirandello	**6**
B. Jean-Paul Sartre	**8**
C. Albert Camus	**11**
D. Alfred Jarry	**13**
E. Antonin Artaud	**14**
F. Twentieth Century European avant-garde	**16**
II. EARLY HISTORY OF EUROPEAN THEATRE OF THE ABSURD	**19**
A. Samuel Beckett	**27**
B. Eugene Ionesco	**31**
III. THE RISE OF AMERICAN THEATRE OF THE ABSURD	**34**
A. Brief History of American Theatre	**34**
B. Little Theatre Movement in America	**34**
C. The Provincetown Players	**36**
D. Eugene O'Neill	**37**

E. Vaudeville and Dark Comedy 38
F. American Theatre of the Absurd 40

IV. EDWARD ALBEE 44

A. His Life 44
B. His Works 46
C. His Writing Style 51

V. WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF? 58

A. Summary of the Play 58
B. What is Behind the Title? 64
C. Analysis of the Play 65
D. Absurd Aspects in the Play 74

VI. CONCLUSION 77

Works Consulted 81

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Yrd. Doç. Dr. Yeşim Başarır for her friendliest approach, for her contributions, for letting me benefit from her knowledge and for giving me all the support I needed in the course of my study.

Then, I wish to express my deep gratefulness to my loving husband Uğur, who encouraged me with his patience and understanding in preparing this thesis.

In addition, I would like to thank Doç. Dr. Semih Çelenk who provided me with the material I needed.

I am grateful to my friend Darlene, who instructed me patiently throughout the long and painful progress of my research and writing.

I would like to thank my dear friend Funda for her advices and valuable criticisms.

My special thanks go also for my family, who supported me from the very beginning, and I am especially thankful to my mother who always encouraged me.

Finally, I would like to thank my friends Sezen and Fikret, and all other friends for supporting me throughout my life.

INTRODUCTION

"Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher,
"vanity of vanities, all is vanity."
Ecclesiastes 1:2[1]

Throughout history people have been trying to find meaning in life. As life appears as a difficult matter for man, s/he tends to think about the negative aspects of his/her experiences and question the "existence" itself. Traditionally, people have found out the meaning of both positive and negative incidents in religion, philosophy, and mythology. The writer of the above quotation, King Solomon—even in ancient times—tried to find answers to the meaning of life. Against the reality of death and belief in God, philosophers and thinkers have been investigating the logic of existence of the human being. The answer of life is still debatable. To give meaning to life is necessary for man so that he can find strength to survive, since man always wants to attach meaning to his existence against the desperation in life.

This is also the common purpose of any art form since the very early times. In drama, playwrights used to seek for meaning in chaos and confusion, and their plays reflected the meaning they found. They worked under the basic assumption that "although life itself was complex, contradictory, and chaotic, art was not."[2]

When the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche came to the scene and declared, "God is dead" in his book Thus Spake Zarathustra (1883), it was the first real attack to the belief in God in world history. If God did not exist, neither did meaning. With the absence of meaning, the truth of life "is meaningless, formless, contradictory,

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[1] The MacArthur Study Bible. "The author's declaration that "all is vanity" envelopes the primary message of the book [of Ecclesiasties] (cf. 1:2, 12:8). The word translated "vanity" is used in at least 3 ways throughout the book. In each case, it looks at the nature of man's activity "under the sun" as: 1) "fleeting", which has in view the vapor-like (cf. James 4:14) or transitory nature of life; 2) "futile" or "meaningless," which focuses on the cursed condition of the universe and the debilitating effects it has on man's earthly experience, or 3) "incomprehensible" or "enigmatic," which gives consideration to life's unanswerable questions. Solomon draws upon all 3 meanings in Ecclesiastes." p. 925

[2] Ed. Frank M. Whiting, "The Theatre of the Absurd" An Introduction to the Theatre (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1978), p. 174.

and therefore absurd and something to be laughed at."[3] It is true that man can still laugh when times get tough, though the laugh is usually hollow and desperate.

The First World War and The Second World War brought this desperation to the forefront of humanity. Where was God when the Nazi Regime was in full steam? In the postwar years, people lived a great frustration and depression that caused fear of life, disappointment and loss of the belief in God. With the disappearance of God, the mere answer to the big question of life is absurdity. By the time meaning had lost its value, the Absurd movement rose. The Theatre of the Absurd emerged as an art form to reflect this meaninglessness of life and as a result of desperation.

The word "absurd" brings a wide range of lexical references and is perceived differently in relation to each context in which it appears. According to The Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary, "absurd" means "untrue or unreasonable; ridiculously inconsistent with reason, or the plain dictates of common sense; logically contradictory."[4] Its synonyms are "foolish, irrational, ridiculous, preposterous, silly, unreasonable, and nonsensical. (Latin: *Absurdus*, from *ab* and *surdus* means deaf and insensible)"[5]

Absurd originally means out of harmony, in a musical context. Hence its dictionary definition is 'out of harmony with reason or propriety; incongruous, unreasonable, illogical.' In common usage, 'absurd' may simply mean ridiculous.[6] The term absurd may be expressed as follows:

> Meaningless, illogical, ridiculous, not accepted. In Latin it is 'Absurdus'. It comes from the word 'surdus' that means deaf and mute. Illogical and irrational, opposite the rules of logic and common sense, contradictory, unthinkable, unable to believe, nonsense, bunk, inconsistent, incongruous thoughtless, clumsy, stupidly, ridiculous...[7]

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[3] Ibid, p.178.
[4] Webster, Noah. Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary of English Language (New York: William Collins Publishers, Inc., 1979), p.8.
[5] Ibid, p.8.
[6] Esslin, Martin. The Theatre of the Absurd (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), p.23.
[7] Savcıoğlu, Nida Nevra. Absürd Öyküler (İstanbul: Okuyan Us Yayınları, 2003), p.1. (my translation)

But this usage of "absurd" is not the same as the usage of the term in the theatre world, particularly in the Theatre of the Absurd. Absurdity is the attempt to find a rational explanation to an irrational existence. Ionesco defined his understanding of the term as follows: "'Absurd' is that which is devoid of purpose... Cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, and useless."[8]

To understand the real situation of an absurd hero, one must look at the words of Jack Deleon:

> The absurd hero can be compared to a man who, walking on a straight, smooth road takes a fall down a deep well for no apparent reason at all. Not necessarily suffering physical injuries, he sits at the bottom of the well, lost and rootless, his head reeling from the shock of being torn from everything he thought would last forever, a tremendous sense of loneliness accumulating in him. His efforts to once more reach the surface generally remain fruitless. [9]

A world that can be explained by reasoning and in that world man tries to cope with illusions and feels like a stranger. "He is an irremediable exile" as Camus, wrote in The Myth of Sisyphus. Man also struggles for a promised land but at the end, or even at the beginning, he realizes the absurdity of life and soon becomes an actor in his own life and seeks to escape. Unfortunately, there is no escape except suicide. So, man chooses to live in an absurd life with an awareness of the absurdity of both life itself and his existence.

The objective of this study is to demonstrate the background of the Theatre of the Absurd, the origins of the Absurd and its early history in Europe, the rise and progress of American Theatre of the Absurd. In order to achieve this objective, I took Edward Albee as an absurd playwright and focused on his first long play Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? I aim to examine the progress of The Theatre of the Absurd by studying Albee's

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[8] Esslin, Martin. The Theatre of the Absurd (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), p.23.
[9] Deleon, Jack. The Harold Pinter Tradition in Contemporary Drama (İstanbul: Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 1986), p.1.

technique and style in his works. If the American theatre in the 1920s and 1930s was said to be dominated by the works of one man; Eugene O'Neill, and in the post war world it was Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller, Edward Albee can be considered as the major figure of the American Theatre by the end of the 1950s and after. Despite numerous theses and researches, many books and studies and hundreds of essays and reviews, there is still room for Albee scholarship. Some critics accept him as an Absurdist, but some claim that he belongs to the Realist tradition. However, his style proves that he is among the Absurd playwrights as Martin Esslin indicates in his book The Theatre of the Absurd at the very beginning of the sixties.

I. ORIGINS OF THE THEATRE OF THE ABSURD

The theatre is an arena in which societies debate with themselves.
It is where that delicate negotiation
between the individual and the group finds its natural contexts.
Its very form and circumstance is an exploration of that relationship.

C.W.E. Bigsby

The Theatre of the Absurd makes man aware of his position in the Universe, which although precarious and mysterious, expresses the absence of any generally accepted values. The Theatre of the Absurd is interested in the presentation of the individual's situation and it presents human being's instinct of his existence as he experiences it. The absurd character is not formed by his surroundings and he is not led by life events and processes. On the contrary, he is isolated, static and motionless, and thus appears and illustrates himself from his inner world; he is recognized through his own picture of the world he puts before us. The whole stage is a symbol showing the inner mental worlds of the characters, which are the organic parts of them. The reality of the situation in which the absurd character appears, is a psychological reality expressed in the images that are the outward projection of states of his mind. That is why, the Theatre of the Absurd can be considered as an image of the human being's mind. The Theatre of the Absurd presents a truer picture of reality itself, reality as perceived by an individual. The Theatre of the Absurd is the reflection of "*a shattered world that has lost its old values and is still struggling to find new ones*"[10] and the offspring of existentialism.

Absurdists did not invent this way of thinking. It had its philosophical precedents, partly in Kierkegaard, partly in Nietzsche, and partly in the early writings of Martin Heidegger, and its antecedents in nineteenth and twentieth century literature and drama such as Luigi Pirandello, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Alfred Jarry and Antonin Artaud.

[10] Esslin, Martin. The Theatre of the Absurd (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), p. 402.

A. Luigi Pirandello (1867-1936)

Pirandello was the most important dramatist of the twentieth century who questioned the concept of absolute truth. "He was one of the most subjective dramatists in the modern theatre, and certainly the most self-conscious" said Robert Brustein:

> In his plays ... the dramatic action turns on a question of fact that cannot be resolved because each character is convinced that his or her own version of it is the true version. Pirandello raises doubt about the possibility of determining truth through direct observation. He concludes that "truth" is personal, subjective, relative, and ever changing. [11]

Luigi Pirandello was the greatest Italian playwright at his time in Europe. He became famous with his novels and short stories. After 1915 he was interested in drama. He wrote It Is So! (If You Think So) *(Cosi e se vi pare,* 1916), Six Characters in Search of an Author *(Sai personnagi in cerca d'autore,* 1921), Henry IV in 1922, (*Vestire gli ignudi,* 1922), Each is His Own Way (*Ciascuno a suo modo,* 1924), Tonight We Improvise (*Questa sera si recita a sogetto,* 1930), Come tu mi vuoi, 1930) and When One Is Somebody *(Quando si e qualcuno,* 1933).[12]

As a cutting-edge artist, Pirandello desired to create "organic art," that is an art that existed on its own. Robert Brustein explains Pirandello's organic art as "changing moment to moment, yet still formed by the hand of man."[13] But this could only happen if the artist removed himself, which Pirandello was not willing to do. "Frustrated but undaunted," Pirandello continued writing, and the result was his "trilogy of the theatre in the theatre"[14]: Six Characters in Search of an Author *(Sai personnagi in cerca d'autore,* 1921), Each is His Own Way (*Ciascuno a suo modo,* 1924), and Tonight We Improvise (*Questa sera si recita a sogetto,* 1930). Although these were each written at a different stage of the author's career, all are joined by a common intent:

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[11] Brockett, Oscar G. The Essential Theatre (Texas: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, 1992), p. 228.
[12] Brustein, Robert. The Theatre of Revolt (Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, 1991), p. 281-317.
[13] Ibid, p. 306.
[14] Ibid, p. 307.

> Probing the complex relationships between the stage, the work of art, and reality itself, Pirandello attempts, in these plays, to forge out of the old theatrical artifacts a living theatre, destroying the traditional conventions of the stage by crossing the boundaries, which separate art from life. In these plays, the illusions of the realistic theatre –where actors pretend to be real people, canvas and lumber pass for actual locations, and forged events are designed to seem real- no longer apply. Now the stage is a stage, actors are actors, even the audience, formerly silent and half invisible in its willing suspension of disbelief, have been drawn into the action and implicated in the theatrical proceedings. Having disintegrated reality in his more conventional plays, Pirandello is now disintegrating stage reality.[15]

Pirandello's dramas appear as quite pessimistic and his dramas reflect his belief that problems encountered in life can never be solved. His work is frustration-drama, which "has at its core an irreconcilable conflict between time and timelessness of life and form; and whether the author is reflecting on human identity or the identity of art, the terms of the conflict remain essentially the same." [16] Though he is stern, negative, and uncompromising, he ironically is sympathetic and full of pity toward the suffering mankind. Nevertheless, he ultimately "sees no possibility of salvation through social or community life. In fact, he is vigorously opposed to all forms of social engineering, and extremely contemptuous of Utopian ideal and idealists." [17]

Oscar G. Brockett believes that "He (Pirandello) could popularize his views."[18] This may said that Pirandello was deeply effective at his time and he was accepted enthusiastically after the World War II. There were many playwrights who followed Pirandello. His influence on the drama of the twentieth century is enormous.

> In his agony over the nature of existence, he anticipates Sartre and Camus; in his insights into the disintegration of personality and the isolation of man, he anticipates Samuel Beckett; in his unremitting war on language,

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[15] Ibid, p. 306-307.
[16] Ibid, p. 282.
[17] Ibid, p. 283.
[18] Brockett, Oscar G. Tiyatro Tarihi (Ankara: Dost Kitabevi Yayınları, 2000), p. 548. (my translation)
[20] Brustein, Robert. The Theatre of Revolt (Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, 1991), p. 316.

> theory, concepts, and the collective mind, he anticipates Eugene Ionesco; in his approach to the conflict of truth and illusion, he anticipates Eugene O'Neill and later Harold Pinter and Edward Albee; in his experiments with the theatre, he anticipates a host of experimental dramatists, including Thornton Wilder and Jack Gelber; in his use of the interplay between actors and characters, he anticipates Jean Anouilh; in his view of the tension between public mask and private face, he anticipates Jean Giraudoux; and in his concept of man as a role-playing animal, he anticipates Jean Genet. [20]

This list can be large; Pirandello was one of the most influential and shaping dramatist at his time.

B. Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980)

Sartre was an existentialist and adopted a more radical version of Pirandello's views. Sartre followed in the footsteps of philosopher Nietzsche by denying the existence of God. Not only did he deny the existence of God, this best-known existentialist also denied the possibility that moral codes could be verified, and that standards of conduct could be fixed with validity. As Oscar G. Brockett puts it,

> He concluded that since none of the institutions (church, state, society) from which we have taken our standards can prove the correctness or necessity of those standards, human beings are "condemned to be free" (that is, people deprived of absolute standards are condemned to choose individually the values by which they will live). He insisted that unquestioning conformity to values established by others is immoral, whereas choosing (and living by) one's own values is to define oneself as a moral being.[21]

[21] Brockett, Oscar G. The Essential Theatre (Texas: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers 1992), p. 228.

Jean-Paul Sartre was born in Paris. From 1931 to 1945 he worked as a teacher and traveled in Egypt, Greece, and Italy. In 1933-34 he studied in Berlin the writings of the German philosophers Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. He had been a prisoner in Germany in 1940. His experience in the prisoner-of-war camp contributed to his philosophical ideas. He was released in 1941, and immediately joined the resistance movement in Paris. His part included writing for resistance magazines Les Lettres Française and Combat. After the war Sartre devoted his full time to writing and political activity. Although he tried to reconcile existentialism and Marxism and collaborated with the French Communist Party as the only hope of bettering the lot of the working classes, Sartre was never a member of Communist party.[22] However, when Albert Camus, with whom Sartre was closely linked in the 1940, openly criticized Stalinism, Sartre hesitated at that time about such acts. The publication of Camus' novel The Rebel in 1951 caused a break between the two friends. "Man can will nothing unless he has first understood that he must count no one but himself; that he is alone, abandoned on earth in the midst of his infinite responsibilities, without help, with no other aim than the one he sets himself, with no other destiny than the one he forges for himself on this earth."[23]

J.I. Styan observes that Sartre had been a prisoner of war in Germany in 1940, when he was released by lucky mistake. In the prison camp, he had written and produced a Biblical play for his fellow prisoners. During their performance, Sartre remarked the intense concern and concentration of his audience under the unnatural circumstances of their confinement. He said "the occasion taught him the nature and virtue of a collective experience in the theatre, and justified his pursuit, in terms of drama, of the philosophy he had been formulating before the war."[24] Existentialism proposed that man was a lonely creature of anxiety and despair living in a decisive and critical choice about his own future course of action. By such a choice, a person would acquire an identity, a purpose and dignity as a human being. For preference, existential man should adopt some social or political cause in order to acquire this dignity and purpose, and "in translating these ideas into dramatic form, Sartre's name became synonymous with the theatre engage, the

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[22] Horton, Rode W. Backgrounds of American Literary Thought, (New Jersey: Prentice Hole, 1974), p. 494-507.
[23] Camus, Albert. L'Être et le Néant / Being and Nothingness, (Paris: 1943), quoted in Brockett, Oscar G. The Essential Theatre (Texas: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers 1992), p. 228.
[24] Styan J.I. Modern Drama in Theory and Practice Vol. II. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 118.

theatre 'committed', that is, to positive social or political action. Each of his plays is representative of his philosophical concerns as an existentialist."[25]

Les Mouches (1943) was Sartre's first play and examined the themes of commitment and responsibility. In the story, set in the ancient, mythical Greece, Orestes kills the murderers of Agamemnon, thus freeing the people of the city from the burden of guilt. According to Sartre's existentialist view, only one who chooses to assume responsibility of acting in a particular situation, like Orestes, makes effective use of one's freedom. In his second play, Huis Clos (1944), a traitor, a lesbian, and a nymphomaniac are forced to live in "hell", in a small room, their authenticity after their deaths. Marvin Carlson observed that Sartre saw Huis Clos as a demonstration of the process of commitment. This process dealt with "rights" not with facts. In this process, each character "acts because he is engaged in a venture and because this venture must be carried to its conclusion, justifies it by reason, believes he is right to undertake it"[26]

Jean-Paul Sartre was largely responsible for our image of the postwar French intellectual - and as an activist and writer he was considered the leading interpreter of the postwar generation's worldview. In his essays Sartre dealt with wide range of subjects, sometimes in provocative manner. The Republic of Silence starts "We were never more free than under the German occupation", explaining this later that then each gesture had the weight of a commitment. In The Humanism of Existentialism he condensed the major theme of existentialist philosophy simply "first of all, man exist, turns up, appears on the scene, and, only afterwards, defines him." According to Carlson, "this process must be relevant to the audience's own concerns but must also be distanced, to give perspective. The essence of theatre, for Sartre as for Brecht, is a combination of objective distance and the presentation of situations relevant to spectator's concerns."[27] In 1964, as French novelist, playwright, existentialist philosopher, and literary critic, Sartre was awarded the

[25] Ibid, p. 118.
[26] Carlson, Marvin. Theories of the Theatre (London: Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 398.
[27] Ibid, p. 398.

