

**RE-READING THE SELECT PLAYS OF EUGENE  
IONESCO AND EDWARD ALBEE IN THE LIGHT  
OF MIKHAIL BAKHTIN'S THEORY OF  
CARNIVALESQUE AND GROTESQUE**

**A Thesis**

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
award of the degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
IN  
ENGLISH**

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PUNJAB  
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## Introduction

Eugene Ionesco is a famous European dramatist belonging to the theatre of the Absurd and Edward Albee is a prominent American playwright who dismantled the trends of realistic drama of Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams of America. The critics and the reviewers such as Bigsby, Brustein and Brooks Atkinson took keen interest in the plays of Eugene Ionesco and Edward Albee. Many articles appeared in *New York Times* and *Saturday Review* in which the main issues were discussed. The intensive review of literature reveals that there is no full length study available on the use of Bakhtin's literary devices of Carnavalesque and Grotesque realism employed by Ionesco and Albee. The present thesis entitled *Re-reading the Select plays of Eugene Ionesco and Edward Albee in the Light of Mikhail Bakhtin's Theory of Carnavalesque and Grotesque* is focused on the absurdities and uncertainties of life dramatized in the plays of Eugene Ionesco and Edward Albee. The major plays of Eugene Ionesco and Edward Albee are examined and investigated from a new perspective applying the theories of Bakhtin who was the Russian philosopher and critic. Mikhail Bakhtin published *Art and Responsibility* (1918), *Rabelais and His World* (1965) and *Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1984) and propounded the theories of carnivalesque and grotesque realism. Bakhtin believes that comic and farcical elements act as a safety valve to get release from the existential despair and absurdities of life. It is pertinent to note that Eugene Ionesco and Edward Albee wrote plays to depict the existential reality in imitation of the Theatre of Absurd which depicts the metaphysical and anxieties of modern man. Eugene Ionesco and Edward Albee belong to the theatre of Absurd drama. The World War II brought about sense of loss, despair and hopelessness. Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus explored the Existential philosophy and responded to the anguish of modern man. Ionesco is regarded pioneer of the French avant-garde theatre. Ionesco was a prolific writer as he wrote more than a dozen plays and was acclaimed as one of the best playwrights. His famous plays are *The Bald Soprano* (1950), *The Chairs* (1952), *Rhinoceros* (1959), *The Hard Boiled Egg* (1966), *The Duel* (1971) and *Double Act* (1972).

Edward Albee is an American dramatist who depicted the anxieties and absurdities confronted by the American people. His *The Zoo Story* (1960) is the real waste land of the modern world. His *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962) dramatizes the impotency, sterility, alienation and anxiety of the neurotic protagonists who failed in love and marital relationships. Albee's *Tiny Alice* (1964) depicted the theme of helplessness of man in the callous universe. Albee's *A Delicate Balance* (1966) got him his first Pulitzer Prize. The majority of the critics and reviewers of Ionesco and Edward Albee examined the plays of these dramatists from different perspectives; Harold Clurman, Brooks Atkinson, Tom Driver, Martin Esslin, CW.E. Bigsby have expressed their opinions on the themes and stylistic techniques of Ionesco and Edward Albee.

### **What is Bakhtian Study?**

This study is quite unconventional and is done from the fresh perspective; the plays of Ionesco and Edward Albee are analyzed through the lens of Bakhtin's theories of Carnavalesque and grotesque realism. In the subsequent chapters of this thesis all the major plays of Ionesco and Edward Albee are analyzed deviating from the traditional criticism of The Theatre of the Absurd. Vonnegut used the tools of black comedy in his novels as he had found laughter an analgesic for the temporary relief of existential pain. The only way to escape and overcome the pain of absurdities is to laugh at the absurdities rather than cry about surroundings. Henry Bergson in his essay on *Laughter* (1911) called laughter "a momentary anesthesia of the heart, the absence of feeling" (17). The contemporary American novelists like Joseph Heller, Ken Kesey, Thomas Pynchon and Kurt Vonnegut used the tools of comedy to overcome the pain of absurdity. Bakhtin averred that laughter is man's only defense against absurdity of life. Human beings are motivated to accept absurdity as inevitable part of life as laughter puts absurdity into perspective lessening the pain and anguish. Bergson clarifies the whole issue thus: "To produce the whole of its effect, then, the comic demands something like a momentary anesthesia of the heart. Its appeal is to intelligence, pure and simple" (Bergson 4). In this study the theories of Bakhtin are applied to explore the meaning of comic laughter and the significance of Carnavalesque and grotesque realism employed by Ionesco and Edward Albee in their plays. All the important texts of Ionesco and Edward Albee are analyzed to



explore the function of laughter and comic techniques to overcome the absurdities of life.

The thesis entitled “*Re-reading the Select plays of Eugene Ionesco and Edward Albee in the Light of Mikhail Bakhtin's Theory of Carnavalesque and Grotesque*” explores the absurdities and uncertainties and the themes of existential despair found in the plays of Eugene Ionesco and the American playwright Edward Albee. It is pertinent to note that Eugene Ionesco and Edward Albee wrote plays to depict the existential reality in imitation of the Absurd Theatre. The European and American playwrights such as Ionesco, Genet, Beckett and Albee depicted the metaphysical despair and anguish experienced by modern man. The scenes of destruction of World War II brought psychological trauma in the minds of the people who participated in war that lasted for six long years. Millions of people were killed in combat and genocide. Religion couldn't give people any spiritual sustenance and the value system built around progress, jingoism and totalitarianism collapsed. The faith was shattered and as Martin Esslin contends the door to the non-traditional drama opened. People suffered anguish and despair as they found life meaningless and struggles of life futile. Ionesco observed that in the absurdist drama there are no heroes but an individual is presented as a lost individual, cut off from his roots and religious rituals. All his actions seem senseless and useless and his entire struggle ends in despair. In this study the prominent plays of Ionesco and Albee will be analyzed and examined applying the theories of Bakhtin to explore the hidden layers of the text.

Eugene Ionesco got an opportunity to read the famous contemporary philosophers as Paris had been a centre of learning and tradition. He found the real world full of decay and moral corruption. He got the awareness of death that is inevitable. His family shifted to Romania and here in his home land he developed contempt for conservatism and conformity and anti-Semitism. He joined as a lecturer at the University of Bucharest and started teaching French and writing poetry. Here the real talent of Ionesco came on the surface as he formed a view of the world and life. He married Rodica in 1936 and got a scholarship and again moved to France. In Paris he came in contact with Raymond Queneau who was a great literary giant at that time. He lived in Marseille during World War II. His first

play *The Bald Soprano* (1950) was a failure as he tried to create an absurdist atmosphere. He developed his philosophical vision and is regarded pioneer of the French avant-garde theatre. Ionesco exposed and ridiculed the absurdity of human beings. Ionesco was a prolific writer as he wrote more than a dozen plays and was acclaimed as one of the best playwrights. Many prominent critics have analyzed and examined the plays of Ionesco from the perspectives of absurdity and existentialism. He is called the father of anti-drama as he used the tools of surreal comic art with an ambition to parody the conformism and traditional form of realistic drama. Ionesco was strongly impacted by the great comedians of the cinema. The Absurd play is described as a “sequence of events without sequence”. He witnessed so many comical films reducing to the level of madhouse. Catherine B. Osborne (1968) in his article “Maeterlinck, Predecessor to Ionesco” published in *French Review* observed that Ionesco was influenced by many writers like Maeterlinck Cervantes, Moliere, Chaplin, the Marx Brothers and the cinema of the 1930s. Like Beckett and Genet, Ionesco discards psychology and coherent dialogues and his main focus is always to depict the dehumanized characters conversing like puppets on the stage. Language in his plays is used to create perfect illusion of reality. Coe comments thus: “Ionesco’s method is to begin with an impossible situation and then to develop it to the limit of impossibility and inconceivability”. Ironically Ionesco forces the audience to participate in what is not an illusion of reality” (58). Ionesco uses language to provoke the audience; he uses the foreign words, forceful uncommon phrases and irrational statements in his plays to provoke laughter. R. Schechner (1962) in his article “The Enactment of the “Not” in Ionesco’s *Les Chaises*”, observes that Ionesco presents a “world of teeming life where not only words, but gesture, clocks, doorbells lead to the process of dehumanization” (24). Voloshinov in his *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* observes that “language is learned through contextualized social interaction” (292).

Bakhtin propounded new philosophy of language and declared that language is dialogic in nature. Different people talk and language grows out of the dialogues of different people. Language develops in the context of dialogues between different people. Bakhtin observes that the real drama must depict unnatural and bizarre situations to provoke laughter. This is not always easy as Martin Esslin observes that “the laws of probability as well as those of physics are suspended” (Esslin, *The*

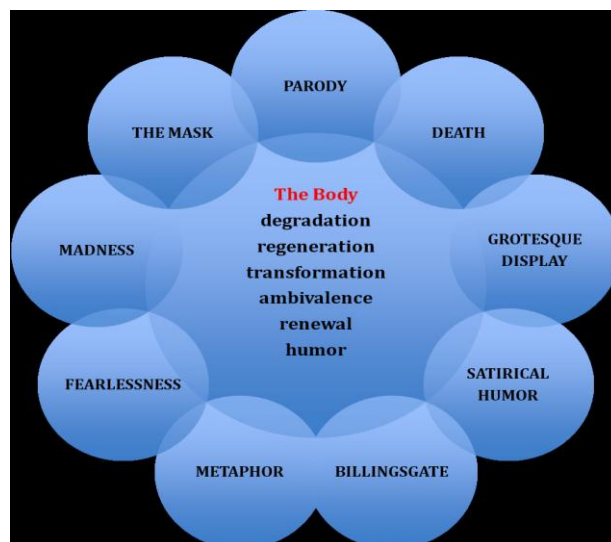
*Theatre of the Absurd* 3). Ionesco had the potential to bring on the stage a girl with several noses and a man being transformed into a Rhinoceros. Kafka also depicts the bizarre situations dramatizing setting, characters and actions. Ionesco is seriously concerned about the plight of man in confronting the absurdities of life and the loss of identity. Ionesco's vision of life is quite clear, he observes that man is confronted with the material world, the threat of death, the attempts of the family and of society to force conformity to social norms. In the modern industrial set up man has to live with fractured and Ionesco's plays deal with the questions of society and politics, corruption and power, death, language and communication breakdown. In his play *The Bald Soprano* (1948) Ionesco depicts the theme of stagnation of man through his language presenting the character of Mrs. Smith who becomes an alienated individual in the plot of the play. Her speeches are packed with platitudes and in the process she becomes a mechanical being- a robot of language.

In *The Chairs* (1951) this process of disintegration continues as Ionesco depicts the mental deterioration of the old couple in shocking language through the use of the tools of grotesque realism. In this play language is reduced to an infantile level as the old couple is trapped in a rut of simple language which they use to express their fantasies. They are old in age but their thoughts are infantile. Ionesco writes the dialogues in nonsensical language depicting the absurdities and uncertainties of their existence. Richard Coe (1961) explored the literary devices used by Ionesco to depict the physical and mental transformation of characters. Richard Schechner observes thus: "Ionesco's settings are always real" and, as in Kafka. Each detail of the nightmare is realistically documented" (Schechner 188). Martin Esslin observes that Ionesco depicts fortuitous universe which has no divine foundation, and which provides no meaning for man's existence. After World War II, the new sense of uncertainty, anxiety, and pessimism, coupled with theological revolution, imparted a new awareness to the continental playwrights. The corrosion of self became an inevitable reality because this was an age in which existence came to enjoy precedence over essence. Truth assumed a life-sustaining illusion. Mind, consciousness, soul are treated as illusive and meaningless things.

Edward Albee is an American dramatist who became famous after the disappearance of Tennessee Williams as Albee depicted the existential despair

experienced by the Americans. Albee wrote Robert Burstein aptly observed that Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story* (1960) is the real waste land of the modern world; the play is dubbed as "sexual-religious claptrap" articulating the corrosion of self of Jerry (22). Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962) dramatizes the impotency, sterility, alienation and anxiety of the neurotic protagonists who failed in love and marital relationships. Albee's *Tiny Alice* (1964) created sensation in the theatre world depicting the theme of helplessness of man in the callous universe. The plays of Ionesco and Edward Albee are famous and they have been great success on the theatre. Harold Clurman, Brooks Atkinson, Tom Driver, Martin Esslin, C.W.E. Bigsby have expressed their opinions on the themes and stylistic techniques of Ionesco and Edward Albee but no critic has so far examined and investigated the texts of Ionesco and Edward Albee from the lens of Bakhtin. In this study, the researcher has taken the challenge to explore the hidden layers applying Bakhtin's theories of Carnavalesque and grotesque realism.

Todorov observes that "Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin is undoubtedly the most innovative and original Soviet thinker of the modern age. His theories are relevant to all societies in all ages and in all times" (Todorov ix). Mikhail Bakhtin (1895 - 1975) was a Russian philosopher and a literary critic. The grotesque aspect of literature is the vital aspect of life, culture and society. All the elements analyzed form the major part of the plays of Ionesco and Edward Albee. All these dramatists use the elements of humor, parody and degradation to depict the collapse of values; they create an atmosphere of freedom and fearlessness through their plays.



In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare depicted famous grave digging scene to articulate the real behavior patterns of the grave diggers. Albee's play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is packed with the grotesque scenes depicting the impotency of George and moral and spiritual sterility of Martha. Albee also reveled in depicting sex and bodily functions that portrayed humans as animals and "grotesque realism" give structural unity to the plot of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*. Eugene Ionesco was shocked to find in the society a tendency to bulldoze the individual into a faceless non-entity. Having killed off God, the absurd playwright finds man alone in the universe. The problem of modern individual today is how to escape the terror of pure contingency, the absurdity of existence. Born without reason and dying fortuitously, man appears superfluous on earth, a waste in the cosmic dustbin.

S Jeanette R. Malkin observes in his famous book *Verbal Violence in Contemporary Drama* (1992), that Ionesco uses unconventional language like Becket in his play *The Bald Soprano*. Ionesco uses Cliches, formulae, mechanical trivia, and mindless inanities in the dialogues of the characters. His characters speak nonsense as their language is interchangeable; they repeat and repeat but don't carry forward the action. Ionesco's language may be dubbed as of one-dimensional insignificance (Malkin 123). In his plays "there is no hero; no villain and the characters lack self-consciousness". Language alone is on heightened display in the plot of *The Bald Soprano* (Malkin 123). In other words, Ionesco suffered a kind of loss of centre, the dissolution of his habitual view of reality. But whereas Pirandello juxtaposes the irrational with the false 'unity' of form, Ionesco creates a grotesque parody of the constructed world. Eugene Ionesco expressed his disgust for the tangible world and distrust of communication. The predominant themes of Ionesco are the banality of the world which often leads to despair, and the inevitability of death and nothingness. In his debut drama *The Bald Soprano* Ionesco uses Bakhtin's tools of heteroglossia and dialogism to articulate the mendacity and absurdity of human existence. *The Bald Soprano* was first premiered in 1960 and the play remained unnoticed but soon it became popular as the critics were very positive about its future. Ionesco's *The Bald Soprano* is a play without a plot or formal sequence of events and the play may be described as anti-play and "the tragedy of language". There is no protagonist who wants to convey any meaning through the

story. In fact the story line is missing, there is no conflict that builds to a climax and then is resolved.

The setting of the play is in the suburbs of London and the play begins in a “middle class English interior, with English armchairs” (Ionesco, *Soprano* 1). There is a mysterious “English clock” which strikes 17 English strokes” (1) and the words ”Yep, you are right-it’s English”(1) repeated again and again to intensify the mystery in the drama. The clock acts like a character in the drama as it controls all the activities of the characters. The emotions of the characters are associated with the striking of the clock. The clock is always seen as prancing around onstage and often it grows crazy with its monotonous repeated sounds. Mrs. Smith takes the lead role and recites the events of the evening using all forms of jargons and talks about the soup: “soup was perhaps a little too salt. It was saltier than you. Ha, ha, ha” (2). Mr. Smith is forced to listen to her harangue; she talks about “Our little boy wanted to drink some beer; he’s going to love getting tidily. He’s like you” (2). Then she talks about the death of Bobby Watson; who has been dead for two years. Ionesco surprises the audience again and informs that Bobby Watson is dead leaving behind two children. Ionesco frames dialogues loaded with many voices. The characters in the drama believe that life is meaningless and all their talk is useless and is about nothingness. There is no coherence and logic in their conversation. As the play progresses, the characters speak broken language; pause are too many in their conversation and breaks are heart breaking.

Exploration of a multi-voiced vision of human consciousness is manifested throughout Ionesco’s *The Bald Soprano*. Mrs. Smith talks of a doctor who is a quack and who performs all operations on himself first. Mr. Smith is very critical of such a doctor as she says: “A conscientious doctor must die with his patient if they can’t get well together”. Mr. Smith adds, “All doctors are quacks” provoking laughter. Mrs. Smith the language of grotesque as she says: “One cannot compare a patient with a ship” (2). Ionesco uses the tool of “dialogism” to depict the absurdity of human existence. Mr. Smith remarks ironically that “A conscientious doctor must die with his patient if they can't get well together” (2). Ionesco has depicted the existential despair and frustration of Mr. and Mrs. Smith in a grotesque style. The conversation is broken and the situation is ridiculous. Mrs. Martin has the same suspicion. Both

are surprised to find that they belong to Manchester and they had met earlier as Mr. Martin says: “Excuse me, madam, but it seems to me, unless I'm mistaken, that I've met you somewhere before” (23).

Like Beckett, Ionesco intensifies the absurdity of life dramatizing the bizarre situations. The conversation of Mr. Martin and Mrs. Martin depicts the anxieties and tensions of the couple who live in a make believe world groping in the darkness. Ionesco's grotesque realism entertains the audience as they happen to be husband and wife and embrace each other. They start telling stories to pass time in sense less language like the clowns of the Grotesque Theatre. Like Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* the plot of *The Bald Soprano* is structured around the existential absurdity and futility of life. Mr. Martin and Mrs. Martin are fighting a lost battle of life. Their endless, meaningless conversations and repetitive lives depict grotesque situation and grotesque realism of Ionesco. The ending of the play *The Bald Soprano* is in fiasco. Nothing happens but the audiences learn the absurdity and the existential reality through the unconventional dialogues. In the chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one concrete whole. Ionesco follows the tool of Bakhtin's chronotope to depict the connectedness of relationships of Mr. Smith and Mrs. Smith in *The Bald Soprano*. It is pertinent to note that Ionesco creates the atmosphere of emptiness in the drama as all the protagonists are lost and bewildered. They are fighting with the absurdity of life in a futile way. They are in grip of sadness and despair. But his is never a completely empty space. “The stage is empty, apart from the chairs, the platform, the confetti and paper streams over the floor” (Ionesco, *Chairs* 177). Ionesco uses Bakhtin's 'polyphony' of voices and ideas in structuring his plot.

Ionesco's *Rhinoceros* (1959) created sensation in the world of drama and Martin Esslin included this play in his book *The Theatre of the Absurd*. Ionesco uses the tools of Bakhtin of parody and Menippean satire to expose and ridicule conformity. The genre of Menippean satire is known for its different forms of parody and mythological burlesque. Ionesco employs Bakhtin's theory of grotesque realism in his play *Rhinoceros*. Mikhail Bakhtin believed that although carnival laughter has diminished and degenerated since the time of Rabelais, the Carnavalesque element in Western drama and fiction is gaining popularity (*Rabelais*

276). The grotesque, which Bakhtin associates closely with the carnival tradition in literature, originally involved the fantastical combination of humans and animals or “the transformation of the human element into an animal one” (*Rabelais* 316). The grotesque style is typical dramatic style used by Bakhtin and Dostoevsky dealing with the crudities and obscenities of human nature. Human body is portrayed in its imperfect and ever-changing form. The grotesque episodes are very often horrifying and create the Gothic horror. The farcical elements of comedy provoke laughter as there are no fixed parameters. Body shapes change and contort. The language is hyperbolic and gruesome.

In *Rhinoceros* Ionesco turns a metaphor into a fleshy reality in order to avoid real political argument. The special characteristics of a Rhinoceros are dramatized to ridicule the mean and slavish conformist mentality of human beings and their eventual dehumanization. The characters in *Rhinoceros* are presented as dehumanized and transformed human beings as they gradually start behaving like animals. Ordinary town people over a period of time start changing into rhinoceroses in appearance and temperament. Ionesco continued Bakhtin’s tradition of grotesque realism in his play *Amedee or How to Get Rid of It* (1954) features many episodes of grotesque in the plot. The main plot dramatizes a grotesque situation of a married couple who are leading a married life with a dead body have hidden in their bedroom for 15 years. The couple is disturbed by the growth of the dead body as it begins to intrude into their simple life. Amédée in the play observes that the dead body is suffering “geometrical progression [...] the incurable disease of the dead” (Ionesco, *Amedee* 52). Now they struggle to remove the dead body; Amedee Buccionini and his wife Madeleine begin their mission about to remove the corpse. Amedee is a writer and is actually the real killer like Othello of Shakespeare. He killed the man out of jealousy believing his wife Madeleine in illicit relationship with him. The couple stuffed the dead body in the apartment to escape from the net of the police. The entire situation is menacing and bizarre provoking fear and grotesque romance. Madeleine admits that she is leading an abnormal life like prisoners: “[...] like prisoners, like criminals [...]” (60-61). All these events are fantastic, grotesque and farcical. The corpse of the dead man intensifies the mystery and suspense in the drama; Amedee thinks that the presence of the dead man is the



main cause of her morbid behavior. Ionesco has used all the literary devices of the farcical elements to dramatize the bizarre situation. The behavior of Amedee is ridiculous when he is praising the dead body.

Ionesco dramatizes a gruesome scene and a challenging job for the playwright to present such a bizarre episode on the stage. It was a great dramatic challenge for Ionesco to dramatize this uncanny and gruesome scene on the stage. Ionesco uses the devices of inversion, ambivalence and exaggeration to create the grotesque realism. In *The Chairs* (1951), Ionesco uses the tools of grotesque realism, polyphony, heteroglossia and dialogism in an absurd style. The setting of the play is at once an uncanny and mysterious exciting romance and wonder of the Gothic tales. The play starts with the stage direction “The Old Man is on the stool leaning out the window” (Ionesco, *The Chairs* 4). The Old Woman in first line talks about how the water smells rotten and the window “lets in the mosquitoes” (Ionesco 3). This reveals that the space is near some body of water and contains animal life. The old man tells that he can see other ships on the water proving that they are not the only people in this world. Soon the old woman gives us an even clearer vision of the world with her line “This house, this island, I can’t get used to it; all surrounded by water...water from the windows all the way to the horizon” (4). The Old Woman also talks about how they used to have friends and family that visited them but that hasn’t happened for ten years. The old man would have had his encounter with his mother and the old woman would have had her conversation and memories about their son. The city of Paris would have also faded at some point. The fifth question Ingham asks is “What is the function of each character in the play?” It’s easy to tell that the Old Man and Old Woman are the principal characters in this script. Because they are the only two real characters in most of the play they often take the roles of protagonist and antagonist against each other. Sometimes the Old Woman acts against the emotion and energy of the old man. At other times, the Old Man takes stances against the actions of the old woman. For the majority of the play, the two drive the action of the play forward. Ingham’s sixth question is “What kind of dialogue do the characters speak?”. Albee appeared at a time when both Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller had already passed their zenith. His *The Zoo Story* (1958) dazzled the audience. His *Three Tall Women* and his play *The Goat or Who*

*Is Sylvia?* and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962) are great plays depicting the grotesque realism.

Edward Albee followed Ionesco as all his characters are threatened by the cosmic fear. They experience failure in love, sex, and communication. Albee ridiculed the success myth, the image of American manhood and the institution of marriage. Robert Burstein aptly observed that Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story* is the real waste land of the modern world, the play is dubbed as "sexual-religious claptrap" articulating the corrosion of self of Jerry (Albee, *Zoo Story* 22). Interestingly, Jerry has all the attributes of a homosexual pervert: he is lonely, seductive, aggressive and rebellious and all his actions are dramatized through the technique of grotesque realism. Albee uses the image of the Zoo to depict his vision of grotesque realism. The image sounds funny but it is a valid image for man who believes that loneliness is inevitable in the modern life. Jerry pushes Peter onto a bench, as he says: "You're a vegetable: Go lie down on the ground" (2). Jerry's conversation with Peter reveals his ridiculous homo-erotic fantasy to seduce Peter. Jerry is the lost animal of the Zoo World- sensitive and belligerent. He is full of hatred "Self-pity and self-imposed isolation". He descends to the world of animals in despair and develops friendship with a ferocious dog. This scene is packed with comic elements. The ugly black dog and the presence of Jerry reveal the neurotic mind of Jerry. Albee reveals the truth of Jerry through the farcical details provoking laughter in the drama. But the technique of grotesque realism works as the audience knows about the perverted behavior of Jerry. Language in Albee's plays is clichés ridden and marked by emptiness and insignificant repetition, which mirrors a void existence.

Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* dramatizes the impotency, sterility, alienation and anxiety of George and Martha through grotesque realism. Groping in the abyss of darkness, they are sticking to their neurotic fantasies and illusions which are their only hope to live in the waste land of America. Both George and Martha suffer from mental and emotional crises. Alienated, desperate, frustrated and sterile, they are victims of anxiety. Their emotional pressure, their outbursts of hysteria is articulated through the fun and games. They are too weak to live in their illusive microcosms, and instead of reaffirming it forever, they quickly break it.

Martha's derogatory epithets symbolize her inner disillusionment and despair. She calls George "cluck", "dumbbell", "pig", "cipher" and "Zero". George is a total "flop" in life and he can't do anything right: "You didn't do anything, you never do anything; you never mix. You just sit around and talk" (7). George is too weak to confront the stark reality of life; he emerges as a lost soul. George has conceived a world of fantasy to nurture such illusions of life as serve the function of antidote to mental depression, nausea, despair and metaphysical loneliness. The tools of grotesque realism are used to depict the psychological traumas of George and Martha. In Albee's *A Delicate Balance* Albee has taken up Ionesco's theme of "cosmic fear" as all characters are fear-ridden. The imagery of balloon circling around is very effective. Albee dramatizes the defeat and frustration of his characters through the language uses by the jesters in the circus. In the period of crisis all are seen circling around, going from one place to another in futile quest for peace and stability. All anxiously long for love but nobody enjoys the fruit of love. Julia married four times and she failed. She returns home empty handed with pressure on her psyche. Tobias lost love when his gay son Toddy died. He repeats a line which serves as a refrain to their collective searches: "If we do not love someone...never have loved someone..." (27). Claire points up the circular nature of love thus: "You love Agnes and Agnes loves Julia and Julia loves me and I love you. We all love each other; yes we do" (27). Tobias is confused and fear-ridden. He tells Agnes: "I almost went into my room . . . by habit . . . by mistake, rather, but then I realized that your room is my room because my room is Julia's because Julia's room is ..." (69). Claire is also fear ridden who says: "I was wondering when it would begin . . . when it would start" (32). When Tobias asked, "START? WHAT?" Claire responded: "Don't you know yet? You will" (32). Claire appeals to Tobias for a rekindling of the love they once shared. She urges him to divorce Agnes. But Tobias has no courage to take this extreme step since he is fear-ridden. Claire longs for peace and rest, as she says: "Succor, Comfort" (53).

Like Beckett's Estragon and Vladimir, Lucky and Pozzo all the characters in *A Delicate Balance* fear from nothingness. All are lost in their mutual conflicts and unresolved mystery of death and fear. Tobias fears risk, pain and life. Kaolin observes that: "What they all share is their common silent conspiracy to do nothing,

to defer decisions and avoid commitment” (170). Agnes also admits the truth “The helpless are the cruelest lot of all, they shift their burdens so” (62). All burdens fall on Tobias, who is himself helpless to deal with them. Agnes fears madness as she expresses her awareness of the “menacing void and terror”. Like Beckett, Albee deals with the ambiguity of existence in *A Delicate Balance*. He uses place, characters and their obsession with death to depict meaningless existence.

To conclude, Ionesco and Edward Albee belong to the tradition of the Theatre of Absurd but interestingly they use the tools of Bakhtin to depict the existential despair; anxiety and absurdities of the people who had witnessed World War and Great Depression of 1930. Bakhtin avers that the comedy is the best way to overcome the existential pain.

### **Objectives of the Proposed Research**

In the present thesis “*Re-reading the Select plays of Eugene Ionesco and Edward Albee in the Light of Mikhail Bakhtin's Theory of Carnavalesque and Grotesque*” the main focus in the study is the application of the theories of Bakhtin to investigate the significance of language and the tools of comedy and grotesque to escape from the existential despair. The plays of Ionesco and Edward Albee are reconsidered and re-interpreted through the lens of Bakhtin’s prominent theories of carnivalesque and grotesque realism. Albee is a prominent playwright belonging to the tradition of the Theatre of Absurd; he used all the tools of Bakhtin to depict the human degradation, the loss of communication and nothingness in a typical style. Albee evolved anti-theatrical devices and closely followed Bakhtin to expose and ridicule the contemporary American life. Following are the main objectives of the thesis: To trace the theories of drama of Bakhtin propounded in his *The Dialogic Imagination* and *Toward the Philosophy of the Act* and *Rabelais and His World*.

### **This study has the following objectives:**

- 1) To trace the historical roots of Carnavalesque and Grotesque Realism.
- 2) To examine existentialist dilemmas in the select works.
- 3) To explore tenets of Black Comedy, farce, parody and humor used in select works.
- 4) To investigate the elements of theatre of absurd in the select plays.

## **Review of Literature of Past and Present**

Nimrod Aloni (1991) in his *Beyond Nihilism: Nietzsche's Healing and Edifying Philosophy* discusses in detail the nihilistic philosophy and its impact on the contemporary art and philosophy. After the World Wars, people witnessed so many human brutalities; Hitler's cruelties perpetrated on the Jews in the concentration camps propagated the wave of distrust and nihilism. R.E. Amacher (1969) in his book *Edward Albee* gives a critical analysis of Albee and his Theatre of Absurd. His *Zoo Story* takes place in 1958, and the play's mood reflects cultural ethos of the 1950s, Albee is depicting the crisis of American culture when all ideals collapsed, man suffered isolation and depression and this is expressed through the bizarre dialogue of Jerry whose personality gets deflated and he is forced to enter into the world of animals. The learned critic has not applied the theories of Bakhtin. Antonin Artaud (1974) in his seminal book *The Theatre and its Double* dismisses the idea of a religious theatre as people are left with no hopes. Artaud gives the revolutionary ideas about theatre of cruelty, when life itself in question, our civilization and culture demand new experiments, new medium for the theatre, new language and new themes. Artaud justifies the emergence of the Theatre of the Absurd. Brooks Atkinson (1947) in *Broadway Scrapbook* traces the evolution of American drama, he depicts the growth of various movements, the trends and techniques employed by the various playwrights are faithfully highlighted. From Expressionism, to the growth of the Theatre of the Absurd, all changes have been recorded in the *Scrapbook*. He is of the firm view that with the growth of drama, there is a consistent devaluation of the personality of the characters. Eric Bentley *In Search of Theatre* (1953) traces the history of American Drama from Ibsen and discusses all the movements and changes brought about by Calderon, Strindberg, Schiller and Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* which proved a trend setter. He refers to the turbulent period of drama. He describes the evolution of the Theatre of Absurd by Beckett and Ionesco, and how the drama became violent and aggressive.