Nobel Prize for literature, but he declined the award in protest of the values of bourgeois society.[28]

C. Albert Camus (1913-1960)

Albert Camus was the first philosopher and dramatist who called the human condition "absurd". According to Camus our situation is absurd because

> Our longing for clarity and certainty is met with, and forever thwarted by, the irrationality of the universe into which we have been thrown; it is absurd also because we can neither rid ourselves of the desire for order nor overcome the irrationality that stands in the way of order. The only recourse is to choose one's own standards and live by them.[29]

In The Myth of Sisyphus, written in 1942, The French philosopher Camus first defined the human situation as meaningless and absurd. He derived the term from this essay. The title character of his essay, the mythical Greek character Sisyphus, was condemned by the gods through all eternity to repeatedly push a large rock to the top of a mountain and watch helplessly as it rolls down again by its own weight, only to start again. Camus compares the absurdity of the existence of humanity to the labor of Sisyphus. According to J.I. Styan, Camus finds meaning in the struggle itself and takes the nonexistence of God granted. Camus became an accidental spokesman for the spirit of the French movement of the Absurd with this essay. For Camus, "the legendary figure of Sisyphus was the prototype of *an absurd hero*" and represents "the epitome of futile labor and pointless existence.[30]

According to Martin Esslin, by the time this essay was written, Camus was calmly asking the question "Why, since life has lost all meaning, should man not seek escape in suicide?" In The Myth of Sisyphus, "one of the great, seminal heart-searching essays of

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[28] Horton, Rode W. Backgrounds of American Literary Thought (New Jersey: Prentice Hole, 1974), p. 494-507.
[29] Brockett, Oscar G. The Essential Theatre (Texas: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, 1992), p. 228.
[30] Camus, Albert. The Myth of Sisyphus. (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), p. 21.

our time", Camus attempts to diagnose the human predicament "in a world of shattered beliefs."[31] The Myth of Sisyphus became a "manifesto of the absurd". In the essay, Camus shows his view that life has no meaning. He attempts to describe how mankind feels to be "a stranger and an exile in an alien world", and believes that this divorce between man and life was properly "*le sentiment de l'absurdite*", or the feeling of absurdity. J.I. Styan asks, "Was suicide the way to end this feeling? No. In the confrontation with the irrational, it was possible to proceed beyond nihilism, for there was a 'wild longing for clarity' in the human heart: 'If the world were clear, art would not exist.' " [32]

Novelist, essayist and playwright, Camus received the 1957 Nobel Prize for literature. Among his best known novels are The Stranger and The Plague. He was closely linked to his fellow existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre in the 1940s. Sartre analyzes the Theatre of the Absurd through the words of the story's protagonist Mersault in The Stranger: "The absurd man will not commit suicide; he wants to live, without relinquishing any of his certainty, without a future, without hope, without illusions, and without resignation either. He stares at death with passionate attention and this fascination liberates him. He experiences the *divine irresponsibility* of the condemned man."[33] Later, he continues by saying, "It is not rebellion itself which is noble but the demands it makes upon us."[34] Camus also discusses the connection is his book The Myth of Sisyphus:

> This world in itself is not reasonable, that is all that can be said. But what is absurd is the confrontation of this irrational and the wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart. The absurd depends as much on man as on the world. For the moment it is all that links them together. It binds them one to the other as only hatred can weld two creatures together.

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[31] Esslin, Martin. The Theatre of the Absurd (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), p.23.
[32] Styan J.I. Modern Drama in Theory and Practice Vol.II. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 119.
[33] Sartre, Jean-Paul. "Literary and Philosophical Essays" The Plague (1947), quoted in Styan, J.I. Modern Drama in Theory and Practice Vol.II. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p.119.
[34] Ibid, p. 119.

> This is all I can discern clearly in this measureless universe where my adventure takes place.[35]

Camus identifies his works as the result of attempting to understand his times. Obviously growing-up in Algeria helped him understand his times better, however he always considered himself a European. Before settling in France, he had the chance to have a subjective and large view about Europe. After the Second World War, he wrote in his writings "By looking at the vast coast of Africa we see the face of Europe more vividly and we realize that it is not beautiful."[36] In both his novels and his plays, Camus protested the war-torn generation against man's fear of death and his helplessness in the face of a meaningless universe. In both his novels and his plays, Camus protested the war-torn generation against man's fear of death and his helplessness in the face of a meaningless universe.

D. Alfred Jarry (1873-1907)

Alfred Jarry was an important predecessor of the Absurd Theatre. The first example of the absurd appears in Ubu Roi, which was a kind of parody of Shakespeare's Macbeth. His Ubu Roi was first produced in Paris in 1896. *Ubu* is a mythical figure, set amidst a wo the Theatre of the Abtypal images. Ubu Roi is a caricature, a terrifying image of the animal nature of man and his cruelty. It resembles a grotesque cartoon. Ubu is fat, dirty, impulsive, terrifying, but in a funny way. Ubu makes himself King of Poland, and kills and tortures. The work is a puppet play and its décor of childish naivety underlines the horror. Jarry expressed man's psychological states by objectifying them on the stage. Jarry was a forerunner of the Theatre of Absurd writing his works in a Surrealistic style, and inventing logic of the absurd that he called *pataphysique.*[37]

Alfred Jarry was born in Laval, Mayenne, and at the age of 18 he moved to Paris to live on a small family inheritance. By the age of 15 he had written Ubu Roi in

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[35] Camus, Albert. The Myth of Sisyphus (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), p. 21.
[36] Cruickshank, John. Albert Camus ve Başkaldırma Edebiyatı. (İstanbul: De yayınevi, 1965), p. 7. (my translation)
[37] Esslin, Martin. The Theatre of the Absurd (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), p. 356-364.

collaboration with a classmate to ridicule a pompous mathematics teacher. The play was originally presented with marionettes. In 1896 the producer Aurélien Lugné-Poë produced it in Paris, where the performance caused a riot. The coarseness of the language and anarchistic tones were too much for the audience. It shocked even W.B. Yeats, who attended its opening night. Jarry also wrote two sequels to Ubu, Ubu Enchaine (1900), which was acted for the first time at the Paris Exposition of 1937, and Ubu Cocu published posthumously in 1944.[38]

Martin Esslin pronounces, "This was the movement that began on that memorable evening of 10 December 1896, when Jarry's Ubu Roi opened at Lugne-Poe Theatre de l'CEuvre and provoked a scandal as violent as the famous battle at the first night of Victor Hugo's Hernani."[39] To him, Jarry was one of the most extraordinary and eccentric figures among the *poetes maudits* of French literature. "Wild, extravagant and uninhibited in his use of language, Jarry belongs toe the school of Rabelais, but his imagery also owes much to dark, brooding, haunted dream world" and "Ubu Roi certainly created a mythical figure and a world of grotesque archetypal images".[40] In 1896, Alfred Jarry was calmly saying *merde* meaning "shit" to bourgeois culture. He believed that *laughter is born of the contradictory* and he wrote his plays around this idea.[41]

E. Antonin Artaud (1896-1948)

Antonin Artaud fully rejected realism in the theatre, cherishing a vision of a stage of magical beauty and mythical power. He called for a return to myth and magic and to the exposure of the deepest conflicts within the human mind. He demanded a theatre that would produce collective archetypes, thus creating a new mythology. In his view, theatre should pursue the aspects of the internal world. Man should be considered metaphorically in a wordless language of shapes, light, movement and gesture. Theatre should aim at expressing what language is incapable of putting into words. Artaud forms a bridge

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[38] Styan J.I. Modern Drama in Theory and Practice vol.2 (New York: Cambridge University *Press,* 1983), p. 45-51.
[39] Esslin, Martin. The Theatre of the Absurd (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), p. 356.
[40] Ibid, p. 357.
[41] Ibid, p. 356-364.

between the inter-war avant-garde and the post-Second-World-War Theatre of the Absurd. Artaud and his followers, while succeeding in giving us something new, failed in their expressed desire to destroy the old, including Sophocles, Shakespeare, and Shaw. As a result, the theatre probably seeks for freedom and although this has resulted in an absence of clearly defined standards, it has also resulted in a theatrical scene that is richly inspiring.[42]

Both Artaud, with the translation of his influential book The Theatre and Its Double (1958) and Jerzy Grotowski, with his visit America in 1967 and his book Towards a Poor Theatre (1968) helped shape American theatre. Artaud's was a vision of theatre as "transformational magic: Theatre would awake the mysteries and ecstasies. It would react against language and psychology and plot in favor of disturbing imagery and gesture. It would uncover truth away from traditional theatre buildings in a mystical space."[43] According to Bigsby, Artaud suggested that seeing lacerating images of cruelty on stage would make it possible for an audience to be cruel outside the theatre. Artaud was rather assimilated by the American theatre that was eagerly waiting for such a theorist. Grotowski's *poor theatre* was rich in ideas that appealed to the avant-garde. *Poor Theatre* was a theatre that emphasized the actor and his rigorous, almost religiously austere training. Grotowski's theatre is "poor only in the accouterments of Illusionist Theatre for like Artaud, he advocated the revelation of truth through the integrity of performance," and performance for Grotowski was the very subject of theatre; so the actor "does not tell a story, or create an illusion –he is there in the present".[44]

Between the two World Wars, the most important surrealist was Artaud. After he worked with the directors Lugne-Poe, Dullin and Pitoef, with the playwright Roger Vitrac (1899-1952) Artaud established the Theatre Alfred Jarry, which opened on 1 June 1927, with a program that included a one act play by Artaud, Upset Stomach, or The Mad Mother (Vertre Brule, ou La Mere Folle) and Vitrac's The Mysteries of Love (Les Mysteres de l'Amour). After Artaud had seen the Balinese Dancers at the Colonial

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[42] Brockett, Oscar G. The Essential Theatre (Texas: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, 1992), p. 225-227.
[43] Bigsby, C.W.E., A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama, vol.3 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 59.
[44] Ibid, p. 59.
[46] Brockett, Oscar G. Tiyatro Tarihi. (Ankara: Dost Kitabevi Yayınları, , 2000), p. 542. (my translation)

Exhibition in 1931, he formulated his ideas and developed his theatre theory in his book Theatre and its Twins that was his essential contribution to drama.[46] His rejection of realism and his demand for a theatre that would project collective archetypes, he called "Theatre of Cruelty": "Everything that acts is a cruelty. It is upon this idea of extreme action, pushed beyond all limits, that the theatre must be rebuilt."[47] Under the influence of the Balinese dancers, Artaud wanted to restore the language of gesture and movement, "to make inanimate things play their part in the action, and to relegate dialogue to the background."[48]

"In theory, Artaud had formulated some of the basic tendencies of the Theatre of the Absurd by the early 1930s. But he lacked the opportunity either as dramatist or as a director to put these ideas into practice."[49] Thus, theories and styles of Artaud and also Grotowski affected the absurdists. To emphasize the performance rather than language is accepted and practiced by the absurdists.

F. Twentieth Century European Avant-garde

In 1878, Mikhail Bakunin published a short time magazine called *L'Avant-Garde* in Switzerland. It was the first used as a military term. Then, the term "Avant-garde" became a mark to identify any untraditional art form.[50] The aim of the avant-garde was to perform away with art as a simple imitation of appearances.

The term Avant-garde comes from military usage, and means "front guard". It means the commander who goes in front in a battle to guard the army from the first attack. This term slowly became the leader in new, unconventional movements in the arts. Shocking the audience is the most important element of the Avant-garde Theatre. Alfred Jarry's usage of the shocking theme in the play Ubu Roi was accepted as the first Avant-garde play in the world history.

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[47] Artaud, Antonin. The Theatre and its Double, trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove Press, 1958), p. 85.
[48] Esslin, Martin. The Theatre of the Absurd (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), p. 384.
[49] Ibid, p.384.
[50] Innes, Christopher. Avant-Garde Tiyatro (Ankara: Dost Kitabevi, 2004), p. 13. (my translation)

In his book the Theatre of the Absurd, Martin Esslin defines the new European Avant-garde plays as the Absurd and named this for the first time as the Theatre of the Absurd. Martin Esslin describes, "Avant-garde theatre is based on the elements that the world is dark and incomprehensible in reality, and has no logical aim and acting rules. Aimlessness of life and the world makes human's actions incomprehensible."[51] He analyzes the characteristics of the movement, and he questions the ground for the facts of avant-garde plays in the below passage:

> Why did a play of the supposedly esoteric avant-garde make so immediate and so deep an impact on an audience? Most of the incomprehension with which plays of this type are still being received by critics and theatrical reviewers, most of the bewilderment they have caused and to which they still give rise, come from the fact that they are part of a new and still developing stage convention that has not yet been generally understood and has hardly ever been defined.[52]

For the French avant-garde, myth and dream has the greatest importance. The surrealists based their artistic theory on the teachings of Sigmund Freud and his emphasis on the role of the subconscious. "Apollinaire demanded that art should be more real than reality and deal with essences rather than appearances."[53] One of the more extreme expressions of the avant-garde was the Dadaist movement, which took the desire to do away with obsolete artistic conventions to the extreme, and some Dadaist plays were written, but these were mostly nonsense poems in dialogue form, the aim of which was mostly to shock the bourgeois audience. After the First World War, German Expressionism attempted to project inner realities and to objectify thought and feeling. "Some of Brecht's plays are close to Absurd Drama, both in their clowning and their music-hall humor and the preoccupation with the problem of identity of the self and its fluidity."[54] French surrealism accepted the subconscious mind as a great, positive healing force. However, its contribution to the subject of drama was small. In fact it can be said

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[51] Esslin, Martin. Reflection-Essays on Modern Theatre (New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1971), p. 3-4.
[52] Esslin, Martin. The Theatre of the Absurd (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), p. 21.
[53] Jan Culik, www2.arts.gla.ac.uk/Slavonic/Absurd.htm
[54] Ibid.

that the Absurd Theatre of the 1950s and the 1960s was "a belated practical realization of the principles created by the Surrealists as early as the 1930s." [55] The theatre of the Absurd was offspring from avant-garde movement after the disappointment and frustration of the Second World War.

[55] Ibid.

II. EARLY HISTORY OF EUROPEAN THEATRE OF THE ABSURD

According to Arnold P. Hinchliffe, the Theatre of the Absurd is "one of the ways of facing up to a universe that has lost its meaning and purpose"[56] It is "the expression of nothing to articulate, no method to express, and expressing is needed although no desire to tell and no attempt to express."[57] The writer Carlson Marvin analyzes absurd as follows:

> The appearance of Camus's Mythe de Sisyphe in 1951 had made "the absurd" a fashionable literary catchword, and a number of writers seized upon it to classify the new drama. Ionesco called "absurd" as "vague enough to mean nothing any more and to be an easy definition of anything." He considered the world "not absurd but incredible". Arthur Adamov expressed his oppositions to the label even more strongly, finding it both incorrect and irritating in his L'homme et l'enfant (1968), saying "Life is not absurd, only difficult, very difficult." [58]

The Theatre of the Absurd is a term coined by Esslin for the effort of a number of playwrights, mostly written in the 1950s and 1960s. The *absurd* plays by Samuel Beckett, Arthur Adamov, Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet, Harold Pinter and others all contribute to the view that man inhabits a universe with which he is out of answer and key. Its meaning is hard to decipher and his place within it is without purpose. He is confused, troubled, helpless, bewildered and obscurely threatened. The absurdists, who emerged in France around 1950, accepted the views of Sartre and Camus about the human condition, but unlike those two writers they saw no way out, since rational and meaningful choices seemed impossible in such a universe. Thus, to the absurdists truth consisted of "Chaos and lack of order, logic, or certainty, and their plays embodied this vision in a structure

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[56] Hinchliffe, Arnold P. The Absurd, p. II, quoted in Merchant, Moelwyn. Comedy (New York: Methuen and Co. Ltd, 1983), p. 39.
[57] Hinchliffe, Arnold P. The Absurd. (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1972), p.67, quoted in Yüksel, Ayşegül. Samuel Beckett Tiyatrosu (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 1997), p. 37.
[58] Carlson, Marvin. Theories of the Theatre (London: Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 411.

that abandoned the logic of cause-and-effect relationships for associational patterns reflecting illogic and chance."[59]

The origins of the Theatre of the Absurd are embedded in the avant-garde experiments in art during the 1920s and 1930s. At the same time, it was certainly strongly influenced by the disturbing experience of the horrors of the Second World War. The atrocities of Hitler's Third Reich showed the total impermanence of any ideals shook the authority of any conventions and highlighted the precariousness of human life and its fundamental meaninglessness, purposelessness and arbitrariness. From 1945, onwards, the trauma of living under threat of nuclear annihilation seems to have been a chief factor in the rise of the new theatre. At the same time, the Theatre of the Absurd also seems to have been a reaction to the disappearance of the religious characteristic from contemporary life. Besides, the Absurd Theatre can be seen as an attempt to restore or re-establish the value of myth and ritual to that age, by making man aware of the ultimate realities of his condition, by instilling in him again the lost sense of cosmic wonder and ancient suffering. The Absurd Theatre tries to achieve this by shocking man out of an existence that has become cliché, mechanical and satisfied.

As a result, absurd plays understood a highly unusual, original form, openly aiming to shock the spectator, shaking him out of this comfortable, easy, conventional life of everyday concerns. In the meaningless, pointless and godless post-Second-World-War world, it was no longer possible to keep using such traditional art forms and standards that had ceased being influential and lost their power. The Theatre of the Absurd directly rebelled against conventional theatre. Definitely, it was anti-theatre. It was surreal, illogical, irrational, conflict less and plots less. The discussion seemed total nonsense.

Not surprisingly, the Theatre of the Absurd first met with incomprehension and rejection:

> On 19 November 1957, a group of worried actors were preparing to face their audience. The actors were members of the company of the San Francisco Actors' Workshop. The audience consisted of fourteen hundred

[59]Brockett, Oscar G. The Essential Theatre (Texas: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, 1992), p.229-230.

> convicts at the San Quentin penitentiary. ...the play ...was Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot. How were they to face one of the toughest audiences in the world with a highly obscure, intellectual play that had produced near riots among a good many highly sophisticated audiences in Western Europe?[60]

The conflict going on in the hearts of these actors is symbolic of the uncertainty most people had of the response there would be to such absurdity. One of the most significant aspects of absurd drama was its distrust of language as a way of communication. Language had become a vehicle of conventionalized, stereotyped, meaningless exchanges. Words failed to express the essence of human experience, not being able to penetrate beyond its surface. First the Theatre of the Absurd constituted an onslaught on language, showing it as a very undependable and insufficient tool of communication. "Absurd drama uses conventionalized speech, clichés, slogans and technical jargon, which is distorts, parodies and breaks down."[61] The Theatre of the Absurd tries to make people aware of the possibility of going beyond everyday speech conventions and communicating more authentically by ridiculing conventionalized and stereotyped speech patterns. "Conventionalized speech acts as a barrier between us and what the world is really about: in order to come into direct contact with natural reality, it is necessary to discredit and discard the false crutches of conventionalized language."[62] Objects are much more important than language in absurd theatre. What happens transcends what is being said about it. It is the hidden, indirect meaning of words that expect main importance in absurd theatre, more than what is being actually said. The Theatre of the Absurd attempts to communicate a totality of awareness, therefore it had to go beyond language. Esslin formulates the absurd plays very clearly in the following lines:

> If a good play must have a cleverly constructed story, these have no story or plot to speak of; if a good play is judged by subtlety of characterization and motivation, these are often without recognized characters and present the audience with almost mechanical puppets; if a good play has to have

[60] Esslin, Martin. The Theatre of the Absurd (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), p. 19.
[61] Jan Culik. www2.arts.gla.ac.uk/Slavonic/Absurd.htm
[62] Ibid.

> fully explained theme, which is neatly exposed and finally solved, there often have neither a beginning nor an end; if a good play is to hold the mirror up to nature and portray the manners and mannerisms of the age in finely observed sketches, these seem often to be reflections of dreams and nightmares; if a good play relies on witty repartee and pointed dialogue, these often consist of incoherent babblings.[63]

Absurd drama subverts and challenges logic. It appreciates the unexpected and the logically impossible. According to Sigmund Freud, there is a feeling of freedom we can enjoy when we are able to abandon the straitjacket of logic. Then, the Theatre of the Absurd tries to destroy logic and language and build a new type of world in theatre.

> In trying to burst the bounds of logic and language the absurd theatre is trying to shatter the enclosing walls of the human condition itself. Our individual identity is defined by language, having a name is the source of our separateness - the loss of logical language brings us towards a unity with living things. In being illogical, the absurd theatre is anti-rationalist: it negates rationalism because it feels that rationalist thought, like language, only deals with the superficial aspects of things. Nonsense, on the other hand, opens up a glimpse of the infinite. It offers intoxicating freedom brings one into contact with the essence of life and is a source of marvelous comedy.[64]

In the absurd plays, there is no dramatic conflict. Dramatic conflicts, clashes of personalities and powers belong to a world where an inflexible, accepted hierarchy of values dominates a permanent institution. Such conflicts lose their meaning in a situation where the establishment and outward reality have become meaningless. On the other hand when characters perform frantically, this only emphasizes the fact that nothing happens to change their existence. Against the more conventional theatre of ordered events, the Absurd Theatre is a theatre of situation. "Absurd dramas are lyrical statements, very much like music: they communicate an atmosphere, an experience of archetypal human

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[63] Esslin, Martin. The Theatre of the Absurd (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), p. 22.
[64] Jan Culik. www2.arts.gla.ac.uk/Slavonic/Absurd.htm

situations," and "It presents a pattern of poetic images. Unlike conventional theatre, where language rules supreme, in the Absurd Theatre language is only one of many components of its multidimensional poetic imagery."[65] In doing this, the Theatre of the Absurd uses visual elements, movement, and light.

The Theatre of the Absurd is totally lyrical theatre which uses abstract scenic effects, many of which have been taken over and adapted from the popular theatre arts: mime, ballet, acrobatics, conjuring, music-hall clowning. Much of its inspiration comes from silent film and comedy (Laurel and Hardy, W C Fields, the Marx Brothers). It underlines the importance of objects and visual experience: the role of language is relatively secondary. It is indebted to European pre-war surrealism.

The Theatre of the Absurd is aiming to create a ritual-like, mythological, archetypal, allegorical vision, closely related to the world of dreams. The tradition of the world as a stage and life as a dream goes back to Elizabethan times. Baroque allegorical drama shows the world in terms of mythological archetypes.

In some literary works of eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there was an unexpected transformation of characters and nightmarish shifts of time and place. When Strindberg produced the masterly transcriptions of dreams and obsessions, dreams were acted in many theatrical pieces, and became a direct and main source of the Absurd Theatre. Strindberg, Dostoyevsky, Joyce and Kafka created archetypes: by digging into their own subconscious, they discovered the universal, collective significance of their own private obsessions. The Absurd Theatre sought to express the individual's longing for a single myth of general validity.

Absurd drama tries to present the human condition, as it is, vulnerable and highly mortal, using a poetry born of over-simple language. Absurd drama is not the drama of debate and narration, but of representation. It is the words themselves that are important, but the context in which they are used. Although the Theatre of the Absurd is in this sense anti-literary, it must in no way be confused with the avant-garde, which, contrary to absurd, relies to a great extent on consciously poetic speech and complex verbal

[65] Ibid.

associations. What separates earlier drama from the Theatre of the Absurd is the fact that the latter contains a more serious purpose than the early moderns. This more serious purpose stems from the existentialist concept that man leads a totally purposeless existence. He is trapped among fixed ideas and differing values, acquires habits that are self-destructive, and is thus reduced to a creature for which language has become a dead thing, limiting his communication and emphasizing his solitude.[66]

When the first absurd plays were being written and staged in Western Europe in the late 1940s and early 1950s in the East European countries, people unexpectedly found them thrown into a world where absurdity was a central part of everyday living. Suddenly, the experience of absurdity became part of everybody's existence. Hitler's attempt to conquer Russia during the Second World War gave Russia a chance to extend its area of influence and at the same time to further the cause of the Soviet brand of socialism. Stalin established rigidly ideological pro-Soviet regime. The Central European countries, whose pre-war political systems ranged from feudal monarchies to a parliamentary Western-type democracy. The Western Theatre of the Absurd draw attention to man's primary panic and confusion, stemming from the fact that man has no answers to the essential existential questions such as: why we are alive, why we have to die, why there is injustice and suffering? East European Soviet-type socialism proudly proclaimed that it had answers to all these questions and, moreover, that it was capable of *eliminating suffering and setting all injustices right*. The formula of Marxism was that all subjects of life and Paradise on Earth would occur. It became apparent soon that this easy formula offered less truthful answers than various esoteric and complex Western philosophical systems and that its performance by force brought huge suffering. From the beginning it was obvious that the simplified idea was absurd: yet it was made to dominate all spheres of life.[67]

The western Theatre of the Absurd may be seen as the expression of disappointment and anger of a few intellectuals over the fact that people seem to lead unimaginative, second class and stereotyped existences, either by conscious choice or because they do not know any better and have no idea how or capability by which to help

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[66] Deleon, Jack. The Harold Pinter Tradition in Contemporary Drama (İstanbul: Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 1986), p. 2-3.
[67] Jan Culik. www2.arts.gla.ac.uk/Slavonic/Absurd.htm

themselves. When we look at Eastern Europe, we realize that these intellectuals are justified in condemning lives of mediocrity, even though many people in the West seem to lead such lives quite happily and without any awareness of the absurdity. In Eastern Europe, "second-rate-ness" has been elevated to a single, sacred, governing principle. As a result, unlike in the West, many people in the East seem to have discovered that it is very uncomfortable to live under the command of second-rate ness. The rise of the Theatre of the Absurd in the East is connected with the period of relative flexibility of the East European regimes after Stalin's death. The arts, as indeed all other spheres of life, were subject to rigid political control and reduced to serving obvious ideological and propagandistic aims. This was the period when feature films were made about happy workers in steelworks, or about a village tractor driver who after falling in love with his tractor becomes a member of the communist party, etc. All the arts assumed rigidly conservative, nineteenth century realistic forms, to which a strong political bias was added. Twentieth century developments, in particular the inter-war experiments with structure and form in painting and poetry were outlawed as bourgeois decadence. In the years after Stalin's death in 1953, the situation slowly improved. Hence it was only in the 1960s that the first absurd plays could be written and staged in Eastern Europe. The East European Absurd Theatre was undoubtedly inspired by Western absurd drama, yet it differed from it considerably in form, meaning and impact. Although East European authors and theatre producers were quite well acquainted with many West European absurd plays from the mid to late 1950s onwards, these plays were not performed or even translated in Eastern Europe until the mid-1960s. [68]

Absurd playwrights have the same themes such as to deal with the problem of existence and its meaninglessness. The decline of religious faith occurred mostly after the Second World War. As mentioned above, this is the time Camus asked the big question that since life had lost all meaning, why should man not seek escape in suicide? The absurdity of existence in the world has caused pain for man that is the main theme of the Absurdists. The pain had become the theme of other writers and philosophers before, such as Giraudoux, Anouilh, Sartre and Camus. They told that theme by rational definitions and rules. However, the Theatre of the Absurd did not use rational methods in arguing

[68] Ibid.

about the absurdity of the human condition on stage. Their dissimilarity is like the difference between theory and experience.

Martin Esslin indicates, "The Theatre of the Absurd is a return to old, even archaic, traditions."[69] The Theatre of the Absurd makes a combination of antecedents and shows them in only slightly different contexts that aim to strike and catch the spectator unprepared. The Theatre of the Absurd displays "the age-old traditions" in new and individually varied combinations, and he summarizes the elements of the Theatre of the Absurd as a "pure" theatre that is its anti-literary attitude, and in it "clowning, fooling, and mad-scenes, verbal nonsense, and the literature of dream and fantasy that often has a strong allegorical component."[70] There is a kind of return to earlier non-verbal forms of theatre. The literature of verbal nonsense and nonsense poetry tries to burst the bounds of logic and language. Edward Lear, Lewis Carroll and Christian Morgenstern are the most important poets of nonsense poetry. Gustave Flaubert is the pioneer of nonsense literature. So, the Theatre of the Absurd uses "the inexhaustible resources of comedy discovered by Flaubert and Joyce in the storehouse of clichés and ready-made language".[71]

There is a close relationship between the performers of wordless skills such as jugglers, acrobats, tightrope walkers, aerialist and animal trainers, and the clown. The old tradition of mime, *mimus*, Middle Age play's comic characters, Italian commedia dell'arte, the plays of Aristophanes, and Shakespearean clowns, fools and ruffians are all seen as forerunners of the Theatre of the Absurd. Dreams, delusions, dreamlike fantasies and allegorical elements are characteristics of the Theatre of the Absurd, and these elements can be seen in old traditions, such as in Dante's Divine Comedy and Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream. Esslin adds in his book "the silent film comedy is without doubt one of the decisive influences on the Theatre of the Absurd. It has the dreamlike strangeness of a world seen from outside with the uncomprehending eyes of one cut off from reality."[72]

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[69] Esslin, Martin. The Theatre of the Absurd (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), p. 327
[70] Ibid, p.327.
[71] Ibid, p.348
[72] Ibid, p.335.

The Theatre of the Absurd aims to shock the spectator with a shocking and incomprehensible play like Ionesco's The Bald Prima Donna. There is no need to be logical as in the play The Bald Prima Donna in which the child's eyes are in different colors. The Absurdists use grotesque figures and emphasize black comedy. The tragic condition of man in the play seemed comic to the spectator, but there is something more scary and shocking in this humor. These dreadful and startled things are mixed with laugh and amusement. Unusual way of language and stage with the grotesque figures increases the effect of tragicomedy. This causes a mixed perception by the audience, and destroying the boundaries of logic and order in a way that he could realize the absurdity of life.

a. Samuel Beckett (1906 -1989)

Samuel Beckett won worldwide fame in his age. He witnessed the new trends in the arts and matured under the influence of early twentieth century's social and political events. In the post-war years, the depression and frustration among society caused a rise of new avant-garde movements in all art forms. The existentialist trend is interested in existence itself and search for self and one's own consciousness.

> Beckett is an author who combined tragedy to the limits of comedy and comedy to the limits of tragedy. The strength of his craft is such that he reminds the reader of the elements of comedy as he deals with tragedy and of the elements of tragedy as he deals with comedy. Just as the effects of his craft are seen in his art, he sometimes resorts to the simplest attitudes and words when he defines a very complex issue; circus and music hall repertoires occasionally are the source material for his plays, for example.[73]

The critic and writer Martin Esslin says that,

> It has been suggested that Beckett's preoccupation with the problem of being and the identity of the self might have sprung from the Anglo-

[73] Özgüven, Azize. Çağdas Tiyatroda Samuel Beckett'in Yeri (İzmir: Ege Üniversitesi Matbaası, 1983), p. V. (my translation)

> Irishman's inevitable and perpetual concern with finding his own answer to the question 'Who am I?', but while there will be a grain of truth in this, it is surely far from providing a complete explanation for the deep existential anguish that is the keynote of Beckett's work and that clearly originates in levels of his personality far deeper than its social surface.[74]

In 1906, Samuel Beckett was born in Dublin as the son of a quantity surveyor, the Protestant Irish middle class family like Shaw, Wilde and Yeats. After his academic career in London and Dublin, and short visits to Paris, in 1937 Beckett decided to settle in Paris because it was a city of art and theatre, and was full of audience. Whenever he passed through Paris, Beckett went to see James Joyce.[75] In Richard Ellmann's words,

> Beckett was addicted to silences, and so was Joyce; they engaged in conversations that consisted often in silence directed towards each other, both suffused with sadness, Beckett mostly for the world, Joyce mostly for himself. Joyce sat in his habitual posture, legs crossed, toe of the upper leg under the instep of the lower; Beckett, also tall and slender, fell into the same gesture. Joyce suddenly asked some such question as 'How could the idealist Hume write a history?' Beckett replied, 'A history of representations.'[76]

According to Peggy Guggenheim,

> Beckett had retained a terrible memory of life in his mother's womb. He was constantly suffering from this and had awful crises, when he felt he was suffocating. He always said our life would be all right one day, but if ever pressed him to make a decision it was fatal and he took back everything he had previously said.[77]

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[74] Esslin, Martin. The Theatre of the Absurd, (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), p. 29-30.
[75] Özgüven, Azize. Çağdas Tiyatroda Samuel Beckett'in Yeri (İzmir: Ege Üniversitesi Matbaası, 1983), p. 1-15. (my translation)
[76] Ellmann, Richard. James Joyce, (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 661, quoted in Esslin, Martin. The Theatre of the Absurd, (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), p. 34.
[77] Guggenheim, Peggy. Confessions of an Art Addict (London: Andre Deutsch, 1960), p.50, quoted in Esslin, Martin. The Theatre of the Absurd (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), p. 35.

Murphy is Beckett's first novel and published in 1938. Eleutheria was his first play, but unpublished and unproduced. The play is about a young man who tries "to cut himself loose from his family and social obligations", and Murphy and Eleutheria "mirror Beckett's search for freedom and the right to live his own life."[78] As Esslin observes,

> (Beckett was) stabbed in a Paris street by an underworld character who had accosted him for money, and after he had healed he went to see his assailant in prison. He asked his reason to stab and received the answer, '*Je ne sais pas, Monsieur.*' (I do not know, Sir.) 'It might well be the voice of this man that we hear in Waiting for Godot and Molly.'[79]

Beckett wrote in French although he is an Irish man, and this may seem a curious phenomenon. He chose to write in French because he felt that he needed the discipline in writing that could be possible by using his second language. He said "Parce qu'en français c'est facile d'ecrire sans style" (to write in French without style is easier.) As expressed by Esslin,

> In other words, while in his own language a writer may be tempted to indulge in virtuosity of style for its own sake, the use of another language may force him to divert the ingenuity that might be expended on mere embellishments of style in his own idiom to the utmost clarity and economy of expression.[80]

The critic Claude Mauriac said in his essays that,

> Anyone who speaks is carried along by the logic of language and its articulations. Thus the writer who pits himself against the unsay able must use all his cunning so as not to say what the words make him say against

[78] Esslin, Martin. The Theatre of the Absurd (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), p.35.
[79] Ibid, p.36.
[80] Ibid, p.38.

> his will, but to express instead what by their very nature they are designed to cover up: the uncertain, the contradictory, the unthinkable [81]

Beckett wrote for stage as well as for television, and "he could be regarded as the creator of moving, three-dimensional images rather than merely a dramatic poet."[82] What is remembered most about Beckett is his play Waiting for Godot and the uncertainty of the play. The feeling of uncertainty, the ebb and flow of this uncertainty, the hope of discovering the identity of Godot and repeated disappointments are the basic tenets of the play. The big question "Who or what was meant by Godot?"" is received from Beckett as "If I knew, I would have said so in the play."[83] In Waiting for Godot, Beckett does not tell a story, but explores a static situation. "Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful."[84] Vladimir and Estragon are waiting throughout the play. In this the most famous play Waiting for Godot, Beckett makes references to some Christian symbols and the Bible, and questions whether his play is religious or not.