Albert Bermel (1973) talks about the characters who are misfits, sick and decadent because they are against themselves and against environment, they are too fragile to cope with the harsh and hostile environment. They are seen fighting against themselves, they are victims of their inner depressions; they have no faith as

no idealism can save them from the nightmarish situation on which they are trapped. They are contradictory, sick and decadent devoid of any heroism. Robert Brustein (1962) in his book *The Theatre of Revolt: An Approach to Modern Drama* traces the history of drama from Genet to Albee, giving the elements of The Theatre of Revolt. He observes that modern drama thrives on the dark fury of Nietzsche with his radical demands for a total transformation of man's spiritual life. Nietzsche's arrogant "I Will" was a desperate response to absurd universe. Rejecting God, church, community and family man is alone in the universe and this loneliness makes him sick and decadent. Cahn, Victor L. Cahn (1979) in *Beyond Absurdity: The Plays of Tom Stoppard* traces the history of absurdism in drama with critical analysis of the vision of Ionesco and Albee who follow the lyrical, symbolical, absurd language of Beckett and Ionesco. The learned critic observes that the contemporary playwrights have to go beyond absurdity because this is the only way left for modern man to comprehend the metaphysical despair. There is no concrete reality and no idealism, man is destined like Sisyphus to suffer alone and die alone and this is precisely his absurdity of life which the dramatists must reflect through plays. Albert Camus (1961) in *The Myth of Sisyphus and other Essays* claims that there is a fundamental conflict between what we want from the universe and what we find in the universe. We will never find in life itself the meaning that we want to find. Cohn, Ruby Cohn (2007) in *A Beckett Canon* examines the variety of genres in which Beckett worked including novels, poems, drama and teleplays. She records When "Waiting for Godot" opened in London in 1955, Kenneth Tynan remarked, "It has no plot, no climax, no denouement; no beginning, no middle and no end". If modernism liberated the writer from conventional storytelling and ordinary psychology, Beckett's novels and plays took modernism just as far as it could go. Beckett came in France and made many experiments. Martin Esslin (1965) in *Introduction to the Absurd Drama* has given in detail all the characteristics of the Theatre of the Absurd. He observes that Theatre of the Absurd has become a catchphrase, much used and much abused. He talks about the different conventions, language, stylistic techniques of anti-theatre explored by Ionesco and Albee. John Fleming (2001) in *Finding Order amid Chaos* opines that death and meaninglessness appear to be at the basis of the philosophy of absurd. The 'absurd'

is a philosophical vision of cosmic, social and psychological disorder. The theatre of the absurd aims to create a ritual-like, mythological, archetypal and allegorical vision. Ihab Hassan wrote *Radical Innocence* (1961), *The Modern Self in Recoil* (1967) and *Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature* (1982). In all these books Hassan theorizes a vision of the postmodern that stresses formal characteristics such as discontinuity, cruelty, violence and radicalism. His theories greatly impacted the contemporary drama as they are concerned with the questions of being. He explores and questions which model of modernism can best serve avant-garde of the future. He advocated subversion of forms; silence fills the extreme states of mind-void, madness, outrage, ecstasy and mystic trance. Soren Kierkegaard (1946) in *The Sickness Unto Death* brought revolution in Western art, religion and philosophy. Heidegger, Kafka, Barth, Sartre and Camus took inspiration from his ideas. His teachings brought about the wave of pessimism and skepticism; the contemporary playwrights depicted the themes of death, angst and despair. David Madden (1971) in *American Dreams, American Nightmares*. It is a collection of 19 important critical essays, the main focuses on various social, cultural and religious forces that brought about the death of the American Dream and led to the growth of nightmares. All the critical essays provide a comprehensive view of American literature, past and present. Fredrick Nietzsche (1883) in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* wrote about the evolution of nihilism and pessimism. Much of the work deals with ideas such as the "eternal recurrence of the same", the parable on the "death of God". Ann Paolucci (1972) in *From Tension to Tonic: The Plays of Edward Albee* has made a significant contribution giving a serious analysis of the plays of Edward Albee who was first of his generation to have tried such diverse dramatic forms as naturalism, surrealism, symbolism, farce, tragicomedy and metaphysical allegory. In the decade since *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1952), Albee has earned a reputation of the dramatist of the sick and decadent people like Jerry, Martha and George. Pronko, Leonard Pronko (1962) in *Avant-Grade: Experimental Theatre in France* discusses the nature of avant-garde theatre which revolted against the bourgeois ways of thinking and living, and sought means of expression that are original, surprising and amusing. Beckett's theatre is remarkable for dehumanizing characters, excessive pessimism, diffuseness of plot and verbal

aridity. Language is obscure, lyrical and inarticulate resulting from the metaphysical despair and anguish of the protagonists. Nihilism of such plays as *Rhinoceros*, *The Chairs* and *The Zoo Story* of Ionesco and Albee reveals man's absurd condition that is thrown in a wide world to suffer alone. Maria Stenz (1970) in *Edward Albee: The Poet of Loss* observes that from the beginning Albee has been called a defeatist and a pessimist, a poet of the loss and a pessimist. His purpose in his plays is to shock, to offend and to disturb presenting the characters that are sick and morbid. In this much discussed book, Maria nowhere talks about the mental state of the protagonists of Albee.

### **Gap in the Past and the Present Research**

In all the books mentioned above there is not even a single book which describes about the tools and theories of Mikhail Bakhtin. No critic in the past and the present has applied the theories of Bakhtin in the plays of Ionesco and Albee. In the present study the main focus is on the textual analysis of all the select plays of Ionesco and Albee from the lens of the theories of Bakhtin.



## Chapter: First

### Mikhail Bakhtin: Carnavalesque and Grotesque Realism

Major works of Mikhail Bakhtin involve literary criticism and the Carnivalization of literature discussed in his famous text *Rabelais and His World* (1968) written at the time when Stalin was at the height of power in Russia. His concept of Carnavalesque is an inversion of Stalinism and the theory of Stalin's prescribed Socialist Realist aesthetics. Bakhtin was inspired by Francois Rabelais (1494-1553) who wrote comic masterpiece *Gargantua and Pantagruel* in the Renaissance age. Bakhtin seriously investigated the cultural impact of the "Carnivalization of literature". Bakhtin wrote book *Rabelais and His World* exploring all the multiple aspects of Carnavalesque and grotesque Realism of the Medieval period. Bakhtin was greatly influenced by the use of folk culture and folk carnival humor in literature and culture. Rabelais took keen interest in folk carnival humor and he articulated his vision of life through these modes of comedy. Rabelais for Bakhtin was an original writer who dared to use the tools of the carnival to describe the problems and challenges of the people of his age. Bakhtin lived under the repressive regime of Stalin who had started the wave of Great Purge killing innocent people through gas vans and other inhuman ways. Bakhtin took inspiration from Rabelais to explore the mysteries of life and significance of culture to react against the Socialist Realist doctrine. Bakhtin used folklore and "the folk" as a metaphor in his writings. Stalin had issued new directions to the poets and writers. They were to write and create such heroes who might praise the economic policies of Stalin. But Bakhtin's folkloric heroes were blasphemous, cunning, coarse, dirty and ludicrous. Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel* became Bakhtin's model as he identified folk carnival humor as the central metaphor in his book in postulating the concept of Carnavalesque. Bakhtin concluded that folk carnival humor may be found in three forms. Firstly, the folk humor can be dramatized through ritual spectacles. Secondly, "folk humor can be depicted through oral and written parodies and lastly the scenes of popular blazons, oaths and curses can stage the events of folk humor" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* 5). The intensive study of Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World* reveals that there are ten important themes of the Carnavalesque (grotesque realism). Bakhtin

argued that Rabelais's book had been misunderstood for centuries. Bakhtin found two important ideas the carnivalesque and grotesque realism hidden in the surface of the narrative of *Rabelais and his World*. An intensive reading of Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World* reveals following carnivalesque signifiers such as:

(1) Parody (2) death (3) grotesque play (4) satirical humor (5) metaphor (6) fearlessness (7) madness and the mask.

Bakhtin also published *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1984) and propounded the concept of polyphony literary meaning "many voices" hidden in the dialogues of the characters. Bakhtin explored the characteristics of mono-logic and dialogic tendencies prevalent in literature. Bakhtin further explored the polyphonic nature of a novel and investigated with fresh perspective the presence of multiple voices in the speeches of the characters. In constructing dialogues the writer does not construct a character but his main concern is to write the dialogues of characters depicting their different attitudes tastes likes and dislikes in the plot of the novel. The plot of a novel depicts the hero's *discourse* about himself and his world" (*Dostoevsky's Poetics* 53). Bakhtin observes thus:

Literature that was influenced directly and without mediation, or indirectly, through a series of intermediate links-by one or another variant of carnivalistic folklore (ancient or medieval) we shall call carnivalized literature. The realm of the serio-comical constitutes the first example of such literature. (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 107)

Bakhtin forms his concept of the Carnavalesque on the basis of his study of *Rabelais and His World*. In this book, Rabelais outlines the concept of the Carnavalesque and grotesque realism of the medieval period. Bakhtin believed that in the medieval folk culture grotesque realism was manifested. His concept of the Carnavalesque is based on the carnival and carnival spirit:

The striving toward renewal and a new birth the thirst for a new youth pervaded the carnival spirit of the Middle Ages and found a multiform expression in concrete sensual elements of folk culture,

both in ritual and spectacle. This was the second, festive life of the Middle Ages. (Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* 57)

Bakhtin was fascinated by Rabelais's comic masterpiece *Gargantua and Pantagruel* in which he utilized the elements of folk culture and folk carnival. Rabelais depicted the view of life in contrary to the official view of society. Rabelais projected the true picture of society based on truth. Bakhtin lived at a time when Stalinism was at the height and nobody dared to go against the policies of Stalin and his official machinery. Bakhtin found a medium to expose the Stalinization of Russian folklore and repression of the artists. Stalin had started the policy of the Great Purge forcing the intellectuals and the writers to leave Russia. No wonder, Nabokov fled to Germany and many famous writers fled to save their life. Bakhtin gives a new theory of laughter and its association with culture. Bakhtin argues that in the age of Rabelais laughter enjoyed a collective significance. But during the regime of totalitarian government of Stalin laughter lost its originality and the carnivalesque forms were marginalized. Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World* is regarded "as the summit in the history of laughter" (101). Bakhtin has discussed in detail the nature of carnival laughter: "It asserts and denies, it buries and revives. Such is the laughter of carnival" (Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 99). Bakhtin argues that carnival laughter is not negative in spirit but it seeks to renew the comic spirit. Bakhtin discusses in detail the nature of carnival laughter thus:

Carnival is a pageant without footlights and without a division into performers and spectators. In carnival everyone is an active participant, everyone communes in the carnival act. Carnival is not contemplated, and strictly speaking, not even performed; its participants live in it, they live by its laws as long as those laws are in effect; that is, they live a Carnivalistic life. Because Carnivalistic life is life down of its usual rut, it is to some extent life ruined inside out; the reverse side of the world. (Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 100)

Bakhtin believes that a “carnival sense of the world possesses a life-creating and transforming power, an indestructible vitality” (Bakhtin 94). Bakhtin finds in carnival “a hilarious, irreverent celebration of all that was pompous, authoritarian, official, repressed and silenced” (Bakhtin 96). He characterizes the complex nature of carnival laughter as belonging to the people and not in response to a comic event. Carnival laughter is universal in that it is directed at everyone and no one is exempt from participating. Carnival laughter is ambivalent. Carnavalesque and grotesque realism is inter-connected. Bakhtin comments thus:

Therefore, the carnival is a pageant without footlights and without a division into performers and spectators...its participants do not watch but live in it with its suspension of hierarchical structure and all the forms of terror, reverence, piety, and etiquette connected with it. (Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 152)

In these two concepts, Bakhtin argues there is a link between the “sacred and the profane, the lofty and the low, the great with the insignificant, the wise with the stupid” (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 123). In the carnival atmosphere laughter applies to everyone and this revolves around the human degradation. Bakhtin (1984) argues that during the Renaissance a new form of comic discourse emerged:

Laughter has a deep philosophical meaning, it is one of the essential forms of the truth concerning the world as a whole, concerning history and man; it is a peculiar point of view relative to the world; the world is seen anew, no less (and perhaps more) profoundly than when seen from the serious standpoint. Therefore, laughter is just as admissible in great literature, posing universal problems as seriousness. (Bakhtin 66)

Debasement leads to death and the rebirth and in modern literature the degradation is actualized through parody. Bakhtin believes that “Grotesque realism is essential principle...is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth

and body in their indissoluble unity” (Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* 19). Bakhtin argues that “when a person is degraded they are meant to be thrown into the reproductive lower stratum, the zone in which conception and a new birth take place” (Bakhtin 21). Philip Thomson is of the opinion that grotesque is that “the value of tears and the circus are one, that tragedy is in some ways comic and all comedy in some way tragic and pathetic” (Thomson 63). Bakhtin contends that during the Renaissance comic discourse was practiced by Rabelais, Boccaccio, Shakespeare and Cervantes who used grotesque imagery to articulate the existential reality, Bakhtin observes thus in his *Rabelais and His World*:

Grotesque imagery, for example, with its emphasis on corporeality, complemented the new humanist perspective on the world, and with their shared privileging of the human rather than the divine, they helped to call into question medieval ideology. (362)

Bakhtin has traced the history of Carnavalesque and grotesque realism in his study of *Rabelais and His World* (1984) on serving that after the Renaissance new trends of the bourgeois culture started with the growth of the feudal order. New relationship and new set of values emerged in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries and “the ambivalence of the grotesque could no longer be admitted” (10). A new relationship was set up between the serious and the comic discourse. The main thrust was on satirical literature. Comic forms were no longer considered suitable to express the serious ideas as Bakhtin aptly states: “At the end of the sixteenth century, Rabelais descended lower and lower, to the very confines of great literature and was finally driven out of bounds” (65). Bakhtin concludes that “the grotesque tradition peculiar to the marketplace and the academic literary tradition have parted ways and can no longer be brought back together” (Bakhtin 109). In this study the researcher has explored the depth of concepts like carnival, carnivalesque and grotesque. All these concepts are used as tools to explore the hidden meanings in the texts of Ionesco and Edward Albee. Bakhtin’s theories are influential in the linguistic, political, social, cultural, philosophical and many other disciplines.

## **The Carnavalesque**

According to Bakhtin Carnavalesque is a medium to depict the world turned upside down. It is a powerful weapon used by the common people to deconstruct and dissolve all the social hierarchies from the King to the constable. In the comic skits performed during the carnival the serious is juxtaposed with the non-serious. The audience often enjoys the scene of riots and disorder but there is no violence on the stage. The idea of the Carnavalesque relates to the medieval idea of the carnival held on New Year Eve in medieval society and was also famous as the Feast of Fools. On this day the people were given the poetic license to act and to satirize the king and his ministers. They were free to dramatize the scenes of foolery and obscenity. In a sense, the festival provided a time and a space in which the participants could “let off steam” without any fear of the feudal order. The Carnavalesque is associated with riot, disorder and pandemonium. Bakhtin called the carnival festival as a great opportunity for the commoners to express their grievances freely for the betterment of society. It was a great mega event for power and creativity as the commoners spent time for rehearsals and made many innovations. In this annual mega event a large number of people actively participated. Beggars, fools and the low class people take the centre stage on the carnival function and use their talents acting sometimes as rulers and kings. There is no difference between fact and fantasy as all rules and customs are scrapped. An individual is free to articulate his feelings and sentiments because all the rules are suspended in carnival. Bakhtin identifies four main characteristics of the Carnavalesque: “There is free interaction between individuals. Strange behavior is welcomed and appreciated by the high and the low since all are in a festive mood (3) Collapse of rigidity and formal traditions” (4). Erotic and provocative and offensive ideas are permitted within the context of carnival. The conspicuous feature of the carnival is the suspension of ordinary customs and rules.

## **Grotesque Realism**

Bakhtin is famous in the world for his theory of grotesque realism abundantly found in the plays from the Greeks to the modern drama. Bakhtin found the elements of grotesque realism permeating in Rabelais’s work (Bakhtin 18). The various phases of human body and bodily functions that are given new turns in the dramas to

provoke laughter but in the grotesque situations the dramatists present truths of life. In *Hamlet* Shakespeare depicted famous grave digging scene to articulate the real behavior patterns of the grave diggers. Albee's play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is packed with the grotesque scenes depicting the impotency of George and moral and spiritual sterility of Martha. Albee also reveled in depicting sex and bodily functions that portrayed humans as animals and "grotesque realism" give structural unity to the plot of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*. Bakhtin's broad theories of the Carnavalesque and grotesque realism will be applied in the textual analysis of the plays of Ionesco and Edward Albee.

### **Grotesque Realism: Historical Perspective**

The concept grotesque has a very long and interesting history and the term has been interpreted by the critic and the reviewers differently by the two main traditions of the grotesque: "the subjective grotesque which is serious and grim directed towards the individuals and carnival grotesque which is joyful and is the product of folk humor. Wolfgang Kayser is the main theorist of the Subjective School and Mikhail Bakhtin of the Carnavalesque School" (Perttula 2011, 23). Mikhail Bakhtin was a Russian philosopher and critic who re-evaluated the grotesque in terms of both aesthetic analysis and critical response. He published *Rabelais and His World* (1968) and *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1984) and propounded new theories of carnivalesque and grotesque realism. The critics and the reviewers took keen interest in the social theories of Bakhtin. Wolfgang Kayser reviewed Bakhtin and published *The Grottesque in Art and Literature* (1968). Peter Smith (1968) contends thus: "The grotesque was viewed as an absurd distortion of nature, with an exception being the viewpoint of Victor Hugo who in his "preface" to *Cromwell* (1827) insists that the grotesque, transmitted through the medium of comic drama, is to be the hallmark of literature. It is also worth noting that Hugo associates the grotesque not with the fantastic but with the realistic, making it clear that the grotesque is not just an artistic mode or category but exists in nature and in the world around us" (qtd. in Thomson 17). They rely on the historical process and grotesque is considered as a social construct. On the other hand carnival grotesque describes rituals and traditions found in the folk culture of the middle ages. During Renaissance the subjective

grotesque grew popular and the growth continued in the Romantic Age and even in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The carnival grotesque is the precursor to the subjective grotesque (Bakhtin 1984, 274). This division is not absolute as the same concepts are developed and emphasized differently under both traditions. Perttula (2011) argues that the “balance of laughter and horror is maintained in both traditions even though both types favor one another” (24). The real shape to grotesque was given by Samuel Beckett when he wrote the plays such as *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*. Beckett heavily borrowed from Bakhtin and used grotesque realism as a powerful tool to articulate the absurdity, death, nihilism and the futility of life. He created new dialogues; used clichés, jargons, uncanny phrases to depict the neurotic tension of his characters. Bakhtin argues that the folk culture carnival spirit produces the real grotesque to provide real laughter to the people. Grotesque is linked with the society and grotesque “cannot be separated from the culture of folk humor and the carnival spirit” (Bakhtin 47). For Bakhtin observes that the language of grotesque is paradoxical in form: The grotesque is formed in the extremities and margins of art, both in exaltation and debasement; especially in the paradoxical process of exaltation through debasement (Bakhtin 370). In the 20<sup>th</sup> century the grotesque is viewed as an intrinsic part of human nature and the writers used it a powerful weapon to expose and ridicule the evils of society. Arthur Clayborough published *The Grotesque in English Literature* (1965) who in the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of his book asserted that the grotesque has become a valuable tool to depict the malaise of the contemporary society. Gabriele Schwab in his latest book *Subjects Without Selves: Transitional Texts in Modern Fiction* (1994) observes thus:

Modernism appears no longer as a unified aesthetic and aestheticizing movement of esoteric writers, but as a diverse and heterogeneous cultural practice that not only reflects the larger trends of its own time but also resists them and work toward shaping new ones... Woolf, Joyce, Beckett and Pynchon share what Foucault once called an “operating of language toward the unconscious”. Such an opening constitutes much more than a psychological device. It testifies to a cultural politics that uses the capacity of language to draw from unconscious energies and creative skills in order to resist the unifying



and codifying powers of language and thus expand the boundaries not only of language, but mediated through it, of perception communication, and emotion. (Schwab 27)

Metaphysics of Carnavalesque: Grottesque Realism and Folk Lore Bakhtin's theory of carnivalesque and grotesque realism is an idealized conception of folk culture. Bakhtin explored and investigated the social relevance of the folk culture and its emergence in the Medieval and Renaissance. During these festivals, the collective power of the common folk was realized in the society during which "all hierarchal rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions are suspended" (Bakhtin 10). Bakhtin comments thus:

All were considered equal during carnival. Here, in the town square, a special form of free and familiar contact reigned among the people who were usually divided by the barriers of cast, profession, and age...such free, familiar contacts were deeply felt and formed an essential element of the carnival spirit. People were, so to speak, reborn for new, purely human relations. These truly human relations were not only a fruit of imagination or abstract thought; they were experienced. The Utopian ideal and the realistic merged in this carnivalesque experience, unique of its kind. (Bakhtin 10)

The important feature of carnivalesque is its destructive power; it destroys the prevailing structure of the society creating a new egalitarian relation. The carnivalesque displaces the notion of hierarchy and destroys the existing social order. Graham Pechey argues that "the radical political potential is located in the practice of inventing social hierarchical social structures" (Pechey 10).

### **Quest for Identity**

Bakhtin observes that the chief aim of each dramatist is to use language for identity formation since language and the ideas behind language are the product of the interactions between people. Language gives consciousness to the characters and they seek identity through dialogues and interactions. Bakhtin's *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* defines the process of identity formation: "I for myself; the

other for me and I for the other self” is the key of the identity formation process in the drama as outlined by Bakhtin. He argues that it is the “I for the other through which human beings develop a sense of identity because it also includes the conception of the way in which others view me. Conversely, the other for me” A Bakhtinian perspective also focuses on the choices individuals make of their own accord and the responsibility accepted because of these choices. Social awareness leads to identity formation and a character uses his freedom of will to forge his identity. Bakhtin compares a displaced subject is compared to a “grotesque body”, which in Bakhtinian terms is “a body in the act of becoming” (*Rabelais and His World* 317). The displaced ‘self’ is “unfinished” and develops when it comes in contact with others in the society. The self always in process of development and drama is an important medium for the growth of the self. This research project is an attempt to use the tools of Bakhtin; the Carnavalesque and grotesque realism to examine and analyze the plays of Ionesco and Edward Albee.

### **1. Consciousness of Death**

Rabelais introduced the themes of death as vehicle of death and birth. He comments thus: "The theme of death as renewal, the combination of death and birth, and the pictures of gay death play an important part in the system of grotesque imagery in Rabelais's novel" (51). Bakhtin eulogized Rabelais for his original and innovative talent. Death as a grotesque imagery is used to convey the cyclical nature of death and birth.

### **2. The Imagery of Grotesque and its Power of Transformation**

Bakhtin has full faith in the forces of transformation. He advocates change as death and birth, growth and becoming are cyclical in nature and the future of society depends upon the spirit of transformation (24). Bakhtin avers that the imagery of grotesque plays vital role bringing upon revolutionary changes as Bakhtin asserts: "we find poles of transformation, the old and the new, the dying and the procreating, the beginning and the end of the metamorphosis" (24). In the middle ages, the clowns and fools were given poetic license and they used this license to comment on the follies of the rulers. Shakespeare created the clowns and fools in his plays

including the tragedies. In *King Lear* for example the Fool is a marvelous character and Touchstone is a powerful comic character in his comedy *As You Like It*. Grotesque plays vital role in the carnivalesque feast. No wonder, Rabelais used the tools of grotesque in his novel "characteristic of the medieval culture of humor" (8).

### **3. The Power of Satirical Humor**

Bakhtin asserts that laughter is the product of the medieval culture of humor. Bakhtin observes that in the Medieval society humor was accompanied the feast was satirical in nature. In the antiquity "satiric" drama was popular in the medieval society and laughter was linked with the events of birth, growth, drinking, eating and merry making (88). Bakhtin defended the use of satirical tools since the satirical laughter is positive in nature and often produces ambivalent laughter. The scenes and situations of laughter are often packed with the images of curses and oaths. Both the ideal and real are blended together. In the carnival feasts and festivals sophisticated language was discarded and a special type of communication was effectively used. Bakhtin has explored the various forms of speeches and the language used in the marketplace or in the common places. Rabelais used this unconventional speech and gesture in his novel. Bakhtin investigates the features of the grotesque literature of the medieval ages. Interestingly, Ionesco and Edward Albee use most of the elements of satirical humor in their plays. Bakhtin (1984) comments thus:

Laughter was a loud, collective communal phenomenon: Bakhtin does not have in mind a collected titter but an unrestrained belly-laugh. Carnavalesque laughter embodied the freedom facilitated by the license of feast days. Laughter in this sense, was a celebration of permissiveness, whose significance, was necessarily relative to the strictures that governed the norms of everyday life. (Bakhtin 89)

### **4. Comical Power of Metaphor**

Metaphor is often used as a powerful and effective tool of the Carnavalesque abundantly found in the writings of Dostoevsky and Rabelais. Metaphor acts as an instrument to convey the "principal of regeneration". Bakhtin investigates and

examines the episodes of the grotesque carnival created by Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. Fielding imitated Cervantes when he wrote his famous novel *Joseph Andrews*. Cervantes introduces ludicrous characters and episodes typical of the grotesque carnival presenting "windmills (giants), inns (castles), flocks of rams and sheep (armies of knights)" (22).

### **5. The Sprit of Fearlessness in the Carnival**

Bakhtin examined the novels of *Dostoevsky and of Rabelais* and believed that the images of folk culture "are absolutely fearless and communicate this fearlessness to all" (Bakhtin, *Dostoevsky and of Rabelais* 39). Bakhtin started writing at a time when Stalin was at the height of power and his The Great Purge had started the wave of oppression and repression in Russia. Bakhtin was sent to the jail for ten years of rigorous punishment since his writings were rebellious and opposed the ideologies of Stalin. Bakhtin took inspiration and moral courage from Rabelais's novel and developed his fearless outlook in life. The novel *Gargantua and Pantagruel* changed his vision of life and society. In the novel, fear is destroyed at its origin and everything associated with it. Bakhtin points out that fear "is the extreme expression of narrow-minded and stupid seriousness, which is defeated by laughter" (47). Bakhtin firmly believed that only a fearless society can give liberty to the people (47). Bakhtin's theory is indebted to the "culture of folk carnival humor" (4). He uses the term carnival to refer to the feast days celebrated over the course of the year. Bakhtin talks of the following forms:

- 1) Ritual spectacle; carnival pageants and comic shows of market place.
- 2) Comic verbal compositions and oral and written parodies
- 3) Curse, oaths and popular blazons

Bakhtin talks of the various comic feasts of the middle ages.

### **Grotesque Imagery**

Carnavalesque fiction was imbued with the images of the grotesque body, "images of exaggeration, hyperbolism and excessiveness" (Bakhtin 303). Grotesque imagery is of the parts of the body, noses, buttocks and genitals and the imagery of the carnival.

Rabelais gives the grotesque imagery of drinking, digestion, defecation, copulation and childbirth and death. In the words of E. P. Thomson “for the young, the sexual cycle of the year turned on these festivals” (392). Grotesque imagery can be seen as nothing more than a celebration of freedoms allowed during the carnival festival. Carnival imagery provides an “alternative to the grotesque provided by the spiritual imagery of the Church” (401). In the Middle Ages man was haunted by the natural calamities such as famine, drought, floods, disease and famine. Bakhtin claims that official imagery traded on these cosmic threats in order to inculcate a sublime sense of the fear (335). In the plays of Ionesco and Edward Albee there are numerous elements of fearlessness. Each play of Ionesco and Edward Albee is a free and frank interpretation of life. For example, Ionesco’s *Rhinoceros* depicts the ridiculous attitude of the conformist ideology of the people of Romania who were turning slaves to the Nazi party. Ionesco has created a grotesque metaphor in the play to expose and ridicule the conformist ideology of the people.

#### **6. Depression, Neurosis and Madness**

The writings of Dostoevsky and Rabelais are packed with the episodes of madness. In all grotesque forms madness is an important signifier as man in madness has an opportunity to look at the world from a fresh perspective. For Bakhtin in all grotesque literature the scenes of madness are common. Men look at the world with different eyes and give their own radical ideas and judgements. In folk grotesque, madness is a gay parody of official reason, of the narrow seriousness of official “truth”. In grotesque fiction depression, neurosis and madness are used "to escape the false 'truth of this world' in order to look at the world with eyes free from this 'truth'" (49). In Edward Albee’s *The Zoo Story*, Jerry is a neurotic wreck but in his fit of madness and depression he is able to comprehend the mysteries of life of people living in New York. His consciousness of death symbolizes the alienation and desperation of the Americans lost in the abyss of darkness and existential despair.

#### **7. The Role of Mask and Pantomime in the Grotesque Literature**

Bakhtin found the role of mask very crucial in folk culture and grotesque literature. He comments thus:

The mask is connected with the joy of change and reincarnation. The mask is related to metamorphoses, the violation of the natural boundaries relying on the elements of foolery, mockery, parody caricaturing and the dramatization of eccentric behavior. (39-41)

### **8. The Scenes of “The Interior Infinite”**

Bakhtin observes that "This *interior infinite* of the individual was unknown to the medieval and the Renaissance grotesque" (44). In the French Renaissance period and “the Romanticists propounded new grotesque methods to liberate from dogmatism, completeness and limitation" (44). The “interior infinite” is not a product of the medieval folk culture of humor. It is the product of Romanticism" (44). Bakhtin investigated that in the famous Socratic dialogue and in the Menippean satires such elements were found in abundance. Carnivalization becomes a purely literary tradition in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century in France (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 131). The Carnavalesque literature of the medieval period and the Renaissance, with Rabelais and Cervantes promoted the carnival culture and folk humor in literature. All the elements of Grotesque Realism instigate degradation, regeneration, transformation, ambivalence, renewal and humor. The grotesque aspect of literature is the vital aspect of life, culture and society.

### **The Theater of Absurd and Relevance of the Grotesque Realism and the Carnavalesque**

The Theatre of the Absurd is supposed to have originated in the avant-garde experiments of the 1920s and 1930s. However, the absurd elements can also be found in the wild humor and buffoonery of old comedy and in the plays of Aristophanes, shortly after the rise of the Greek drama. Sometimes, the morality plays of the Medieval Age are considered to be the precursors of the Theatre of the Absurd. These elements also found their way in the novels of Franz Kafka and James Joyce.

However, the word ‘absurd’ was first used when Alfred Jarry’s play *Ubu Roi* was presented on December 10, 1896 at Lugne Roe’s Theatre. It is said to be a play, unforgettable, nasty, devoid of all decorum and an outrage on society. The play is

the acknowledged predecessor of the Theatre of the Absurd. *Ubu Roi* portrays a terrifying image of the animal nature of man and his cruelty. The audience stood aghast in utter bewilderment, not knowing what it was all about. They had not heard the like of it ever on a stage. Majority of the onlookers were dumbfounded at what they heard and seen. Martin Esslin avers rightly, “These plays flout all the traditional and conventional notions of the plot” (Camus 1).