> Thus could we say that it is a religious play? Totally not. The play W*aiting for Godot* has some parallelization to Christian symbols and makes some references to the Bible, but, we could not think the play totally religious. Samuel Beckett tries to stress on 'the uncertainty of the appointment with Godot, Godot's unreliability and irrationality, and the repeated demonstration of the futility of the hopes pinned on him. The act of waiting for Godot is shown as essentially absurd.'[85]

In addition to that, Vladimir and Estragon have some parallel aspects with Cain and Abel in the Bible.

> The parallel to Cain and Abel is evident: there too the Lord's grace fell on one rather than on the other without any rational explanation –only that

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[81] Claude, Mauriac. La Litterature Contemporaine (Paris: Albin Michel, 1958), p. 83, quoted in Esslin, Martin. The Theatre of the Absurd (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), p. 39.
[82] Esslin, Martin. The Theatre of the Absurd (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), p. 42.
[83] Schneider, Alan. Waiting for Beckett (New York: Chelsea Review, Autumn 1958), quoted in Esslin, Martin. The Theatre of the Absurd (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), p. 44.
[84] Beckett, Samuel, Godot'yu Beklerken (İstanbul: Kabalcı Yayınevi, 2000), p. 48.
[85] Ibid, p. 56.

Godot beats the minder of the sheep and cherishes the minder of the goats. Here Godot also acts contrary to the Son of Man at the Last Judgment[86]

In the play Estragon calls out "Abel! Abel!" to identify himself but later calls out "Cain! Cain!" and then he concludes "He's all mankind" which means that he is like all mankind, that he has ambitious and jealous in him and his name has no meaning or difference.

Although Beckett did not express a manifesto or essay about the theory of the Theatre of the Absurd (except for French Review), his plays were accepted as the representative of the Theatre of the Absurd. His theatre was pessimistic but has comical actions. The space is limited and the stage has a visual and comical foundation. For Beckett, "stage play is life and life is play."[87]

b. Eugene Ionesco (1909-1994)

Ionesco's worldview reminds
one of Nasreddin Hodja riding a donkey backwards
to see the world from a new and "backwards" perspective.[88]

The German dramatist Wolfgang Hildesheimer suggested in his Erlanger Rede über das absurde Theatre that "Ionesco's theatre is neither Aristotelian nor epic; it shows a universe in which questions are asked but no answers are given or even implied." Ionesco's drama is a sort of "symbolic ceremonial, in which the spectator assumes the role of man who questions, while the play represents the world that gives no reasonable response."[89]

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[86] Esslin, Martin. The Theatre of the Absurd (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), p.55.
[87] Özgüven, Azize. Çağdas Tiyatroda Samuel Beckett'in Yeri, (İzmir: Ege Üniversitesi Matbaası, 1983), p. 87. (my translation)
[88] Acarlıoğlu, Abdüllatif. Saçmanın Tiyatrosu (İstanbul: MitosBoyut Yayınları, 2003), p. 11. (my translation)
[89] Hildesheimer, Wolfgang. "Erlanger Rede über das absurde Theater", Akzente 7. Dec. 1960. p. 548, quoted in Carlson, Marvin. Theories of the Theatre (London: Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 416.

Romanian born French dramatist Ionesco's one-act antiplay, The Bald Soprano (1950) inspired the Theatre of the Absurd. Since the 1970s, his writing has mainly been non-theatrical. Ionesco's earlier works were characterized by the logic of nightmare, but later his plays began to employ a more straightforward plot line. He introduces his plays in foreword in *Plays I* as follows: "All my plays have their origin in two fundamental states of consciousness: now the one, now the other is predominant, and sometimes they are combined. These basic states of consciousness are awareness of evanescence and of solidity, of emptiness and too much presence, of the unreal transparency of the world and its opacy, of light and of thick darkness."[90]

While learning English in 1948, Ionesco conceived the idea for his first play, The Bald Soprano *(La Cantatrice chauve)*, which was produced in 1950. The Bald Soprano was inspired by the repetitive and nonsensical phrases of his textbook while attempting to learn English. The play went first unnoticed but arose attention when such writers as Jean Anouilh and Raymond Queneau started to campaign for it. Ionesco's play consists mainly of a series of meaningless conversations between two couples that eventually deteriorate into babbling. The work burlesques the nonsensical stuffiness of a middle-class English home by stringing together the clichés of a foreign-language phrase book.[91] The Bald Soprano shows Ionesco's rebellion against the traditional theatre, which he called it "anti-theatre": "I have called my comedies 'anti-plays', 'comical dramas' and my dramas 'pseudo-dramas', or 'tragical farces', for, it seems to me, the comical spirit nothing can be taken entirely seriously, nor entirely lightly."[92]

His early plays are The Lesson *(La leçon;* 1950), The Chairs *(Les chaises;* 1952), Amedee 1954, The New Tenant *(Le nouveau locataire;* 1957); which are pessimist plays with themes such as clichés of language and idea and illogical quality of social values. His later plays The Killer *(Tueur sans gages; 1959)*, Rhinoceros; 1960, The Airborne Pedestrian *(Le pieton de l'air; 1962)*, La soif et la faim; 1966, Macbeth; 1972 and L'Homme aux valllises; 1975 have a more positive view as to show the heroes fighting against the order. Opposite of Beckett, Ionesco deals with the relation of man with society

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[90] Ionesco, Eugene. Bald Soprano, in Plays, vol. I (New York: Grove Press, 1958), foreword.
[91] Esslin, Martin. The Theatre of the Absurd (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), p. 128- 200.
[92] Ionesco, Eugene. Discovering the Theatre (1958), quoted in Driver, Tom. Romantic Quest and Modern Query (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1971), p. 68.

and mostly middle class character's domestic life.[93] Hildesheimer describes Ionesco's style as follows: "The playwright must feel this absurdity to write about it, as only a religious dramatist can write authentic religious drama; his play, like the world it reflects, simply exists, without purpose, without cause and effect," and "This places a new challenge before the actor, trained in the theatre of logic. He must feel and express the same alienation in his interpretation as is found in the script, an even more radical alienation than that sought by Brecht in his epic theatre. "[94]

Ionesco wrote that the theatre has tried for too long to be "ideology, allegory, politics, lectures, essays or literature." He stated that it is just as wrong to conceive of theatre as any of these as it would be "to claim that music should be archaeology, or painting, physics and mathematics."[95] In his plays the world of things is utterly intractable, and to such a world human language, gestures, and motivations are assimilated. Words multiply, like the chairs and their invisible occupants in The Chairs and like the furniture of The New Tenant. Logic is pursued relentlessly for a time, and then exploded as if it were a breakable physical object.

[93] Esslin, Martin. The Theatre of the Absurd (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), p. 128-200.
[94] Hildesheimer, Wolfgang. "Erlanger Rede über das absurde Theater", Akzente 7. Dec. 1960. p. 556, quoted in Carlson, Marvin. Theories of the Theatre (London: Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 416.
[95] Ionesco, Eugene. Discovering the Theatre (1958), quoted in Driver, Tom. Romantic Quest and Modern Query (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1971), p. 379.

III. THE RISE OF AMERICAN THEATRE OF THE ABSURD

A. Brief history of theatre in America

Few records have survived about theatrical performances belonging to the early years of the colonial America. Professional stage was very slow in establishing itself in the New World. The main problem in those early days was the strong Puritan prejudice against all forms of show and pretence. During the whole of seventeenth century, only a few performances of play were recorded.

The rapid growth of the theatre from the middle of the nineteenth century followed the opening of new frontiers and the remarkable growth of the main cities. During the second half of nineteenth century, New York became the center of theatre.

In the late nineteenth century, serious playwrights such as Ibsen, Chekhov, and Shaw rediscovered the theatre in the Old World. In America, William Dean Howells and Henry James wrote "new realistic" novels. In the theatre this "new realism" was practiced, too. They used real objects on stage. They took social and moral issues with consistent characters. By the new system of electric stage lighting, they produced naturalistic effects on realistic stage. It was the period that realism settings were the major elements of the newly matured American drama. In many ways, American theatre mirrors the European theatre. The American theatre gained international importance following the growth of American military and economic power after the Second World War.

B. Little Theatre Movement in America:

During the early years of the twentieth century many new theatres were built, audiences increased their support while managers, actors and playwrights made fortunes. In spite of occasional failures, there were always opportunities for new ventures. The economic expansion of the country revealed itself in an unprecedented boom in the theatre.

While the theatre prospered materially in the early years of the twentieth century, with its large new theatres, growing audiences, and productions of great technical skills, the plays were mainly for entertainment and commercial value. The theatre was indeed Big Business at that time. In an age of great material advancement, there has naturally been great disruption and reassessment of personal and spiritual values, and the theatre reflected this turmoil of thought and ideas in the work of younger dramatists.

The period after the First World War was a lucky period for American drama, partly because of the chaotic social changes brought about by the conflict of war, but more dramatically by the revolt of the dramatists against the exploitation of nonartistic producers and the theatre owners. By this new generation, a movement toward noncommercial drama started in America.

In the early years of the century there were several small groups of individuals interested in serious writing for the theatre. The Little Theatre Movement in America was of that kind. The impact of the new ideas from abroad was obvious, but the explosion of experimental theatre, at the turn of the century, was quite late in reaching America. "The story of the Provincetown and the Washington Square Players and other pioneering groups between 1915 and 1929 holds great interest for anyone who wants to observe the American theatre in a proper perspective. To do this, one must consider the efforts of these groups both as a native development and as an extension of the European stage."[96]

As the European-inspired Little Theatre movement took hold and spread like an epidemic across America, for the first time it seemed possible that the theatre in America might actually play a role in literary renaissance. This renaissance contributed the modern theatre movements in America.

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[96] Gassner, John. "Pioneers of the New Theater Movement", quoted in Downer, Alan S. The American Theater Today (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1967), p. 15.

C. The Provincetown Players:

The mission of most of these early art theatres in the twentieth century was to introduce new works and to test the new American playwrights' products. One of these art theatres was the Provincetown Players. The Neighborhood Playhouse, The Washington Square Players, and The Provincetown Players began in showing up 1915, as nonprofessional and noncommercial organizations, and all were housed in tiny theatres seating fewer than 300.

According to many critics and historians of theatre, the establishment of the Provincetown Players was the beginning of the modern American drama. Susan Glaspell, George Cram Cook, and Floyd Dell established the Provincetown Players in a fishing village Provincetown, Massacusess, at the Wharf Theatre in 1915. As Cook announced the foundation of the Provincetown Players in 1916, he makes the below comment which also may describe the transformation in the American drama from modernist impulse to the Absurd:

> Primitive drama, the expression of the communal or religious life of the organic human group, the tribe had spontaneously the unity of art. There may be two hundred actors dramatically dancing the conflict of winter and spring, but all that, all of them do in that drama springs from one shared fund of feelings, ideas, impulses. Unity is not imposed on them by the will of one of their number, but comes from that deep level in each where all their spirits are one. The aim of the founder of the Provincetown Players is to make all hands work, from that level and to do it by recreating in a group of modern individuals. Individuals far more highly differentiated than primitive people, a spiritual unity underlying their differences, a unity resembling the primitive unity of the tribe, a unity that may spontaneously create the unity necessary to the art of the theatre.[97]

The Provincetown was one of the many *Off-Broadway* dramatic troops organized by various communities of people to whom the restrictions (both economic and artistic) of

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[97] Bigsby, C.W.E. The Twentieth Century American Drama (New York: Cambridge Un. Press, 1982), p.73.

the commercial theatre had become irksome. This experimental theatre group envisioned as a community of artists working together but maintaining an amateur status.

The Provincetown Players stood up until the Depression of 1929 and finally closed. It is the first to establish a concept of theatre in America as a serious focus of artistic activity, and its emphasis went on the central importance of a group working cooperatively it established a model for other groups and laid the foundations for the modern American Theatre.

D. Eugene O'Neill (1888-)

"One of the marks of O'Neill genius is
that he was able to convert what happened to him
into the drama of what has happened to us.
His own story has become American history."
Tennessee Williams

Eugene O'Neill's father, James O'Neill was a famous actor. As a son of a famous actor, he seemed very lucky, born in theatre was an opportunity and that early theatrical experience and education was a chance for him. The American drama of the 1920s was O'Neill's drama, he generally considered the leading playwright of the modern American Theatre. He had decided on the theatre as a career after having read the plays of Strindberg, Wedekind, Kaiser and the other Europeans. In the winter of 1914 he met George Cram Cook and Susan Glaspell, in that summer he joined their experimental theatre organization Provincetown Players. Thus, his theatre life began. He wrote several plays for them and became famous in this time. He tried to find new things and new techniques in theatre with the Provincetown Players. He seemed capable of so many new ideas for the theatre. His plays were so much the expression of dramatic experiment and innovation.

Eugene O'Neill was recognized as the leader in the Renaissance of American Drama. He was a restless experimenter. Although his themes, or *large ideas* are

unchanging, he was constantly seeking new vehicles for communicating with his audience. Eugene O'Neill brought about in American drama a revolution, which fundamentally changed its character. Boldly experimenting with both style and theatrical technique, he wrote highly individualized plays that show an uncommon theatrical know-how. He wrote expressionistic plays, experimented successfully with a variety of styles. O'Neill was very affective after his period. He could be accepted as a forerunner of the modern American theatre. His expressionistic style gave courage for the younger dramatists such as Edward Albee and Sam Shepard and others.

E. Vaudeville and Dark Comedy

In the fifteenth century the drinking songs and satirical ballads of Oliver Basselin of Normandy became popular under the name of his native village, *Vau de Vire*, later written as Vaudevire and then corrupted as vaudeville. By the eighteenth century, French comedies included interpolated songs and dances that were called vaudevilles and the name was then taken over by light comedies usually composed in rhyming couplets. Vaudeville was alight, farcical entertainment including song and dance, aimed primarily at the gallery and hitting the rest of the house with scattered shot. Eugene Scribe (1791-1861) was the most important and popular writer of vaudeville in France.

The variety show, or vaudeville, was perhaps the first type to achieve independence. A kind of variety show, revealing most of the elements of vaudeville, is as old as public entertainment itself. Since the beginning of recorded history, there have been gatherings where the singer, the reciter, the dancer, and the mimic have performed their bits. For many centuries professional entertainers performed their tricks in inns, beer halls and public squares. Thus the entr'acte specialties in the American theatre of the nineteenth century were nothing new. But during the century they broke away from legitimate drama and set up shop in public museums like Barnum's and in saloons, beer halls, and concert halls. By the middle of the century, they had grown so popular that every city of any size had regular theatres devoted to variety programs. Clearly this was the type of popular entertainment that was to culminate in the great vaudeville circuits of the early twentieth century.

The first successful chain of vaudeville theatres whose entertainment was supplied for a whole season by a central booking agency was the work of two men: B.F. Keith and E.F. Albee (playwright Edward Albee's grandfather). Both men had experience in circuses and in the Barnum type of museum. In 1885 they formed a partnership and opened the Bijou Theatre in Boston. For the admission price of a single dime, a spectator could watch a vaudeville show that was continuous from ten in the morning until eleven o'clock at night. The venture was a huge success, and the partners quickly capitalized on it. Within two years they opened similar theatres in Philadelphia and Providence, and later in New York. From these beginnings grew Keith and Albee's huge vaudeville circuit, which blanketed the East. From such success grew other circuits, like the Orpheum and the Pantages, which covered the rest of the country.[98] Speaking of vaudeville Esslin says:

> And so the line from the *mimus* of antiquity, through the clowns and jesters of the Middle Ages and the Zanni and Arlecchini of the *commedia dell'arte*, emerges in the comedians of music hall and vaudeville, from which the twentieth century derived what will in all probability be regarded as its only great achievement in popular art –the silent film comedy of the Keystone Cops, Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, and a host of other immortal performers.[99]

Vaudeville and the dark comedy are accepted as the origins of the Absurd Theatre. "The comic aspect is a really important characteristic of the Theatre of the Absurd; it is central to the absurd approach. It is not only for entertainment and empty comedy, but on the contrary is to be a disturbing dark comedy."[100]The grotesque figures, comics, mime, and other entertainment subjects were become the sources of inspirations for the Absurdists. Old vaudeville tradition, dark comedy, silent film comedies, Laurel and Hardy, W.C. Fields and the Marx Brothers exercised their influence on the Theatre of the Absurd.

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[98] Wilson, Graff B. Three Hundred Years of American Drama and Theatre (California: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1982), p.113-114.
[99] Esslin, Martin. The Theatre of the Absurd, (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), p.335.
[100] Güllü, Fırat. "Absürd Oyunlarda Temalar", Mimesis, sayı 6. (İstanbul: Boğaziçi Yayınları, 1990), p.363. (my translation)

F. American Theatre of the Absurd

When America was discovered, Europe was in the midst of the second great peak of the cultural activity in history: The Renaissance. When America was settled, the great dramatic activity in Europe was going to a close: the Age of Shakespeare, Lope de Vega, and Moliére. After the first colonies settled and established their towns, the first plays started to be acted in America. Overwhelmingly English speaking, the strolling players from their homeland, England, set up makeshift theatres and put on English plays. With the rise of the Republic at the end of the eighteenth century, drama began a two- hundred-year process of becoming uniquely American.

In Europe, First World War and Second World War created new movements in all kinds of art such as Expressionism, Surrealism, Dadaism, Avant-garde and Absurd. These movements appeared in the United States, too. The principles of the Absurd springs from the feeling of deep disillusionment, the exhausting away of the sense of meaning and purpose in life, which has been characteristic of countries in Europe in the years after the Second World War. In the United States there has been no corresponding loss of meaning and purpose. Probably this is the reason for lack of examples of the Theatre of the Absurd in the United States. The American dream of the good life is still very strong. "In the United States the belief in progress that characterized Europe in the nineteenth century has been maintained into the middle of the twentieth. It is only since the events of the 1970's –Watergate and defeat in Vietnam- that this optimism has received some sharp shocks."[101]

In the period after Second World War, the Broadway theatre discovered and developed two significant new dramatists, Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller, and one young playwright of great promise, Edward Albee. It produced a number of admirable musicals, plays and a great many musical comedies a few slick, frivolous comedies, a handful of dramas of some distinction, and a considerable amount of trash. Edward Albee, Jack Gelber, Arthur Kopit and Jack Richardson practiced the Theatre of the Absurd in America. A part of the early Off-Broadway drama in the 1960's was basically similar to the style and content of the European Absurd Drama. The

[101] Esslin, Martin. The Theatre of the Absurd (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), p. 311.

theoreticians Antonin Artaud and Jerzy Grotowski had great influence upon the avant-garde Off-Broadway movement of the period; and the play of the most influential practitioner of the Theatre of the Absurd Samuel Beckett, Waiting for Godot, was staged almost all over the country. From the Free Southern Theatre to San Francisco Actors' Workshop, many companies produced the play. Several playwrights acknowledged the immediate effect of the play.

There were also some critics who thought different about the new dramatists. "What has actually happened is that since the Second World War, there has been a revolution in the method of producing and presenting theatre in this country [America]."[102] The producer Richard Barr expresses the situation of American Theatre in 1960's like that and continues to tell his ideas about the Theatre of the Absurd:

> We have often been accused of being a theatre-of-the-absurd because we have shown the plays of Beckett and Ionesco and Genet and Arabal and several others; Albee himself has been listed among the playwrights-of-the-absurd. Actually, we feel very strongly about this. Esslin himself suggests that he was just talking about a collection of playwrights, not a particular school of playwrights; furthermore, he does not include Albee in this group at all. In my opinion, there is a big difference between those who are called the playwright-of-the-absurd and the younger men who are now writing... our playwrights are moving much further along in my opinion; they are far more concerned with the self-awareness of the individual. They are continually examining themselves or others or the characters in their plays with the existential attitude that the individual must take action on his own behalf in order to be able to live in the present-day world.[103]

The relative absence of dramatists of the Absurd in the United States is puzzling, particularly in view of the fact that certain aspects of American popular art have had a important influence on the dramatists of the Absurd in Europe. The Theatre of the Absurd

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[102] Barr, Richard. "The Problems of the Producer", quoted in Downer, Alan S. The American Theater Today (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1967), p. 101.
[103] Ibid, p. 109-110.

is not a literary movement or a school; its spirit lies in the free and unregulated discovery, by each of the writers concerned and of his own individual vision. A number of dramatists have been experimenting on the parallel lines and encouraged by the source of works of Beckett, Ionesco or Genet, and then developed their own vision.

The elements of the Theatre of the Absurd are influenced by the tradition of English music hall and American vaudeville. The tradition of the commedia dell'arte and Shakespeare's clowns affected the process of the Absurd tradition. The silent film comedy is without doubt one of the important influences on the Theatre of the Absurd. Esslin describes it as "It has the dreamlike strangeness of a world seen from outside with the uncomprehending eyes of one cut off reality. It has the quality of nightmare and displays a world in constant, and wholly purposeless, movement," and "it repeatedly demonstrates the deep poetic power of wordless and purposeless action."[104] Laurel and Hardy, W.C. Fields and Marx Brothers also exercised their influence on the Theatre of the Absurd.

> With the speed of their reactions, their skill as musical clowns, Harpo's speechlessness, and the wild Surrealism of their dialogue, the Marx Brothers clearly bridge the tradition between commedia dell'arte and vaudeville, on the one hand, and the Theatre of the Absurd, on the other. They belong to the same category as the great E.C. Fields, also a brilliant Surrealist comedian.[105]

In plays and performances of the 1960s and early 1970s in America exhibited variety and distinction. Social and cultural events shaped the period. The Civil Rights Movement, Feminist Movement, the Black Power Movement, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the assassinations of Kennedy, Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, and so many other events contributed to the foundation of a counterculture ideology that lead to sexual, political, racial and artistic liberation in the United States of America. Lawlessness and chaos were shown in all artistic practices of the period, including drama.

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[104] Esslin, Martin. The Theatre of the Absurd (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), p. 335.
[105] Ibid, p. 336.

The avant-garde movements and realist views challenged on the stage, and practiced by the new American playwrights in the period.

The Theatre of the Absurd found its voice in America. Although in the beginning of the movement critics like Martin Esslin did not include Albee as a proper absurdist playwright because he is not yet a proper experimenter of the Theatre of the Absurd. But later Esslin himself cites Edward Albee as the only true practitioner of the genre in America, especially after his first play The Zoo Story, which shared the bill at the Provincetown Playhouse with Beckett's Krapp's Last Tape. According to Esslin, Albee's play "already showed the forcefulness and bitter irony of his approach. In the realism of its dialogue and in its subject matter –an outsider's inability to establish genuine contact with doglet alone any human being- The Zoo Story is closely akin to the world of Harold Pinter."[106] Then Albee comes into the category of the Theatre of the Absurd exactly for the reason that his works attacks the especially basics of American optimism by using techniques of the Theatre of the Absurd.

[106] Ibid, p. 311-312.

IV. EDWARD ALBEE (1925-)

What people really want in the theatre
is fantasy involvement and not reality involvement.
Edward Albee (Quote, 4 Jun 1967)

A. His Life:

Like Eugene O'Neill, Albee knows the theatre inside out. He was adopted by Reed A. and Frances Albee, and named after his adopted grandfather, Edward Franklin Albee, part owner of the Keith-Albee Theatre Circuit, a coast-to-coast chain of two hundred vaudeville theatres. The writer Richard Amacher finds that "the life of Edward Albee reads like a Horatio Alger story... all poor boys- inevitably rose to fame and wealth after struggling with temptation and poverty. *The lucky orphan*, as Albee has termed the history of his earliest years –a change to the fascinating and wonderfully ironic tale of rich boy makes good."[107]

Edward Franklin Albee was born on March 12th 1928 in Washington D.C. Because his adopted grandfather, Edward Franklin Albee, was a theatre company owner, young Albee met the theatre world at a young age. At about the age of six he began attending the theatre.[108] In an interview Albee tells about his early experience with theatre:

> When I was six years old, I decided not that I was going to be, but with my usual modesty, that I was a writer. So I started writing poetry when I was six and stopped when I was twenty-six because it was getting a little better, but not terribly much.[109]

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[107] Amacher, Richard E. Edward Albee (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1969), p. 15.
[108] Ibid, p. 15-25.
[109] Harte, Barbara and Riley, Carolyn. Contemporary Authors (Michigan: Gale Research Company The Book Tower, 1969), p. 18.

When he was twelve, in 1940, for the first time he wrote a play, a three-act sex farces Aliqueen.[110] He describes his further experience:

> When I was fifteen, I wrote 700 pages of an incredibly bad novel –it's a very funny book I still like a lot. Then, when I was nineteen I wrote a couple hundred pages of another novel, which wasn't very good either. I was still determined to be a writer. And since I was a writer, and here I was twenty-nine years old and I wasn't a very good poet and I wasn't a very good novelist, I thought I would try writing a play, which seems to have worked out a little better.[111]

During his youth he had to change schools many times because of his parents traveling job. He attended schools in New York (Westchester Country, Rye Country Day School); and in Pennsylvania, (Wayne, Jaltey Forge Military Academy). He was graduated in Wallingford Connecticut, from, Choate School. After graduating, Albee attended Trinity College for a brief time and then, restless and dissatisfied, quit college. He wrote mostly poems and novels, and one of his poems was published in Kaleidoscope, a Texas magazine. In the Choate Literary Magazine, his one-act melodrama, Schism, appeared. While he was in Trinity College, he acted in Maxwell Anderson's The Masque of Kings as the role of Emperor Franz Joseph. In 1950 he moved away from home and worked at a number of routine different jobs until 1958.[112] These different jobs gave him an unusual perspective according to some sources. As Jerry Tallmer quoted from an interview with Albee in New York Post's Sunday Magazine section, November 4, 1962; "I've lived a lot of places, a fifteen-dollar-a-month cold-water flat on the lower East Side, a great big loft right in the middle of the garment district, for seventy a month, and a couple of other places in the village." The writer continued by describing these sundry habitations and odd jobs as constituting for Albee "an era the very odor of which permeates the life and lines of Jerry the lonely psychotic in The Zoo Story."[113]

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[110] Amacher, Richard E. Edward Albee (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1969), p. 15-25.
[111] Harte, Barbara and Riley, Carolyn. Contemporary Authors (Michigan: Gale Research Company The Book Tower, 1969), p. 18.
[112] Amacher, Richard E. Edward Albee (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1969), p. 15-25.
[113] Ibid, p. 18.

Thornton Wilder suggested in 1953 that Albee write play. Albee's roommate William Flanagan remembers that before Albee wrote The Zoo Story "there was no suggestion in anything he had done or in any attitude he had toward life that he might be a playwright. He was the least likely candidate for success among our friends."[114] With the attempts of Flanagan, the play reached Berlin, and Boleslaw Barlog produced it in 1959, Albee's career as a playwright began. Although he was not a very productive writer, his plays contributed a lot to the American Drama of the Absurd. Albee was primarily influenced by Ionesco to write his surrealistic one-act plays in the absurdist manner.[115]

B. His Works:

The Zoo Story (1958) premiered in the Werksatt of the Schiller Theatre in Berlin, Germany on September 28th, 1959. It was directed by Walter Henn with the help of Boleslaw Barlog. At the same time and on the same stage Beckett's play Krapp's Last Tape was performed, which was significant to the appeal. On January 14th 1960, the play was produced in the Greenwich Village off-Broadway Provincetown Playhouse by Milton Katselas.[116]

In his brief allegory of modern society, The Zoo Story, the main characters are two men who meet on a bench in Central Park, New York. Peter is an older man and comes from the middle-classes; Jerry is a young working-class rebel. Speaking in quasi-realistic dialogue, they are unable to understand each other and in the language of the day, they fail to communicate. Not only this, but violence is the only thing they have in common. In this play, the effect of intelligent one-act dialogue between Jarry, the outcast, and Peter, the conformist bourgeois, is spoiled by its melodramatic climax; when Jerry provokes Peter into drawing a knife and then impales himself on it, "the plight of the schizophrenic outcast is turned into an act of sentimentality, especially as the victim

[114] Harte, Barbara and Riley, Carolyn. Contemporary Authors (Michigan: Gale Research Company The Book Tower, 1969), p. 19.
[115] Amacher, Richard E. Edward Albee (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1969), p. 15-225.
[116] Ibid, p. 25-40.

expires in touching solicitude and fellow-feeling for his involuntary murderer."[117] With the great success of The Zoo Story, the name Edward Albee became known to the press.

> In 1960, with the off-Broadway presentation of Edward Albee's The Zoo Story, his first play to be produced in this country. It was combined with Samuel Beckett's Krapp's Last Tape and, fortunately, they proved to be a great hit. But that is not the whole story. It proved to be one of the first times in many, many years that a playwright in this country (probably since O'Neill, as a matter of fact) has had a play produced off-Broadway or in a small theatre, risen to fame, and eventually become one of the leading playwrights of the country.[118]

The Zoo Story was an immediate success both in Germany and in America. To the critic Rose A. Zimbardo, what Albee has written in The Zoo Story is "a modern Morality play. The theme is the centuries old one of human isolation and salvation through sacrifice. Man is in his natural state is alone, a prisoner of Self" and in creating this theme Albee has used symbolism that "is an immensely expanded allusion to the story of Christ's sacrifice. But the symbolism is not outside of the story that he has to tell which is the story of modern man, and his isolation, and hope for salvation. He uses the allusion to support his own story. He has chosen Christian symbols."[119] The critic George Wellwarth writes that the play "is not only remarkable as a young writer's first play; it is remarkable by any standards for the spareness of its construction and the daring of its conception. It is both an extremely simple and n extremely mystifying play. It is mystifying because it is so simple."[120] Wellwarth compares Albee with Ionesco "like Ionesco, who is clearly his literary progenitor, Albee is not saying anything with his play, which is nothing but an excessively fantastic slice-of-life pastiche: he is exemplifying or demonstrating a theme. That theme is the enormous and usually insuperable difficulty that human beings find in

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[117] Esslin, Martin. The Theatre of the Absurd (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), p. 312.
[118] Downer, Alan S. The American Theater Today (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1967), p. 101.
[119] Bryfonski, Dedria. Contemporary Literary Criticism, Vol. 13 (Michigan: Gale Research Company The Book Tower, 1980), p. 3.
[120] Harte, Barbara and Riley, Carolyn. Contemporary Authors (Michigan: Gale Research Company The Book Tower, 1969), p. 19.

communicating with each other."[121] In the play, Albee uses Freudian psychological theories and claims that man can never understand each other in reality.

Albee's short play The Death of Bessie Smith was written in 1959. After a motor accident, the blues singer Bessie Smith died in Memphis in 1937 because hospitals refused to admit her since she is black. On this play Esslin says "Albee produced a play that clearly takes up style and subject-matter of the Theatre of the Absurd and translates it into a genuine American idiom."[122] Beside to deal with the problem of racism, as an Absurdist playwright, Albee tells both the meaninglessness of life and lack of confidence, and critics the society. The Sandbox in 1959, directed by Lawrence Arrick at the Jazz Gallery, New York, and The American Dream in 1960, directed by Alan Schneider at the York Playhouse, New York, were twin one-act plays, amusing but caustic, intended to satirize the hollow social values of contemporary America. In American Dream, American aspirations towards the good life are symbolized by the arrival of a handsome but vacuous, young man. A stereotyped Daddy adopts him. The ideal or typical American family adopts the handsome young man, but there is no humanly communication with each other in the family that the lack of communication and emptiness of the young man is symbolizes the decline of American ideal life dream. With their emblematic two-dimensional, cardboard characters, they also seemed refreshing after so long a period of realism on the American stage.[123] "The writer attacks the people who believe in the ideals of progress, and optimism, and faith in the national mission, and pours scorn on the sentimental ideals of family life, togetherness, and physical fitness more than mental health" [124] writes Özdemir Nutku about the theme of the play and Albee.

> 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's are French. The most disagreeable verities are hidden behind the corn-fed cheeriness of advertising jingles and family magazine unctuousness... and the oily glibness and sentimentality of the American clichés in Albee's promising

[121] Ibid, p. 19.
[122] Esslin, Martin. The Theatre of the Absurd (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), p. 312.
[123] Amacher, Richard E. Edward Albee (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1969), p. 40-82.
[124] Nutku, Özdemir. Dünya Tiyatrosu Tarihi II (İstanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 1985), p. 224. (my translation)

and brilliant first example of an American contribution to the Theatre of the Absurd.[125]

Fam and Yam is Albee's little known one-scene play that was produced in 1961, and presents a satirical interview between a famous playwright Fam and a young American playwright Yam who resembled Albee, in that he showed the conflict between Broadway and Off-Broadway. His first long play, Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf, won him international fame and "the claim to be considered a major playwright." [126] In the play, the life of rich and well-educated people is shown empty and boredom, and Albee critiques the social situation and successfully shows these differences. Albee's next long play was Tiny Alice in 1965 that was an antifeminist play. Richard Amacher believes that in Tiny Alice Albee embodies many ideas of Antonin Artaud and the Balinese theatre. The play deals with in terms of reality and illusion, symbol and actuality.[127] Following it, Albee adapted and dramatized two novels for the stage. The first was Carson McCuller's The Ballad of the Sad Café (1963) which looks at personal relationships in another way; the second was James Purdy's Malcolm (1966) which was a more antifeminist play. Although there were praiseworthy qualities in both adaptations, neither one succeeded on the stage. Nine months after Malcolm closed and an original play by Albee entitled A Delicate Balance appeared on Broadway. It was chosen as a best play for the season of 1966-67 and also won the Pulitzer Prize. Harold Clurman found Albee's A Delicate Balance, "to be superior, but if it was more subtle, it was less popular, more absurdist and less verbally sensational." [128] In this play, another family is catalyzed, this time by a visit from friends who are trying to escape from a mysterious terror, and who insist on staying the night when they are not wanted. It is the task of the quiet but downtrodden head of the family, Tobias, to maintain a balance between family and friends.[129]

Albee wrote All Over in 1971. In the play, a famous man is dying in his bed on the stage throughout the play while his wife and mistress, his family and friends, talk

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[125] Esslin, Martin. The Theatre of the Absurd (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), p. 313.
[126] Wilson, Graff B. Three Hundred Years of American Drama and Theatre (California: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1982), p. 311.
[127] Amacher, Richard E. Edward Albee (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1969), p. 130.
[128] Styan, J.L. Modern Drama in Theory and Practice, volume II. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 143-144.
[129] Amacher, Richard E. Edward Albee (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1969), p. 40-154.

about him to each other. "The play was not so well received as its predecessors, but in its experiments with forms of speech selected to lend a ritual tone to the scene, it was an interesting advance in absurdist technique," wrote Harold Clurman. He continues by challenging Albee's right to be counted an "absurdist" playwright, claiming: Albee's strength lies in his cynical and seemingly realistic observation of people under stress, and *theatre of the absurd* is a term that can no longer be readily applied to his work."[130] All Over is his most tightly-structured, rigorously controlled essay in the genre to date, and it is interesting that it should have received praise from Pinter who said: "All Over is a most rich, quite remarkable achievement. I feel it to be a major work and something that has made a great impact on me". Albee resembles Pinter in the dramatization of the relentless games his characters play.[131]

In 1961, Bartleby was an unpublished adaptation of Herman Meville's short story; in 1967, Every Thing in the Garden was an adaptation from one of Giles Cooper's plays; in 1966, Breakfast at Tiffany's was musical adaptation of Truman Capote's novella of the same name, and in 1968 Box and Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-Tung was Albee's new play. Albee won another Pulitzer Prize in the season of 1974-75 with his play entitled Seascape. Although admired by the critics, it had a run of only two months. On March 28th 1976 one of his radio plays Listening was produced on BBC and on January 28th 1977 he performed Counting the Ways in Connecticut. His 1980 play, The Lady from Dubuque, aroused sharp controversy among the critics and closed after twelve performances. In 1981 he made another adaptation from Vladimir Nabokov's novel Lolita, but the play was not found successful enough. The Man Who had Three Arms was his next play on September 4th 1982. In 1984, he wrote Walking and in 1983 Finding the Sun but they are unpublished plays. In 1984, the play Envy and in 1987 Marriage Play were published. During this time, Albee also taught courses as various universities and maintained his residence in New York. In 1994 he earned his third Pulitzer Prize with his play Tree Tall Women that is about three tall women's lives, and takes place in a blue imposing bedroom, and his first commercial hit in over a decade. Tree Tall Women also won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award and the Outer Critics Circle Award.