Martin Esslin and Camus has discussed in detail the nature and meaning of absurdity of life. The atmosphere of the absurd plays is dreamlike, allegorical and symbolical full of poetic images. The ancient tradition of fools and mad scenes in drama, of which Shakespeare provides a multitude of examples, are also a part of absurd literature. By the 1950s, in France, a group of playwrights wrote plays which the modern audience felt hard either to approve easily or reject conveniently. They placed the audience in a situation analogical to its own. Thus the drama of the ‘absurd’ is a type of experiment in theatre, which French masters experimented first and afterwards it took America in its stride. The American playwrights like Edward Albee, who are also categorized as ‘New Wave Playwrights’ have shown their concern with the predicament of man in the universe, essentially as summarized by Albert Camus, in his essay *The Myth Of Sisyphus* (1942). This book is a very serious study of the helplessness of man and the futility of human labour and attacks the very existence of man. Camus’s Sisyphus is a typical absurd hero personifying the real quality of an absurd life:

The Gods had condemned Sisyphus to ceaselessly rolling a rock to the top of a mountain, whence the stone would fall back of its own weight. They had thought with some reason that there is no more dreadful punishment than futile and hopeless labour. (Camus 88)

## Chapter: Two

### **Bakhtinian Study of *Rhinoceros* and *The Bald Soprano***

Ionesco was a European dramatist belonging to the tradition of The Theatre of Absurd as he wrote plays following the existential philosophy of Sartre and Camus. Ionesco and Albee imitated the dramatic techniques of Adamov and Genet depicting their vision of angst and absurdity of life. The two World Wars, the Great Depression and the Jewish Holocaust brought about the wave of nihilism and futility of life. The most crucial influence on Eugene Ionesco was of James Joyce, Proust and the Surrealists, Dali. The evolution of anti-hero is an interesting literary trend in art, drama and fiction of the post-World War era. In the contemporary society many changes took place in art and literature as new innovations were made in philosophy and psychology. New ideas were propounded that revolutionized the Western thought. New language, new words were invented to express the inner turmoil of the characters who were suffering from the anxieties and absurdities of life. The existentialists gave new themes and techniques in art and drama. The Greek hero also suffered from isolation as his aristocratic self urged him to revolt against fate and God. However, his identity crisis did not make him a neurotic misfit inevitably led to the age old questions of meaning, salvation and survival in a spiritual sense. On the contrary the quest of the modern protagonist suffering from the angst is futile, his despair grows in a degree of intolerable anguish because he “cannot get rid of himself, cannot become nothing” (Kierkegaard 110). The Existentialists took the cue from Soren Kierkegaard and the concept of the self-presented in Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness* (1943) is abstract and beset with irreconcilable contradictions. The self, though free, is trapped in a solitude from which there is no escape. Therefore, the most conspicuous characteristic of selfhood is that “man is always separated from what he is by all the breadth of the being which he is not” (Sartre 17). Man is the being who confers meaning on the world, but this meaning is never certain. Human reality is a perpetual becoming so that “what is not determines what is” (Sartre 87). Thus, the self at all times confronts its own negation. Ionesco is a



visionary playwright who sees language as an unquestionable system to convey the metaphysical despair and absurdity gripping the life of the people. He realized that the prevalent modes of communication are not suitable to articulate the contemporary malaise. He rejected the rational techniques and evolved anti-theatrical techniques of drama such as dissonance; pauses; clichés and short and crisp sentences. He turned to Bakhtin and borrowed the tools of parody, grotesque and carnivalesque to give a new strength to drama. The tramps of Beckett struggle to question the universe around them. Everything becomes absurd for them, even their consciousness. The absurd hero of Beckett and Ionesco lost his identity; he is carried by the tide of events. This “absurd” hero cannot say confidently: “I am myself”. Ionesco depicted the Old Man as an absurd hero in *The Chairs* who says: “I am not myself. I am another. I am the one in the other” (Ionesco 145). Ionesco observes that “modern man is lost in the world. His actions have become meaningless and senseless. They are absurd and useless” (Ionesco 34).

Ionesco also expressed the growth of nihilism as his plays dramatize senseless, absurd and useless protagonists. There is no action as all “the actions of the protagonists are absurd and useless” (Ionesco 34). The existential philosophy of Heidegger, Sartre and Camus greatly impacted the contemporary playwrights. The result was the evolution of “The Theatre of the Absurd”. War, Depression and political uncertainty also promoted pessimistic and nihilistic ideas. Man found himself alone in the terrifying universe. Ionesco, Beckett, Albee and Pinter were the productive of the destructive forces of the Second World War. Anti-theatre was evolved and all the anti-theatrical techniques such as breaking down of communication, surreal elements and plots plays were less written. The hero of Ionesco is a Sisyphusean type of man, alienated and uprooted from his society and the world. He is alien, unknown and indifferent. Sypher Wylie puts in this context that, “Man cannot alienate himself from his own consciousness, a dilemma that brings on the present crisis in anti-literature and anti-art” (Wylie 17). The socio-political situation changed in post-Second-World-War world. Old traditional art forms and standards became obsolete. Beckett gave an interview to Tom F. Driver in 1961 who made very valuable revelations:

I don't mean to say that there will henceforth be no form in art. I mean new form will be invented and new themes will be taken up by the playwrights. The writers after the Second World War are conscious about the chaos and disharmony in life and Nature. The society has put heavy burden and responsibility on the artists. The plays of the absurd are formless, without beginning and middle and the traditional ending. The structure is chaotic and there is no communication. (Federman 219)

Albert Camus used the plague myth in drama in imitation of Antonin Artaud who welcomed the plague as the liberating force that would unleash "the uncontrollable subconscious instincts". Ionesco used the metaphor of rhinoceros to dramatize the themes of existential absurdity and conformity in a sensational style. Ionesco's plays *Rhinoceros*, *The Chairs* and *The Bald Soprano* are full of the elements of Carnavalesque. Eugene Ionesco wrote *Rhinoceros* after World War II to explore the destructive impact of the Holocaust, Fascism and the Nazi ideology. Ionesco wished to explore how people turn into wild and ugly rhinoceros. The plot structure of *Rhinoceros* is based on the theory of absurdist drama evoking the themes of existential despair and absurdity of life. Ionesco employs the tools of carnival and of Grotesque Realism of Bakhtin to expose and ridicule the conformist attitude of people pursuing Nazi ideology blindly. The plot of the drama is loaded with the episodes of violence, love betrayal, exploitation, apathy and the loss of individuality. The play *Rhinoceros* was first staged by Black Box Players of Syracuse University on 4<sup>th</sup> May 2006, though its script was written in 1958 after the World War II. The philosophy of Existentialism of Albert Camus and Jean Paul Sartre brought about the Theatre of the Absurd in Europe and America. Nietzsche's philosophy of nihilism and Kierkegaard's ideas of nothingness led to the loss of faith. Ionesco realized that the world didn't make any sense after the Holocaust and brutalities of war. Man became lonely as there was no religion or philosophy to give him moral and spiritual strength. Life became meaningless and all struggle of man futile. Camus wrote the famous *The Myth of Sisyphus* depicting the eternal plight of man in this universe. Ionesco is the Franco-Romanian writer who was greatly impacted by the ideas and philosophy of nihilism and death. Pirandello in his plays observes that there is a loss of center in the modern world.

On June 1, 1958, Ionesco stated in the *New York Times* thus: "There are no alternatives; if man is not tragic, he is ridiculous and painful, 'comic' in fact, and by revealing his absurdity one can achieve a sort of tragedy" (9). Ionesco wrote plays to depict the banal and mundane and the insignificance of life. Ionesco deviated from the traditional language and style and new unconventional imagery, formless plots and broken communication to depict the loss of centre and absurdities and existential despair of war-ridden people. Ionesco wrote plays in imitation of Bakhtin, Rabelais and Dostoevsky since all his plays are loaded with the Carnavalesque and Grotesque Realism. Pirandello's work evinces wide range of tools of parody and comedy and even madness and humor. Like Pirandello, Ionesco's plays are loaded with the episodes of the grotesque, the fantastic, tragicomedy, humor and irony. Ionesco took inspiration from Surrealism and Dadaism. Ionesco was fascinated by the style of grotesque since he found Shakespeare using the tools of grotesque in his *King Lear*. The grotesque style has the power to depict human nature in its imperfect form. The grotesque can depict the scenes of horror, comedy and exaggeration effectively. The grotesque is a source of entertainment and moral instruction. The grotesque became very popular in Europe with the popularity of the Theatre of Absurd.

### **The Historical Perspective: Evolution of Grotesque through the Ages:-**

Since antiquity the grotesque has existed in many forms of art and literature. In Ancient Greece the grotesque was a liberating style breaking from the conventional theatrical practices. Hadas (2006) traced the history of grotesque beginning from the famous old comedies of Aristophanes old comedy in his book *The Complete Plays of Aristophanes*. Hadas argues that the comedies of Aristophanes were packed with the images of grotesque and were intellectual in nature. The plays of Aristophanes depict the images of the lower parts of human body. His plays are loaded with the images of sexuality, "obscenity and excretory functions" (Hadas 5, 6). The Greeks had high opinion of comic art since they believed that comedy has the power to purge as it can act as a safety valve to get freedom from the tensions and worries of life. In religious festivals the comic skits were performed. Consider for instance the scene in the play *Clouds* in which Aristophanes depicts the incongruity of

homosexual relationship in a humorous way: “RIGHT LOGIC: But what if your backside's singed and rammed with the adulterer's rod? How will argument then prevail to void the stretching of your bum?” (151). The Grotesque Realism was very popular in the Middle Ages of Europe as in all feasts and carnivals the scenes of grotesque were enjoyed by the masses. These festive occasions gave an opportunity to the lower class people to articulate their ideas freely. The Church had dominating control on the life of the lower class people as they didn't dare to violate the rules of the Church. Bakhtin (1984) investigated the causes and the consequences of the freedom speeches of the lower class people. They exhibited strange behavior during these feasts and carnivals (154). Francois Rabelais lived in a monastery taking keen interest in the activities of the feasts and carnivals organized in the marketplaces every year with the permission of the Church and the King. They were greatly excited to witness the free speeches expressed by men and women in carnivals, fairs and festivals (Bakhtin 154,155).

In the middle ages, the theatrical activities concentrated on farces and burlesques as the playwrights exulted in depicting the scenes of the grotesque on stage. Church feasts come beneath the label of ritual spectacle. The *Feast of Fools* is one such famous example. The clowns and Jesters would behave like kings. Bakhtin's famous *Rabelais and His World* investigates the role of the fools and the clowns in the Middle Age theatre. His vision of reality is a blending of truth and falsehood as his plays are not expressions of realism but are excursions into the world of reality. Deborah B. Gaensbauer in her book *Eugene Ionesco Revisited* traces the circumstances that led to the evolution of pessimistic vision of life of Ionesco. Ionesco walked in summer sunshine in a village. He was wonderstruck by the intensity of blue sky and was gripped by the feeling of intense luminosity. He found that the sky was blue and full of life but in the real world there was death, decay and corruption. His vision of life is articulated in most of Ionesco's plays since each of his plays depicts his disgust for the tangible world. Each character feels the sense of loss as a better world lies beyond his reach. In his plays *The Killer* and *The Chairs* the protagonists pine for an unattainable “city of lights”. In the play *A Stroll in the Air* the characters are given an opportunity to fly but in his plays

*Amedee* and *Victims of Duty* the forces of absurdity grip the protagonists leading them into the whirlpool of despair. The theme of the inevitable nature of death is taken in his play *Exit the King*. Ionesco is not much concerned with the basic truths of life as love, death and other needs that obsess man. In his play *Rhinoceros*, Ionesco uses the device of retrogressive evolution. Norman N. Holland contends that his preoccupation with the unrealistic elements often dazzles the audience and the main story line is lost. Ionesco evolved his new vision of theatre and communication. He destroyed all the traditional theatrical techniques and made serious efforts to destroy the old deep rooted convictions about drama. In “An Address Delivered to a Gathering of French and German Writers” in February 1960, Ionesco outlined his theories on the form of the play with an architectural metaphor: An architect builds a temple, a palace or a small house. A musician composes a symphony. The architect tells us this is for the faithful to have a place made for prayer; for the king to have a dwelling spacious enough to house distinguished guests, various dignitaries and countless soldiers; and for the peasant to have somewhere to shelter his family and his pig. But the architect is properly caught out: the faithful have died and religion is in ruins, but the temple is not, it is still standing; and generations after generation come to admire the abandoned temple, the empty palace and the picturesque old house, which now shelters only furniture or memories (*Notes and Counter Notes*, 146). Ionesco used the metaphor to describe the structure of the drama. He expressed his disgust observing that “religion is in ruins”. Ionesco believed that art and belief systems are interlinked but he took up the responsibility to build the theatre from the ruins.

Ionesco wrote *Rhinoceros* in the form of a short story in 1957 and the play was first performed at the Odeon Theatre Paris in 1960. Later on in Germany its world premiere was staged and the play was given ten minutes ovation and Ionesco became an international celebrity. The absurdity of the plot of *Rhinoceros* and its message of anti-conformity lashing on the ideology of the Nazi fascinated the audience and Ionesco became the icon playwright in the club of Beckett, Genet and Pinter. His anti-theatre approach greatly influenced the various historical moments of Europe and America. Martin Esslin observes that Ionesco’s anti-theatricality

deconstructs the “the value of theatricality” (354). J.S. Doubrovsky in his article “Ionesco and the Comic of Absurdity” published in *Yale French Studies* observes that many critics dismiss all his plays as “mere extravaganzas born of the author’s dreams and anxieties” (247). Ionesco created characters living alone struggling in the trap of absurdity expressing their impulses, desires and nightmares. The theater of Ionesco is ontological in nature; he believes that thought is not a region of being but nothingness in the plenum of the world. Sartre believed in the futile struggle of Sisyphus but he created characters with a “personality”. Beckett’s Lucky and Pozzo, Vladimir and Estragon are human beings flesh and blood. Ionesco’s characters are as interchangeable as they speak lines and their continuous duplication creates confusion in the plots of the drama. Jacques performs several roles; he is a father, a son, portrayed with the same name. There seems to be an endless game of hide-and seek in the creation of Ionesco’s characters. Their identity is in vacuum and the result is the total decomposition of the theatre. Ionesco doesn’t design a character in the traditional sense with no overreaching moral as Ionesco observes: “the characters themselves do not appear to understand what they are communicating” (*Rhinoceros* 20). The plot of the play is circular in nature and the characters who verbally repeat themselves. Ionesco “reacts against the Realist and Naturalist theatres. Ionesco gives a critique of the universal petty bourgeoisie” (34).

### **Ionesco and Existentialism**

The plays of Ionesco voice this excruciating mood of nihilistic despair inspiring protest against life that has been drained of ultimate meaning. In *The Sickness Unto Death* (1946), Kierkegaard had foreshadowed the anxiety neurosis of the post-World War era. It is this type of despair, “this sickness unto death” which accounts for the inevitable split in the modern individual. Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1833), made the revolutionary statement that “God is dead, buried Him long long ago!” (Nietzsche 2) and propagated skepticism, doubt and despair. Two World Wars, the Great Depression of 1930, Jewish Holocaust in the concentration camps led to the loss of human ultimate certainties. There was no unifying principle left to give direction to human beings. The Existentialists took the cue from Kierkegaard and the concept of the self-presented in Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*

(1943) is abstract and beset with irreconcilable contradictions. The self, though free, is trapped in solitude from where there is no escape. Therefore, the most conspicuous characteristic of selfhood is that “man is always separated from what he is by all the breadth of the being which he is not” (17). Inspired by Sartre, Albert Camus wrote *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), tracing the history which brought about his helplessness in the universe. Highlighting the absurdity of the human situation, it attacks the very existence of man. Everywhere man feels torn between infinities, between absolutes and between odds. Camus defines “absurdity” as the “disproportion between man's intention and the reality he will encounter” (28). Ionesco articulated his absurd vision of life in his plays using the tools of Carnavalesque and grotesque realism. Ionesco's plays rely on the manipulation of language and the main focus is on how his characters react to it, how agents of authority abuse their power and how one character resists the temptation to submit to a mob mentality. Ionesco exults in using bizarre distortions to achieve grotesque realism in his plays.

### **Existential Dilemmas of Berenger**

Ionesco depicts the existential dilemmas of Berenger who confronts absurdity, irrationality and futility of life. He believes that modern man is a puppet in the hands of external forces. Ionesco's approach is existentialist because his main concern is to depict the existential dilemmas of Berenger. Ionesco's *Rhinoceros* presents the protagonist as a victim pitted against the forces of absurdities and irrational forces. Berenger struggles in his life to comprehend the essence of his existence and attempts to isolate “this one element which regards as the one that constitutes the theatre's supreme achievement” (Esslin 161). Berenger takes the challenge to fight with the absurdity and conformity unlike Jean who turns out to be a conformist of the Nazi ideology. Ionesco is seriously concerned to liberate his protagonist from the illusion, social pressures, loss of faith and mechanization. The play of Ionesco is an allegory of the absurdity of Berenger who is cut off from the society and confronts existential angst and the pain of living in the contemporary world. He is trapped in the meaningless universe and finds himself in the abyss of darkness and terror. Berenger is horrified to be caught between the two false worlds but he remains

unheroic to find any solution of life. Jean Paul Sartre while defining humanism in his work *Existentialism is a Humanism* says:

We remind man that there is no legislator other than himself and that he must, in his abandoned state, make his own choices, and also because we show that it is not by turning inward, but by constantly seeking a goal outside of himself in the form of liberation, or of some special achievement, that man will realize himself as truly human. (53)

Also Coe says, “Ionesco’s method is to start with an unrealistic - preferably an impossible, an inconceivable situation, and to then develop it, still impossibly and inconceivably as far as it will go, yet at the same time forcing the audience to participate in what is not an illusion of reality” (15-16). This means that the nonsense of life has been opening in the only one incomprehensible feeling. “Beginning to think is beginning to be undermined” (Camus 45). Being alienated, the protagonist of the anti-theatre begins to question himself as well as the universe around him; everything becomes absurd and problematical, even the phenomenon of consciousness. Having lost his identity, he is swept along by the tide of events. This “absurd” hero bears the knowledge of his own insignificance in the cosmic scheme of things. He cannot say confidently: “I am myself”. Instead, he says, like the Old Man in *The Chairs*, “I am not myself. I am another. I am the one in the other” (Ionesco145).

Ionesco was clearly influenced by the war when he wrote *Rhinoceros* in 1958. He describes his feeling of disgust as most of his friends were blindly following the herd mentality in supporting the oppressive policies of the Nazis. In *New York Times* Ionesco observed thus in an interview:

Why did I choose to transform my people into rhinoceroses? Because it is the most stupid and the most ferocious animal in the world, and also the ugliest. You saw people change into rhinoceroses in Nazi Germany. They dehumanized themselves and became horrible, destructive beast in a herd. (January 8, 1961)



Ionesco's *Rhinoceros* has its central concern on the conflict between the individual's responsibility to himself and his responsibility to others. The thing which distinguishes *Rhinoceros* from *Victims of Duty* and *The Lesson* is that its protagonist is a character who genuinely embodies himself authentically. *Rhinoceros* was staged in many countries of Europe including Russia. The reviewers and the critics of Ionesco expressed their divergent views on the anti-theatre of Ionesco. However, *Rhinoceros* remains unexceptional creation of Ionesco for its timeless themes and accessibility. Ionesco used the metaphor of a human transforming into a rhinoceros. Ionesco commented thus:

I spoke to him. He was still a man. But suddenly everything changed. His skin changed, his glove and shoes changed and turned into hoofs. His hands turned into the paws of an animal and a horn could be seen growing out of his forehead. He looked ferocious and dangerous terrifying. He attacked furiously and had become a rhinoceros. (Ionesco 123)

Berenger of Ionesco is a mighty creation that really embodies him authentically. Berenger's passion for independence and his wholehearted resistance to the social forces of conformity substantiate his authenticity. The play evokes the images of futility of life and its nothingness of life. Ionesco's *Rhinoceros* is not a story of two couples as is found in *The Bald Soprano* but a serious tale of human transformation. Ionesco was greatly impressed by the ugly and huge body of a rhinoceros symbolizing herd mentality. Ionesco's versatility lies in his ability to conceive a drama on the conflict between mindless mass conformity and the herd mentality. In creating the play he conceived the character of Berenger portrayed as the absurdist anti-hero. Ionesco's *Rhinoceros* begins in the town square of a small French village. Jean and Berenger are friends; Jean is eloquent and intellectual but Berenger is shy and kind-hearted. Both meet in a coffee house to talk about an unspecified urgent matter:

JEAN: There you are, You see!

BERENGER: What are you drinking?

JEAN: You mean to say you've got a thirst even at this time in the morning? BERENGER: It's so hot and dry.

JEAN: The more you drink the thirstier you get, popular science tell us that. (Eugene Ionesco, *Rhinoceros* 10)

Ionesco uses language of the Theatre of the Absurd and of Bakhtin and Dostoevsky to depict the herd mentality of the people by repetitive speech patterns. Jean is tidy, careful "immaculate" but the clothes of Berenger are "all crumpled, they're a disgrace!" (11). Berenger is leading a boring and dull life as he has lost the charm of life, "I get so bored. I'm not made for the work I'm doing...every day at the office, eight hours a day and only three weeks holiday a year!" (11). He looks ridiculous, shabby and a grotesque figure wearing "a filthy shirt and dirty shoes". Jean expresses his disgust and says: "I feel ashamed to be your friend" (11). In the meantime, a rhinoceros rampages creating panic in the people; a rhinoceros crushes the cat of a woman symbolizing the terror, death and destruction in the drama. Ionesco expresses emotions of characters through visual images. The imagery of lightness and heaviness in *Rhinoceros* is new and unconventional. A well-made traditional play has a beginning, middle and a neatly tied-up ending but the absurd plays start and end arbitrarily. Martin Esslin states that, "By all the traditional standards of critical appreciation of drama, these plays are not only abominably bad; they don't even deserve the name drama" (Esslin 1). The appearance of a rhinoceros in the busy street creates panic among the people but Ionesco dramatizes the grotesque horror and terror through this unconventional scene:

BERENGER: Yes, I can see You can't. Well, it was a rhinoceros- all right, so it was a rhinoceros! It's miles away by now... miles away...

JEAN: But you must see it's fantastic! A rhinoceros loose in the town, and you don't bat an eyelid! It shouldn't be allowed! (18)

Ionesco presents the elements of black comedy as Berenger's final moments of the play mimic a surreal. The picture of the crowded city and the rhinoceroses appearing and trumpeting create the atmosphere of horror of Gothic novels. Ionesco crosses all barriers of dramatic conventions presenting the city with jams making the

city loud and oppressive. Ionesco is satirizing the “petty bourgeoisie society of France as Coe aptly observes that all plays of Ionesco are virulent satires on the bourgeoisie; its speech, its manners, and its morals...” (22). Ionesco depicted the reality of the political ideologies in the play *Rhinoceros* as the most “nefarious incarnation of the bourgeois mind” (Coe 94). Ionesco articulated his vision of political ideologies in *Notes and Counter Notes* thus: “Quite simply, I thought it was my job to reveal the insanity of these terrible systems, what they can lead to, how they stir people up, stupefy them and then reduce them to slavery” (199). In *Rhinoceros* Ionesco really condemned the growing process of collective transformation. Genevieve Serreau observes that *Rhinoceros* is an implacable diatribe against the oppression and poison of the Nazi state. Ionesco believes that a latent negative force takes over the subconscious desires until eventually the outcome is universal devastation. Ionesco demonstrates his theory in the “fabrication of the rhinoceros which started out as a political wave and ends up an uncontrollable monstrosity” (116). In his *Notes and Counter-Notes* Ionesco lashes at the party manifestoes that screens the mind from reality, perverts our understanding and makes us blind” (207). Rhino image is very powerful; its ugliness provokes laughter but its destructive nature excites awe in the minds of the audience. The robust skin and body of rhinoceros symbolizes the fanatical and oppressive nature of the political leaders. Jean is very critical of Berenger for his excessive drinking habits as he says: “You’re digging our own grave, my friend you’re destroying yourself” (22). Berenger justifies his drinking habits expressing his boredom of anguish of life: “I feel out of place in life, among people, and so I take to drink” (22). The grotesque realism is intensified with the dramatization of the antithetical disposition of two friends. Jean is hypocritical and a sentimental knave of the Restoration Comedy of Manners. His philosophical maxims and arm chair idealism is exposed and ridiculed throughout the play. *Rhinoceros* also features the mental “sidewise glance at another”. Bakhtin highly eulogized Dostoevsky who created heroes following the Menippean tradition. Graham Townsend points out that Ionesco also follows the techniques of Dostoevsky in his famous play *Rhinoceros*. Berenger’s first question ‘But how can one be a rhinoceros?’ is on the farcical tradition of Carnavalesque. According to Townsend, Ionesco builds the carnival atmosphere giving comic liberty to his characters to assume any form they like. The process of metamorphosis

is typically carnival and evokes farcical laughter. The ambiance of *Rhinoceros* is precisely “that carnival-square atmosphere in which abrupt Carnavalesque changes of the fates and appearances of people can occur” (*Dostoevsky* 145). The setting of the drama is also in line with the Carnavalesque atmosphere as it conforms to the “threshold and the square” typical of the spaces of Carnivalized literature. Bakhtin comments thus “people live a biographical life in biographical time: they are born, they pass through childhood and youth, they marry, give birth to children, die” (*Dostoevsky* 170).

Ionesco is very particular in vividly describing the corridor, the landing, the stairway, the taverns, streets, and squares of the city”. The entire city is in crisis but the scene is a fine blending of the real and the grotesque. The imagery is suggestive of chaos and darkness but at the same time a scene is imbued with the Carnavalesque atmosphere of a Sunday afternoon in which people interact freely and familiarly with each other. The second Act is set in the office; the work place of Berenger. Soon the grotesque action begins as Madame Boeuf leaps to straddle her rhinoceros husband. Berenger and his colleagues are seen running to escape from the building and the fire department in full action. Ionesco continues dramatizing the folk feast of the carnival taking Berenger into Jean’s apartment. This part of the drama is the nucleus as the action is about the process of metamorphosis; human beings are seen turning into rhinoceros realistically and symbolically. The main grotesque takes place between the bedroom and the bathroom as the audience watches Jean repeatedly retiring to check his progress of transformation. The last grotesque action begins with the flight of Berenger from the apartment in horror and surprise to alert the concierge who has also been transformed. To his dismay, the old couple too has become rhinoceroses. He struggles to exit the building from a window. Berenger emerges as a grotesque figure; he is repelled by the sight of herds of pachyderms in the street. He provokes guffaws of laughter to the audience rushing frantically from exit to exit. The rhinoceros chase him until at last he escapes through the back wall into the street like a hero of the great comedies of Moliere. Ionesco sets the last scene in Berenger’s apartment as all the characters listen to the voices on the radio and the telephone haunted by the presence of the rhinoceros in the city. Daisy highlights the seriousness of the situation thus in her grotesque language:

BERENGER: It's the rhinoceroses which are anarchic, because they're in the minority.

DUDARD: They are, it's true-for the moment.

DAISY: They are pretty big minority, and getting bigger all the time. My cousin's rhinoceros now, and his wife. No to mention leading personalities like the Cardinal de Retz...

DUDARD: A prelate!

DAISY: Mazarin! (123)

Bakhtin believed that the carnival sense of the world embodied in the menippean includes a view of life as "one great communal performance" (*Dostoevsky* 160). In the carnival world all are equal and all have the liberty to express in free and fair manner. There is no distinction between actors and spectators because in the carnival folk feast all are the actors. In *Rhinoceros*, Ionesco takes pains to extend the world of the play beyond the footlights into the auditorium. In the last scene Berenger announces to Dudard that the rhinoceroses have demolished the fire station spreading a wave of collective hysteria engulfing all the characters. Ionesco juxtaposes levity with seriousness as Berenger and Daisy are left alone in the world. In comic despair Berenger looks out the window at herds of rhinoceroses thronging the streets. The stage directions indicate that powerful noises of moving rhinoceroses produce a musical sound. Bakhtin observes thus in the context of the carnival dramatization:

In all genres of the socio-comic there is a strong rhetorical element, but in the atmosphere of joyful relativity characteristic of a carnival sense of the world this element is fundamentally changed: there is a weakening of its one-sided rhetorical seriousness, its rationality, its singular meaning, its dogmatism. (*Dostoevsky* 107)

Bakhtin discusses in detail the characteristics of grotesque realism in his *Rabelais and His World*. Carnavalesque is "opposed to all that is finished and polished, to all pomposity, to every ready-made solution in the sphere of thought

and world outlook” (3). Ionesco’s *Rhinoceros* is an anti-Nazi play and a virulent attack on all ideologies (*Notes and Counter-Notes* 199). As Marie-Claude Hubert explains “It is not fascism alone which is condemned, but all forms of fanaticism....Ionesco distrusts all ideologies” (150). Fanaticism is of course the extreme form of monologism. The central theme of *Rhinoceros* is the repudiation of all monologic discourse as inherently inhuman and de-humanizing. Dudard is an intellectual, Botard an anti-intellectual. Jean is a racist; Botard decries racism. Botard spouts the slogans of Marxism: ‘Just like religion—the opiate of the people’ (Prouse 45); Jean propounds the rhetoric of fascism: (159) ‘Morality’s against nature’ The essence of the carnivalesque is the defeat of fear, guilt, and anxiety by laughter. Bakhtin points out that Rabelais wrote fiction to get rid of “his terror and regains his cheerfulness” (*Rabelais* 175). Ionesco uses comic violence through the imagery of rhinoceros, bad language to terrorize Berenger and the tools of satire to expose and satirize Dudard and Jean who turn rhinoceroses in the play. Bakhtin discussed in detail all the tools of Carnivalesque literature. Bakhtin defended the Carnivalesque literature since it liberates human spirit and empowers human beings to escape from the tensions and anxieties of life. In *Rhinoceros*, Berenger gets freedom from fear, guilt and anxiety at the end of the play. In Act III, Berenger is having nightmares about the rhinoceroses, he is tormented with feelings of guilt over his estrangements with Jean and Daisy but in the last scene in his soliloquy he emerges stronger as he boldly affirms his resolution to struggle: “I’ll put up a fight against the lot of them, the whole lot of them! I’m the last man left, and I’m staying that way until the end. I’m not capitulating” (107). Ionesco reverses the scheme of the menippean. Instead of describing the utopian vision he depicts a dystopia of the human race metamorphosed into beasts. Deviating from the tradition of the carnival, Ionesco satirizes Dudard. Dudard chides Berenger for his lack of a sense of humor. He exhorts Berenger to “be more detached, and see the funny side of things” (78). Dudard himself confesses that he finds the transformation of M. Papillon “rather funny” (81). Ionesco gives the manifestation of the grotesque in his typical style imitating the Socratic dialogue. The interesting thing in the drama is the awareness of Berenger who learns to escape anxieties and tensions through the experience of the grotesque. The comic power helps him to transcend fear through laughter,

*Rhinoceros* echoes the carnival sense of the world which Bakhtin traces back through Dostoevsky and Rabelais to the socio-comic literature of antiquity. Jean motivates Berenger to find some weapons to confront the existential reality and Berenger asks him “Where can I find the weapons?” (20) and Jean candidly replies: “Within yourself. Through your own will” (21). Pronko observes that the characters of *Rhinoceros* are especially capricious, and Jean soon is represented as a slave to the herd mentality, while Berenger declares, “Instead of drinking I’ll develop my mind. I feel better already. My head already feels clearer” (24). Later he declares, “I’ve got no horns and I never will have” (30). Haney avers that this dispute foreshadows that Jean will become a rhino while Berenger will retain his humanity (96). Indeed, Berenger uses his newly found clear-headedness to resist rhinoceritis. In the Second Act of the play, Ionesco continues loading the plot with visual ages with the purpose of exposing and ridiculing the herd mentality of the people represented by Jean. The setting of this Act is in the government office suggestive of slavish adherence to duty by the office workers. Botard is a committed propagandist as he expresses his hatred for the journalists: “I never believe journalists. They’re all liars. I don’t need them to tell me what to think; I believe what I see with my own eyes” (40). Botard says that “the rhino sightings are an example of collective psychosis just like religion” (45). Mrs. Boeuf is terrified by “the sight of rhinoceros” (47), Berenger enters Jean’s apartment to revive his friendship with Jean. He is shocked to discover Jean suffering with the symptoms of rhinoceritis. Jean’s voice has changed, he is coughing and his skin has turned green and a bump has grown which eventually grows into a horn and a predilection for charging at those in his line of sight” (63). All these symptoms of transformation excite the pleasures of grotesque realism found in the fiction of Bakhtin and Dostoevsky. For Berenger this transformation is horrible:

BERENGER: But whatever’s the matter with your skin?