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[130] Styan, J.L. Modern Drama in Theory and Practice, volume II. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 144.
[131] Hirst, David L. Comedy of Manners (New York: Methuen and Co Ltd, 1979), p. 113.

Lorca Play in 1993 and Fragments: A Concerto Grosso in 1995 are his productions. He wrote The Play About the Baby in 2001, and in 2002 The Goat, or Who is Sylvia? and won Tony Award. Also at the same year he produced the play The Occupant.[132] He is a member of the Dramatists Guild Council and the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He teaches courses in playwriting every spring at the University of Houston. Albee himself sums up his career thusly "I have been both overpraised and underpraised. I assume by the time I finish writing –and I plan to go on writing until I'm ninety or gaga - it will all equal itself out. You can't involve yourself with the vicissitudes of fashion or critical response."[133] After more than twenty plays, three Pulitzer Prize, and many other prizes, Edward Albee is remembered as one of the most successful, the most influential and dynamic American dramatists like O'Neill, Williams or Miller.[134]

C. His Writing Style:

Throughout his career, Albee was often labeled either a pessimist or a nihilist playwright with no positive philosophy or social message. He tried to explore the dark recesses of the human soul. He is also recognized as a defeatist, depressing and cynical dramatist to some critics. The actions in his plays might be violent and aggressive. His social criticism of the American way of life finds voice within the framework of the Theatre of the Absurd. Acknowledging the roots of the absurd in existentialism, Albee's theatre has had an existentialist texture, focusing on the preeminence of consciousness. His drama centered on how people lie to themselves and to each other and how they try to live without the cleansing consciousness of death. His fundamental theme is the collapse of community, and perceiving the Other as a threat. Like Artaud, Albee believes that, as active participants within the play, the audience contributes to the play.[135] The reason for this attempt is that "as life is threatened with being smothered in the mass consumption of hypnotic mechanized vulgarity, the need to confront man with the reality of his situation

[132] http://archive.columbiatribune.com/2004/Mar/20040307Ovat014.asp
[133] Ibid.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Tekinay, Aslı. Contemporary American Drama: 1960-2000 (İstanbul: Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2001), p. 10.

is greater than ever;" and that "the dignity of man lies in his ability to face reality in all its senselessness; to accept it freely, without fear, without illusions and to laugh at it."[136]

Harold Bloom considers him to be "the decisive link between our principal older dramatists –Eugene O'Neill, Thornton Wilder, and Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller – and the best of the younger ones – Sam Shepard and David Mamet, among others."[137] Harold Clurman, who admires Albee, has some reservations about his talent, believing that "Albee is not yet a complete or 'perfect' dramatist. He occasionally slips into facile dodges... Much more serious is his failure thus far to reveal in clear dramatic terms the connection between the individual crises he presents and the broader scene outside them, though he always implies it," and Clurman believes that Albee's content "has its counterpart in such foreign writers as Ionesco, Pinter, possibly Beckett and Camus, but such influences, if they literally exist, are far less important than the fact that Albee brings to than general theme of 'alienation' in his own American accent."[138] Albee himself says that:

> The only living playwright I admire without any reservation whatsoever is Samuel Beckett... I admire Brecht's work very much. I admire a good deal of Tennessee Williams. I admire some of Genet's works. Harold Pinter's work. I admire Cordell's plays very much, even though I don't think they're very good... I consider myself in a way the most eclectic playwright who ever wrote. As a matter of fact, I made a list about a year and a half ago, of the number of playwrights, according to the critics, that I had been influenced by and it got to be a drag after I had listed 26. And this list of 26 included three playwrights whom I had not read or seen. So I made a point of reading these playwrights and found that I had indeed been influenced by them." [139]

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[136] Esslin, Martin. The Theatre of the Absurd (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), p. 429.
[137] Tekinay, Aslı. Contemporary American Drama: 1960-2000 (İstanbul: Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2001), p. 9.
[138] Harte, Barbara and Riley, Carolyn. Contemporary Authors (Michigan: Gale Research Company The Book Tower, 1969), p. 18-19.
[139] Ibid, p. 19-20.

Edward Albee was not a didactic writer. He wanted both to entertain and to offend. When asked why he writes he answered simply "It's what I do." Albee faced to the existentialist problems and expressed definite feelings on good writing. He realized the meaninglessness of the pragmatic values. So Albee's experimentalist manner was not based on only existentialism or Freud's symbolism or the stream of consciousness, but on the change of the dramatic tradition, and he developed it. Critics related him with other dramatists of The Theatre of the Absurd, but some critics did not:

> As many critics have observed, however, the spirit of the absurd did not quite fit the American spirit. It is true that absurd drama did find its voices in America but in tamed and domesticated manner. Martin Esslin, in his influential study of the absurd theatre, cites Edward Albee as the only true practitioner of the genre in America. [140]

The first time he heard that he was a member of *the theatre of the absurd* he said he was upset, for he thought it applied to the standard, ridiculous Broadway fare. The purpose of the genuine *the theatre of the absurd,* as Albee sees it, is "to make a man face up to the human condition as it really is..."[141] Albee notes that at the time such a reference offended him, not only because he dislikes labels, but also, he says, "because I had never heard the term before and I immediately assumed that it applied to the theatre uptown –Broadway."[142] Later he wrote "as I get it, The Theatre of the Absurd is absorption-in-art of certain existentialist and post-existentialist philosophical concepts having to do, in the main, with man's attempts to make sense for himself out of his senseless position in a world which makes no sense... And one more point: The avant-garde theatre is fun; it is free-swinging, bold, and iconoclastic and often wildly, wildly funny."[143] Albee describes the Broadway Theatre is *absurd* in the sense that it is ridiculous:

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[140] Tekinay, Aslı. Contemporary American Drama: 1960-2000 (İstanbul: Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2001), p. 9

[141] Albee, Edward. "Which Theatre Is the Absurd One?" New York Times Magazine (February 25, 1962), quoted in Kernan, Alvin B. The Modern American Theatre (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967), p. 170-175.

[142] Harte, Barbara and Riley, Carolyn. Contemporary Authors (Michigan: Gale Research Company The Book Tower, 1969), p. 19.

[143] Ibid, p. 19.

> What ... could be more absurd than a theatre in which the esthetic criterion is something like this: A "good" play is one which makes money; a "bad" play (in the sense of "Naughty! Naughty!" I guess) is one which does not; a theatre in which playwrights are encouraged (what a funny word!) to think of themselves as little cogs in a big wheel; a theatre in which imitation has given way to imitation of imitation; a theatre in which London "hits" are, willy nilly, in a kind of reverse of chauvinism, greeted in a manner not unlike a colony's obeisance to the Crown; a theatre in which real estate owners and theatre party managements predetermine the success of unknown quantities; a theatre in which everybody scratches and bites for billing as though it meant access to the last bomb shelter on earth; a theatre in which, in a given season, there was not a single performance of a play by Beckett, Brecht, Chekhov, Genet, Ibsen, O'Casey, Pirandello, Shaw, Strindberg-or Shakespeare? What.... could be more absurd than that?[144]

Within the framework of the absurdist habit of mind, the answer to the question *What is the meaning of life?* is that *There is no meaning.* This basic element of the absurd theatre finds voice in certain dramatic forms that differ from conventional theatre and the belief in reason. Albee does not employ characters with permanent identities, events with distinct meanings, plots centered on the cause-and-effect relationships, motivated action, a language that means what it says, and a final resolution. Obviously, Albee chooses to use images of non-reason in his attack on the American way of life by rejecting theatrical conventions that reflect a belief in reason. He uses the technique of the absurd theatre.[145] The techniques and themes of the Theatre of the Absurd suit Albee because he is not a traditional playwright and wants to deal with the existentialist problems of human in life, lack of communication and contact, isolation and alienation of man in society, mixture of love, hate, and violence, failure of ideals and beliefs, confusion of truth and illusion, and

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[144] Albee, Edward. "Which Theatre Is the Absurd One?" New York Times Magazine (February 25, 1962), quoted in Kernan, Alvin B. The Modern American Theatre (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967), p. 170-175.

[145] Tekinay, Aslı. Contemporary American Drama: 1960-2000 (İstanbul: Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2001), p. 9-20.

critique of American society and family relations. He handles these themes and attacks the foundations of American optimism in the style of Absurd drama.

Anne Paolucci writes in From Tension to Tonic, "Albee is the only playwright, after O'Neill, who shows real growth, the only one who has made serious effort to break away from the 'message' plays which have plagued our theatre since O'Neill."[146] Paolucci claims that experimentation is a slow internal transformation of the dramatic medium for Albee, and his arrogance is not an empty gesture, and also, he is the only one of American playwrights who seems to have accepted and committed him serious articulation of the existential questions of the time, recognizing the incongruity of insisting on pragmatic values in an age of relativity.

According to Debusscher, "Albee assimilated rather than copied the French avant-garde style in the early plays but produced a distinctly American cadence," and he concludes that Albee is a nihilist: "Albee's work contains no positive philosophical or social message. His theatre belongs in the pessimistic, defeatist or nihilistic current that characterized the entire contemporary theatrical scene."[147]

Some critics claim that some of Albee's works are autobiographic. Therefore during his youth, he had conflicts with his parents and it is related to the family relationship themes of his plays. On the other hand, from a psycho-biographical perspective, Albee's homosexuality is regarded as influencing his characterization and affecting sexual battle in his plays. In his early plays, sexuality is a powerful and available symbol of the absolute need to escape the self. Some other critics discuss in a solid psychological reading of characters. Another group of critics are interested in socio-political way in Albee's plays and claims that these plays are an identity search of a nation on the theatre stage.[148]

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[146] Paolucci, Anne. From Tension to Tonic: The Plays of Edward Albee (Illinois, Southern Illinois University Press, 1972), p. 3.
[147] Debusscher, Gilbert. Edward Albee: Tradition and Renewal (Brussels: Center for American Studies, 1967), p. 82-83, quoted in Kolin, Philip C. ed. American Playwrights Since 1945 (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989), p. 12.
[148] Bigsby, C.W.E. *A* Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama, Volume II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 249-329.

The writer of the book Romantic Quest and Modern Query, Tom Driver has written in his history of the modern theatre book "Albee became a culture hero almost immediately after the first American performance of a short play, The Zoo Story," and he added the criticisms such as "Albee's work is extremely derivative, showing the mixed and undigested influence of Beckett, Strindberg, Ionesco, Pirandello, Tennessee Williams, T.S. Eliot, and others. His mixture is a brew that seems calculated, consciously or unconsciously, to cater to a debased popular taste," then to Driver, "Albee would be what the public holds him to be –the crown of the theatre's development in the 1960's."[149]

> The fundamentally English nature of comic genre is revealed all the more clearly by an examination of the plays of Edward Albee which, because they possess many features of the dramatic convention. Like Pinter, Albee has developed from the absurdist vein of such early comedies of menace as The Zoo Story to a wittier, more sophisticated, social comedy. [150]

When Roudane asked Albee the artists he was influenced by, Albee answered: "I admire Chekhov, Sophocles, Beckett...I think of the experience of seeing O'Neill's The Iceman Cometh...which Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? is a response too. Then there is William's Suddenly Last Summer. I think of my first experience with Beckett and Genet as being authentic experiences for me."[151]

Albee's drama focuses on confrontation and death as demonstrated in his play Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? His recurrent issues are betrayal, abandonment, withdrawal into a death-in-life existence, and difficulties of genuine communication as can be seen in his play The Zoo Story. He is recognized as a defeatist, depressing and pessimistic dramatist, which is evident in the play American Dream. He chooses to use the techniques of the Theatre of the Absurd, but to some critics, he is a realist playwright. In the modern theatre, Albee is listed under the writers of the Theatre of the Absurd.

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[149] Driver, Tom F. Romantic Quest and Modern Query (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1971), p. 316-317.
[150] Hirst, David L. Comedy of Manners (New York: Methuen and Co Ltd, 1979), p. 113.
[151] Kolin Philip C. ed. American Playwrights Since 1945 (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989), p. 12.

After this general outlook on Edward Albee, I will try to focus on his first long play Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? and also aim to examine the progress of The Theatre of the Absurd by studying Albee's play and style in his work. As I mentioned before some critics accept him as an Absurdist, but some claim that he belongs to the Realist tradition. However, his style proves that he is among the Absurd playwrights as Martin Esslin indicates in his book The Theatre of the Absurd at the very beginning of the Sixties.

V. WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF?

GEORGE: We all peel labels, sweetie;
and when you get through the skin, all three layers,
through the muscle, slosh aside the organs
them which is still sloshable and get down to bone...
you know what you do then?
When you get down to bone, you haven't got all the way, yet.
There's something inside the bone...
the marrow...and that's what you gotta get at. (Act three)

George, one of the main characters of the play Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? summarizes in the above quote the aim of the absurd drama. This aims is namely that the layers of man's life need to be "peeled off". Under all these layers, as absurd playwrights agree, is reality that is essentially meaningless. Focusing on this aim is the main subject of my research by studying Albee's Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? This play is set in a New England home and deals with illusions existing between the four main characters in a living room. Mainly, instead of facing realities, they choose to live with illusions. They keep themselves alive by believing individual illusions. To Albee, the reason for illusions cannot be explained and results are the unconscious fears of man. In this play he tells a story of people who are socially respectable, but in their private life, have lost all ethics and communication ability. Only after individual illusions disappear, these personal challenges are resolved. In the course of the play, the character George, as the voice of the writer, as quoted above states that it is necessary to get in deep to find the origins of the problems. To get in deep, one must find the main reason of his/her problems and inner confusions, then he/she could solve them one by one, so reach the origin of the problem is the only necessary thing to get the right answer, to get the marrow. This could be possible if one forget all false values or individual illusions. In the play, George tries to get the main reason, then faces the reality and reaches the solution with his invented games.

With his play Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, Albee received the Drama Critics' Award, the Tony Award and numerous other appreciative acknowledgments throughout its 644 performances. Immediately, it was popular and controversial. When

the prize committee did not accept its nomination for Pulitzer Prize unanimously, two members of the Pulitzer Prize committee resigned. In 1966 it was made into a successful film by the Warner Brothers, starring Elizabeth Taylor as Martha and Richard Burton as George.[152]

A. Summary of the Play

As the play starts Martha and George have just returned from a faculty party given by Martha's father, the president of the East Coast University at which George works. This faculty party was for old and new teachers to get to know one another. Martha and George, a middle-aged couple in the college town of New Carthage, New England, enter first to the living room. It is two A.M.

Martha, a fifty-two year old wife, six years older than her husband, quotes the line "What a dump!" from a Bette Davis movie. She then proceeds to nag George, demanding to figure out what movie it is from, but George does not pay attention to her question. At first he refuse to engage in the one-sided shouting match and ignores her, which seems simply to be a result of his tiredness or apathy. In fact this is a power struggle and part of a game. George, forty-six years old, a history professor at the college and acknowledged failure, has soon informed his wife has invited Nick, a handsome young new biology teacher, and Honey, his seemingly innocent wife, for a nightcap after the party because Martha's father has asked her and George to be nice to them. Before these guests arrive, Martha accuses George of "sulking" (Act One, p.15), and then she patronizingly acts sympathetic. She criticizes George as "You didn't do anything; you never do anything; you never mix. You just sit around and talk" (Act One, p.13). He responds "What do you want me to do? Do you want me to act like you? Do you want me to go around all night braying at everybody, the way you do?" (Act One, p.13) Their quarrel continues which sometimes seems comic, sometimes ridiculous. Martha makes fun of him as "Poor Georgie-Porgie, put-upon pie! Awwww... what are you doing? Are you sulking? Hunh? Let me see... are you sulking?" (Act One, p.15) When she does not get a reaction, she

[152] An interesting point here is that at the time this movie was made, Taylor and Burton were actually married in real life.

keeps on teasing him, and begins to sing loudly a song they heard at the faculty party, "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" sung to the tune of "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?" She gets angry when George does not laugh.

As the doorbell rings, George warns Martha not to start in on "the bit about the kid." They argue about this and just as Martha shouts a rude reply of "screw you" (Act One, p.19) to George, Nick and Honey step inside. The guests are shocked and find themselves drawn into an alcoholic night. While George and Martha shouts it out, their guests, at first treated like referees, soon became the prize to be won, and later, the target. Nick is thirty years old and blond, genius professor in the biology department, and his wife Honey is twenty-six years old, a frail and "slim-hipped", rich, silly and childlike woman. They married because she was pregnant, but it was a hysterical false pregnancy. George soon learns that Nick married her for her money. She still suffers a hysterical pregnancy, has a fear of the pain of childbirth and of getting pregnant and so prevents this secretly.

Martha declares that for some men to be married to the daughter of the president of a university would be an extraordinary opportunity for any, but George says "There are easier things in the world, if you happen to be teaching at a university, there are easier things than being married to the daughter of the president of that university. There are easier things in this world" (Act One, p. 24). Martha admires her father, and George makes jokes about him that "He is so marvelous! He's a God, we all know that." When they start to argue, Honey tries to escape by asking the way to the restroom and Martha offers to show her the whole house. Before they go George reminds Martha not "to shoot your mouth off... about you-know-what" (Act One, p.25). But, Martha tells Honey that they have a son whose 21st birthday is tomorrow and will be returning home the next day. Martha changes her clothes into a more comfortable outfit. This is "most voluptuous", showing off her body. She begins acting flirtatious with Nick. Then she insults George by telling a story to everyone about how she punched him when he refused to join in a boxing match with her father. He grows fed-up and leaves the room, then comes back with a rifle and shocks everyone by firing it at Martha. A parasol erupts from the barrel. Since George gets angry with Martha, he will start the games.