JEAN: Can’t you leave my skin alone? I certainly wouldn’t want to change it for yours.

BERENGER: It’s gone like leather.

JEAN: That makes it more solid. It's weatherproof.

BERENGER: You're getting greener and greener. (64)

Jean is shocked to discover a bum as he cries out in despair: "It's true. I have got a bump" (66). Jean sides with the rhinoceroses, declaring that they have as much right to life as people do (66). His troubling transformation continues as he declares that he favors nature over morality and that the two are diametrically opposed (67). Jean expresses his hatred for the mankind and his selfish and self-centered vision of life and morality: "It's not that I hate people. I'm just indifferent to them – or rather, they disgust me" (64). Berenger tells Jean that even Boeuf has turned into a rhinoceros. The entire scene of confrontation between Jean and Berenger is packed with the images and metaphors of human transformation alluding to the symbolical process of herd mentality and slavish conformity of people to Nazism. The audience hears the trumpeting sounds of the rhinoceros. Berenger tries to help his ailing friend Jean with sedative words: "Calm down, Jean, You're being ridiculous! Oh, your horn's getting longer and longer-you're a rhinoceros!...He's is a rhinoceros, he's is a rhinoceros" (69). Ionesco uses the tools of wit, irony and black humor to ridicule the ideas of Jean. After having witnessed Jean's metamorphosis into a rhinoceros, Berenger rushes away from his apartment. His flight symbolizes his love for liberty and his individuality that remains intact in the forces of conformity. In the last act, Berenger breaks off with his beloved Daisy and co-worker Dudard. Berenger declares to Dudard that he fears becoming someone other than himself (73). Berenger expresses his love for liberty thus: "But if one really doesn't want to, really doesn't want to catch this thing, which after all is a nervous disease – then you don't catch it, you simply don't catch it!" (76). Dudard is fatalistic as he says: "that infection is inevitable" (79) and that "there is nothing more natural than a rhinoceros" (84). Dudard replies that everyone has a right to change his mind (88). He extols the virtues of adherence to duty. "I feel certain scruples!" he says to Berenger and Daisy. "I feel it's my duty to stick by my employers and my friends, through thick and thin" (93). With this, he runs out of the apartment and joins the herd, "Let things just take their course. What can we do about it?" (101). Berenger attempts to convince Daisy that the world is worth saving. Daisy pledges to help



Berenger resist rhinoceritis until the very end, but she capriciously changes her mind within a single page of dialogue: She sneaks out of the apartment while Berenger examines himself in the mirror, to join the throng of pachyderms rampaging through the town. Her departure makes Berenger's isolation complete and final. At first he panics and regrets his human form, though he soon recovers himself and launches into his final soliloquy in which he declares his authenticity. Berenger emerges as the only human being in the drama who remains human in spite of the waves of conformity enveloping the town. His cry of defense is indeed exceptional: "...I'm the last man left, and I'm staying that way until the end. I'm not capitulating!". He is alcoholic, shy and friendly and makes no heroic action at the end of the play. He is an anti-hero of Ionesco trapped in the forces of absurdity and conformity but had the strength of character to resist the destructive forces that bulldozed human beings. Lamont observes that Berenger represents a shadow of Ionesco in his plight: "In Romania I remember how everyone around me converted to fascism, till it seemed to me that I was the only one left in the world" (Lamont, *The Hero In spite of Himself* 73). Berenger emerges as an anti-hero through his conformity and adherence to the ideology of conformity propagated by the Nazis. He is a ridiculous character as Ionesco parodies him in comparison with the great tragic heroes of the Greek and the Shakespeare world. Berenger is a grotesque character exhibiting his cowardice, ignorance and laziness (*Rhinoceros* 75). Berenger stands alone; a face in the crowd and his ignorance of all political values allow him to remain human. Berenger battles alone against odds knowing well that he cannot discipline himself to anything. He says: "I am not capitulating" (107). Ultimately, Berenger keeps away from the herd. Botard, Dudard and Mrs. Boeuf are transformed in the play. Botard understands the need for a community within society on the pattern of Marxism. Botard is constantly expressing his commitment to his work community, the social community. Berenger is shocked to observe Botard's transformation. Dudard in the beginning of his life tries to live and let others live. He resists blind transformation. Like Sartre Dudard avoids conflicts. It is pertinent to conclude that *Rhinoceros* of Ionesco gives an insight into the herd mentality of the people of Europe. Students, college professors and the leading intellectuals who controlled the political activities in the towns and the big cities had been infected with the deadly

virus of conformity and were joining Nazis. *Rhinoceros* emerges as a political drama highlighting the social and political evils of the society. Ionesco's anti Nazi stance is beyond time and place. The play *Rhinoceros* hinges on the theme of the complexities of our over-civilized society. Ionesco is aware of the bourgeois existence transcending the social connotations. Bakhtin expressed his modern and revolutionary feelings in *Notes and Counter Notes*: "Quite simply, I thought it was my job to reveal the insanity of these terrible systems, what they can lead to, how they stir people up, stupefy them and then reduce them to slavery" (199). In *Rhinoceros* Ionesco expresses his sense of fear, contempt and hatred as the play is a diatribe against the oppression and poison of the Nazi state. These sentiments are dramatized through the tools of black comedy and grotesque realism. The plague of conformity grips the characters who don't know the cause of the irrevocable forces. The people who turn into bellowing rhinoceroses remain confused and bewildered. The critics such as Coe and Ann Holloway Quinney (2007) lash at Ionesco for his theatrical excess and the play is dubbed as "theatrical farce". The hyperbolic images and metaphors depicting historical events of the Nazi occupation of France and French subjugation of the Algerians give a new dimension to the play. Ionesco imitated Bakhtin and Dostoevsky in his language experiment when he wrote *Rhinoceros*. His main focus is on the dramatization of Grotesque Realism and to achieve his goal Ionesco evolved new images and stylistic techniques to convey his hollow messages of conformity and dehumanization of people turning into rhinoceroses. Cliche is used to depict the automatic responses when everyone exclaims "Well, of all things!" (26). The characters use platitudes and most of the characters love to repeat their ideas. For example, the phrases such as "It's never too late" (22); "Come on, exercise your mind. Concentrate!" (21) reveals the emptiness of the characters. The dialogue of the drama resembles one with the deaf or the mad. There is a remarkable lack of smooth flow of communication. Ionesco gives a clear portrait of the absurdist society run amok. The logical growth in the drama is invisible as there is no coherence in the plot. In a truly absurd dialogue, the character of the old gentleman applies this logic to his own life and decides that his dog must be a cat based on his having four paws. He exclaims: "Logics a very beautiful thing" (19). Quick to correct him, the logician replies: "As long as it is not abused" (19). In

the last scene of the drama Berenger exclaims in absolute terms: “Well, in spite of everything, I swear to you I’ll never give in, never!” (104). Berenger feels that it is difficult to maintain identity when everyone else has become a rhinoceros. Berenger comments thus: “Alcohol is good for epidemics. It immunizes you” (76). Ionesco learnt from Bakhtin the power of irony as a weapon to dramatize absurdity. It is ironical that all friends of Berenger, Jean and Dudard chastise him for his drinking habits. They tell Berenger that he lacks will power and is a slave to alcohol but in fact all readily succumb to the herd mentality of rhinoceritis. Rossette C. Lamont in her book *Ionesco’s Imperatives: The Politics of Culture* observes that Berenger looks weak, shabby and careless but under the cover of his weakness Ionesco theorized that the “plight and the privilege of the modern hero stemmed from what may be taken for weakness” (139). Ionesco recollects his days of his life in Romania when he found the mad race of people turning into rhinoceros as he records:

All around me men were metamorphosed into beasts, rhinoceros . . .  
 You would run into an old friend, and all of a sudden, under your very eyes, he would begin to change. It was as if his gloves became paws, his shoes hoofs. You could no longer talk intelligently with him for he was not a rational human being. (Lamont 37-38)

Berenger suffered from the dilemma of Ionesco as he seriously struggled to find out the solution to escape from the epidemic of rhinoceritis surrounding him. Berenger displays his strength of character in resisting the crushing tide of evil; his combat against the evil forces excite admiration from the audience. Ionesco depicted his dilemma thus: Ionesco writes: “I no longer believed that I alone could be right against all people . . . I was saying to myself that it would be impossible and I met several people who had the courage to be isolated from evil and not to believe in evil” (Lamont 38). The themes of the play are social, political and dealing with the struggle of the individuals with the forces of conformity and oppression. Ionesco describes the deadly virus of the fascist forces spread over Romania, Italy, Germany and other European countries. Ionesco was sick of French intellectuals who embraced communism supporting the destructive ideology of Stalin. Botard belongs to this group of intellectuals and Mr. Dudard expresses his Marxist ideology thus:

“An example of collective psychosis, Mr. Dudard. Just like religion; the opiate of the people!” (45). Botard is narrow-minded and pedantic and is convinced that the plague of rhinoceritis is a right-wing conspiracy, sustained by the press, and consumed by the masses. Botard denies the existence of rhinoceros in the town calling it an instance of “your propaganda” (46) and an “infamous plot” (49). He observes that it is a scheme of the capitalist to make money. He accuses the journalists of fabrication: “They don’t care what they invent to sell their wretched newspapers and please the bosses they serve!” (41). Ionesco once observed that “Dudard is Sartre” (Lamont 145). Ionesco wrote four Berenger plays presenting a central irony in Berenger’s character. Ionesco gave him multiple roles in many of his plays. In *Rhinoceros* Berenger emerges as a true actor. Richard Coe (1961) in his book *Eugene Ionesco* observes that Ionesco revolted against “the prevailing concepts of time and space, of cause and effect, of psychological continuity”-of a deterministic universe. Berenger has witnessed all the aspects of life and the slavish mentality of the people around him. Berenger exposes Daisy also who is leaning to the race of rhinoceroses. Daisy scolds Berenger telling him that he does not understand love. She believes that the rhinoceroses are in the right. Berenger slaps Daisy exclaiming that, “in just a few minutes we have gone through twenty-five years of married life!”. They attempt to reconcile, but fail. George Wellwarth observes that Berenger reflects Ionesco’s commitment to depict the image of the disintegrating world. In *Notes on My Theatre* Ionesco commented thus: “if here is no crisis, there is stagnation, purification, death. All thought, all art is aggressive” (156). Moshe Lazar (1982) observes that Berenger is “a contemporary Everyman, struggling with a divided mind and a splintered soul in the ongoing quest for a meaningful existence” (148). Berenger is bound to suffer alienation as he laments the slavish and herd mentality of Daisy. In his desperate state he begins to doubt his existence and his language changes, his mind are confused and he struggles and fails in his attempt to change into a rhinoceros. He looks at the mirror and breaks down in desperation. Soon he renews his vow to fight with the rhino mentality of the people. Berenger shouts “I’m not capitulating!” to the audience. Anne Quinney argued that the plot of the drama is not based but Ionesco used his autobiographical events in structuring the plot. Ionesco had experienced the herd mentality of people when he

was in Romania. Ionesco's mother was a French Protestant of French society. Ionesco was not Jewish, but was considered to be Jewish. Ionesco had closely watched the herd mentality in Romania as many intellectuals were embracing the ideology of Nazis. Nancy Lane (1994) in her book *Understanding Eugene Ionesco* observes that the entire career of Ionesco was devoted to evolve a new language for drama, the hatred for authority and for the defense of the individual. The image of the rhinoceros was born in Ionesco's mind at a time when he was in Romania and he witnessed most of his friends supporting the Fascist regime. Ionesco's *Rhinoceros* after twenty years being dismayed to witnessing the same totalitarian forces regarding to Communism. Indeed in *Rhinoceros* Ionesco dramatizes the 'decentred' situation of twentieth century man without God. Ionesco's *The Bald Soprano* (1949) brought a revolution in the domain of drama in the world. The play was hailed as a masterpiece of Ionesco contributing to the growth of the Theatre of the Absurd. The critics called Ionesco as grandmaster of the "meta-linguistic drama" as the plot of *The Bald Soprano* is packed with the clichéd, mechanical speeches of Smith and Martins. Richard Gileman in his *The Drama is Coming Now* observes that "*The Bald Soprano* is explosively, liberatingly funny ... a loony parody with a climax which is an orgy of non-sequiturs" (123). Steven G. Kellman in his *The Translingual Imagination* avers that "*The Bald Soprano* is a parody of our conversations, of the so-called dramatic situations of our lives, and of our inability to remain silent" (58). The origin of the play is very interesting as the play came to Ionesco while he was learning English language in Romania. Rosette C. Lamont observes that Ionesco originally wrote *The Bald Soprano* in French. He was greatly impressed by the contents of the dialogues, often unique and strange and odd. He decided to pen down an absurd drama named "English Without Toil" and later on he changed the title to "It's Raining Cats and Dogs". Ionesco regularly wrote and reframed the dialogues and then later on wrote the finished copy of the drama for performance.

For Ionesco language is a primary tool to provoke laughter in the theatre (Coe, 59). His *The Bald Soprano* is loaded with the foreign words, forceful and illogical statements. The play is a wonderful example of themes of self-estrangement and the difficulty of communication. The play was first staged at the Theatre de la

Huchette on 11 May 1950 and the play was considered as the most performed play of France and got the prestigious Moliere Performance award. In *The Bald Soprano* words used by the characters are meaningless blobs and trite phrases are frequently thrown in for no apparent reason. Language has broken down completely and serves no meaningful purpose. The comic and grotesque elements dominate the plot from the beginning to the end of the drama. The plot of the drama creates an inconsistent world at the outset of the drama. With the rise of the curtain, a middle class couple appears on the stage. Mrs. Smith begins the conversation highlighting the merits of a Romanian grocer. She lashes at the medical profession and remarks cynically that “a conscientious doctor must die with his patient if they can’t get well together”. Mr. Smith supports her and adds “all doctors are quacks. And all patients too. Only the Royal Navy is honest in England” (Eugene Ionesco, *The Bald Soprano* 18). She creates all the contradictions and creates confusion about Bobby Watson:

Tsk, it says here that Bobby Watson died

MRS. SMITH: My God, the poor man! When did he die?

MR. SMITH: Why do you pretend to be astonished? You know very well that he's been dead these past two years. (2)

Logical contradictions begin when the protagonist couple Mr. Smith and Mrs. Smith start talking nonsense sitting in their living room. Mrs. Smith and Mr. Smith talk about a family whose each member is named Bobby Watson. They are confused about the life of Bobby Watson as they are not sure whether he is alive or dead. The absurdity is intensified with the grotesque elements as Mrs. Smith asks an old question:

MRS. SMITH: And when are they thinking of getting married, the two of them?

MR. SMITH: Next spring, at the latest. (Eugene Ionesco, *The Bald Soprano* 3)

The suspense is built step by step as both Mrs. Smith and Mr. Smith refer to Bobby Watson as if he were alive and about to get married. The irony is in full

swing as both of them have attended his funeral and have talked about his widow. Ionesco creates a situation in which a person is discussed as being both dead and alive. Mrs. Smith gives every detail of the evening meal. The futility is accentuated by the fact that she is discussing what they have just done. His meaningless verbal harangue is at once grotesque and an expression of sheer nonsense. Ionesco goes on creating complications and absurd complexities as the couple talks of Watson's children:

MRS. SMITH: [...] It's sad for her to have been widowed so young.

MR. SMITH: Lucky they didn't have any children.

MRS. SMITH: Oh! That would have been too much! Children! What on earth would she have done with them. (31-5)

Madame Smith is informed by the maid servant Mary that Martins are into the living room. The couple hurriedly goes upstairs to change their clothes. The scene becomes more grotesque when the Martins express their ignorance about the Smiths though both the families are neighbors and live in the same house and sleep in the same bed room. Leonard C Pronko in his article "The Anti-Spiritual Victory in the Theatre of Ionesco" observes that the characters of Ionesco are "dead, all of them entombed within his restricting universe with walls closing in upon them, and buried also within their solitude, each one separated from all others in world where communication is absolutely impossible" (34). For instance the Old Woman in *The Chairs* emerges as a grotesque automated as she is seen rushing from door to door bringing in chairs and when the room is crowded she aromatically takes on the role of usher and begins selling programs and candy. In *The Bald Soprano* Mary tries to clear the confusion about the married life of the Marines. Finally, the Fire Chief appears. He's come to see if there is a fire in the house and is very discouraged to find out there isn't any. The Fire Chief suddenly recognizes Mary. It is discovered that she was his first love. When the Fire Officer leaves the play becomes crazy. In *The Bald Soprano* Ionesco creates a dramatic world where dream and reality are inseparable. The most fantastic events no longer seem exceptional and dream in equilibrium with the order imposed by the conscious mind, are shown as being the

key to the true nature of reality. The Fire Chief goes out and the characters scream and cry like animals. Ionesco is expert in dramatizing a grotesque situation; a person is discussed as being both dead and alive intensifying the logical contradictions. Ionesco came under the influence of Jacques Derrida as *The Bald Soprano* follows the theory of deconstruction. It is a challenge for the audience to establish a link between the text and meaning. Ionesco used the technique of “Aporia” featuring the meaning and the text. The ambiguities and clichés give both positive and negative meanings and baffle the audience. In *The Bald Soprano* Ionesco creates a number of statements from which he shows the usage of Aporia.

Mr. SMITH: Fortunately, they had no children.

Mrs. SMITH: That was all they needed! Children! Poor woman, how could she have managed. (3)

The plot of *The Bald Soprano* is full of contradictory statements, repetitions and baffling remarks. Ionesco was influenced by the nihilistic forces after the Second World War as he found the disconnection between religion, culture and language of people. Sartre and Camus discussed the distinction between rationality and irrationality in the actions of human beings. Wyatt aptly remarks that “such a situation creates a sense of disorientation and confusion in the face of an apparently meaningless or absurd world” (Wyatt). The characters Mr. Smith and Mrs. Smith and the Martins depict human conditions in absurdities through distorting the language and thoughts and by the use of grotesque realism. *The Bald Soprano* and *The Chairs* provoked heated controversies among the critic and reviewers of Ionesco as they found the plots sinuous in nature. The title of the drama also intensified confusion:

Fire CHIEF [moving towards the door, then stopping]: Speaking of that - the bald soprano? [General silence, embarrassment]

Mrs. SMITH: She always wears her hair in the same style.

Fire CHIEF: Ah! Then goodbye, ladies and gentlemen. (Eugene Ionesco, *The Bald Soprano* 15)



The Martins are so lost in their loneliness that after years of married life they fail to recognize each other. The characters are presented as lifeless dummies with no life and moral and spiritual strength. They talk and just talk as the curtain falls they are seen talking the same things over and over again saying the same phrases and aphorisms. Aristotle observes in *The Poetics* that drama is men in action but in Ionesco's theatre there is no action. They don't do anything; don't climb any mountain but sit in the living room of the Smiths talking about a bunch of nonsense. The main focus of Ionesco in this drama is the trapped existence of the middle classes in the whirlpool of absurdity. They are leading a meaningless life being the slaves of inhibiting old conventions and traditions. Ionesco hits at the futile and mechanical nature of modern civilization. In the last scene the language completely breaks down and only the characters shout the alphabets like the human beings living in the Stone Age.

MR. SMITH: The pope elopes! The pope's got no horoscope. The horoscope's bespoke.

MRS. MARTIN: Bazaar, Balzac, bazooka!

MR. MARTIN: Bizarre, beaux-arts, brassieres!

MRS. SMITH: a,e,i,o,u, a,e,i,o,u, a,e,i,o,u, i! MRS. MARTIN: B, c, d, f g, l, m, n, p, r, s, t, v, w, x, z!

MR. MARTIN: From sage to stooge, from stage to serge! (17)

The reality is lost and dialogue is reduced to syllables, consonants and vowels and words are turned into sounding shells devoid of meaning at the end of the drama. Decay of meaning is a primal element in the Theater of the Absurd as in the last scene all the characters are found trapped in the abyss of darkness disconnected with the outside world as the communication network breaks down. As the play ends, the absurd quality of language devolves into a state of decay. Decay of meaning is a primal element in the Theater of the Absurd. *The Bald Soprano* presents characters caught in hopeless situations forced to do repetitive or meaningless actions expressing their inner world in clichés, wordplay and nonsense.

Ionesco uses the technique of subversion of reason in the drama. The Smiths and Martins join together in the destruction of reason. The fireman also joins them who also belong to the same incongruous race as the erratic clock. The play acquires the verbal frenzy of senseless sounds. Mr. Smith and Mrs. Smith relies on improbability as she says: "He's been dead these past two years ...It's been three years since his death was announced" (2). At the end of the drama all the characters join together and speak incoherent sentences creating the word chain at once senseless and confusing:

Mrs. Martin: I can buy a pocketknife for my brother, but you can't buy Ireland for your grandfather

Mr. SMITH: One walks on his feet, but one heats with electricity or coal.

Mr. MARTIN: He who sells an ox today, will have an egg tomorrow.

Mrs. SMITH: In real life, one must look out of the window. (Ionesco 15)

To conclude, the characters of Ionesco know only the language of the absurd and they spend time and waste their energy in talking nonsense looking grotesque and ridiculous. The audience may laugh at them but in reality they seem to expose and ridicule the hidden reality of the meaningless existence. The ending of the play supplies full taste of grotesque culture as the audience is forced to debilitate upon the ideas of misconceptions, contradictions and disfigurement. The dialogues are enshrined in the tragedy of language to make the play hilarious and farcical. Characters look stupefied and irritated because of something unclear and unexplained. Ionesco belongs to the tradition of the Carnival Theatre as writing for him was a medium to exorcise his tensions and anxieties of life. In all his plays Ionesco concentrated on the themes of death and nothingness.

Ionesco discards the realistic language used by Bernard Shaw and Brecht and feels that language of the theatre ought to provide the audience with an illustration of total reality. As Coe observes that says, "Ionesco's method is to start with an

inconceivable situation and then to develop it into impossibly and inconceivably and this device helped Ionesco to force the audience to participate in what is not an illusion of reality” (Coe 123). Kenneth Tynan highly condemned Ionesco for his destruction of language depicting the lack of communication. Tynan even called Ionesco as a Messiah of the enemies of realism in the theatre. Ionesco’s dramatic power lies in his use of grotesque realism borrowed from Bakhtin. His plays build on bizarrely illogical or fantastic situations using the devices of the carnival and grotesque to ridicule the futile life of the bourgeois. The clichés and tedious maxims of polite conversation expose the deadening futility of most human communication. The grotesque reaches at the zenith with the exchange of shouted disconnected clichés and slogans raised by the characters in the climax of the drama.

### Chapter: Three

## Absurd Dilemmas in *The Chairs* and *Amedee or How to Get Rid of It*

### Martin Esslin and Theory of Absurdity

Martin Esslin wrote the seminal book *The Theatre of the Absurd* (1964) outlining the characteristics of absurd theatre. The awareness of absurdity in man's situation gives an extreme sense of anguish and all the plays of Ionesco depict this anguish (3). The philosophical ideas of Sartre and Camus brought a revolution and the result was the evolution of The Theatre of the Absurd. The contemporary dramatists took inspiration from the theories of nihilism and made experiments in theatre. The evolution of the Absurd Plays brought new dramatic conventions and techniques rejecting all the traditional forms of the Elizabethans and the Victorians. Shaw, O'Neill was outdated and a new wave in drama started. The Absurd plays brought drastic transformation in art and drama in England, France and America. Modern man lost his integral self and the loss of self was depicted in the British and American drama. Ionesco, Genet, Beckett, Albee, Gelber and Tom Stoppard depicted the deterioration of self in their plays. Martin Esslin (1962) published his *The Theatre of the Absurd* in which he explored the main characteristics of absurd drama:

These plays give a bewildering experience; the plays are packed with a barrage of irrational ideas. The playwrights revolted against the traditional conventions of dram and evolved anti-theatrical techniques to dramatize the anxiety, alienation, and nihilism of the age. In all these plays, there is no heroism, no; no grandeur as some of which are labeled "anti-plays". (Esslin 1)

Most of the critics of Ionesco have written on the themes of absurdity and uncertainty predominantly found in the plays of Ionesco but no critic has discussed the multiplicity of voices hidden in the dialogues of the plays of Ionesco. The

researcher has done an intensive review of literature of past and present and has found a research gap that can be filled by the application of the theories of Bakhtin.

The plays of Ionesco and Edward Albee deal with the theme of the negation of all values. They put faith in the ideas of Sartre and Camus and revolted against the traditional techniques of drama. In the absurd drama of Ionesco and Genet new images and symbols were effectively used depicting the traumatic experiences of man and his absurdity. Language also deteriorated and devalued. There is no action and no communication. The general effect is often a nightmare. The protagonist is confused and bewildered as he is too fragile and helpless to confront his environment. Eugene Ionesco and Jean Genet were pioneers of "The Theatre of Absurd Movement". Absurdity is the soul of the Theatre of the Absurd. Ionesco opines that "absurd drama is about the theme of nothingness; the play has no purpose, or objective" (Ionesco 4). Martin Esslin contends that Absurd is devoid of purpose or meaning of life. Esslin observes that in absurd drama "there is no heroism; the protagonist is lonely and rootless; he is totally uprooted from his religion. He is cut off from his metaphysical and transcendental root" (Esslin 20). Absurdity is the result of tension and anxiety of life. Absurdity is the result of anxiety neurosis. Ionesco realized that life is uncertain, everything in the world is uncertain and anxiety is inescapable. He looks confused and bewildered all the time. He is defeated by the external forces. Ionesco defines absurdity thus: "Absurd is that which has no purpose, or goal, or objective" (Ionesco 4). Martin Esslin defines absurdity thus: "Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose....Cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots..." (Ionesco 20). His alienation from society brings pain as he feels tormented. He loses interest in living because he finds life meaningless. Man lacks inner strength to comprehend the mysteries of life and the world around him, he looks confused and bewildered. He is cut off from his roots and stands naked in the cruel and mysterious universe. He is alienated and his quest for life is futile. The tramps of Beckett struggle to question the universe around him. Everything becomes absurd for them even their consciousness. The absurd hero of Beckett and Ionesco lost his identity; he is carried by the tide of events. This "absurd" hero cannot say confidently: "I am myself". Ionesco depicted

the Old Man as an absurd hero in *The Chairs* who says: “I am not myself. I am another. I am the one in the other” (Ionesco 145).

Eugene Ionesco wrote without any specific point of view because, for him, all points of view are useless. Life is projected as hell in which each person is imprisoned in his own private cubicle, invisible and inaudible to others. The so-called communication being nonsense, the world of Ionesco is populated with weak, helpless and artless lost souls who “cannot defend themselves either against machinations of bourgeoisie society...or against the demands of their spouses...or at least of all against their own natures” (Wulbern 143). Genet’s characters live in the world of illusion and when all the layers of illusions are stripped off, the cycle of the corrosion of self is complete. They do not exist at all. Living in the world of illusion, they have no selves, except as illusions, they are not even protagonists, for they do nothing. In fact, the avant-garde theatre of France demolished the very concept of hero. Influenced by it, Ionesco and Edward Albee depicted the angst and absurdity and metaphysical despair of the protagonists. He is bewildered, troubled and obscurely threatened expressing his metaphysical despair because of his alienation from society. Beckett’s characters are, barely able to speak, trying to articulate the approaching void. So the characters are depicted as such victims that they dare not even laugh. The protagonist of Albee merely waits to be “physically or psychologically emasculated, invites his doom with a self-immolation passivity that masochistically converts pain into pleasure” (Hewes 60).

Catharine Hughes (1961) in her article “Ionesco's "Approaches to Truth" published in the *Antioch Review* contended that Ionesco emerged as a revolutionary playwright in Europe bringing incongruity in the theatre and using the devices of paradox, parody and grotesque realism in his plays. Ionesco himself called his play *The Chairs* as a “comedy of comedies”. He observed that human discourse has degenerated into a collection of “empty platitudes”. However, his friends found his plays very amusing and inspired him to stage them for entertainment and laughter. His friend Monique Saint –Come showed the script of the play to the director Nicolas Bataille who was associated to the group of avant-garde theatre of Paris. Ionesco often shared his experiences with his friends and used the term “parody of

theatre” for his play. Ionesco expressed his views thus in *Tulane Drama Review*: "If there is an avant-garde it can be valid only if it is not a vogue. It can be only an instinctive discovery, and a new awareness of forgotten models which require, at each moment, to be discovered anew and rejuvenated" (123). Ionesco's main priority as a playwright was to bring drastic changes in the contemporary theatre. He wrote critical essays and gave his interviews expressing his disgust about the theatre and theatrical techniques. He took inspiration from many writers and philosophers and freely experimented in the anti-theatrical techniques. He turned to Bakhtin, Rabelais, Dostoevsky and Antonin Artaud and borrowed heavily for his plays. Artaud wrote his famous book *The Theatre and its Double* (1935) in which he propounded new theories of comedy and the theatre of cruelty. He was influenced by the antic of Marx Brothers; the film which gave him the idea of the essential comedy of situation. Artaud was discovered new form of comedy in the film; he found the humor of the film poetic and meaningful.

For Artaud the comic situation in Marx Brothers evolves into a revolutionary grotesquerie whose overtones are at once political, social and metaphysical. Michel de Ghelderode was an avant-garde Belgian dramatist who wrote in French like Ionesco. He was the creator of a fantastic and disturbing and created a macabre and cruel world populated by puppets, devils and the ridiculous old women. Michel de Ghelderode was a contemporary of Ionesco who wrote sixty plays and mastered grotesque and burlesque theatre. Ionesco wrote *Fragments of a Journal* and *Notes and Counter Notes* and discussed in detail the anti-theatrical techniques used by Beckett in his plays. In 1970 *Conversations with Eugene Ionesco* appeared containing valuable information about Ionesco's theatre and his experimentation in grotesque and burlesque. Colin Duckworth (197) wrote his *Angels of Darkness: Dramatic Effect in Beckett and Ionesco* in which he hailed Ionesco as one of "France's angels of darkness" (2). Ionesco realized very early in his dramatic career that real drama lies in the dramatization of the extreme exaggeration of the feelings with power to dislocate reality. This was possible only through the disarticulation of language. He writes: "When I manage to detach myself from the world and feel able to take a good look at it, it seems to me comic in its improbability". In all his plays

since the publication of his first play *The Bald Soprano* (1950) his mission was to dramatize comic improbability evolving new anti-theatrical techniques to make absurdity of life dramatically effective. He wanted “to push drama out of that intermediate zone” and to go out “for caricature and the grotesque” rejecting the witty drawing-room comedies.

Ionesco discusses in detail in *Notes and Counter Notes* the new words and phrases used in his plays breaking from the traditional drama. “Everything raised to paroxysm, where the source of tragedy lies. A theatre of violence: violently comic, violently dramatic” (26). It is interesting to observe that the characters of Ionesco were able to discover “a style at once more natural and more exaggerated, something between a realistic character and a marionette”. They give a comical relief throughout the drama as laughter is like a tonic to escape from the anxieties and absurdities of existence. Ionesco borrowed the tools of Bakhtin to give a new form of comedy. Bergson also contended in his essay on *Laughter* that laughter is a suitable tool to get freedom from the anxieties of life. Laughter distances human beings from disappointments and depressions. Ionesco observed that there is only one true way of demystifying: by means of humor, especially if it is “Black”. He used farcical and comical elements in all his plays because the comic empowers a man to endure the tragedy of existence. Ridiculous and “Fantasy can reveal the truth and life is impossible without freedom and humor” (Ionesco, *Notes and Counter Notes* 150).

Ionesco puts faith on grotesque and comic realism and his use of comic is essentially moral. He writes: “As I am writing for the theatre I am only concerned with personifying and incarnating a sense of reality which is both comic and tragic” (150). For Ionesco theatre is a place in which human beings can study and explore the nature of their own actions. He chooses to write comedy fundamentally because it provides greater depth for such study: “A tragic character does not change, he breaks up; he is himself, he is real. Comic Characters are people who do not exist” (150). Erwin Piscator and Bertolt Brecht also made experiments in the comic theatre because they experienced that the comic spirit alone can free human beings from psychological obsession. Piscator was a German director of comic theatre who



revived the burlesque and the grotesque in theatre believing that in the modern world only comedy can save modern man. Ruby Cohn explored the Beckett's comic devices and their impact on the audience. He observed that Beckett used puns, twisted quotations, hyperbole, litotes, irony, jargon, incongruity, parody and paradox in his plays to demonstrate metaphysical problems of modern man. Ionesco and Adamov put faith in grotesque tradition of Bakhtin to confront the absurdities and existential realities of the society. *The Oxford Universal Dictionary* defines grotesque as "A kind of decorative painting or sculpture in which portions of human and animal forms are fantastically interwoven with foliage and flowers". As Otto Von Simson writes in *The Gothic Cathedral*, (1988) "Two aspects of Gothic architecture are without precedent parallel: the use of light and the unique relationship between structure and appearance". American fiction is packed with the episodes of grotesque Heller's *Catch 22*, Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, are some examples.

Eugene Ionesco continued Bakhtin's tradition of grotesque realism in his play *Amedee or How to Get Rid of It* (1954) features many episodes of grotesque in the plot. Ionesco is known for a comedy of anguish and despair as most of his plays depict the existential absurdity of life. Most of his critics discussed and reviewed the plays of Ionesco from the existential perspective. But in this chapter, the plays of Eugene Ionesco are investigated through the mirrors of Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of carnivalesque and grotesque realism. Ionesco has sought to release his unconscious fears common to humanity in every age but the medium of expression is humor, parody and grotesque fun and games. In his choice of themes, Ionesco reduces his material to fundamentals, attaching overwhelmed significance to personal experiences, dreams and the irrational as these alone appear to him to be representative of mankind as a whole. The majority of people believed that there are three important elements of grotesque; distortion of facts, fantasy and ugliness. Briefly stated, grotesque deals with the distorted, fantastic and ugly situations and events and the purpose is always to bring into the limelight the power of comedy and humor. It is interesting to note that people distrust grotesque but the hidden demonic fantasy torments and attract the audience. People try to suppress the shadow because

they don't want to confront the central problem in society. Grotesque realism has become a major tool in literature and in drama Ionesco and Edward Albee wrote plays that were great success on the stage. The tradition of grotesque realism in art and literature is followed by many prominent writers today. Wolfgang, Kayser, Philip Thomson have written books on grotesque realism.

Ionesco created the grotesque situation in his famous play *Amedee* introducing the corpse in the plot. The critics raised hue and cry against the theatricality of Ionesco but on the stage the drama was a grand success and Ionesco was successful in upsetting all conventions and habits of the past. Ionesco commented thus in *The Alma Impromptu*: "The creator himself is the only valid witness to his own time, he discovers it in himself, he alone, mysteriously and freely, expresses it" (123). Ionesco had the courage to dramatize the nightmares experienced by modern man on the stage with a passion to depict reality of existential absurdity.

Ionesco dramatizes strange and disconcerting and creates a world of dream and delirium. He has evolved a theatre of decomposition because modern life is decomposed and disintegrating. In Ionesco's world man is left alone to live with a void and to suffer an endless despair. He has the alternative to laugh at the existential realities and to drink the cup of sufferings laughingly. The tools of grotesque, parody and burlesque help Ionesco to dramatize the gradual decomposing of life and its values. Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus*, use logical language to express the illogical so Ionesco uses the broken communication to depict the plight of the characters engulfed in the whirlpool of absurdity and nausea. Ionesco wrote *The Chairs* in 1951 after his success of the play *The Bald Soprano*. He called this drama as a "tragic farce" expressing his firm faith in the power of the ridiculous and grotesque. The plot of the play deals with issue to be human in the harsh and contradictory absurd world. There are only two characters in the drama and it may be viewed as an attempt of an old couple at self-realization after a life of failure and defeat. The play echoes the anti-dramatic techniques of Beckett such as vaudevillian characters, old and sick characters living in the desolate space. They live in a place where bad smell is suffocating as the Old Woman says: "There's a bad smell from

that stagnant water and besides the mosquitoes is coming in” (Eugene Ionesco, *The Chairs* 1). The place in the drama is circular room surrounded by water. The Old Man is aged ninety five and the Old Woman is of ninety four years old. The Old Man and Old Woman review their past memories and as the plot progresses the past is mixed with the present. In the very beginning of the novel the Old Man confesses his failures in life: “I’m all spoiled...my career is spoiled. The stage is so much crowded that the Old Man is lost in the crowd”. He expresses his agony thus: “I am not myself. I am another. I am one in the other” (18). Ionesco gives the imagery of dirt, smell and darkness in the exposition of the drama to depict a world in disorder and chaos. As the play progresses the comic power of Ionesco intensifies as the Old Man bursts out ironically:

OLD WOMAN [*laughing*]: At last we laughed like idiots, at last arrived all bare, we laughed, the *trunk*, the trunk full of rice, the rice on the belly, on the ground. (Ionesco 23)

The critics of Ionesco observe that the play is an allegory; the Old Man and Old Woman are portrayed as Adam and Eve of the Garden of Eden. His play *Rhinoceros* too is an allegorical tale since it narrates the herd mentality of the people following the ideology of fascism and Nazi power in Romania. The tale of the Old Man and Old Woman is full of depression and frustration. The protagonists are nameless and are depicted as man and woman who have lost charms of life and are leading a routine insipid life. They are living in a post-apocalyptic world of nothingness similar to the world of Beckett’s *Endgame*. The Old Woman is extremely worried about her dismal future; she is too old to grapple with the existential despair. She articulates his sickness in a lyrical manner thus:

Doctor, Doctor, I feel squeamish, I have hot flashes, I feel sick, I've aches and pains, I haven't any feeling in my feet, I've caught cold in my eyes, I've a cold in my fingers, I'm suffering from liver trouble, Doctor, Doctor! ... (Ionesco 11)

Antonin Artaud in his *Theatre and its Double* propounded new theory of drama. He rejected realism in theatre. Artaud propagated the ideas of magic beauty

and mythical power as he wanted the theatre to be a source of awareness. He wanted the playwrights to revive old myths and folk tales. He created plays evolving collective archetypes and myths. The purpose of theatre should be to excavate the inner world of the characters. The dramatist should coin new words and phrases, to achieve a sensation effect. Theatre should express the inexpressible sufferings and anxieties of human beings. Artaud was very serious to comprehend the nature of memory images and their role in theatre. He compared these memory images to the effects of plague in his book *The Theatre and Its Double* (1974):

The plague takes dormant images, latent disorder and suddenly carries them to the point of the most extreme gestures. Theatre also takes gestures and develops them to the limit. Just like the plague, it re-forges the links between what does and does not exist in material nature. (Artaud 18)

Artaud believed that traditional drama was theme based drama dealing with the universal issues confronting humanity. The plays of Greek and Shakespeare had holistic effect. It is recorded that when Ionesco was in the college he came under the influence of Mallarme and the other French Symbolists. Ionesco made many innovations in the form and structure of drama. He creates new type of characters, the climax is abrupt and unconventional and characterization is absurd and grotesque.

The major theme of emptiness of life is depicted in the plot of the drama. Ionesco gives a graphic picture of the real life lived by the old couple. He has not taken up the young characters but old man and woman who have experienced all the kicks of life. The drama is a true tale of human life on this planet; life is hellish, boring and full of defeats and trials and tribulations and the only way to escape the futility of life is suicide. The old couple struggles to escape from the sordid and mundane realities by way of inviting all people in their house. The party symbol is used by Ionesco in imitation of Mrs. Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*. The Old Man is sick of life and is haunted by the memories of failure and defeats and loss:

Old MAN: Do you understand? We could have had the pleasure of sharing, joy, beauty, eternity. ..an eternity ...Why didn't we dare? We weren't brave enough. .. Everything is lost, lost, lost. (11)

*The Chairs* gives Ionesco's vision of death. When he was two years old his sister Marilina was born but she died at the very young age. Her death gave a traumatic shock to Ionesco who formed a pessimistic and nihilistic vision of life and death. Loss of life, inevitability of death remains a continual thematic reference point in all his plays and the ending of *The Chairs* is also based on his vision of death. The emptiness of death is portrayed through the empty chairs, empty of people and the menace of emptiness engulfing all the visitors. Ionesco expressed his vision of emptiness of life in his *Notes and Counter Notes* thus: "What is needed is plenty of gesture, almost pantomime...to create this emptiness, so that it grows and devours everything: absence can only be created in opposition to things present" (Ionesco 189). Ionesco conveyed the same message in his play *Exit the King* that the end of life is similar to the end of the world and the reality of life is obvious as after death the world and its people forget man forever. He goes into history. Anne Violette Cirella (1998) observes that there is no life outside the world of *The Chairs*; the home of the old couple is a dingy cell "full of ghosts" (Ionesco *The Chairs* 171). The old couple has no contact with the outside with the outside world. The sound of a boat carrying invisible guests is only presented onstage symbolizing a void and emptiness of life. The chairs are brought in large numbers but here are no people sitting on the chairs; the audience hears only sounds of voices and the old couple also interacts with the invisible people entering through the door. Ionesco seriously devoted himself to confront absurdity of life as he expressed his views in an interview that "every message of despair is the statement of a situation from which everybody must freely try to find a way out". Martin Esslin observed that the Theatre of the Absurd is packed with "frivolities, grotesquerie, and irreverence" but in spite of all these elements the theatre of Ionesco performed the function of religion (*The Theatre of the Absurd*, 293). The critical analysis of the text reveals that Ionesco has structured the drama through the images of knowledge, change, redemption and restoration of order. The imagery of "wildness" in the plot is very

effective. In the First Scene the Old Woman evokes the mood of winter symbolizing death and decay:

OLD WOMAN: You can't see them, there's no sunlight, it's nighttime, my darling.

OLD MAN: There are still shadows. [*He leans out very far.*]

OLD WOMAN [*pulling him in with all her strength*]: Oh! ... you're frightening me, my darling....come sit down, you won't be able to see them come, anyway. There's no use trying. It's dark...[*The Old Man reluctantly lets himself be pulled in.*]

OLD MAN: *I wanted to see—you know how much I love to see the water.* (Eugene Ionesco, *The Chairs 2*)

Ionesco has borrowed the name Semiramis from old civilization of Babylonia and this name is given to the Old Woman who is presented as mother to the Old Man. Interestingly, the Old Woman has full control over the activities of the Old Man who admits her influence on his mind and sensibility in his speech:

OLD WOMAN: Around, around, my little pet. [*Silence.*] Ah! yes, you've certainly a fine intellect. You are very gifted, my darling. You could have been head president, head king, or even head doctor, or head general, if you had wanted to, if only you'd had a little ambition in life...(2)

The Old Woman has acute sense of loss and the knowledge of the coming of civilization. She narrates the story of her life many times with the oft repeated words: “Then at last we arrived...”. In the Third Scene the Old Man expresses his disgust over the old story narrated by his wife so many times about the beginning of their love and the arrival in the city seventy years ago:

OLD WOMAN: For all of the seventy-five years that we've been married, every single evening, absolutely every blessed evening, you've made me tell the same story, you've made me imitate the same

people, the same months. ..always the same ...let's talk about something else. ..(3)

Ionesco introduces the images of darkness, dissolution and defeat as the Old Woman gives a suitable reply to her old husband. The Old Woman is seriously concerned with the life and long journey of the Old Man. She finds the world chaotic and disorderly but she uses the language of grotesque and burlesque:

OLD WOMAN: You are very gifted. If you had had a little ambition in life you could have been head king, head journalist, head comedian, head general. ..All that's gone' down the drain, alas. ..down the old black drain. ..down the old drain, I tell you [*Silence*]. (Ionesco 45)

Ionesco uses the tools of irony, wit, humor and grotesque realism through the eventful struggles of the life of Old Man. The Old Woman is proud of the epical struggles of the Old Man and urges her to continue the struggles of life but all her exhortations are expressed in the farcical language. For her he is the darling of his life: "Oh, my darling, you are really so fine!" (3). She encourages him to be bold and courageous in life since he must carry out the message. Zoran Milutinovi comments thus: "Like meaning, the audience is awaited and welcomed, but the actual audience sees that in fact, there is nothing, and that to await either the audience or the meaning of the Orator's speech is a delusion" (Milutinovi 338). The Old Man is guilt ridden as we hear his poignant cry being haunted by the memory of his mother:

OLD MAN: I let my mother die all alone in a ditch. She called after me, moaning feebly: "My little child, my beloved son, don't leave me to die all alone...Stay with me. I don't have much time left." Don't worry, Mamma, I told her, I'll be back in a moment. ..I was in a hurry. ..I was going to the ball, to dance. I will be back in a minute. (Ionesco 30)

Ionesco dramatizes the theme of nothingness in *The Chairs*. The Old Man develops intimacy with Belle representing the white goddess. He develops sexual

relationships with Belle and his actions are parody of sexuality. Belle's red woolen stockings, the holes in her petticoat, her licentious and erotic sexual gestures are dramatized in a grotesque style by Ionesco. Belle exposes her breasts but the Old Man recollects his romantic days of his married life:

OLD WOMAN [*to the Photo-engraver*]: We had one son. .. of course, he's still alive. ..he's gone away. ..

OLD MAN: ...As for me I was an ungrateful son myself. ..

OLD WOMAN: He said to me: "You kill birds! Why do you kill birds?" ...."You're lying, you've betrayed me! The streets are full of dead birds.... We couldn't hold him back. As he went we could still hear him calling: "It's you who are responsible. (Ionesco 29)

The romantic adventures of the Old Man are a parody of the heroic deeds of the great heroes. The old couple hires an Orator believing that he will convey their message to the world but at the end of the drama all hopes are shattered as the Orator is unable to convey the last message of the old couple. They lived with emptiness and died in emptiness as no message is conveyed and they remain uneasy along with the audience. Ronald Hayman (1975) opines that the audience is moved and amused at the grotesque situation created by Ionesco at the end of the drama: "The situation is one in which we cannot but recognize our own weaknesses, by the extreme grotesqueness of what is happening with such a very old man and such a very old woman makes it all the funnier and all the more touching" (Hayman 45). In *The Chairs* Ionesco explores the husband and wife relationships and interestingly like other plays the wife is presented both as a wife and a mother. In his play *Exit the King* Marguerite and Bérenger act as husband and wife and in *Amedee*, Madeline and Amédée are two important characters performing the role of the husband and wife. The Old Man reverts back to dependence on his wife in the last scene when confronted with imminent death. In the first scene of the play the audience watches him "seating on the lap of the Old Woman" (13) like a child. There is a sense of loyalty and commitment even in the mouth of death:



OLD WOMAN: ...Rot together. ...

OLD MAN: Alas! ...alas! ...

OLD WOMAN: Alas! ...alas! ...

OLD MAN: ...Our corpses will fall far from each other, and we will rot in an aquatic solitude. ..Don't pity us over much.

OLD WOMAN: What will be, will be! (25)

Ionesco dramatizes a grotesque situation as an old couple is seen busy making arrangements for the arrival of guests. A hired Orator is ready to deliver their last message to the world. The entire stage is filled with the chairs as the old woman is busy in bringing the chairs for the guests. The real action begins on the arrival of the king:

OLD MAN (to the king): . . . I alone could have

OLD MAN (to the king): . . . I alone could have saved humanity, who is so sick . . . had I had the opportunity to communicate my message.... (54)

Ionesco highlights his philosophical vision of the world through the character of Old Man who is serious to save humanity through a message that remains unknown to the audience till the end of the drama. He had the passion to save humanity that is sick but lacks the real courage like the protagonists. The old woman is a woman of exceptional tastes. She appreciates sun and snow, rain and sky and is very much conscious of happiness. Ironically, her soul searching husband is suffering from existential despair. Ionesco has put many questions about life, death; emptiness of existence and of sick humanity but the end of the drama doesn't lead to any solution or consolation as there remains only danger, fear and emptiness:

OLD MAN: We shall not be forgotten. The eternal Emperor will remember us, always.

OLD WOMAN [*echo*]: Always.

OLD MAN: We will leave some traces, for we are people and not cities.

OLD MAN AND OLD WOMAN [*together*]: We will have a street named after us.

OLD MAN: Let us be united in time and in eternity, even if we are not together in space, as we were in adversity: let us die at the same moment. ..(26)

In the last scene the Orator is preparing to deliver the message of the old couple but the situation takes a decisive turn as the couple is preparing to throw themselves into the sea.

OLD MAN: We will leave some traces, for we are people and not cities. TOGETHER: We will have a street named after us. Death is inevitable for them but they do affirm mutual dependence and love for each other. (34)

They are betrayed by the Orator who appears deaf and dumb “helpless” to communicate the last message meant to be delivered to the visitors. He simply writes on a blackboard:

AADIEU ADIEU APA. But there is no reaction from his audience. Sensing failure, he leaves. It is only then that "We hear for the first time the human noises of the invisible crowd; these are bursts of laughter, murmurs, shh's, ironical coughs. (78)

The crowd cries in despair and voice of the Orator is a "cry in the wilderness". Ionesco wrote thus in *New York Times*: "The characters I have used are not fully conscious of their spiritual rootlessness, but they feel it instinctively and emotionally. They feel 'lost' in the world; something is missing which they cannot, to their grief, supply". They are lonely and cut off from their roots being the victims of self-deception in *The Chairs*. Ionesco's Old Man and Old Woman fail to save the world and their sacrifice goes futile. Their death symbolizes futility of life and nothingness gripping the psyche of the people of the world. Ionesco introduced full

length comedy *Amedee* depicting the theme of anti-spiritual victory. Edwin T. Williams (1962) in his article “Cervantes and Ionesco and Dramatic Fantasy” published in *Hispania* observes that Ionesco borrowed the elements of burlesque, parody and fantasy from Cervantes. The main theme of Ionesco’s *Amedee or How to Get Rid of It* is the theme of futility and meaningless of human being struggling to escape from sordid existence. The plot of the drama is structured around the theme of futility prevalent in the relationship of Amedee and Madeleine. Ionesco took up the theme of universal degeneration, stagnation and decadence and used the comic elements to present the pervasive vogue of such anguish. Coe criticized Ionesco for dramatizing “abstract humanism” (123). But in reality Ionesco presents the real human condition through concrete images expressed in flesh and blood.

In his *Notes and Counter Notes* Ionesco observed that he was “obsessed by death and death-like existence brought about by the impossibility of communication, isolation and encirclement” (227). His play *Amedee* deals with the themes of love, death, wonder, suffering and dreams depicted through Bakhtian techniques of burlesque, grotesque and carnivalesque. In the very opening of the scene Amedee is presented as a timid soul who has been imprisoned in a small cell of his apartment for the last fifteen years. When the curtain rises Amedee Buccinioni is seen walking nervously round and about the furniture, he is a middle age, “a petit bourgeois” perfectly bald and too possessive of Madeleine who lashes at his male domination: “I don’t belong to myself any more. I’m not myself any more, I’m a slave...” (Eugene Ionesco, *Amedee* 7). The play begins in a mood of pessimism and fear as Ionesco presents a strange and fantastic situation of two lovers involved in the murder of a man and the terror of life has been haunting them for the last fifteen years. Amedee realizes that “this life’s not worth living!” (17). The presentation of the corpse in the drama intensifies the fear of death and Amedee is threatened by the mushrooming of the corpse, “six inches in twenty minutes!” (27) and Madeleine is sick of the growing nails of the corpse: “As he’s still growing, he must still be feeling spiteful. He still has grudge against us. The dead are terribly vindictive. The living forget much sooner” (19). The sprouting of the poisonous mushrooms in the flat makes Madeleine sick and depressed. The terror that man experiences springs

from the senselessness of death rather than fear of the process of death. Since death, however, is devoid of meaning, then the significance of all that goes before it too has been destroyed.

The presentation of the corpse in *Amedee* is a materialization of the oppressive presence of death. Amedee is living in death-like existence, irony, paradox are powerful tools used by Ionesco to depict the failures and stagnation and menace of death. Amedee is a writer but the oppressive and menacing environment prevents him to write something creative in life. Rosette C. Lamont observes that "The corpse itself reflects more intensely what is essentially tragic about the human condition" (42). There is futility in Amedee's work as a playwright since he wrote only two speeches in fifteen years: "Do you think it will do?" and "It won't do by itself". The corpse is very active and growing and the liberty of the lovers is being invaded every day and night. Both Madeleine and Amedee have totally forgotten how the corpse first made its appearance in their bedroom. The corpse and its growing tendency becomes an obsession with the couple. The incongruities in the drama are plenty and Amedee is observed making cries of futility. He is confronted by the oppressive forces of death and is trapped in a universe ruthless and full of derision. *Amedee* is packed with a number of grotesque strands. The first scene of the drama describes a mysterious grotesque situation; a married couple has a hidden dead body in their bedroom to escape the net of the police. Ionesco uses the tools of fantasy and magic realism as the corpse is described growing creating the comic atmosphere in the drama. The post man appears and Madeleine and Amedee try to play dead. Amedee is startled to note that the dead body is suffering "geometrical progression [...] the incurable disease of the dead" (52). The married couple struggle to remove the dead body from their bedroom forever. Ionesco tells the audience that Amedee killed the man out of jealousy believing that his wife had illicit relations with the man he killed. Madeleine openly confesses that they have been living abnormally like "the prisoners, like criminals" (60-61). The lovers have become prisoners in their own house as all the time they are under threat of being arrested by the police. They remain outside and they spend most of the time in discussing the

killed man. Amedee and Madeleine “discuss him; reminisce about him” trying to recall who he was (61-64). Amedee gives the blame for the failure of his life on to the dead man. The situation becomes grotesque and farcical as the dead man is discussed in all the scenes of the drama. He is living in each scene even after death. He creates a nuisance in their house but they are forced to tolerate his nuisance fearing the arrest and the eventual death punishment:

MADELEINE: It'll be quite impossible if he makes them grow in here too. If he's not satisfied with his own room, we won't be able to go on living in this place at all! (34)

Ionesco unravels the truth in a slow and systematic manner.

MADELEINE: It doesn't sound like you at all, not like your real self! [*Pointing to the body*] It's his fault. It all comes from him. *He* must have given you the idea. It's *his* world, not *ours*. (178)

Madeleine and Amedee discuss the handsome personality of the dead man and they highly praise his physical features: start admiration of the dead man, “He was handsome. He's too old now” (45). Ionesco created two ambiguities in the plot of the drama. It is quite baffling that Amedee is highly impressed by the handsome appearance of the man whom he killed in a fit of jealousy. It is quite ludicrous that Amedee put the corpse of the dead man in his bedroom on his first night after marriage. Amedee’s behavior is ridiculous and provokes laughter. The inversion most notable here is the preference for ensuring the best for the dead rather than for the living. Amedee and Madeleine hoped that the dead body would forgive them but the corpse assumes the terrifying form because the body is still growing (grotesque body):

AMEDEE: He may have forgiven us. I believe he has.

MADELEINE: If he'd forgiven us, he'd have stopped growing. As he's still growing, he must still be feeling spiteful. He still has a grudge against us. The dead are terribly vindictive. The living forget much sooner. (43)

Mikhail Bakhtin observes in his *Rabelais and His World* that ambivalence is an important element of grotesque. Amedee is full of anxiety and looks terrified at the mushrooming of the corpse. Madeleine's scornful response intensifies the menacing atmosphere in the drama. It is quite improbable that a corpse can grow but Ionesco has the dramatic powers to make the audience believe this creating a willing suspension of disbelief. The growth of the nails, beard and the size of the corpse gives shock waves to the audience but at the same time the young enjoy the dramatization of grotesque by Ionesco.

AMEDEE: He's grown again. Soon, the divan won't be big enough for him. [...] I seem to remember fifteen years ago he was rather short. And so young. Now he's got a great white beard. He's quite imposing with that white beard. (38)

The growth of the body creates dilemma in Amedee who has watched the dead boy breaking the window with its head. Madeleine wants the corpse to be folded in two and the entire scene evokes comic entertainment to the audience:

AMEDEE: He's growing. It's quite natural. He's branching out.

MADELEINE: What do you take him for, a tree? [...] (195, 39)

In the Second Scene, Amedee and Madeleine look “restless as they are pacing on the floor out of the bedroom” (38). The audience doesn't see the dead body and Ionesco builds the atmosphere of intrigue and suspense. The audience could see only a large foot at the corner of the bed. The green light emanating from the dead man gives the visual image of the corpse (39). Ionesco invented the latest dramatic techniques to make the grotesque effective and credible. He introduced the exaggerated occurrences as the stage directions indicate that “the dead man's feet should jerk periodically during Act Second” (55). Ionesco directed that “a green glow should be emitted from the bedroom” (79) giving unpleasant effect. Amedee is shocked to know that the light is coming from the body's green eyes. The dead body is made to sing without movement of the mouth and Amedee “believes the sound is escaping through the ears” (79). All these new anti-theatrical techniques are essential part of the terrifying strands of the grotesque style. This horror is

intensified by these anti-theatrical devices as the stage directions clearly indicate a number of incompatibilities. The novelty of the play lies in the amalgamation of horror and beauty, creating ambivalence. In Act Two Madeleine talks of the neighbors: "They're there all right. No fear of that. In their flats, with their ears glued to the walls or the floorboards, or at their windows, peering out, perhaps, behind the curtains ... or downstairs, in silent groups, standing round the concierge..." (69). Amedee accuses her of exaggeration. Madeleine's manic concern about the neighbors can be compared with Amedee's odd behavior and self-interest. An acerbic tongue of Madeleine is an important factor in the speeches. She is always annoyed by her, Amedee who has no satisfactory answer for the murder of the handsome person. Madeleine's distress is multiplying because she is confined to their small apartment with a continually growing body. Amedee's ability to find excuses is again very interesting. Madeleine goes on becoming depressed as the plot progresses:

AMEDEE: Yes, Madeleine, you're right. Anyone else could manage better than I do. I'm like a helpless child, I'm defenseless. I'm a misfit ... I wasn't made to live in the twentieth century. (56)

Amedee hurls abuses on Madeleine in frustration and fears. In the first scene Amedee evokes sympathy but as the plot progresses the abuse of Amedee is highlighted. Bakhtin states, "Abuse reveals the other, true face of the abused, it tears off his disguise and mask" (197). By allowing Madeleine's use abuses exposes the real Amedee hidden behind the mask. Ionesco dramatizes the grotesque elements in Acts One and Two of *Amedee*. The scenes are terrifying, grotesque and menacing as the dead body begins growing. The lay emerges as an allegory of the married couple hiding the murder of Madeleine's supposed lover. Amedee's suffocating dependency on his wife lead to their unhappiness and disharmony. Ionesco relies on two major elements of grotesque; the abnormal and exaggeration.

In Ionesco's *Rhinoceros* the human body begins changing shape and nature. Amedee is dead tired and is hardly able to chalk mark the routine growth of the dead body. Amedee and Madeleine waste their energy shifting the furniture to clear the dead body. Richard M. Eastman (1961) in his article: "Experiment and Vision in

Ionesco's Plays" published in *Modern Drama* observes that "For Amedee and Madeleine, the corpse has become a chronic alibi, a vengeful terror, a jailer, a shameful fascination" (12). Madeleine urges Amedee to break your rule. Have a glass of wine, go on, you look so miserable!". Amedee acts passively as he restrains from answering back his wife being a hen-pecked husband. He tries to assure her "We've still got some food in reserve, Madeleine! Macaroni, mustard, vinegar, celery". Ionesco mingles farcical elements with nightmarish elements. The audience is shocked to know the muddled world of Amedee and Madeleine. Interestingly Ionesco has developed the dead body as a powerful symbol in the drama to dramatize the moral and spiritual sterility of modern man. Madeleine constantly nags Amedee provoking laughter in the play and becoming the main center of information: No Sir, there are no gas chambers left since the last war... You'd better wait for the next time" (54). The postman is whisked off who could not understand all the experiences of the concentration camps of the Nazis and the hint to the traumatic and lonely existence which Madeleine is leading. On the stage a curious duet begins, a tragic lyric is sung invoking the past episodes of the death camps built by the Nazis:

AMEDEE: Madeline, wake up. Curtains, Let's pull the curtains, the spring is dawning... Wake up... the room is flooded with sunshine... a glorious light... a gentle warmth! (34)

Madeleine and Amedee are married people as they love each other representing Adam and Eve. They have many differences but in spite of their mutual differences each one of them is dependent upon the other. Madeleine sings a song to express her love for Amedee:

AMEDEE: We love each other. We are happy. In a house of glass, a house of light...

MADELEINE: He means a house of brass, brass!...:

AMEDEE: House of glass, of light!...

MADELEINE: House of brass, house of night!...



AMEDEE: Of glass, of light, of glass, of light...

MADELEINE: Of brass, of brass, of night, of brass, of night...