After Martha has belittled George's place in her father's college and put down George's manhood, he initially revenges himself by ridiculing Nick and Honey, using information he has learned from Nick. Then they take revenge on each other in the form of "Fun and Games." This is the title of Act I. The games they start to play are a kind of *comedy dell' arte* involving pace and readiness of wit, and a profusion of sex, drinking and cursing. The title is ironic that the games Martha and George play are neither fun for them or for their guests. The game playing that characterizes George and Martha's interaction is very complex and difficult to understand for the audience. They have created quite naturally a somewhat socially acceptable ritual for the release of their bitterness, perversities, self-loathing, hatred and sexual frustrations, as well as grudging love and affection. "Fun and games," characteristic of clever, educated, supposedly uninhibited moderns who seldom communicate in anything but sounding jokes, witticisms, and puns, enable George and Martha to turn their insides out, to move easily at critical moments from one stance to another, all in the name of good clean fun.

George tells Nick that he and Martha are like children viciously playing sad games. The characters slip in and out of these games so subtly that it is difficult for both reader and characters to mark the frequent shifts from mood to mood, for the blend of "fun" and seriousness is ambiguous. George shares an anecdote of a boy, whom he says he knew in prep school, he crashed into a tree and killed his father. But, while Martha is continuing her flirtation with Nick, she suggests that the boy was George and insults him by mocking his failed attempt at publishing a novel. He tries to strangle her, but Nick pulls him off.

This scene is particularly significant in the process of characterization. Albee tries to show George's intellectual superiority above Nick. George's clever response for Nick's clichés about an abstract painting hanging on the wall is an instance that adds to the character portrayal in the play. Then George's references to Parnassus[153] show another clever way of thinking. After a while George catches Nick's failure in his words about his reason for being a teacher "Oh... well, the same things that... uh... motivated you, I

[153] Parnassus: in Greek mythology, a mountain whose twin summits were devoted to Apollo and to the muses. Considered to be the seat of poetry and music. "That what you were drinking over at Parnassus?" (Act I, p. 25), quoted in "Albee's Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" www.guthrietheater.org.

imagine" (Act One, p.25) George immediate probe "What were they?" offers a kind of clever game and finally Nick gets angry "All right... what do you want me to say? Do you want me to say it's funny, so you can contradict me and say it's sad? Or do you want me to say it's sad so you can turn around and say no, it's funny. You can play that damn little game any way you want to, you know!" (Act One, p.26)

In the second Act the title "Walpurgisnacht" comes from the German belief that the night before May 1st witches come together at the Borchen Hill. It is named Walspurgisnight after the old Saint Walspurgis' name. In this act, the characters attack on the illusions that surround them as witch magic.[154] The metaphor of Nick and Martha as Satanic figures could also be possible in that act. "Old Nick" is also used of a name for Satan.

They challenge one another without knowing the difference between illusions and reality. When Nick says disgustedly that he cannot tell whether or not George and Martha are lying, George insists that they must behave as though they themselves knew the differences. Nevertheless, he himself has stopped caring. Martha rises to this challenge by offering Nick to have sex with her. But the next scene informs Nick's failure to achieve sexual union with Martha. In their presence, George acts as if not concerned, preferring to read a book that posits the decline of Western civilization. George, as the voice of Albee in the play, plays the games called "Humiliate the Host," "Hump the Hosts," and "Get the Guests" to make their individual illusions clear. By these games, George tries to find the main reason of illusions and then reach the reality although they are happy under the influence of the illusions.

Act three, "The Exorcism" opens as Martha wanders onstage alone. She is drunk and exhausted, she launches into a confused monologue that reveals her desperation and loneliness. Nick comes back and is surprised when she tells him that George is the only one who can satisfy her. George rings the doorbell with a bouquet of flowers, quoting a line from Tennessee Williams' A Streetcar Named Desire: "Flores; flores para los

[154] Walpurgisnacht: German; the eve of May Day; witches' Sabbath celebrated in medieval Europe; night of orgiastic celebration on which evil spirits are exorcised from cities and towns, quoted in "Albee's Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" www.guthrietheater.org.

muertos."[155] For the evening's final game, "Bringing Up Baby", George forces the resistance of Martha through a recitation about their son's perfect life, only to slap her down with the news of the boy's death. While she is recounting her story of her idealized non-existent son's childhood, George begins to chant the Requiem. Albee introduces a duet effect as George murmurs in Latin phrases. He devises the ultimate revenge in that he invents an illusionary telegram, which tells of their son's death. Martha is furious and yells that George has no right to do this. George insists that those were always the rules of the game, and that once she broke the rules by mentioning their son, he had no other choice. As Martha's fury at George becomes genuine grief, Nick realizes the son was only an illusion, invented by George and Martha to represent the child they could not have. The guests stumble out the door, leaving George and Martha to face the future without their illusionary crutch. The last few minutes of the play are quiet and tender. After the guests go out, George picks up glasses and asks Martha if she wants anything but she does not. He asks if she is tired, and she says she is. After a long silence, she asks if he had to "kill" their son, and he says yes. She asks again, and he says yes and adds that it was time. After a pause, Martha says she is cold. George says it is late. After a long silence, he says it will be better. She says she does not know. He says that it will be, maybe. He asks if she is all right. She says, "Yes. No." she puts his hand on her shoulder, she leans her head back. He sings very softly, "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" as a sort of lullaby, and Martha answers, "I am." George nods slowly and the play ends with this tableau in silence. This mode of dialogue is described by Styan as such:

> In 1961, Albee's gift for fluent and incisive dialogue helped his first long play Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, to immediate and international fame. It was directed by Alan Schneider with Utah Hagen Arthur Hill in the leading parts at the Billy Rose Theatre, New York, and at the Piccadilly Theatre, London, in 1964. An idealistic and newly married couple is entertained by a disillusioned, older couple, and the conjunction of the two groups has the effect of throwing up a variety of ghosts and skeletons. In spite of its absurdist title, the play constituted a retreat to a naturalistic

[155] Flores; flores para los muertos. Flores: Spanish; Flowers; flowers for the dead. Flowers. Quoted from Tennessee Williams' A StreetcarNamed Desire. (Act III), quoted in "Albee's Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" www.guthrietheater.org.

> mode of accentuated, Strindbergian, psychological realism, with a liberal addition of symbolic suggestion about the futility of human illusions.[156]

Albee is not concerned with attacking hypocrisy and materialism but the falseness of the idealism associated with the American dream. Nick embodies fine qualities with all psychological and sexual implications. George and Nick struggle as social equals despite their different backgrounds and the fact that Martha and George may be bad hosts.

B. What is Behind the Title of the Play?

The original title of the play was "Exorcism," but Albee changed it into "Who's afraid of life without false illusions?" that is a slogan inspired by the common nursery rhyme about the three little pigs and the big bad wolf. The wolf of the nursery rhyme can be taken to represent the fear of the unknown—since the first two pigs do not prepare themselves for eminent danger, they are both killed. The third pig keeps himself prepared to face the wolf and is able to overcome it. In the same way, the play indicates that when the characters cannot manage to equip themselves to deal with reality, they are destined to lose. When they separate themselves from illusions, they could survive to reality.

The title of the play Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? comes from a joke, the intellectual tale of a popular children's film. The tale was evidently told as a joke at the faculty party attended by the foursome. At first, it seems nonsense but gradually becomes an emotional anthem, as when George chants it, fearful of Martha's revelations about his failure. The rhyme chant recalls, "Who's afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?" from the Walt Disney's cartoon about The Three Little Pigs, which might seem as propaganda for instilling faith in American progress during the depression years. Not only is this a play on the main song of the film's title score, it also remarks on the interior fear of all the characters in its reference to Virginia Woolf, a writer who wrote about modern people's alienation from each other and who ultimately killed herself. "Edward Albee has says he first saw the phrase scrawled on a mirror in a saloon on 10th Street between Greenwich

[156] Styan, J.L. Modern Drama in Theory and Practice, volume II. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 143.

Avenue and Waverly Place in New York around 1953 and 1954 considering the setting of his play –the sterile academic life of a selected New England college- the phrase was most appropriate as 'a rather typical, university, intellectual joke'."[157] He answers a question about the meaning of the title that "I choose the title Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? because it's very good title. There is a national reference to 'Who is afraid of the big bad wolf" which can be said to be the fear of living life without false illusions. While the play has nothing to do with the author Virginia Woolf, if you read her work you will find similar enthusiasms to mine."[158]

The reference to Virginia Woolf is meaningful in terms of the literary illusions she created. As a fiction writer, she created wonderful, elaborate and illusionary stories just as Martha and George's imaginary stories and imaginary son, and her works deal with mainly the fearful and tenuous nature of life. She suffered many psychological problems in her lifetime, went mad and committed suicide. Her self-destruction can be seen as a commentary on George and Martha's self-destruction. This is clearly indicated in the closing lines when George softly sings, "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf..." and Martha responds, "I... am ... George ... I ... am...."[159] Thus, Albee is demonstrating the fear and trembling of the universe with his false convictions and illusions, and all seem meaningless according to the existentialist view. Their imaginary child symbolizes an escape from realities and also connects Martha and George to each other. But the declaration of his death seems a kind of self-destruction of their marriage.

C. Analysis of the Play

Albee wrote the play Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? in the early 1960s, at the time when Americans were beginning to question the American dream of the postwar 1950s. George makes critical references to Second World War and Cold War throughout the play. George and Martha, the main characters of the play, resemble George and Martha Washington, and Nick's name is a reference to Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev.

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[157] Inge, M.Thomas. Perspectives on American Culture (West Cornwall: Locust Hill Press, 1994), p. 154.
[158] http://www.educeth.ch/english/readinglist/service/answers/albee.html. "Ask the Author: Answers"
[159] Albee, Edward. Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? (New York: Penguin Books, 1983), p. 140.

Thus, Albee makes references to the world leaders and capitalism versus communism and George and Martha's marriage resembles the threat of Cold War. Nick, as a scientist, symbolizes the mechanized and alienated man in the monotony of life. George, as the historian, symbolizes the emotional and traditional man's view. History versus biology depicts the past and future challenging each other. Old, tired and ineffectual, George is opposite of the young, vital and "wave of the future" (Act One, p. 47) Nick. Albee demonstrates these two clashing worldviews. George, already obsolete, meaningless and powerless, is "bogged" (Act One, p.36) in the History department. He is already a relic of the past. Nick, in contrast, embodies the future in his youth and his position in the Biology department. George's description of a genetically altered race of supermen that look like Nick emphasizes Nick's very embodiment of the scientist as "wave-of-the-future." In Act One, George expresses the horror that the humanist feels at the potential impact of rationalism and science on society which is also one of the typical themes of the Theatre of the Absurd. This sentiment is depicted in the following passage:

> GEORGE: It's very simple, Martha, this young man is working on a system whereby chromosomes can be altered... the genetic make-up of a sperm cell changed, reordered... to order, actually... for hair and eye color, stature, potency... I imagine... hairiness, features, health... and mind. We will have a race of men... test-tube-bred... incubator-born... superb and sublime.
>
> But! Everyone will tend to be rather the same... Alike. Everyone... and I'm sure I'm not wrong here... will tend to look like this young man here.
>
> It will, on the surface of it, be all rather pretty... quite jolly. But of course there will be a dank side to it, too.
>
> I suspect we will not have much music, much painting, but we will have a civilization of men, smooth, blond, and right at the middleweight limit...a race of scientists and mathematicians, each dedicated to and working for the greater glory of the super-civilization. There will be a certain... loss of liberty, I imagine, as a result of this experiment... but diversity will no longer be the goal. Cultures and races will eventually vanish... the ants will take over the world. And I, naturally, am rather opposed to all this.

> History, which is my field... will lose its glorious variety and unpredictability... There will be order and constancy... and I am unalterably opposed to it. I will not give up Berlin!
> MARTHA: You'll give up Berlin, sweetheart. You going to defend it with your paunch?
> NICK: (to GEORGE) I am going to be the wave of the future. (Act One, p. 45-46)

The warfare metaphor is given in George's refusal to surrender Berlin that demonstrates the character's and author's understanding of the very real meaning of symbols in the world. The city of West Berlin itself was a symbolic location of the Cold War at the time the play was written. Therefore, while Berlin was in many ways a symbol of Western resistance to Communist power, the destruction of such a symbol was believed to have had destructive real-life consequences. Nick will succeed in destroying illusions like Berlin and the American dream: he has the power to destroy the American dream and Berlin by his chromosomal research in his Biology department. Thus, his position in the Biology department is not only a threat to the world at large but more so a threat to mankind. Surprisingly, Martha and George's imaginary son embodies the perfect appearance of this equally imagined race of future men. The boy's physical perfection resembles Nick in appearance, thus, it could be said that Martha and George function as parental figures to Nick and Honey. George and Martha embody the failure of the American dream. Their first names evoke the America's first President and First-lady. Albee makes the critique of the very subject matter about false values and empty illusions of American society which he first had attacked in his earlier one-act play American Dream. George and Martha remind the father and mother of America and show the success or failure of American revolutionary principles. The revolutionary principles have failed as George suggests in his speech in Act Two in response to an obscenity from Nick:

> You take the trouble to construct a civilization... to ... to build a society, based on the principles of... of principle... you endeavor to make communicable sense out of natural order, morality out of the unnatural disorder of man's mind... you make government and art, and realize that

> they are, must be, both the same... you bring things to the saddest of all points... to the point where there is something to lose... then all at once, through all the music, through all the sensible sounds of men building, attempting, comes the Dies Irae.[160] And what is it? What does the trumpet sound? Up yours. I suppose there's justice to it, after all the years... Up yours. (Act Two, p. 73)

Albee demonstrates that love and hate are dialectical, two sides of the same coin. Hating each other does not preclude George and Martha from simultaneously loving and needing each other. From their initial shared laughter to Martha's continued demands for kisses, the dialectic of love/hate becomes clear in the play. There are complicated motives behind her demand for a kiss. Martha's flirtation with Nick is not about a sexual desire for Nick. Because George ignores her act, her encounter with Nick is deliberate strategy in her war against George. While she is flirting with Nick, George reads aloud from his book Decline of the West by Spengler, emphasizes the war metaphor that he ignores the chaos around him. George and Martha's marriage represents the decline of the West. Their little college town of New Carthage is a microcosm for the West, threatened and destroyed by conformity as represented by Nick as biologist, and totalitarianism as represented by Nick as Nikita Khrushchev. Sprengler's Decline of the West and the passage Albee has chosen from it as fitting to the material situation in the play is read aloud by George: "And the west, encumbered by crippling alliances, and burdened with a morality too rigid to accommodate itself to the swing of events, must... eventually... fall" (Act Two, p. 104). It is not only for he was thinking it but also for the audience's benefit. Spengler tells a theory whereby decline is marked by the collapse of values in a period in which money and power become the only realities—as an age typified in the ancient world by Carthage[161] and in modern world by America, Albee's play takes place in the university town of New Carthage. Classical mythology also gets referenced in the setting of the play, New Carthage. Classical Carthage was the home of the mythical tragic lovers Dido and Aeneas, who provide an unexpected counterpoint to George and Martha. Later,

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[160] Dies Irae: Latin, from the Mass for the Dead; day of wrath, quoted in "Albee's Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" www.guthrietheater.org.

[161] North African city which fell prey to internal conflicts and eventually was sacked by the Romans during the Punic Wars (c. 150 B.C.); in Virgil's The Aeneid, the ancient, tragic love story of Dido and Aeneas is played out in Carthage, quoted in "Albee's Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" www.guthrietheater.org.

Carthage was destroyed. Here, New Carthage is the site of the destruction of the American dream. The New England setting of the play is also significant in Albee's commentary on the American dream. Simply the word "New" in New Carthage is a suggestion of hope and a second chance. George is Martha's second husband, so her second chance at a happy marriage.

Honey functions as a Greek chorus as well as a parody of the stereotypical young society wife in the play. Her intoxication functions to make her reactions more honest and immediate. She is also a childlike figure, the most frank character in the play. In fact she does not want children and is afraid of having them. Her headaches and nausea probably stem from the pills she takes to prevent childbirth. In Act Two, George tries to explain her what is happening in the kitchen, but she says "I don't want any... children... I'm afraid! I don't want to be hurt..." (Act Two, p. 105) Also she refuses to learn the fact about her husband's affair at that moment in the kitchen with Martha:

> GEORGE: There are a couple of people in there... they are in there, in the kitchen... Right there, with the onion skins and the coffee grounds... sort of... sort of a... sort of a dry run for the wave of the future.
> HONEY: I... don't... understand... you...
> GEORGE: It's very simple... When people can't abide things as they are, when they can't abide the present, they do one of two things... either they... either they run turn to a contemplation of the past, as I have done, or they set about to... alter the future. And when you want to change something... you BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG!
> HONEY: Stop it!
> GEORGE: You don't want to know, do you? You don't want to listen to it, hunh? (Act Two, p. 106-107)

The confusion over the difference between appearance and reality is general theme of the Theatre of the Absurd, that there is much confusion about this theme. When George throws the book at the door chimes, which "crash against one another, ringing wildly" (Act Two, p. 104), Honey enters and asks who rang the doorbell. Thus brings a new idea to George to take his revenge, the idea of coming of a messenger to announce the death of

their son. So, George creates an illusion and Honey could help him to prove it. In Act Three, both George and Martha recognize the difficulty of distinguishing between them when Nick asks the truth of George's parents:

> GEORGE: Maybe.
> MARTHA: Yeah; maybe not, too.
> GEORGE: Truth and illusions. Who knows the difference?
> MARTHA: You were never in Mediterranean... truth or illusion... either way.
> Truth and illusion, George; you don't know the difference.
> GEORGE: No; but we must carry on as though we did.
> MARTHA: Amen. (Act Three, p.119)

While Martha and George are playing such a game, Nick could not understand them and says, "Hell, I don't know when you people are lying, or what." (Act Three, p. 118) Then Martha asks George, "Truth or illusion, George. Doesn't it matter to you... at all?" (Act Three, p. 120) At this time, George finds a new game called "Bring Up Baby" in order to "peel labels to get the marrow" he says, in order to reach the truth in their life for their reunion.

Martha admires her father so much that she wants to marry a man who has resemblances to her father in the future. Therefore she married George, she thinks he will become the president of the college after her father, but George cannot do that. So, she creates an illusion for her to believe, but fails at the end and gets disappointed. According to Freudian psychological theories which Albee uses in that play, it might be said that Martha has an Electra complex that she is fond of her father and wished to marry a man like her father.