AMEDEE: Of glass, glass, glass...(29)

Madeleine has discovered the secret of her hollow existence. She is haunted by a sense of insecurity, suffers mental tortures as impending doom threatens her all the time. She is leading a life of nothingness and is stuck in a small dark and dingy flat haunted by the growing corpse. The time has come to get rid of the dead body and for Amedee the moment is pleasant and harmonious: "Our home will soon quite empty when he's gone... He's been the silent witness of our whole past..." (31). Amedee goes to the window and looks at the blank sky oblivious of his wife's growing frenzy and restlessness. Ionesco dramatizes the atmosphere of horror and beauty through the images of grotesque creating suspense and ambivalence. The images of luminous mushrooms are contrasted with the radiance of the dead man like the Gothic novels. The image of the glowing sky creates the atmosphere of wonder and romance; Look, Madeleine...all the acacia trees are aglow. Their blossoms are bursting open and shooting up to the sky. The full blown moon is flooding the Heavens with light, a living planet. The Milky Way is like creamy fire...And space, space, infinite space! (45). Ionesco is at his best in Act II as he gives the visual pictures of the real carnival. Amedee is presented on the stage dragging the corpse into Little Torco Square. The sound of the Jazz music and the shrilling sounds of the cabaret dances create the scene of the pure carnival. A drunken American soldier appears directing Amedee the way to become a human spool to wind up the flaccid corpse. Many soldiers appear on the stage to chase Amedee. The girls appear, whistles, applause create demonic sounds. Amedee makes a farewell historical speech: "...I wanted to take the weight of the world on my shoulders...I apologize, Ladies and Gentlemen, I apologize profusely" (67). The audience and Madeleine enter into the cabaret hall to enjoy dance and drinks; the hilarious comedy is over and the carnival is in full bloom. Amedee is a dramatist who has created like Ionesco the true nature of the grotesque realism on the stage dramatizing a world without weight. The message of Ionesco is clear that the theatre must renounce all arrogance and violence depicting the real scenes of the carnival

since in such free atmosphere the real absurdity of life can be expressed and overcome. For Ionesco the drama is a medium to devalue the intellect and to accept life with all its challenges.

To conclude, in both the plays, *The Chairs* and *Amedee* Ionesco used anti-theatrical techniques to depict the collapsing social world and the terror of absurdity, fear and anxiety engulfing the modern generation. Ionesco invented new techniques of grotesque realism such as abuse, ambiguity, exaggeration and inversion in the plot of the plays. In *The Chairs* (1951), Ionesco uses the tools of grotesque realism in an absurd style. The setting of the play is at once an uncanny and mysterious exciting romance and wonder of the Gothic tales. The play starts with the stage direction “The Old Man is on the stool leaning out the window” (Ionesco, *The Chairs* 4). Edward Albee appeared in the American Theatre in 1959 and depicted the theme of loss and human depression and used suicide as a tool to dramatize the metaphysical theme of human despair. Ionesco evolved new theory of the comic based on its potential for dislocation. He wrote in *Notes and Counter Notes* thus: “For my part, I have never understood the difference people make between the comic and the tragic. As the comic is an intuitive perception of the absurd, it seems to me more hopeless than the tragic. The comic offers no escape” (26-27). Ionesco was influenced by Surrealism as he observed that the surrealist element of comedy could be found in everyday life. For Ionesco the comic is the “unusual pure and simple; nothing surprises me more than banality; the surreal is there, within our reach in our daily conversation” (165). Ionesco was fascinated by the theatrical medium because he was convinced that the stage was the only platform to articulate anxieties and tensions of life through the comic devices. The best medicine to relieve the distress of life is the laughter and detachment. The threads of the comic and farcical create ambivalent atmosphere in the drama as the audience are confused when they brood over the contradictory attitude of Amedee. The presence of dead body in *Amedee* excites the interest of the audience and becomes the main source of comic laughter. Ionesco builds the grotesque atmosphere through the images of the growing corpse and green eyes in *Amedee*. The themes of anxiety, guilt and murder are presented through the grotesque images in the play *The Chairs*. The Old Man develops intimacy with Belle representing the white goddess. He develops sexual

relationships with Belle and his actions are parody of sexuality. Belle's red woolen stockings, the holes in her petticoat, her licentious and erotic sexual gestures are dramatized in a grotesque style by Ionesco.

## **Chapter: Four**

### **Existential Breakdown in Albee's *The Zoo Story* and *The Goat or Who is Sylvia?***

Edward Albee was greatly impacted by Beckett and his theory of broken communication depicted in his plays such as *Endgame* and *Waiting for Godot*. In their struggle to escape from self, both Estragon and Vladimir become the victims of schizophrenic tendencies. It is a psychotic disorder or a group of disorders marked by severely impaired thinking, emotions and behavior. Generally, Vladimir and Estragon lose their ability to take care of personal needs and grooming. There is a disconnection between their thoughts and actions which further causes loss of personality, agitation, unusual behavior and loss of touch with reality. The characters of Edward Albee of *The Zoo Story*, *A Delicate Balance* and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* are suffering from delusions, hallucinations, disorganized and incoherent speech, and several emotional abnormalities which are the implications of their absurdity. Edward Albee through the Theatre of the Absurd highlighted man's fundamental bewilderment and confusion, stemming from the fact that man has no answers to the basic existential questions: "Why we are alive, why we have to die, why there is injustice and suffering?"

#### **Emergence of the Theory of Existentialism**

For the existentialists like Jean -Paul Sartre, Albert Camus and Karl Jaspers, failure is the fate of man whose every project is doomed. In this situation action is futile and aspiration absurd. The existentialists thus gave eloquent expression to the current metaphysics of despair. A representative of the "lost intellectual", the existentialist hero is introspective, subjective, and tormented by doubt. Being lost and fragmented, the neurotic protagonist who, like the neurotic characters of Kafka's novels, lives in a cosmos without direction, meaning or purpose.

The Existentialists argued that failure is inevitable fate of man. Nature is cruel to man and the forces of nature always work against the wishes of man. Sufferings in life are inescapable. Each project of man is doomed. In this situation

action is futile and aspiration absurd. Sartre wrote *Nausea* (1938), *Being and Nothingness* (1943) *No Exit* (1944) and *Existentialism is Humanism* (1946). In his *Nausea* Sartre observed that man must use his freedom to escape nausea. Death is inescapable and it is an event of absurdity. He depicted the nature of fractured identity of man thus: “I want to leave, I am out of place, I don’t know where I should go, it seems there is no place left for me, it seems I am unwanted” (Sartre 2). Sartre demolished all religious principles that sustained mankind since ages, his destructive ideas about being and nothingness plunged people into darkness and pessimism. Albert Camus published *The Stranger* (1942), *The Fall* (1956), *A Happy Death* (1972). He concluded that suicide is the only philosophical problem confronting man in the present time. Thus Sartre and Camus depicted the metaphysical despair of contemporary man. Man was considered as a lost intellectual groping in the darkness. The protagonists of Camus are lost and fragmented anti-heroes. They suffer disintegration of self and are presented always struggling to escape death and despair. They are like the neurotic protagonists of Kafka’s novels living in a world that is directionless and meaningless.

Edward Albee appeared in the American Theatre in 1959 and depicted the theme of loss and human depression. The drama is filled with the tools of Bakhtin as Albee dramatizes the theme of human despair and alienation through the comic vision of Bakhtin. Albee appeared at a time when both Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller had already passed their zenith. He published his first play *The Zoo Story* in 1958 and since then he dazzled the audience winning his third Pulitzer Prize in 1991 for *Three Tall Women*. In 2000 he won the Tony Award for his play *The Goat or Who Is Sylvia?* (2000). Albee’s career has spanned almost half a century and it has seen many ups and downs in terms of quality. Albee’s appearance proved very lucky for the American theatre since he appeared at a time when America was desperately looking for a new playwright. As C. W. E Bigsby observes, “If Edward Albee had not existed he would most certainly have been invented” (Bigsby 249). When he emerged in 1959, the theatre was in its usual state of crisis. There was a crisis which went much deeper than the apparent decline or actual disappearance of the major dramatists of the previous period. Albee seized the occasion and became the American playwright of the 1960’s. Albee successfully blended the realistic with

the surreal supplying the feast of comic laughter to the audience. Albee's *The Zoo Story* appeared in New York, on January 14, 1960 and reacted against the plays and the conventions of O'Neill and Arthur Miller. Albee's *The Zoo Story* depicted the psychological pain and despair of the people. The performance of the play surprised the drama critics of America as Albee depicted unconventional themes of alienation and anxiety of people. The mood of the youth was of frustration and despair since they found the illusion of progress and good life false and misleading. The young generation lashed at the very foundations of the American Dream. The early fifties were the period of the cold war. The feeling of deep disillusionment, the growing sense of nihilism characteristic of World War II, found its place in the American drama from a new perspective. Albee was inspired by the Theatre of the Absurd as he borrowed heavily from the French dramatists Ionesco, Genet and Beckett. But he made new innovations in drama and turned to Bakhtin for the comic tools. The new themes and challenges of the American Society were depicted in *The Zoo Story* with new methods and techniques.

Albee realized that the situation after World War II was very grim. He could not express the poignant alienation of the contemporary youth with the techniques of Miller and the realist drama. He needed new modes of expression, new settings, new plot structures and new imagery to depict the struggles of the individuals. He was considered as a pioneer of the American version of the contemporary Theatre of the Absurd which had dominated the European scene for some time. Following Ionesco, Beckett and Genet, Albee highlights the absurdity of human existence, despair involved in the process of living and the constant threat to the failure of humanness in man by the failure of sex, love and communication. For Albee, however, these are not the attendant problems of a metaphysical or religious world as they are to Beckett, Pinter and Ionesco, but the result of a sick culture. Martin Esslin called The Theatre of Absurd as a literature of "verbal nonsense". Albee borrowed heavily from Beckett, Ionesco to give a fresh outlook to the contemporary situation. Genet and Albee have no story or plot and are "peopled with almost mechanical puppets". Albee combines laughter with dark humor; juxtaposes reality with grotesque and dramatizes the frustrations of modern man through the tools of burlesque behavior of the characters. Nicolle comments thus:

Here is the dramatic mirror which shows us the basic Absurdities of present day men, able to achieve undreamt of wonders by the application of their scientific imagination and yet the constant prey of devouring thoughts and passions: here are the human beings so proud of their ability to communicate with each other, delineated in such a manner as to demonstrate the meaninglessness of their life. (Nicolle 5)

John Gassner explored all the elements of the grotesque and the burlesque that influenced Edward Albee when he wrote *The Zoo Story* and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*. On the surface level Albee followed Albert Camus and the Absurd Art, but there is always an effort on the part of the dramatist to expose and ridicule the absurdity of life. For Camus: "The absurd describes a universe divested of illusions and lights. In this universe man is cut off from all his roots, he is alien to his religion and metaphysics. Myths and old stories don't sustain him. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of the lost home or the hope of a promised land" (Camus xii). Albee took these themes in all his plays; he ridiculed the success myth, the image of American manhood and the institution of marriage. Albee's *The Zoo Story* brought him world-wide recognition since he borrowed heavily from the Theatre of the Absurd. It is a drama of language. It is quite interesting that Albee uses the tools of Bakhtin to structure the plot of the drama. Jean Gould aptly comments: "He had spoken out at last, telling the truth in sweeping indictment of the world as he had found it, a world that made conformity a virtue and nonconformity a vice, a disease" (Gould 277). Albee soon realized that human life after the World War II had been threatened by many socio-political factors. With the loss of self in the contemporary literature, the protagonist is a schizoid personality. No wonder in the existentialist works of Strindberg, Pirandello, Dostoevsky, Proust, Joyce, Beckett and Ionesco, the traditional concept of character is totally lost. Since the traditional Greek heroes were committed to a noble cause, their quest for identity led them to explore the meaning of salvation and redemption. On the contrary, Albee's Jerry and George look bewildered and lost and indulge into the comic fun and games to escape from the harsh realities of life. An Albee protagonist is a grotesque figure; he looks sick and behaves in an abnormal manner.

His actions are strange and he becomes a butt of ridicules. Being abnormal creatures, Albee's protagonists are lost fragmented souls, victims of instincts and therefore look grotesque.

Albee dramatizes a frustrating parody of human contact; he deals with the themes of hatred, humor, anger and nausea employing all the tools of comedy. In Albee's *The Zoo Story* "nothing happens" and Jerry behaves like an abnormal crank. The interesting thing in the drama of Albee is the dramatization of frustration and absurdity of human life. Albee uses several comic devices to depict the ridiculous actions of the protagonists. Peter and Jerry are involved in nonsensical exchange of dialogues that don't lead to anything but provoke laughter. Jerry has embarked on a quest to connect with someone to release the anxieties and tension of life. Man suffered alienation and displacement, moral degradation because of his involvement in money culture and sex adventures. David Riesman wrote his famous book *The Lonely Crowd* (1950) and discussed the psychological predicament of modern man who was afflicted with the cancer of alienation. Albee depicts alienation and the issue of loss of contact and fragmentation of self of modern man. Jerry fails to establish a 'connect' with others. The plot hinges on melancholy irony projecting Jerry as a victim of sick mercantile American culture. Stephen Bottoms avers thus: "Albee empowered the disempowered. Jerry is the anti-establishment, counterculture hero" (Bottoms 19). Albee's protagonists are indeed nude-stripped semblances of what is called "character". He appears a grotesque figure in gradual stages. He behaves like a crank and doesn't know what to do and what to avoid in his encounter with Peter. He fabricates grotesque illusions and all his actions are meaningless, futile and communication is lost. Albee traces the history of the dissolution of Jerry bound to the wheel of time and headed for collapse like the joker of circus who falls from the height willingly to provoke tragic laughter Jerry is a fragment of debris, thrown up by "time". Jerry cannot say "I" with any measure of conviction and certainty. R.S. Stuart in his famous article "John Gielgud and Edward" published his views about new theatre in *Atlantic* thus: "I try to let the unconscious do as much work as possible, since I find that's the more efficient part of my mind" (Stuart 64).



The protagonists of *The Zoo Story* and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* are such neurotic victims of loneliness, depression, anger, violence, anxiety and other psychic pressures. Dramatizing the "dilemmas of the borderline personality" in the tradition of Beckett, Ionesco and Genet, Jerry is an abnormal crank who can perform any act. Jane Brody in his article "The Case is Familiar but the Theatre is Absurd" published in *The New York Times* observed thus: "The borderline is a person who has severe difficulties maintaining a stable and gratifying relationship" (Brody 15). Caught in a paradoxical situation, Jerry longs for human contact, seeks it everywhere as if he is lost in the carnival feast. Jerry's problems are of a neurotic kind: a victim of internal and external forces, he lives in a void groping in darkness. No wonder, Albee's *The Zoo Story* depicts an acute lack of communication of Peter and Jerry. The protagonists are isolated human beings, lonely and desperate yearning for human contact. Albee's *The Zoo Story*, dramatizes the impotency, sterility, alienation and anxiety of Jerry and his failure in marital relationships. Groping in the abyss of darkness, he looks ridiculous sticking to his fantasies and illusions. Albee's Jerry is a fragile creature like the broken who creates his own world of illusion to escape from the hostility of the mercantile selfish society. As Kolin and Davies point out, "Albee is the most absorbing postwar American dramatist, ranking only second to O'Neill as a subject for critical exegesis" (Davis 2). Rutenberg stressed the social aspect of Albee's plays describing the sociological relevance. Albee was a serious dramatist who took up the social issues which gripped the psyche of the youth after the War and the great Depression and supplied the tonic of laughter to overcome the burden of frustration. Stenz focused on the psychology of the characters. Martin Esslin felt a strong urge to determine the degree of absurdism in Albee's plays. Erick Bentley observed that the theatre is "the externalizations of a depth of latent cruelty by means of which all perverse possibilities of the mind are localized" (Bentley 76). Ann Paolucci took great interest in the plays of Edward Albee. Mann called him as the "dean of Albee scholars". C. W. E Bigsby was another dedicated critic of Albee who contributed a lot to Albee's criticism. Bigsby wrote many books, research articles on American drama in general and on the plays of Albee. Two decades of criticism have proved that *The Zoo Story* is a study in man's loneliness in the modern waste land where Jerry has only one option left; to weave the fantasies and

illusion. Jerry is the lost animal of the Zoo world, sensitive, and belligerent. He is full of hatred, self-pity and self-imposed isolation. C.W.E. Bigsby observes thus: “Albee’s thesis is that there is a need to make contact, to emerge from these self – imposed cages of convention and false values so that one individual consciousness may impinge on another” (Bigsby 72). Robert Brustein dismissed Edward Albee’s *The Zoo Story* (1960) as “sexual-religious claptrap” (Brustein 22), as Jerry has all the attributes of a homosexual pervert: he is lonely, seductive, aggressive and rebellious. His deviant behavior in the society exposes his inner void; the audience doesn’t pity him but laugh at his grotesque behavior. The play describes the life which man has created for him as a “solitary free passage” characterized by indifference towards others. The image of the zoo is a valid image for man who has come to accept loneliness as the norm of existence. Jerry pushes Peter onto a bench referring to him as a vegetable. Jerry’s conversation with Peter expresses his homoerotic fantasy to seduce Peter. Jerry is the lost animal of the Zoo World- sensitive and belligerent. Jerry’s need to make contact is an inner compulsion, a psychological urge, an inevitable necessity of a crank. In his book on *Dostoevsky*, Bakhtin notes that “In carnival ... the new mode of man's relation to man is elaborated” (164).

Harold Clurman observes that Jerry performs a unique function on the stage approaching a person through a barrier of mistrust and in a tension of disgust, fear and despair” (Clurman 13). His predicament is not metaphysical, religious or transcendental as in the case of the protagonists of Beckett, Pinter and Ionesco: rather he is victim of a sick culture. Albee punishes Jerry for his failure of love, sex and communication. Indeed he “is a harrowing portrait of a young man alienated from the human race”, as Brooks Atkinson observed (Atkinson 72). Albee is popularly known as “the dramatist of loss” as his tragic melancholy excites great interest among the critics. He depicts the despair that looms large in the lives of western individuals. Albee was deeply concerned with the isolation of an individual in society and the indifference of society towards the young people who were disappointed and depressed. There was a growing tendency of deep disillusionment as they lost the meaning and purpose in life. Beckett, Albee and Pinter came under the influence of Sartre and Camus as they wrote plays to depict the absurd situation

of post War humanity. The plays of Albee question the dilemmas of the modern man who is forced to lead a caged existence. They often experience rejection, fear, sense of loss and alienation. Albee in *The Zoo Story* depicts an encounter between Jerry and Peter belonging to different social classes. In his first encounter with Peter, Jerry exhibits an intense hunger for relationship. Henry Hewes calls him an outsider, “an obnoxious stranger” (Hewes 32). In the beginning, Peter is quite at peace reading a book. He is settled and is leading a comfortable life. He has all the material amenities of life. He becomes uneasy on hearing Jerry's story. Peter does not want to talk to Jerry whose appearance looks imposing and disturbing. Peter lives in a posh apartment in the East Seventies, while Jerry “lives in the West Side of New York City” (177). Jerry is aggressive while Peter is calm and docile. He is forced to listen to Jerry. The scenery is peaceful as there is no tension on the face of Peter. The Central Park is a place of the recreation of mind, far from the madding crowd. It is ironical that in such a calm place, surrounded by nature, Peter and Jerry have to fight for a place on the bench. The bench of the Park becomes an envious symbol of their honor. Peter is possessive as he doesn't allow Jerry to sit on the bench. The empty picture frames that Jerry keeps are significant as they symbolize the emptiness in his life. Jerry lost his parents and his mother's sister looked after Jerry. Jerry finds himself alone in the harsh world. But there is no burden on Jerry's mind, for him the loss of parents is nothing more than the loss of a purse or of furniture. He is quite insensitive and indifferent to what Jerry says.

Moreover, Jerry's story about his landlady's dog reveals much about his approach to social interaction. Jerry observes a parallel between human relationship with animals and their relationship with each other. “If you can't deal with people”, Jerry explains, “You have to make a start somewhere. With animals” (13). The image of the Zoo is the most effective in the drama and Albee depicts the corrosion of self of modern American man through this powerful image. Jerry says: “I went to the Zoo to find out more about the way people exist with animals, and the way animals exist with each other, and with people too” (34). Donald Malcolm opines that Jerry is “just another of those talkative cranks with which the city abounds” (Malcolm 68). The plot of the drama tells about two Jerry and Peter who confront each other in Central Park of New York. Jerry has all the traits of a borderline

personality: he is frustrated and depressed. Jerry accosts Peter when the latter is reading a book on a bench on a sunny Sunday afternoon in summer in a secluded corner of the Central Park. Bakhtin (1990) gives great importance to dialogue as he uses the term dialogic to capture the meaning –making process. He firmly states that “all utterances are inherently dialogic; they have the history and a present, which exist in a continually negotiated state of intense and essential axiological interaction (Bakhtin 10). Edward Albee uses the dialogic form to give a fine blending of humor and acidic satire. The dialogic interaction of Jerry and Peter delivers swift comic kicks and a piercing sting. The dialogues between Jerry and Peter are packed with absurdism, acrobatic language and provocative thoughts on marriage and children and futility of life.

In *The Zoo Story* of Albee the metaphor of zoo is very significant. The world is a zoo “with everyone separated by bars from everyone else the animals for the most part from each other, and always the people from animals” (Edward Albee, *The Zoo Story* 49). The play opens upon Peter who is not a dashing personality; “he is neither fat nor gaunt, neither handsome nor homely”. According to Albee, Peter is a middleclass stereotype of Everyman. He is very fond of reading as he is engrossed in reading a book. The beginning of the play is slow, natural and quite appealing. Unlike Beckett and Ionesco Albee doesn’t give shock in the beginning of his dramas. Peter reads the “right books”, he is sitting on the right side of the bench of the park and has the average number of children and has the right Madison job. He is leading a stable secure life. Peter lives in his own world and is reluctant to talk with Jerry and the image of the iron bar is very effective. The iron bar separates the animals similarly Peter is separated from Jerry who is an intruder entering into the world of Peter. Like a sick patient, urged by his emotional restlessness, Jerry ambles up to Peter and announces: “I’ve been to the Zoo... I said, I’ve been to the Zoo. MISTER, I’VE BEEN TO THE ZOO” (Edward Albee, *The Zoo Story* 12). The predominant image in the novel is of Zoo as Jerry boasts that he had been to the Zoo. Albee prepares the audience to be ready to enjoy the confrontation between a civilized person and the man from the Zoo. His declaration confounds and baffles Peter who goes on asking again and again the mystery about the Zoo but Jerry holds him in suspense. Bakhtin remarks thus: “The link with the essential aspects of being,

with the organic system of popular-festive images, has been broken. Obscenity has become narrowly sexual, isolated, individual, and has no place in the new official system of philosophy and imagery" (Bakhtin109). Jerry takes the initiative and tries to establish connect with Peter throwing a few personal questions about his family and children:

Jerry: "And you're not going to have any more kids, are you?"

Peter: (a bit distantly) "No, No more. (Then back and irksome) Why did you say that? How would you know that?"

Jerry: "The way you cross your legs perhaps: something in the voice. Or may be I'm just guessing. Is it your wife?"

Peter: "That's none of your business. Do you understand?". (18)

Peter is hurt and expresses his furious and frightened feelings that a stranger should know his personal life and should try to expose it. Peter becomes interested in Jerry's confessions and his experiences about the Zoo but he is embarrassed by his acidic candor. He wants Jerry to restrict the conversation to books and weather. He wants Jerry to discuss the merits of the contemporary writers such as Marquand and Baudelaire but Jerry is not interested in the evaluation of the writers but is interested in his bitter critique of life. He changes the subject and starts a simple folk conversation about the village:

Peter: Oh, You live in the village? (this seems to enlighten Peter)

Jerry: "No. I don't..."Peter: (almost pouting) Oh, I thought you lived in the village.

Jerry: What were you trying to do? Make sense out of things, bring order? The old pigeonhole bit? (25)

Peter is imprisoned in his cocoon and his life and things protect him from the outside world. He feels that he is above pleasure and pain and feels complacent but Jerry punctures his middle- class morality and stability forcing him to break the cocoon to come in the outside world to know the existential reality. For Bakhtin, it is

only throw knowing others that human beings come to know about themselves. The more “opportunities we have for interacting with others, the wider and more varied our experiences with different genres are. The more encounters with different genres we experience, the more enriched is our ability to understand and participate in social life” (223). Jerry establishes the connection with Peter breaking all barriers of middle-class respectability. He is determined to discover the essential nature of Peter. He strips himself of goods, things and relationships. He is deprived of family relationships he feels jealous of Peter. Jerry led a harrowing life and in childhood also he remained isolated and disturbed. Jerry realized in very early life the truth about human relationships that men are islands cut off from others. Contacts are made from time to time but they are not permanent as the human beings are fickle and capricious; selfish and greedy. Bakhtin either agrees or disagrees with it, arguments it, applies it, prepares for its execution and so on (68). In this respect Peter is a silent listener and Jerry is an active participant who tells Peter what he has learnt about human relationship in his tale of “Jerry and the Dog”. In the carnival every effort is made to provoke laughter and to entertain the people. Albee was a professional dramatist and he took up the neurotic character to provide the feast of parody to the audience.

### **The Existential Dilemma of Modern Man:-**

Separation and isolation in the world created by the two World Wars is a significant theme which the contemporary playwrights have been describing in their works. Albee’s well-known play *The Zoo Story* (1958) is a sharp and exact perception of man’s seclusion and break down of communication. This play *The Zoo Story* is an absurd and existential play. It turns out in existential terms the existence condition of the contemporary man, the insaneness and foolishness of the human circumstances. Boredom of custom life, breakdown of principles and the complete incapability for creative action are regarded as the main causes of depression and dissatisfaction among the modern men.

The play may be concentrated as an image of the issues and clashes of an existential character. It presents the experience, choice and irreversible activities of Jerry, the existentialist man, who uncovers himself incomprehensibly however

altogether as a lasting transient. The absurdist perspective and questions about existence self have been at the very core of the play. Jerry has got understanding of the existentialist distress of absolute disengagement and found the futility of ideas. As Jerry would like to think both society and the whole human conditions are as baffling as his picture of the Zoo where everybody is detached by bars from every other person. The creatures are isolated from creatures and comparatively men are isolated from creatures. Jerry, in this manner, profoundly identified with the essential human issue of setting up contact with individuals, with creatures, with thoughts, with objects, and eventually, with deity and supernatural being in the human form. The entire play is Jerry's endeavor to cause Peter to comprehend what he has found about himself. For instance of the disconnection of the individual and the existential consciousness of his dilemma, the play shares significantly more practically speaking with *Tiny Alice* and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*?. In spite of the level of elevated mindfulness Albee gives on Peter and Jerry, and in spite of the clearly differentiating real factors of the two, Albee presents them as sharing a significant feeling of separation. This is the reason, to a limited extent, *The Zoo Story* remains as a sort of natural existentialist play and the constrained correspondence between the two characters highlights the point.

Jerry belongs to the sick culture of folk carnival humor. The real farcical humor begins when Jerry narrates his harrowing experiences of the "The Lady and the Dog" in a grotesque style. Jerry's insistence tone, his broken language, repetitions, pauses, incoherence in conversation-all these excite laughter in the theatre. Jerry struggles desperately to strike up a conversation in a ridiculous manner. Jerry moves around Peter's bench and asks direct questions in an incoherent language: "You're married...How many children you got?...Any pets?" (16-17). The entire encounter of Jerry with Peter symbolizes the ironical parody of the quest of the traditional hero. The quest of a Shakespearean hero is for social and moral order but Jerry seeks the contact with Peter to articulate his psychic tensions. As soon as the conversation starts between the two, the differences in their socio-economic backgrounds become more apparent. Peter belongs to upper middle class society and is living a life of comfort and luxury. Jerry questions Peter about his family, job and even his salary to highlight the affluence. Peter shows his disinterestedness to

communicate with a crank like Jerry. He thinks Jerry to be a crank who disturbs his reading a book. The main conflict between Peter and Jerry is between the protagonist and the antagonist. Peter stands for everything related to American optimism. He lives in a world of complacency, conformity and is depicted as “the old pigeonhole bit” (164). Jerry represents the lost intellectuals of America who are homeless jokers of a circus. He belongs to a world in which everyone is “a permanent transient” (177). ‘The Jerry and the Dog’ tale of Jerry is an interesting part of the drama with symbolical meaning. The dog attacks Jerry only when Jerry tries to enter the house, “whenever I came in; but never I went out... I could pack up and live in the street for all the dog cared” (37). The dog considers the house his domain just Peter thinks that the bench of the park belongs to him and he doesn’t like any one to intrude into his domain. Jerry tells Peter that love cannot be bought and it is not easy to establish relationship. Jerry bribes the dog with hamburgers but this was not a permanent solution:

Poor bastard he never learned that the moment he took to smile before he went for me gave me time enough to get out of range. But there he was malevolence with an erection waiting. (39)

Jerry gives a graphic picture of his dog: “The dog is old, misused, and black all over except for its bloodshot eyes and the red, open sore on its right front paw” (36). The dog of Jerry reflects all the traits of human beings; hatred, lust, exploitation and treachery. Jerry has learnt from the dog that it is not easy to establish contact and win confidence of others. One must reach below the surface to the level of pain and pleasure to establish a contact. “I have learned that neither kindness or cruelty, independent of each other creates any effect beyond themselves; and I have learned that the two combined together, at the same time are the teaching emotion” (Albee 56). The imagery of the dog is very effective in conveying the meaning of life and the mystery of establishing new contact. Jerry expresses his learning thus: “We neither love not hurt because we do not try to reach other”. Jerry takes more than four pages to narrate his experiences with the dog who taught him the valuable lessons of life to survive in the harsh world. Ironically Jerry didn’t learn from human beings the secret of making contact and the mystery of human relationships but the dog taught him to exist in society:



I have gained solitary free passage, if that much further loss can be said to be gain. I have learned that neither kindness nor cruelty by themselves, independent of each other creates any effect beyond themselves, and I have learned the two combined, together, at the same time, are the teaching emotion. (43-44)

Jerry applies the same therapy in establishing the contact with Peter. His conversation is filled with irony, comedy and romance. He tries to touch Peter from the surface and employs the farcical technique of tickling. The effect of tickling on Peter is enormous as his subtle and comic images make Peter laugh:

Peter: Oh hee, hee, I must go. I ...hee, hee, hee. After all, stop, stop, hee, hee, hee, after all the parakeets, will be getting dinner ready soon. And the cats are setting the table. Stop, Stopm... and we're having.... (48)

Peter goes on laughing and Jerry reminds him that something has happened at the zoo about which Peter is curious:

Peter: Ah! Ha, ha, ha, the what? Of yes the Zoo. Well I had my own zoo, there for a moment with... hee, hee, the partakers getting dinner ready... Oh my, I don't know what happened to me. (48)

Peter has learned to see clearly the emptiness of his life, a life in which cats, children, wife and parakeets are interchangeable. After his contact he provokes Peter to fight for the ownership of the bench. Jerry ridicules Peter for his attachment for material things of life. Jerry assumes the ferocity of his dog and challenging Peter provoking folk laughter Jerry behaves like a savage pit-bull craving for a bone. Jerry has been observant of his neighbors; the Puerto Rican family that entertains a lot; the woman who cries determinedly all day; the homosexual who plucks his eyebrows "with Buddhist concentration" (26). Jerry will never get to know a person who lives in a room within a few feet of his own.

Jerry gives the sordid details of the adulterous life of his mother while she toured in the Southern states and how she died in Alabama at last. He also tells Peter

of the tragic and disgraceful death of his father who was drunk and got killed in an accident in front of “a somewhat moving city omnibus” (26).

In his *Introduction* Albee observed that the conflict between Peter and Jerry forms the core of the drama. His personal vision of the world becomes “an image of the communication loss” (12). Martin Esslin observes that Albee uses all the comical tools to depict the conflict between Peter and Jerry in *The Zoo Story*. Albee satirizes through Peter “the absurdity of human life” (390). In Jerry and Peter we have the examples of “lonely people trapped in the callous universe” (392). Albee has given the realistic background of Peter and Jerry in simple and effective words. Jerry is a young boy in his “late thirties”; Peter is “neither fat nor gaunt, neither handsome nor homely”. Peter’s face suggests that he was once “handsome” (158). Allan Lewis observes in his book *American Plays and Playwrights* (1970) that Peter also holds a knife symbolizing the “meeting of two separate worlds in the heart of a modern city” (Lewis 82). Peter and Jerry talk about the useless things of life incoherently. There is no unity in their ideas as they banter about the set of pornographic playing cards that Jerry keeps in his apartment. Bakhtin observes thus in his book *Rabelais and His World*:

Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people. While carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it. During carnival time life is subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom. It has a universal spirit; it is a special condition of the entire world, of the world's revival and renewal, in which all take part. (qtd. in Helene Iswolsky, 7)

Bakhtin observes that everyone participates in the carnival festival. In Albee’s *The Zoo Story* Jerry expresses the malaise of modern man; he is inwardly sick but his urge to establish the contact with Peter reveals his concern for humanity. He enjoys freedom of the carnival as all his actions reveal his freedom of life. His farcical tale of his encounter with landlady is in the true spirit of a farce. All of a sudden Jerry changes the subject and tells Peter about his visit to the Zoo. Jerry describes about his landlady who is a drunken and idiotic woman. She even tried to

seduce him. Jerry narrates the story of his landlady's dog. Peter is not in a mood to listen to the story but Jerry forces him to hear all about the lady and the dog. In Peter's apartment everybody lives in pairs suggesting companionship. There are daughters, cats, parakeets but in Jerry's world everybody is isolated from the other.

In the course of the play Jerry behaves more and more like a neurotic. Jerry is a "permanent transient" (177). Jerry is a strange crank; his only property is the two empty picture frames of his father and mother. The frames are empty because he has "no feeling about any of it" (181). Jerry is proud of his own world of animals; he lives in his own little Zoo. He refers to a horrifying and decadent dog. This dog is owned by an old landlady sexual and seductive. Albee has described the perversion and degradation of Jerry who has become an untamed "animal" (177). It is pertinent to note that Jerry lives in a tormented house, his dwelling place is "an underworld described in the old myths" (170). The dog of his landlady symbolizes decay, sterility and horror. Jerry also owns a "pack of pornographic playing-cards". The scene is loaded with the imagery of death and destruction. Jerry describes the absurdity of his existence giving an account of his carnal relationships thus: "I wonder if it's sad that I never see the little ladies more than once. I've never been able to have sex with, or, how is it put?... make love to anybody more than once.. And now; oh, do I love the little ladies; really, I love them. For about an hour" (24). The old woman and the dog describe their spiritual decay and moral perversion. The old woman and the dog are leading a hellish life. The old woman is "fat, ugly, mean, stupid, unwashed, misanthropic, and cheap" (168). Peter is baffled by the broken and ambiguous communication of Jerry as he shouts "I DO NOT UNDERSTAND!" to Jerry (179).

In the beginning of the plot, Albee introduces the destructive image of the knife which is used to kill Jerry. Jerry feels lonely throughout the drama; his quest for contact is achieved through his murder symbolizing the need for suicide. In the drama Jerry can make contact with Peter only through death. The law of nature is reversed. Jerry is passing through a period of neurosis and is seen restless. Lewis observes that "Jerry's violent death, impaled on his own knife held by Peter, also marks the end of a macabre love affair of latent homosexual relations" (83). Albee

calls Jerry a “self-confessed homosexual” (167). Jerry shows no reluctance whatsoever about recalling his own private life. He is not married but apparently has had plenty of one night sex experience with women and once he found solace and comfort in homosexual perversion: “I met at least twice a day with the park superintendent’s son...may be just with sex” (30). Jerry gives an account of his neighbors-“The Puerto Rican family that entertains a lot: the woman who cries determinedly all day: the homosexual who plucks his eyebrow, which he does with Buddhist concentration” (26). All these details of Jerry are based on his false illusions since there is no seriousness in his talk. He goes on blubbing and concocting stories about him and the landlady and the dog. The stories of Jerry are senseless but they engage the audience through the play. His loneliness as he emerges an antithesis of Peter. George Wellwarth aptly observes thus: “Nothing protects him, and consequently, he feels the full agony of Adamov’s cripples or any number of other characters from the current avant-garde theatre” (Wellwarth 276). Albee was abandoned by his mother, neglected by his father and orphaned at twelve. The same life was led by Jerry who has been completely on his own from the day of his schooling. Indeed, he seems to be drifting in a hostile void governed by the forces of the “Savage God”. Again to quote George Wellwarth: Albee sees society... as a part of Chinese wall protecting these within from the barbican hordes outside. Occasionally, though, one of the inhabitants of the artificial enclosures inadvertently strays too near the line and is overcome by an intruder like Jerry (Wellwarth 276). Bakhtin observes that in the carnival feast the images of sexuality and obscenity were freely used to provoke the laughter. Jerry also uses the images of homosexuality and the language of the marketplace. Bakhtin observes thus:

Because of their obvious sensuous character and their strong element of play, carnival images closely resemble certain artistic forms, namely the spectacle. In turn, medieval spectacles often tended toward carnival folk culture, the culture of the marketplace, and to a certain extent became one of its components. (Bakhtin 31)

As Jerry proceeds with his conversation with Peter, he is in the grip of a crisis. The purposelessness of his life has begun to manifest itself in his appearance.

Albee uses the ridiculous and burlesque to portray the appearance of Jerry. He is dressed not poorly but carelessly. His body has “begun to go fat”. He reminds the audience of the grotesque characters of Dickens and Cervantes. He doesn’t appear as a normal human being but a tramp or a man belonging to the riff raff society. The entire action of the play consists of conversation which culminates in an outburst of violence. Albee has given the image of “prowling” as like animals he is restlessly moving around the stage. In the words of Anne Paolucci, “Jerry’s persistent questioning of Peter and his tireless energy are unmistakable signs of a hysterical state, a longing to commit suicide” (Paolucci 40). Sometimes, it becomes difficult to find any relevance in what Jerry says or relates, for he is full of contradictions, irony and paradoxes. Charles R. Lyons compared Brecht’s *Im Dickicht Der Stadate* and Albee’s *The Zoo Story* and discovered that both “Jerry and Shlink are strangers to the society and look ridiculous” (Lyons 138). Shlink’s boxing match and Jerry’s “course” is the quest of a comic hero. Jerry’s quest for life leads him to nothingness as he admits “I took down to the village so I could walk all the way up Fifth Avenue to the Zoo” (*Zoo Story* 25). Jerry’s story of “Jerry and the Dog” which is a rehearsal of an anguished cry for contact with something external to his own consciousness. He descends to the world of animals in a comic manner. Albee also introduces the ugly black dog, who guards the entrance of his squalid rooming house, selects Jerry, from the other roomers, as the object of his animosity. After telling Peter the story, Jerry feels somewhat relaxed telling him the climax of his story: “I decided: First, I’ll kill the dog with kindness, and if that doesn’t work...I’ll just kill him” (37).

Bakhtin observes that the language in the carnival is common free from bombast. Language in Albee’s plays is clichés ridden and marked by emptiness and insignificant repetition, which mirrors the comic vision of Jerry and Peter. The plot of the drama hinges on the communication of the protagonists. Bakhtin observes that in the “medieval carnival a special idiom of forms and symbols” was evolved to give the true comic feast. In his *The Zoo Story*, Albee rejected and discarded the traditional language and idiom of Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams and used the comic tools and simple folk language to depict the breakdown of communication. The various pauses and brief dialogues are rich in absurdity. Action

in Albee's plays carries the teaching of existentialism, and the meaning it realizes through engaging in purposeful action transcends the pessimistic deadlock of the Absurd theatre. Violence in action embodies Artaud's advocating of a "Cruel Theatre" which returns to the theatre the wonder and force of a lost cosmic power. There is not realistic style of setting; plot is cyclical and structured around comic images and forms. Jerry's speeches are loaded with incoherent images since he is left and bewildered. Consider for instance the following speech of Jerry:

A person has to have some way of dealing with SOMETHING. If not with people...if not with people... SOMETHING. With a bed, with a cockroach, with a mirror... no, that's too hard, that's one of the last steps. With a cockroach, with a ... with a ... With a carpet, a roll of toilet paper". (30)

Since the entire fabric of Jerry's harrowing experiences reveal his uncanny story with no head and tail the audience find themselves, drawn into a "nightmare". Left with no alternative, he must make contact "WITH ANIMALS!" (42). Jerry is at the crossroad of life, he is aware that the end is near as he explains the love-hate theme in his story. Jerry is silent when he ends his long story symbolizing the paralysis of his thoughts. His silence is used to parody the heroic action of the great heroes of the traditional drama. Peter is also "silent", "disturbed" and "numb" at the end of the story. He rejected Jerry's emotional encounters. The long speech of Jerry has no impact on Peter; he is baffled and bewildered and simply expresses his distrust as his tale is unbelievable. Like Hamm in *Endgame*, Jerry has his morbid "course", which brings him to the realization of human isolation. Jerry struggles to break his isolation but Peter is adamant. At last Jerry is "Grotesquely fatigued" at the end of the story. Jerry is exhausted and for the first time he sits down on the bench besides Peter. He observes that he has annoyed Peter. Suddenly Jerry "tickles", "pokes", "punches" and "pushes" Peter off the bench like a caricature. He loses his patience as Peter remains silent and is unresponsive. The comic situation turns violent as Jerry grows restless and mentally disturbed. His jealousy and hatred for Peter surfaces and he plays the last card and opens a knife. He begins tossing the knife terrorizing Peter. Mita Mitra analyses the scene thus:

Taunted by Jerry, Peter denies in his response that the possession of the bench is indeed a question of honor. But his anger at Jerry's encroachment contradicts his statement, and his effort to protect the bench implies that it has assumed an abstract meaning for him. (Mitra 31)

Jerry's quest is fruitless, a mockery of modern man trapped in the existential absurdity of life. There is a blend of mockery, contempt and derision. Bakhtin observes that "carnival laughter is the laughter of all people and is universal in scope since it is directed to all people" (Bakhtin 24). Albee is not much concerned about a section of society; Peter represents the bourgeoisie class and Jerry belongs to the lower middle class. His humor is crude and directed to Peter who represents the upper class of America. Bakhtin further observes that "laughter is ambivalent, it is gay, triumphant and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives. Such is the nature of laughter of carnival" (36). The laughter provoked by Jerry in his actions and dialogues is depressing and deriding in nature but his activities on the stage are hilarious and quite appealing. His long speech is loaded with the images of grotesque supplying melancholic irony and comic feast. Jerry does feel the burden of metaphysical anxiety when he cries:

Oh..... my... God (He is dead)" (61). At last Jerry's illusions about life are broken when he embraces death at the end of the play: "I came unto you... and you have comforted me. Dear Peter. (61)

Ronald Hayman observes that "in Jerry's final death, his acute neurological tension is released in a "homosexual contact" (8). His fall is the most at once ridiculous and a parody of the great heroes. Jerry is a typical representative of modern man afflicted with fears, doubts, anxiety, isolation and neurotic despair. Jerry's suicide itself is symbolical of his defeated personality, being an escape into another unworldly illusion. Jerry is like O' Neill's Yank – a desperately isolated outcast, a victim of nervous disorder who struggles in vain for acknowledgement. Both visit the Zoo to contemplate their isolation and reach the conclusion that men are animals, and that beneath the illusion of civilization they still have the tendency of killing. Albee seems to imply that, faced with a mysterious cosmic order, man

finds it difficult to face the situation and his only choice is suicide. The sordid predicament of Jerry is that he remains rootless till the end. Jerry's fall is the fall of a comic circus joker who has no ambition and no direction in life. Whatever he does on the stage is to be pitied and regretted and not to be emulated or envied in any heroic manner. Thus, *The Zoo Story* dramatizes not heroism, but the parody of the traditional heroes. To quote Anita Maria Stenz:

For Albee Jerry represents a wasted life. The question which the author is stridently asking in this play is in fact whether the one man is any less depersonalized than the other. For the author the polarization of Jerry and Peter represents man's alienation from himself. (Stenz 8)

There are several psychological, sociological, and personal factors which urge Jerry to impale on his own knife held by Peter. There are many theories on suicidal behavior in terms of the paranoid process. Freud's theory of internalized aggression and depression is quite relevant in case of Jerry. The message of the play is very clear. Death is a scary reality that we all must face. It is an inevitable event. Suicide is the intentional killing of oneself. The rationale behind the suicide of Jerry is quite simple. He was fed up with the alienation of life and the lack of communication. The speeches of Jerry are loaded with the images of death and destruction; the references to ferocious animals, cats, dog, Zoo are significant. Jerry commits suicide; his action gives solution to his severe physical or psychological dilemma. His suicide results from a number of things. Suicide is not a simple behavior; it is the product of his perverted will. Most clinicians agree that suicide is the result of internal psychic pressures. Some critics have discussed the suicide of Jerry in psychological terms. Bakhtin is in favor new language of communication in drama:

A new type of communication always creates new forms of speech or a new meaning given to the old forms. For instance, when two persons establish friendly relations, the form of their verbal intercourse also changes abruptly, they address each other informally abusive words are used affectionately, and mutual mockery is permitted. (Bakhtin, 40)



Freud in his *An Outline of Psychoanalysis* (1910) has also discussed the various causes of suicide. Man is always under two basic drives of love and death. Psychological reasons include the internal factors related to the psyche of the characters and these include personality, character, temperament, emotional stability etc. Sociological reasons constitute the external factors like family, social relationships and society itself. The most common psychological causes are depression, schizophrenia, and neurotic behavior. The psychology of suicide is rooted in depression. Depression is the primary motivation for suicide. It is a mood disturbance which is characterized by feelings of sadness and despair. Jerry suffers from depression and is the victim of mental anxiety. Depression can become an abnormal emotional state. Jerry is a depressed person who thinks of himself in a very negative way. He views his future with despair. He feels himself to be responsible for all his problems and considers himself to be a failure. He starts believing that he is inferior to Peter. Bakhtin observes that “the essential principle of grotesque is degradation, that is the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body interior indissoluble unity” (Bakhtin 43).

Jerry suffers degradation as goes to the Zoo and tries to establish a link with the animals. This human degradation is a part of the scheme of grotesque in the drama. The function of the carnival spirit is to give a new chance to look at the world and society from a fresh perspective. Albee’s *The Zoo Story* is an attempt to project a new approach of life in its modern existential world. Albee’s Jerry offers no solution to the absurdities of life but his actions urge the audience to laugh away the situation that gives depression. The comedy is a powerful tool to get away from the burden of absurdity. Jerry is in the grip of tensions and anxieties but he struggles to come out of it. His suicide shows his weak character in coping with the challenges of life. Bakhtin is in favor of dramatization of the madness because “madness is inherent in all the grotesque forms because madness makes men look at the world with different eyes...” (63). Jerry is mentally sick and behaves like a mad man and his madness gives an insight into the sick and morbid human self. Jerry’s speeches are packed with the images of melancholic irony, parody and human degradation.

Albee depicts human condition as an inevitable part of human existence. Human condition is absurd and hopeless; Albee expresses the experiences of sufferings through the metaphors of “silence”, “waiting” and “memory” in his plays. His characters suffer from misfortunes as meaningless waiting, disillusionment of hope, and abnormal relationship. They are doomed to live in a meaningless and godless universe. They look helpless and feel trapped in a Godless universe where sufferings are an inescapable reality. Beckett reveals that all the evils, sins, and disasters exist in life and man has to confront them. Suffering constitutes the centre of Albee’s plays; his protagonists are involved in multifarious situations expressing different kinds of human responses to suffering, ranging from meek passivity to rebellion and exile. No wonder, all Albee’s protagonists are worn out with age and ailment, paralyzed and immobilized, and awaiting extinction as a possible relief from their weary existence. Albee’s men and women are physically disabled, aged and derelicts. They are on the verge of decline and grotesquely entrapped. They are alienated from the universe, where they ceaselessly strive to live with misery and unendurable pain. All these characters are outsiders, cut off from the world of social activity. Albee peels off all the layers that surround life to show that at the core, everyone is suffering. There is reason in Jerry’s madness as he is serious in exposing and puncturing the middle class complacency of Peter through of the images of fun and laughter supplying the carnival feast to the audience. The last death scene is full of melancholic irony; tragic pathos and grotesque humor as the approach of Albee is acidic and sarcastic:

Peter: Oh my God, oh my God, Oh my God...Jerry: (Jerry is dying, but now his expression seems to change. His features relax, and while his voice varies, sometimes wrenched with pain, for the most part, he seems removed from dying) Thank you, Peter, I mean that now: thank you very much, I came unto you and you have comforted me, dear Peter.

Peter: (Almost fainting) Oh my God.

Jerry: You’d better go now. Somebody might come by and you don’t want to be here when anyone comes.

Peter: (Does not move, but begins to weep” Oh my God, Oh my God.

Jerry: (His eyes still closed, he shakes his head and speaks: a combination of scornful and mimicry and supplication.) Oh...my ...God. (62)

The death scene of the drama is in the form of a parody as the death of Jerry doesn't excite the feelings of pity and fear. It is a sudden and unexpected case of suicide of a crank who enters in the world of Peter by chance and unexpectedly without any plan. As Jerry confesses:

I think that while I was at the zoo I decided that I would walk north...notherly, rather...until found you...or somebody...and I decided that I would talk to you...I would tell you things...and things that I would tell you would...Well here we are”. (26)

Bergson in his famous essay on *Laughter* observes that very often the death also becomes a cause of laughter; we are not serious all the time when we witness a dead body unless he is related to us. Jerry and Peter are not related and Jerry's death is a shock to Peter as he sees him laughing and there is mockery and derision in his eyes after death. Bergson observes thus:

In a society composed of pure intelligences there would probably be no more tears, though perhaps there would be still be laughter; whereas highly emotional souls, in tune ad unison with life, in whom every event would be sentimentality prolonged and reechoed, would neither know or understand laughter. (Bergson 40)

To conclude, Edward Albee reacted against the conventional realistic drama of O'Neill and Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams and evolved his own dramatic techniques seeking inspiration from Beckett, Ionesco and employed the tools of comedy of Bakhtin to laugh at the modern absurdity in which middle class men like Martha, George and Peter are trapped. Jerry learns the real and practical philosophy from the dog: “we neither love nor hurt because we do not try to reach other”. Peter knows that Jerry I smugly caged behind the bars and there is no sense in arguing

with him; he doesn't want to talk to him in the beginning but Jerry forces him to interact with him.

### **Black Comedy**

Black comedy is a very popular literary device used in literature and its roots are found in the Greek literature. Black comedy was called black humor, dark humor and gallows humor and it was a powerful tool with the writers to expose and ridicule the contemporary vices of the society. In fiction the black comedy grew very popular as it effectively explored the vulgarity, affectation and snobbery of the people. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Fielding observes that a novel is a comic epic in prose and he admitted the tools of black comedy, humor, irony, wit and even repartee to lash at the evil mongers of the society. In the Restoration Comedy of Manners, the tools of the black comedy were extensively used by John Dryden, Wycherley and Congreve. The play *The Way of the World* is loaded with the elements of black comedy. Black comedy is a reflection of the vices of the society; themes are light and the characters are conceived to laugh at the snobberies, hypocrisies and affectations of the people.

Eugene Ionesco and Edward Albee used the tools of black comedy to lash at the contemporary oddities, absurdities of the people. The weapons of the black comedy such as wit, humor, irony, repartee, paradox empowered the playwrights to expose and ridicule the society in a convincing and humorous style. The witty dialogues; fun and games of Albee depicted in the plays, *The Zoo Story* and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* intensify the comic and farcical atmosphere. Edward Albee's play *The Goat or Who is Sylvia?* was first staged in Broadway in 2002 and created sensation in the domain of drama. Albee got the Pulitzer Prize and the prestigious Tony Award for the best play in 2002. Albee borrowed the title from Shakespeare's comedy *Two Gentlemen of Verona* in which Proteus sings a song to woo Sylvia. Edward Albee observed thus on the issues that he took in the drama: "The play is about love, and loss, the limits of our tolerance and who, indeed, we really are" (Albee, *Stretching* 262). The very fact that Martin feels that he is connected with the goat is funny, unnatural and a taboo. Martin is the main protagonist who expresses his connection thus: "I didn't know what it was what I

was feeling...There she was just looking at me, with those eyes of her” Edward Albee, *The Goat* 21). Martin is the hero of the drama and he is conceived as Everyman by Albee. Martin looks helpless and bewildered in the very first part of the drama. He is seen correcting the grammar of other characters. He corrects the sentences with arrogance and a sense of superiority. He struggles to live in “black and white” and tries his best to tell the truth to his family. He wants to tell all the grey area of his love for Sylvia. Billy is another important character who loses his fraternal connection with his father at the discovery of Martin’s secret and at the end of the drama he establishes his connection with a sensual kiss. The novel is packed with the images of chaos and disorder but Albee creates funny situation to laugh away the tragic emotions. Martin writes a letter to Stevie. She is smart and funny whose marriage is also a source of fun. She talks about her marital expectations as she says: “We prepare fix things, for lessening, even; unevitable lessenings” (39). It seems she is worried about the intricacies of human relationships and medical issues “emotional disengagement” (29). The real mystery of sexual relationship is revealed when she is confronted with the reality: “You have bought me down to nothing! You have brought me down, and Christ! I’ll bring you down with me” (44). In her life she had been haunted by the fear of marriage and at the end the fear turns into reality. The third major character is Billy who lived an insulated life. He has been loved and he is lucky to enjoy safety and comfort of life. Fate is cruel to him as his awareness about his father’s actions gives him comic shock and the audience enjoys the comic feast when his world is toppling. In a living room he observed chaos and he is engulfed with the chaos at the end of the drama. His father runs the peace and happiness of his life. He desperately struggles to save his mother yet he emerges powerless to help her. He clings to his father in an instinctual way kissing his father sensually and longingly with tears rolling down his face. He emerges as a grotesque figure as the truth shatters all his hopes and he strikes as a comic figure. The third important character is Ross acting as an antagonist in the drama pushing the whole situation to a boiling point. Albee focuses on the power of instincts that drive human beings into action. Ross is driven by the instinct to tell Stevie. Ross and Martin had been thick friends as Ross had been getting a couple of prostitutes for Martin. The conversation between Martin and Rose in the drama forms the core of the plot. The conversation between Martin and Stevie justify the role of both the characters:

MARTIN: (Quietly) Let him go. (Silence, quietly) Well, now just you and me. STEVIE: YES. MARTIN (Awful, chuckle) Oh God! (Afterthought) You take it? (26)

Albee intends this section to be lyrical and musical as there is a verbal dance of the two characters. Elva Gardner of *U.S.A. Today* dubbed the play as “self-indulgent mess” (203). But the famous critic of Albee Clive Barnes contended that the play *The Goat* “was one of the wittiest and funniest plays of Albee has ever written” (Barnes 203). The reviewer of *The New York Post* dubbed the play as “humbug” (204). The critical analysis of the text reveals that *The Goat* is focused on exploring sexual fantasy, frustration and domestic anguish. Albee came under the influence of the Greek and Shakespeare when he wrote this drama. On the surface level of the text *The Goat* it is a play about bestiality, sexuality and human relationships. The play had been written to test “a few boundaries” (Horn 45). Albee used the animal imagery of goat the way Ionesco used the metaphor of rhinoceros in his play to expose the conformity culture of the Europeans. Albee sought inspiration from Aristotle, Shakespeare and Bakhtin to structure the plot of the drama. Eric Bentley observes that the play is nothing but a “goat song”. Interestingly, Albee seems to be seriously engaged with the traditions of comedy, tragedy and the grotesque realism. The audiences who watched the drama were shocked to know that there could be sexual relationship between a goat and a man. Albee dramatizes death in two spectrums in the play *The Goat*. The climax comes when the wife of Martin’s marriage with Stevie is shattered and even the friendship with Rose collapses. But the complications arise when Martin loses the friendship with Ross who is supposed as the best friend and Billy who remains in the whirlpool of darkness. Kinship in the play “is embodied in Martin’s relationships: with Stevie as husband and wife; with Ross as his supposed best friend; with Billy, not only as father and son but also” (110). The play is remarkable for the themes of notions of sacrifice and guilt inherent in tragedy. The strength of the play is on the “verbal sharpness” in the drama. Martin is the main protagonist of the drama; a 50 a world-famous architect and he is the architect of the drama. As the plot of *The Goat* progresses Albee introduces Martin and Stevie as he gets ready to be interviewed by his old friend, Ross, for a TV program. Martin also observes that Ross picks up on

Martin's growing anxiety and the truth is revealed that he has been sleeping with the goat. *The Goat* of Albee is a story about the growth of a character from a normal human being to his bestiality; it is the story of a man who is an architect but his own life crumbles at the end. Albee continues the tradition of fun and games and creates funny situations in the drama to create the atmosphere of carnival in the drama. The play features many language games and grammatical arguments to excite laughter. Albee mixes the tragic with the comic borrowing from Shakespeare and the Greek tragedies to ridicule the gay culture of America. Martin's relationship with Stevie and Sylvia is that of "cross-sex love" (male-female), and as mentioned before, this type of bond is not as strong as "the idealization of male friendship as superior to male-female love" (Carroll 15), according to Aristotle, Cicero, and Shakespeare's *Two Gentlemen*. Stevie's inability to understand the difference in these types of relationships makes her equate Martin's sex with the goat as rape and thus feel betrayed. By the end of the play, however, Stevie brings Martin the dead corpse of the goat, justifying her actions by only saying: STEVIE. "She loved you... you say. As much as I do" (110). Martin has the moral courage to apologize to Stevie in Scene Two of the play admitting his wrong actions. He confesses to his friend Ross as well and asks for forgiveness. Ross doesn't forgive him for his wrong actions and in the last scene Martin expresses his unusual love for the goat and for hugging and kissing him. The important fact to be noted is the gradual progression of the drama; in the first part the information is given about the characters and their main conflicts and at the end is given the big revelation of the secret of Martin. Albee dramatizes the issue of bestiality and the last scene is devoted to the resolution of the problem. The ending of the play is very interesting and provocative as Roth catches father and the son in a passionate kiss and Stevie is seen storming in the scene.

BILLY: I love that man who has been down there digging...I love this man! I love him. (102)

Billy is a passionate character who is overwhelmed with love and embracing his father; kisses hands and neck symbolizes his animalistic nature: "a deep, sobbing, sexual kiss" (102). Albee has given a comparative study of Billy's uncertainty of the meaning of love to Proteus's understanding of "love" and

“friendship”. Martin and Billy are father and son engaged in a passionate kissing action and Ross gets disgusted when he discovers them. Bakhtin’s farcical and burlesque elements are fully exploited by Albee. Stevie carries the dead body of the goat intensifying the comic tone of the drama. All these episodes are possible in a world of carnival and Albee exploits all the elements of the burlesque and grotesque to entertain the audiences. Martin is cut to size and he asks his forgiveness in a mood of repentance reaching out his parents who are reluctant to respond to his gestures. Martin has been faithful to his wife in his life and Ross is shocked to know that Martin would cheat him. Martin tries his best to explain his passion for the person with whom he is having love affair but he is disturbed when he sees the picture of Sylvia and he understands for the first time what is happening in Martin’s life. Ross insists that Martin must tell everything to Stevie and even threatens to disclose to her but Martin pleads for Ross to understand but Ross cannot. He cannot believe that Martin is “FUCKING GOAT” (Edward Albee, *The Goat* 23). There are many complications in the plot; in many scenes the characters remain baffled and bewildered. Billy is at a loss as his relationships with his father remain strained since he told his parents that he was gay. In desperation his father called him a “Fucking faggot” (23). Billy also doesn’t know where his mother is and the world depicted by Albee is collapsing. Billy soon discovers the hypocrisy of his father who is living an abhorrent lifestyle. Billy digs out the truth about his father and he uses his own style to connect him. Ross believes that love is something sacred and it can be expressed in a socially defined way but Martin takes a liberal view of love and sees it something much more primal and indefinable. As the play progresses the audience witnesses the culmination of the frustration of Stevie and her violent and aggressive behavior. She brings the dead body of the goat Sylvia. Martin is distraught as she couldn’t believe her violent attitude and the purpose behind her killing the innocent goat. Stevie uses the words of Martin to justify her actions: “She loved you...you say. As much as I do” (54). Symbolically the impetus of the goat’s sentence was exactly the same as the ruin of Stevie’s life. Stevie’s sacrifice of the goat at the end of the drama is similar to George’s revelation of the dead fantasy-son in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*. Both the plays of Albee are about the connecting of relationships and rebuilding of their shattered marriages. The plot is structured



around the metaphor of the goat and Sylvia is a literal goat who is mentioned in the entire drama. Albee has exposed and ridiculed the bestiality of Martin and his passionate and liberal sexuality. The name of Sylvia reverberates throughout the drama as the whole play is structured around Sylvia. Albee is impacted by the pop culture of America dramatizing the topical issue of gay marriage and homosexuality. Ellen Gainor observes that Albee's *The Goat* dramatizes the contemporary issue of homosexuality and the gay culture puncturing the American morality of the traditional marriage; the theme of the drama is bestiality. Martin's job as an architect is another important symbol in the drama and his task of building of "a dream city" of the future is ridiculed by Albee. His job is connected with the goat symbol and for Gainor Albee expresses his reverence for the American pastoral ideal, contrasting nature and the rural environment with the urban "dream city" he plans to build. Martin looks ridiculous because he violates nature developing his unnatural relationship with Sylvia intending to destroy nature. Albee gives the message that gay culture is aberrant and not good for the healthy growth of civilization. The killing of the goat at the end of the drama is symbolical of restoration of order and affirmation of the faith in normal married life. Interestingly, Albee uses many techniques of Bakhtin to dramatize the unconventional and absurd theme of bestiality and gay culture. He describes the absurdity employing the tools of ludicrous and ridiculous and at the same time he depicts the meaninglessness of life and futility and perversion of Martin's life.