> MARTHA: Mommy died early, and I sort of grew up with Daddy. Jesus, I admired that guy! I worshipped him... I absolutely worshipped him. I still do... And Daddy built this college... And I got the idea that I'd marry into the college... which didn't seem to be quite as stupid as it turned out. And along came George. And the match seemed... practical, too. Daddy was

looking for someone to take over, some time, when he was ready to retire, and so I thought... When Daddy retired, he'd take over the college...until he watched for a couple of years and started thinking maybe it wasn't such a good idea after all... that maybe Georgie-boy didn't have the stuff... that he didn't have it in him! George didn't have much... push... In fact he was sort of ... a FLOP! A great ... big... fat... FLOP! (Act One, p.42-56)

As evinced in her rude words to her husband, George and Martha are unable to form a connection because they are unable to listen to each other or themselves. Albee employs cultural clichés about a lack of communication to express a belief about the impossibility of human connection. He draws the characters as caricatures. Honey and Nick function as surrogates for the audience and Martha and George's marriage battle is shocking to them as it is to the audience. Both the young couple and the audience learn the rules of the game and the meaning. As the representatives of the American society, Nick and Honey are empty, conformist characters, and confused by the illusions that they do not realize the difference between truth and illusion.

Albee also deals with words and language that tend to confuse rather than communicate, as in the conversation at the beginning of the play about the abstract painting on the wall in the living room:

NICK: (indicating the abstract painting) Who... who did the...?

MARTHA: That? Oh, that's by...

GEORGE: ...some Greek with a moustache Martha attacked one night in...

HONEY: Oh, ho, ho, ho,HO.

NICK: It's got a... a...

GEORGE: A quiet intensity?

NICK: Well, no... a...

GEORGE: Oh. Well, then, a certain noisy relaxed quality, maybe?

NICK: (knows what George is doing, but stays grimly, coolly polite) No. What I meant was...

GEORGE: How about... uh... a quietly noisy relaxed intensity.

HONEY: Dear! You're being jashed.

NICK: (cold) I'm aware of that. (A brief, awkward silence) (Act One, p. 20-21)

Both the opening and closing scenes of the play feature Martha and George alone on stage. Between the beginning and end of the play there are a contrast and change. The first scene is loud and full of energetic dialogues and the final scene is quiet and contemplative. In both scenes, their marriage seems miserable and they have desire for illusions, because they are afraid to live without illusions. The final words of Martha mean that they are afraid to face reality. Albee gives a kind of message that we must live without illusions, however they give much comfort to us. As George says, "peel the label...get down to bone, inside the bone...the marrow...and that's what you gotta get at," he remarks how it is important to go below the surface, below the bone, right to the marrow. Killing the son is going to the marrow for George. Although it is imaginary son, his death is painful for George, but his decision to kill him is meaningful and important for them, because it is necessary for the future of their relationship. Even though the son is the source of arguments between George and Martha, he is also a force that brings them together and also the son image enslaved them and this caused unproductiveness for them. George says "I'm numbed enough... and I don't mean by liquor, though maybe that's been part of the process –a gradual, ever-the-years going to sleep of the brain cells." (Act two, p. 93) This old couple represents broken and spoiled marriages that they cannot succeed to build communication with each other.

> We are largely hampered by a convention of which we are unaware simply because it is a convention of our theatre and therefore universally accepted: realism. The behavior of the actor must conform more or less to that of real people in real-life situations. We are not given the freedom of to express our inner world, our obsessions and fears, in any way that might be bigger than life. The play, Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? may be violent, even inhuman, but violence and inhumanity are represented in a recognizable,

believable human way, with gestures, voices, and facial expressions that could be used in everyday life as we live it.[162]

Albee makes literary allusions in the play. Martha quotes the line "What a dump!" from a Bettie Davis movie. While talking to herself at the beginning of the third act, Martha references "The Poker Game" in Tennessee Williams' A Streetcar Named Desire, the painting based on the scene in which fragile Blanche comes in her animalistic brother-in-law Stanley's poker game.[163] When George enters with flowers on his hand, he says a line from Williams' play "Flores para los muertos", means flowers for the dead, that line foreshadows Blanche's imminent spiritual and emotional death. George uses this line to foreshadow his announcement of imaginary son. When George enters with flowers, Martha says "Pansies! Rosemary! Violence! My wedding bouquet!"[164] Also this line foreshadows the death of the son. Martha uses "violence" for "violets" to characterize her marriage in a linguistic cleverness.

Another literary allusion in the play is to Bible. Third act titles as "The Exorcism" that refers to George's exorcism of the destructive power of their illusory son on their marriage and also the casting out of devils encountered in the "Walpurgisnacht" of Act Two. At the final Act, their son becomes a Christ figure; George sacrifices him for the good of their marriage in a Christian allegory. George chants the Requiem that is used for a Catholic funeral service, and Kyrie Eleison's song "Lord have mercy" during Martha's monologue about her imaginary son. Also, she calls their son a "poor lamp" which refers to Jesus Christ who is known as the "Lamp of God" for his sacrificial death. Martha tells his childhood story "Poor Lamp. Helpless... George... cried. I carried the poor lamp. George snuffling beside me, I carried the child, having fashioned a sling... and across the

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[162] Pronko, Leonard Cabell. Theater East and West, (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), p. 188-189.

[163] The Poker Night: A scene from Tennessee Williams' play, A Streetcar Named Desire. "Up the spout: THE POKER NIGHT. Up the spout." (Act III), quoted in "Albee's Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" www.guthrietheater.org.

[164] "Pansies! Rosemary! Violets! My wedding bouquet!" a line of Ophelia's mad speech from Hamlet in which she offers the other characters imaginary flowers. Ophelia says this line before drowning herself, quoted in "Albee's Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" www.guthrietheater.org.

great fields." (Act Three, p. 129) George prays in Latin "In Paradisum deducant te Angeli."[165]

When George tells that their son is dead, Martha screams "You can't decide that for yourself! I will not let you do that!" (Act Three, p. 135) George repeats in Latin the last lines of the funeral service, to which Honey gives the appropriate responses. "George: Requiescat in pace. Honey: Amen. George: Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine. Honey: Et lux perpetua luceat eis."[166] (Act Three, p.138) This most powerful emotional effect in the play is the discovery of the reality in the Aristotelian sense like Sophocles' Oedipus, when Oedipus discovers he has killed his father and married her mother and fathered her children. When George announces that there had been a telegram, but he had eaten it, Martha spits in his face. She knows that George killed their son. But he reminds the rules for the reason; she had broken the rules by mentioning their son to someone else. Honey confirms as "To me. You mentioned him to me." Martha defends her breaking, crying: "I forget! Sometimes... sometimes when it's night, when it's late, and... and everybody else is... talking... I forget and I... want to mention him... but I... hold on... I mentioned him... all right... but you didn't have to push it over the edge. You didn't have to... kill him" (Act Three, p. 138). George assures Martha that things will be better and says a quiet "no" to her suggestion that they create another child.

D. Absurd Aspects in the Play

One of the characteristics of absurdist drama is the characters' recognition of the absurdity of existence. They do not ask to live and they will die without wishing it. Thus alienated from their surroundings, they seek comfort in their individual illusions which make them happier. Characters' recognition of this illusion and struggle to survive the absurdity of existence characterizes Theatre of the Absurd. Clearly, Martha and George and to lesser extent, Nick and Honey, are characters who create illusions. To deprive them

[165] "In Paradisum deducant te Angeli.": means "May the angels lead you into paradise", quoted in "Albee's Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" www.guthrietheater.org.
[166] "Requiescat in pace": Rest in peace, "Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine": Eternal rest grant them, Lord, "Et lux perpetua luceat eis":And light perpetual shine down upon them, ", quoted in "Albee's Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" www.guthrietheater.org.

of these illusions is equal to a violent act. George and Martha's entire existence is based on illusion. Martha married George not because of who he was but because of who she imagined he could become. She married the illusion of George who would be a university president. One of the biggest illusions in the play is "the bit about the kid." The kid is not real, but is a shared and private illusion. Nick and Honey are also creatures of illusion; their social niceties present the image of a happy couple. In fact, they married because of Honey's false pregnancy and her money.

George, the unsuccessful academic, and his ambitious wife Martha are married for twenty three years but have not a child. Their fights and ongoing power struggles integrate them. However they want to have a child, but did not. They expected to have it to give meaning and a hope to keep them alive. This relates with the play Waiting for Godot, in which the waiting keeps the main characters alive. They may know that Godot will not come, but they still wait because it may be their life force. In the play Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? George and Martha wait for a child although they know that it is impossible and too late. So, the hope of it creates an imaginary child that they treat as real, and this keeps them together in their torn marriage. The imaginary child is the only way that they can bear the emptiness and boredom or the monotony of their life and their marriage.

One of Albee's major themes, the appearance of illusion and reality, takes center stage in the play Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? Such a concern is characteristic of the Theatre of the Absurd. In his play, Albee explores the relationship between illusion and reality in the contrast between his play's form and context. George and Martha's dialogue, at first, seems to be a naturalistic representation of a modern-day couple's arguments. Meaningless topics and repetition imitate the sound of real conversation. But there is more to Albee's repetitious dialogue than surface realism. In addition, this repetition emphasizes the circularity of George and Martha's dilemma and troubles. Despite the amount of arguing and repeating they do, George and Martha rarely reach an understanding point. That is, there argument is more about the process of arguing rather than any conclusion or agreement achieved by argument. For that reason, it is possible to view Albee's representation of that modern marriage as definitely failure. We can only pity both of them. Also, in them, we see the whole general problem of humanity suffering

from the forces beyond its control, forces which lie inside and outside us and makes us fearful. George's decision to destroy the child causes a threat to future survival. It is hard to survive in the face of life's absurdity. Albee's play finds deep and true meaning in the small and absurd details of life.

VI. CONCLUSION

Hamm : We're not beginning to... to... mean something?
Clov : Mean something! You and I, mean something!
(Brief laugh) Ah that's a good one!

(Samuel Beckett, Endgame)

In Beckett's Endgame, not only the characters in the play but also the spectators live in an illogical world. The Theatre of the Absurd emerged in a period when meaning lost its value and importance. After the First and Second World Wars, depression and frustration of humanity is expressed in the Theatre of the Absurd. With the theoretical disappearance of God by the declaration of Nietzsche, lack of faith and ethical values occurred. Then Hitler's slaughter in Europe caused an all-out distrust against life.

During the Cold War period, the fear of communist regime effects people in the United States and Europe. "After the war, there was a hopeless period. The human mind was shocked against the incomprehensible and fearful forces. The hope of better world took place in acceptance of a broken world."[167] These actions and atmosphere drifted people to search for new art forms, which are called avant-garde movements. Absurdism is one of them and may be considered as a life style rather than a movement. Mostly the stage is the place where absurdism flourished.

Absurd plays find their origin in existentialism. After the second half of the nineteenth century, the existentialist writer Alfred Jarry wrote Ubu Roi (1896), which was accepted as the first absurd play. He rejected the traditional approaches and styles in his dramatic technique. After Jarry, Absurd theatre produced the meaninglessness of life by destroying all the traditional art styles on stage.

Absurd means illogical, ridiculous and meaningless. But, its meaning is different in the Theatre of the Absurd. Absurd playwrights tried to find an explanation to the irrational and absurd existence of man. Albert Camus explained the man's absurdity in life in his book The Myth of Sisyphus (1942). The absurd hero Sisyphus struggles for his

[167] Şener, Sevda. Dünden Bugüne Tiyatro Düşüncesi (Ankara: Dost Kitabevi, 2000), p. 298

meaningless purpose, but he still has hope. Camus' book became a manifesto of the absurd and influenced the absurd writers.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, avant-garde movements, such as Dadaism influenced Absurd writers and established new techniques, which became the foundation of the Theatre of the Absurd. Dadaist movement begun in 1917 by Tristan Tzara and was a rebellion against hopefulness and the human situation in the world. Then Surrealist movement was its reflection in France. They have different characteristics. Surrealism tried to destroy all old values, to seek for freedom, and to want to rebuild the world. Antonin Artaud gave the most important examples of this movement. He rejected realism and aimed for an absence of clearly defined standards on stage. He wrote The Theatre and Its Double (1958), a theatre theory book, and contributed to the drama by demanding a theatre that would project collective archetypes that he called "Theatre of Cruelty". By emphasizing the performance rather than language, Artaud's theories and styles influenced Absurdists.

With the beginning of Industrial Age in the nineteenth century, man started to live in a mechanical universe. Especially in city life he stayed alone, apart from nature and others which resulted in lack of communication and mistrust. The existentialist movement sprung from these circumstances which affected the Theatre of the Absurd. The most well known existentialist writer Jean-Paul Sartre adopted a radical version of Luigi Pirandello, who is the most influential dramatist of early twentieth century. Sartre denied the moral codes and existence of God like the philosopher Nietzsche.

There are similarities between existentialism and the absurd approach, but their usage of stage is different. Absurd writers do not directly call to the audience, but wish to make them realize their absurd situation in the universe, and do not give solutions or direct messages. As Sevda Şener says, "The aim of the Theatre of the Absurd is to show that the world is absurd, there is no humanly order in society and man is controlled by his primitive motives, but not his mind. Thus, this achieves to make man aware of the conscious of absurd and give up soothing himself with illusions." [168]

[168] Ibid, p. 299. (my translation)

The tragic condition of man in the play seems comic to the audience, but there are scary, shocking, dreadful and startling things in this humor. They are mixed in the play. By destroying the boundaries of logic and order, the spectators realize the absurdity of life. There are also black humor and grotesque figures in the Theatre of the Absurd. Samuel Beckett and Eugene Ionesco were the forerunners of Absurd Theatre. They wrote absurd plays and tried to build a new form on stage after the world wars' destruction in Europe.

When we look at the American stage in the twentieth century, the social and historical condition is different. Americans did not live the effects of the World Wars and were not influenced or depressed as the same way. After Little Theatre Movement, Broadway developed and produced so many artificial plays. Eugene O'Neill was the major playwright during 1920s and 1930s. Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller were main American playwrights in 1940s.

In Europe, avant-garde movements such as Dadaism, Surrealism, Expressionism and Absurd occurred during the First World War and the Second World War. But in the United States of America, there were not many examples, because the American dream of the good life was very strong. After the end of 1950s and 1960s, same social and political experiences such as Vietnam War, Cold War, Korean War, Civil Rights Movements, political leaders' assassinations, Watergate and many others, caused people to lose their optimism and their faith in the American dream. In that chaotic circumstances Broadway discovered Edward Albee who practiced the Theatre of the Absurd.

Edward Albee met the theatre world at his young ages; because of his grandfather was a theatre company owner. Adopted by a rich American family, Albee tried to show the failure of the ideal family figure on stage by using Absurd Theatre techniques. He started to write plays at a young age and in 1958 he wrote his famous one-act play The Zoo Story. After the premiere of the play in Berlin, Albee had an immediate success both in Germany and in America.

During the sixties, Albee was called as the most promising of the new playwrights. In 1961, he wrote his first long-play Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? and got a great

success. Critics think that from The Zoo Story and The Death of Bessie Smith came his ability to depict tense human relationships and from The American Dream and The Sandbox came a comic talent, and in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? greatly matured.

In Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, he creates a play that is sometimes funny and sometimes terrifying; but he fuses terror and comedy into a single current and sustains it as the tone of the play, accomplishing an artistic achievement unprecedented in American Theatre successfully. Its story is bare. Its setting is a conservative living room. The main characters, George and Martha are middle-aged couple. George is a college professor and younger than his wife, whose father is the president of the college. They have just returned from a Saturday night faculty party of the college. The place is satirically named New Carthage. Time is two o'clock in the morning. They have guests, Nick and Honey, a young couple; a handsome biology instructor and his simple, giggly, slim-hipped wife. The two couples engage in drink and conservation. They start to play games to take revenge on each other.

In its basic structure, the play is a tribute to Albee's genius that he can turn such unpromising materials and so little action into theatrical fireworks. During its changing atmosphere, tension and rhythm, each character bares himself to the others, revealing that the appearance each presents is merely a façade to mask the hideous truth, the ugly wolf (of the title) that each of us tries to hide.

At the end of the play, Nick realizes that Martha and George have just a fantasy son, he is imaginary. They created him to compensate for their inability to have children. The illusion gives them power to live and keeps them together. The main aim is peeling away artifices in the dramatic tension and the curious spectator wonders "What is he hiding?" The stripping down is finally completed at the final scene of the play. Also Albee's way of evoking awareness of masks is its central meaning. Each of us creates masks to hide the terrible creature we are underneath. A creature we are unwilling to unveil because it would make us socially unpresentable. The mask hides psychological insecurities and enables too go with life. Therefore, we feel sympathy and compassion for the characters in this play, and we live an awareness of personal complexities.

George and Martha represent the decline of the American dream and the failure of old values. Thus, Albee named them from the first president and first lady of America, George and Martha Washington. They have a love-hate action and power struggle. Nick and Honey represent the future. In the course of the evening, all the characters recognize their illusions and false fears and reality of their weaknesses. Thus each achieves a stronger strategic position from which to conquer them.

This is Albee's brilliant and masterful theatrical technique. The steady stream of sharp, punching speeches is his talent. He employs language brilliantly. The characters interact with each other in a way that creates a dynamic tempo. Edward Albee dominated the American theatre of the 1960s. Although he was included the list of the playwrights of the Theatre of the Absurd, he could be categorized as a Realist playwright because his plays have realistic themes and scenes. But, he is not a realistic playwright because he reacted against simple realism. Reality could not be so easily defined in his plays. The audience has to explore the meaning or the meaninglessness. As demonstrated in this study, Edward Albee's contribution to the American Drama is acknowledged by the all critics. His effect on American theatre was apparent. He was one of the most powerful and original playwrights in America. He is the American leader in the Theatre of the Absurd and the most promising and controversial experimentalist in the American theatre. In the largest sense, the play is about the games people play, the illusions people create, in order to survive in the post-World War II meaningless and Godless universe. The exact ideal Albee treat in the play is the ideal of love, especially the kinds of brutal game-playing. In a sense, the play is truly a most contemporary love story. This is a treatment of love on both the emotional and intellectual levels. Unlike Romeo and Juliet, their love is the love story of the Age of the Absurd and is not protected from the usual destruction of time and the banal realities of life.

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