To conclude, in his play *The Goat* of Edward Albee continues his experimentation with the new American culture ridiculing the depravity of the American people. *The Goat* follows the techniques of his play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* as Albee uses Bakhtian tools of comic fun and games to lash at the gay culture of America. Albee uses the tools of parody and Carnavalesque to depict the malaise of the contemporary society. The plot of the plays of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and *The Goat* are full of the comic fun and games provoking laughter. In *The Goat* Albee has exposed and ridiculed the bestiality of Martin and his passionate and liberal sexuality. Albee seems to be seriously engaged with the traditions of comedy, tragedy and the grotesque realism. The audiences who

watched the drama were shocked to know that there could be sexual relationship between a goat and a man. Albee dramatizes death in two spectrums in the play *The Goat*. In the drama *The Goat*, his responses are ambiguous and ironical as his remarks provoke laughter. The plot belongs to the carnival world of Bakhtin as the situations described are funny and unthinkable. The comedy is a powerful tool to get away from the burden of absurdity. Jerry is in the grip of tensions and anxieties but he struggle Albee used the animal imagery of dog and goat to depict the traumatic alienation of the American people employing the techniques of the farcical comedy and grotesque realism of Bakhtin. Edward ridicules the liberal American society through the characters of Martin Gray, his wife Stevie Gray and her son Billy. His suicide shows his weak character in coping with the challenges of life. Bakhtin is in favor of dramatization of the madness because “madness is inherent in all the grotesque forms because madness makes men look at the world with different eyes...” (63). The comic elements such as humor, wit, paradox and melancholic irony structure the plot of the drama. Albee is not serious even on the tragic suicide of Jerry at the end of the drama; Jerry laughs and finds comfort in death laughing at the absurd existence of man. Delving into the depths of despair, Albee’s plays represent the isolation, alienation and the morbid condition of modern man through the images of burlesque and grotesque. Albee depicts a sterile world lacking in morals, compassion and love using the literary devices of the carnival of Bakhtin. In his plays people crave for human contact but men are selfish, cruel and lost in the money hunting culture. The play *The Zoo Story* is an acidic attack on the complacency and smugness of the middle class people represented by Peter and the tools of carnival feast of Bakhtin enhance the grotesque atmosphere of the drama.

## Chapter: Five

### **Parody and Grotesque Realism in Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and *A Delicate Balance***

Mrs. Virginia Woolf was a trend setter in the domain of fiction in the post-World War period who became famous in the world for her *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and *A Room of One's own* (1929). Woolf's life was characterized by periods of madness, and it is not surprising that she depicted the poignant experiences of the contemporary people evolving the technique of the stream of consciousness. Her protagonists suffer from the cancer of alienation and neurotic pressures. Edward Albee examined the themes of breakdown of marriage, love and sex in his play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962) using the tools of grotesque realism and the farcical elements of the comedy. Martha, George, Nick and Honey are the major protagonists who are living with a void but Albee make them to play fun and games to laugh away the painful memories of the past. Albee borrowed the title from Walt Disney's *Three Little Pigs* (1933) giving the song *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?* Albee changed it as *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*. The title excited great interest among the critics. The title of the play is a pun on the song of Walt Disney. Albee substituted the name of the prominent British writer Virginia Woolf. Interestingly, Martha and George sing this song many times in the play in a tone of carnival mockery. Virginia Woolf's essay "*A Room of One's Own*" launched the movement of feminism in the 20th century. Woolf's essay challenges the contemporary patriarchal society of England. Edward Albee's play depicts George and Martha scrapping the traditional values of the American Dream through truth and illusion. Edward Albee's grotesque comedy destroys the idea of the "American Dream". Both texts *A Room of One's Own* and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* deal with the issue of the conflict between truth and illusion. In all the scenes of the drama, Albee's main focus is to puncture the morality of the American society and to break down the illusions of the characters. Albee illustrates the defeated strength of 'spirit' and his protagonists experiencing pain and anguish. The world of Albee is dominated by degeneration; the characters have no option but to continue the

journey of life. Albee's representation of the mind is based on the truth that the world is subject to death and decay. Paradoxically the mind of man is trapped within a body that is essentially perishing. Edward Albee employs the tools of sarcasm and cynicism, grotesque realism and burlesque borrowing from Bakhtin to expose and ridicule the contemporary bankrupt American society. He was greatly influenced by the stylistic techniques used by Ionesco, Genet and Beckett.

### **The Comic Tool of Parody of Rabelais:**

Bakhtin puts high faith on the tool of parody used by the great writers of France and other countries of Europe. He said in *Rabelais and His World*:

During the following centuries, especially in the eleventh, parody drew into its game all the themes of the official teaching and cult of the Church and, in general, all the forms of the serious attitude toward the world. Many parodies of the most important prayers-"Our Father," "Hail Mary", the creed-have been preserved, as well as parodical hymns, for instance, the *Laetebundus* and the litanies. Neither did the parodists hesitate to approach the liturgy. We have the "Liturgy of the Drunkards," the "Liturgy of the Gamblers," and the "Money Liturgy." There are parodies of the gospels: "The Money Gospel of the Mark of Silver," "The Money Gospel of the Paris Student," "The Gambler's Gospel," and "The Drunkard's Gospel". There were parodies of monastic rule, of ecclesiastical decrees and the constitutions of the Councils, of papal bulls and encyclicals, as well as of sermons. As early as the seventh and eighth centuries we find parodies of wills (for instance "The Pig's Will," The Will of the Ass") and of epitaphs. (85)

Bakhtin observes that parody is an important social vehicle of folk culture exposing and ridiculing the vices prevalent in society (*Rabelais and His World* 11). Hence, Parody has the power to bring down to earth the great institutions correcting and reforming them (20-21). Bakhtin while discussing about the feast of fools in his work *Rabelais and His World* said, "The feast of fools showed a particular obstinacy

and force of survival in France (*fete des fous*). This feast was actually a parody and travesty of the official cult, with masquerades and improper dances” (74). In Medieval times, parody was a powerful tool and many writers used this tool to expose and ridicule the social and political parties and institutions. Pope in the 18<sup>th</sup> century used the tools of parody and mock epic to ridicule the fashionable women of the 18<sup>th</sup> century in his famous *The Rape of the Lock*. Jonathan Swift and Dryden used the tools of parody to bring reformation in society. In America, Edward Albee wrote plays and relied on the tools of parody and grotesque realism.

The main focus of Edward Albee is to explore the inner turmoil of his protagonists in his play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*. Both George and Martha are the victims of anxiety and absurdity but Albee uses the tools of the carnivalesque feast to ridicule their disintegration of self. Paolucci observes that Albee made many innovations in the dramatic domain as he exploited all the sources of the traditional and contemporary theatre. Freudian reversals, irony as irony, here for the first time appear whole in a mature and completely satisfying dramatic work (Paolucci 45).

The American theatre of the post World War II era voices an excruciating mood of nihilistic despair as the modern man protests against a life that has been drained off ultimate meaning. The goal of Albee is to expose the deepest layers of human conflicts.

Love, marriage, domestic happiness is missing in the world of Edward Albee. In his plays, love can only coexist with dissatisfaction and suffering. Death is the central issue in *The Zoo Story*. The characters are just anti-heroes who are confused and bewildered. They are not free. Their language is absurd and there is no communication between them. The activities of the characters and their dialogue express the negation of life. George and Martha are misfits in America; they are the victims of anxiety disorders and are aggressive and neurotic. For Martha aggression is the most powerful tool to strike through masks and to make contact with George. Aggression is the perfect way to strip off illusions and to break the web of lies and frauds. Albee's protagonists are reduced to interrogation marks in a world in which everything is problematic and uncertain. Filled with moral despair, they live in an elusive world to escape from the harsh realities of life. George feels homeless and

redundant in an inscrutable universe. He distrusts truth, justice and love and negates all moral and religious values which have been sustaining the human civilization. No wonder, the plot structure of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* depicts the tragic process of the deflation of self. Albee shatters all myths and illusions in this drama. Albee examines and probes the inner world of the protagonists depicting the conflicts between sexuality and spirit, good and evil, matter and mind, the world and the unconsciousness. According to Carl Jung, neurosis is essentially a matter of schism between individual's conscious and unconscious desires—"a dissociation of personality due to the existence of complexes" (Jung 188). For Alfred Adler, the social set up is the basis of the neurotic conflict. While Freud sees in a neurotic very little of social inclination, he is bent on establishing his supremacy in society-an anxiety that springs from a sense of inferiority. Adler contends that "every neurosis can be understood as an attempt to free oneself from a feeling of inferiority in order to gain a feeling of superiority" (Adler 23). Neo Freudians like Eric Fromm and Karen Horney have emphasized "anxiety", "adult experience", "cultural influence on the individual" as the dominant factors of neurosis. The neurotic protagonists like Jerry or George long to enter into "phantasy of life". They seek mechanisms of escape like sado-masochism, destructiveness and conformity. George and Martha manufacture illusions and withdraw into their self created cocoon believing that they can escape from the harsh realities of the outside world.

R.D Laing observes that "the term schizoid refers to an individual, the totality of whose experience is split in two ways. In the first place, there is rent in his relation with his world and, in the second, there is a disruption of his relation with himself" (Laing 8). *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* was first staged at the Billy Rose Theatre, New York, on October 13, 1962. Richard Schechner, the editor of the Tulane Drama Review greeted it as "a persistent escape into morbid fantasy". W.D Maxwell found it "a filthy play". The staging of the play was a grand success as the audience was spellbound. Saul Colin admitted to having "never spent such an emotionally and physically upsetting evening at a theatre". Some critics leveled charges of misogyny, homo-sexuality, and lack of originality. The critics observed that Albee's play is an imitation of Strindberg's *The Bond*. Charles Thomas Samuels also lambasted Albee and observed thus:

But what seems more damaging is the author's confusion of the social problem of discrimination with a portrait of neurotic womanhood and Strindbergian conflict. (Samuels 190)

Despite the scathing criticism, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* became a popular drama since it indicted the entire American civilization which suffers from emotional and spiritual sterility. Albee dramatizes the harrowing existence of a neurotic and frustrated history Professor who teaches in a small American college. George leads a lonely and desperate life struggling in a grotesque manner to live through illusions and phantasm. The plot of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is full of anguish, frustration and defeat. George and Martha are cut off from the old securities as they no longer visualize a harmonious social relationship in a society. The ideas of Darwin push George and Martha as well as Nick and Honey onward, their shared lack of clear purpose is the main focus of the drama. Sex, violence, perversion, moral and spiritual damnation are the main themes of the play. George is dramatized as a lonely individual, craving for the love and affection of a son but whose false illusions result into his being the victim of comedy of grotesque. Albee dramatizes him when he finds himself in a crisis. He has two possible ways of acting either to face reality or to retreat into illusion. His passionate tendency to cling to neurotic illusions dehumanizes his personality and debilitates his sensibility. *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is a grotesque comedy and the main focus of Albee is to puncture all illusions of George and Martha. The textual analysis of the plot of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* exposes George and Martha who are living in their own self-created illusive world. Albee has brought many issues into the limelight. Many critics are of the opinion that the play is a psychological "case study" of married couples who are leading a meaningless life in the contemporary American society. The plot of the novel depicts the traumatic life of two couples- George and Martha and Nick and Honey. George married Martha twenty three years ago and Nick is a Biology Professor who married Honey recently. The life of the old couple is contrasted with the young couple and in a way George and Martha see in the new couple their past life. Albee uses the elements of wit, irony and paradox to expose and ridicule the corrupted American family institution. Nick married Honey for money; Martha's father also married his second wife for money. Albee takes up the

problem of love and sex in family relationship; he depicts the psychological tensions of the married people who run after money at the cost of real love. In fact corruption has polluted the married life of the Americans. The family ties are crumbling very fast because of the supremacy of money culture.

Albee's characters look helpless and feel trapped in a Godless universe where sufferings are an inescapable reality. The plays of Beckett are packed with the scenes of evil, sins, and disasters. Suffering constitutes the centre of Albee's plays; his protagonists are involved in multifarious situations expressing different kinds of human responses to suffering, ranging from meek passivity to rebellion and exile. In accordance with this perception of suffering, all of Albee's protagonists are worn out with age and ailment, paralyzed and immobilized, and awaiting extinction as a possible relief from their weary existence. The psychologist and sociologists believe that modern age is the age of social and moral dilemmas. Carl Gustav Jung observes thus: "Western culture teaches us that every man is the unique, isolated 'self'" (Jung 20). People are getting away from their old cultural norms, the alienation from culture results into fragmentation of society. C.G. Jung called it the "collective unconsciousness" symbolizing wisdom, purpose, and sense (Jung 20). When man cuts himself from the collective consciousness; he is filled with fear, anxiety and uncertainty. The play may be described as "an allegory of American society. It is a poetic image of its emptiness and sterility". The main focus is on the dilemmas of a couple who struggle to live despite the fissures in relations. Anita Stenz rightly says:

Edward Albee explored the absurdities and dilemmas faced by the husband and wife. Martha is a barren lady and George is an impotent; Albee has explored the destructive forces which wreck the happiness of the couple. (Stenz 3)

Albee projects his main protagonist who struggle to live in the false illusive world to escape from the terrors of life. Alan Schneider directed the play for the first time and he found out that "What Albee wanted was the image of a womb or a cave" (Schneider 39). The plot centers on the "games of deceit and betrayal" which George and Martha play to escape from the neurotic tensions of their life. "What a dump" (7) is the first disgusting remark of Martha that sets the tone of the drama.



George is reading Spengler's book *The Decline of the West*. The play begins in a very soft note. Nick is a new Biology Professor. Martha has invited him and his wife, Honey for drinks. After Nick and Honey arrive, George and Martha begin ridiculing their twenty years of marriage, violently and brutally. Both feel that the marriage was a failure. George and Martha indulge in typical games to pass time and to entertain each other. Berne and Harris in the book *Games People Play: The Psychology of Human Relationships* (1973) defined the comic fun and games of George and Martha. The players do not join voluntarily, but are lured into the game. Each game has certain set rules and nobody dares to violate these rules. They play their parts without even realizing that a game is going on. Garff Wilson wrote his book *Three Hundred Years of American Drama and Theatre* (1973) to explore the nature and significance of the witty games played by George and Martha. He describes the play as an "all night drinking party during which two couples ruthlessly and sadistically rip each other to shreds" (Wilson 487). Malkin wrote *Verbal Violence in Contemporary Drama: From Handke to Sheppard* (1992) and wrote that the games "demand little action, only an abundance of verbal energy" (Malkin 165). In the opinion of Roudane (2005) George and Martha are "two connoisseurs of verbal dueling" (Roudane 45), and in Ruby Cohen's words they are experts in "sodomasochistic language" (Cohen 217). George and Martha treat language "as a power tool, to be controlled and possessed" (*Who's Afraid* 171). L. Kane has commented thus in *The Language of Silence: On the Unspoken and the Unspeakable in Modern Drama* (1984). George and Martha use the cynical and bitter language to threaten and intimidate the audience. It is an unconventional language; the product of their sterile life and absurd existence. They construct an 'imaginary son' to confront the metaphysical despair (Kane 20). Albee was familiar with such games which symbolize the different forms of pathological relationships. The fun and games are not new to Albee alone. The other dramatists like Harold Pinter, Eugene O'Neill, and Tennessee Williams have used this dramatic device to portray the inner turbulence of the protagonists. Pinter's *Caretaker*, *Betrayal* and *The Birthday Party* are interesting plays dealing with such situations. The motive behind is to expose and ridicule the funny and ridiculous characters of George and Martha who are too fragile to confront the reality. Tennessee Williams wrote his

famous drama *A Streetcar Named Desire* to depict the world of false illusions of Blanche. Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night* also portrays different forms of entrapment in pathological relationships. George and Martha indulge in delusive fun and games. George and Martha rely on the value of self-delusion and believe that it is the only source of their happiness and survival. R.D. Laing (1961) observes thus: "Illusion is a technique to deceive oneself under a strong wish. It is an expression of traumatic experiences. Collusion is a game played by two or more people whereby they deceive themselves. It is a game involving mutual self-deception. So collusion is necessarily a trans-personal or interpersonal process" (Laing 98). According to Roudane, Albee propagates the theme that the "audience must enjoy their pipe-dreams if they want to but realize the meaning and significance of self deception and destructive illusion in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*" (Roudane 109). Cohn contends that "all the games included in this play "Humiliate the Host", "Get the Guests", "Hump the hostess", and "Bringing up Baby" "suggest a miniature society" (*Who's Afraid* 96). Toby Zinman argues that the plot of the play shows in "the dysfunctional family, a subject American drama has been in love with from the beginning" (Zinman 39). Albee virulently satirizes the American culture, American Dream, the success myth, the image of American womanhood. The institution of marriage is attacked through the couples who live in the hell. Martha is unpleasant and aggressive; her vulgarity is her chief weapon to pull down her husband. She cultivates the appearance of fertility in spite of her age. Maria Stenz observes that "Martha is an alienated woman who lived at home and 'daydreamed about her future instead of creating it herself" (Stenz 41).

Martha and George live in the small New England town of new Carthage. Their wonderful old house suggests a middle class home with tiled bathroom, door-chimes and a portable bar. The play begins with distrust and lack of mutual confidence between husband and wife. George and Martha are unable to have a child together. Martha has nothing to do at home; she spends her time in shopping: "She is a housewife; she buys things" (Albee 6). Martha is a woman without any aesthetic sense; she lives in her own false delusions and doesn't struggle to improve the quality of her life. She lives in self-pity and disillusionment. She spends her

nights enjoying gin and soda. The action in the play mainly revolves around the verbal attacks and counter attacks of George and Martha who spare no opportunity in insulting the other, and Martha outshines her husband in this field by calling him a “pig” (*Who’s Afraid* 16). The atmosphere of the drama recalls Congreve’s famous play *The Way of the World* in which the sexual intrigues form the main fabric of the plot. George and Martha play many games to amuse themselves. The first game is called “Humiliate the Host”. George directs Martha to start blue games to entertain the guests, Nick and Honey. But George himself is the victim of the game. As C.W.E. Bigsby writes, he is a “defeated liberal who has largely opted out of a world whose values he does not share” (Bigsby 49). George knows that his life has stagnated but he creates an illusion to hide the truth and he refuses to compromise his integrity. The entire of George and Martha is based on a funny and grotesque imagination. Then follows the humorous game of the carnival feast “Humiliate the Host” and George takes the charge to take revenge from Martha. George calls Martha a “book dropper! Child mentioner!” (140). George is in high spirits as he plans to retaliate with full energy:

We've played Humiliate the Host ... we've gone through that one ... what shall we do now?” (138); “there are other games. How about ... how about ... Hump the Hostess?” (139)

Martha calls him “a portrait of a man drowning”. Martha is under the attack of George. He manipulates another game to let her down. He proposes: “We'll play a round of Get the Guests. How about that? How about a little game of get the guests?” (140). George knows how to control Martha, Nick and Honey. The tone of Martha is quite cynical and ridiculing: “I don't know what you're so tired about ... you haven't done anything all day, you didn't have any classes or anything” (67). George proved a dullard as Martha pulls him up: “When you've made something, you want to pass it on, to somebody. So I was sort of on the lookout for...prospects with the new men. An heir apparent” (88). Martha delights in sadistic pleasure in bullying George. When the ladies go upstairs, George and Nick confide in one another. George's failure to achieve distinction in the History department and his failure as a writer are the basis for “Humiliate the Host” (38). Nick's opportunistic

marriage with Honey for money and her hysterical pregnancy allows George to retaliate in “Get the Guests” (93). Martha’s infidelity and her sexual advances provide basis for ‘Hump the Hostess’ (15). Martha’s disclosure to Nick that she and George have a son provided the basis for “Bring up Baby”. Each game in the drama unravels the psychic pressures of the individuals and their inner void. The games create a miniature culture with rules and regulations and a fluid value system. The breach of confidence is very common; each character assails the other to derive sadistic pleasure. Martha is at her best in showing her vulgarity and in desperation, George cries out:

THE GAME IS OVER!” (136). Martha refuses to stop and goes on insulting George who with new energy declares to take revenge from Martha: “This is my game! You played yours... you people. This is my game! (142)

George cuts Nick down to size in front of Honey and Martha. Honey becomes sick and starts vomiting, she rushes to the bathroom:

Martha: “You make me sick”.

George: “It’s perfectly all right for you...I mean, you can make your own rules...you can go around like a hopped-up Arab, slashing away at everything in sight, scaring up half the world if you want to. But somebody else try it...no sir!” (151-52)

George is happy that he has taken revenge from Martha, he is happy that Martha is all cards down. In this situation of exultation he advises her thus: George: “I’m giving you good advice, now. [...] There’s quicks and here, and you’ll be dragged down, just as.... [...] ...before you know it... sucked down....” (115). Martha is an angry, frustrated and a strong woman who cannot be easily defeated. She and Nick join together to humiliate George. Martha crosses all barriers and limits of womanhood. She openly seduces Nick to offend George who cries in a trance: “You ineffectual sons of bitches... You’re the worst!” (111). He is so much hurt that he decides to take revenge upon his rivals. The games George and Martha play symbolize their freedom. There are strict rules of the games as these games cannot

be played everywhere or anytime. George and Martha play fun and games strictly according to the rules. Each game has an internal order. Again each game has an end in itself. Each game excites tensions and promotes feelings of competition. Interestingly the opening of the play is very unconventional and innovative. George and Martha play games to humiliate each other. Their dialogues are packed with subtle verbal phrases, the witty and cynical language depict the inner void of the protagonists. The role played by Nick, who in the eyes of voluptuous Martha is “young...and blond and...well-built” (9). Nick is young and attractive; Martha tries to seduce him to excite jealousy in George who is impotent. Martha has won her one match by knocking George down with “a punch in the jaw” (56). Nick is physically agile and Martha is sensual and erotic. In Act I, Martha returns downstairs to join the others. She is now in her “most voluptuous” clothes. George comments thus: “There you are, my pet” (47). Nick is highly impressed by the sexual appeal of Martha and says: “Well, now. ...” (47). Nick is ambitious as he enjoys the sexual adultery; Martha has the thirst for revenge. It looks preposterous that George ignores Martha’s sexual orgies and Nick’s sexual advances for Martha. George’s home reflects the limit of hollowness and perversions of the American culture. George knows that Martha is a sick cat suffering from mental disorder as he says: “What it is, actually, is it a pictorial representation of the order of Martha’s mind?” (22).

Albee creates an unconventional community populated by George and Martha who throw away all moral scruples as the fun and games supply them the value system contrary to the practical experience of life. They follow the comic rules of the games as they cannot love seriously. When the rules are broken all their illusions are lost and they come down to the world of reality, depressed and frustrated. The antagonistic spirit is established at the very beginning of the game world. A vicious cycle of the game world begins in the First Act. The Act “Fun and Games” begins the conflict between George and Martha. They employ highly destructive weapons to pull down each other. The weapons here are finger-nails. George and Martha “tear at one another’s vitals” like truck drivers. Martha uses the tools of barbarism to vent out her pent up emotions of morbidity. Richard E. Armchair observes in his book *Edward Albee* (1969) thus:

Martha seems to be suffering from a long standing psychological repression of an unsolved problem that the alcoholic intoxication and the consequent events of the play in the Third Act eventually flush out of deep hiding in the labyrinth of her sub-consciousness. (Armchair 83)

Nick and Honey and the audience witness hurling of dirty remarks, swearing, cursing and shouting going on throughout the night. George, Martha, Nick and Honey play the game of deceit in the drama. Nick is a Professor of Biology and Honey is his wife. Nick and Honey are the doubles of George and Martha. Nick and Honey symbolize the past of George and Martha. The young couple represents the dreams and aspirations of George and Martha. Honey's hysterical pregnancy is also symbolical in the drama. In Bigsby's words, they represent "a warning of the next stage of decline" (Bigsby 267). Martha is the main psychopathological case who seeks to get release from her neurotic tensions through verbal violence and cruelty to avenge on her husband for giving a "luckless life". The world of George and Martha is nocturnal, hermetic and demonic- a world haunted by death and horrors. The four neurotic protagonists play nothing but games-"war games" and "nerve games". Walter Karr sums up the atmosphere of the play thus: "Hell lived there but all the devils were great jokers mocking at the desperate neurotic despair of the individuals" (Karr 122-23). The tone of Martha is derogatory in the very first scene; she uses insulting remarks for her husband, calls George a "cluck" and a "dumbbell", "blank", "flop", "cipher", "pig" and "Zero". Martha is discontented with her house, with her husband who never does anything "You never do anything; you never mix ... You just sit around and talk" (7). The deceitful games of George and Martha express their love-hate relationship. As the plot develops, their neurotic relationship becomes violent and aggressive. Martha's reckless and indifferent attitude is an expression of her neurotic tensions. George objects to Martha: "I wish you'd tell me about something sometime. ... I wish you'd stop *springing* things on me all the time" (11). However, Martha derives sadistic pleasure when she sees him in rage: "I like your anger. I think that's what I like about you most ... your anger" (14). George is too weak to confront the stark reality of life lacking the guts to grapple with the external forces that agonizes him. He has conceived a world of

fantasy to nurture such illusions of life which are antidote to mental depression, nausea, despair and metaphysical loneliness. For example, George has cemented his marriage relationship with the fiction of their “illusiv son”. Charles Lyons investigates the role of the child in the life of George and Martha as he observes:

Within the plot structure of *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* the fantasy child is the vessel of Martha’s and George’s hopes and fears: the object of an incestuous eroticism, a weapon in their attempt to maim each other, and an extension of their will in time. In another sense, the child is their attempt to enjoy the game of “normality” in the face of the reality they comfort. (Lyons 70)

George knows that he is impotent and his wife sterile, but the fiction of having fathered a son sustains his life. In his article “Hidden Meaning of *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*” John Dollard interprets the creation of the illusionary child: “Well, it could mean that Martha was safe and George shared the delusions but if she tried to persuade others without that George’s love and tolerance; they would reject the phantasm and count Martha as insane” (Dollard 46). George describes his fictional son “our own little all- American something or other”. They are committed to reaffirm the illusive microcosm, the only way left to live in a psychological vacuum. John Mc Carten rightly described the action of the play as a “long night’s journey into daze” (Mac Carten 85). Albee has given the historical background of the families of George and Martha in bits and pieces. Martha tells Nick and Honey in Act I that her mother died when she was a child. Her father was very fond of her and she grew up very close to her father. Her father insisted that she should divorce him. She started living with her father. She met and fell in love with George. Martha married George just to please her father. George also led a troubled childhood. In Act II George tells Nick the harrowing tale of his life, how he accidentally killed his mother, and later his father. George’s comedy of concealment alludes to his love-hate relationship with Martha expressed in a lyricism of witty malice. George and Martha are experts in picking up fights over petty things; their clash of egos precipitates the situation at home before the guests for they have no moral decency to behave like civilized human beings.

The verbal duet of George and Martha provoke huge laughter creating the carnival atmosphere talked about by Bakhtin. Albee dramatizes the ambiguity between truth and illusion. George has developed hatred for her father-in-law and he enjoys digging at her father: "Your father has tiny red eyes like...like a white mouse. In fact, he's a white mouse" (57). Truth is a fact which threatens both George and Martha since both are weak and fragile; illusion is a false image which they have created to survive in the harsh world. This false image is the product of their abnormal mental disorder. Martha never misses an opportunity to humiliate George. She uses all the means to dethrone him. Her cynical remark "You make me puke" indicates how intolerable she finds him. Then after some time she demands "a great big sloppy kiss" from him. Martha calls George a "flop" or a "stud" depending on how he can perform in bed. George and Martha go on creating scene after scene and in each attack a scene of seduction is enacted. Martha's opening line "What a dump" (3) begins the scene of attack and counter attack. Martha depicts the impotency of George. She calls him thin and weak. He appears as a man whose wife can knock him down. Bakhtin observes thus:

Carnival has worked out an entire language of symbolic concretely sensations forms- from large and complex mass actions to individual carnivalistic gestures. This language, in a differentiated and even (as in any language) articulate way, gave expression to a unified (but complex) carnival sense of the world, permeating all its forms. The language cannot be translated in any full or adequate way it is amenable to a certain transposition into a language of artistic images that has something in common with its concretely serious nature.

*(Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 122)*

George defends himself against the allegations of Martha, he claims that he does not have a "paunch" in comparison of Nick: "What I've got . . . I've got this little distension just below the belt . . . but it's hard . . . It's not soft flesh. I use the handball courts" (35). Nick is not interested in fun and games at the initial stage but soon he starts playing the game with determination to attract Martha. Nick soon gets involved in the fun and games of the hosts. He expresses his resolve: "I'll play the



charades like you've got 'em set up... I'll play in your language... I'll be what you say I am" (150). George takes up the challenge and says: "Now I've got you, you SOB". When he tries to lay the "Queen of Spades", Nick attacks George and forces him to kick him. George admits that "Nick has the most profound indication of a social malignancy ... no sense of humor" (68). In Act II Nick tells the truth about him to George: "You've got History on your side. ... I've got Biology on mine. History, Biology" (112). Nick is rational, practical and believes in facts. George is romantic, imaginary and unrealistic. He takes Science as a menace. George starts condemning Martha in front of Nick using insulting and derogatory words. Nick soon becomes sick of the hosts who fight like dirty animals. He is shocked by the vulgarity of Martha. Martha plays her trump card to provoke George. She wants to give a psychological torture to enjoy the fun. Martha teases George with more energy than she employs in seducing Nick. George feels almost non-existent in the presence of Nick: "Don't I sort of fade into the background... get lost in the cigarette smoke" (32). Martha uses very derogatory remarks to emasculate George: "he's not completely sure it's his own kind" (71). Albee juxtaposes mirth and gloom, laughter and tears to produce dark humor. George and Martha behave like tribal savages as they draw pleasure in hurting others. Their sadistic pleasure creates an atmosphere of disgust. Throughout the drunken evening in the play, George reveals the truth about the marriage of Nick. They become witness to their dysfunction and illusions. The characters pretend, play games and hide the truth. Nick sarcastically comments: "Hell, I don't know when you people are lying or what". "We all play" shows that everyone is hidden behind falsehood and dependent on lies. Alcohol is used as a symbol to mask true emotions.

The games in Albee's play including "peeling back the label" are metaphors that reveal the truth hidden behind each of the characters. The audience witness the stage filled with wounds springing from love-hate relationship, glancing blows, destructions of confidence, revulsions, intimidations, bitter exaltations and hopeless embraces. George and Martha tear at each other with their biting sharp words. The sadistic purpose is to give pain and draw blood. George and Martha behave like wounded animals, always ready to attack each other to draw blood. Indeed, George

and Martha are the dysfunctional couple. Albee exposes and ridicules the mystery of the relationship between George and Martha layer by layer in each dialogue. The comic and grotesque is mixed to heighten the absurdity of human relationships. George accusations relate Martha to animals: “She is braying, chewing ice cubes like a cocker spaniel, and howling like a sub-human monster”. George tells Martha:

It's just I've got to figure out some new way to fight you, Martha.  
Guerilla tactics, maybe ... internal subversion ... I don't know.  
Something. (125)

The emotional instability of Martha is an index to the personal emptiness of her life. Martha feels uprooted and helpless; she seeks refuge in her violent outbursts to escape from the neurotic fits. Her prejudices against George and her guests are a mask to ensure that she is still in control of her life. Martha finds no meaning in her life; she spends nights drowned in gin and days in sleeping off the drunkenness. In despair Martha is seen packing away the booze: “My God, you can swill it down, can't you” (16). She drinks and drinks and becomes intoxicated. Her sexual instincts become active when she is drunk. George ridicules her sexual expression thus: “your skirt up over your head” (17). While dancing with Nick, Martha starts flirting with him. She talks about the novel of George. She knows how to arouse George's anger and how to torment George. George warns Martha that “THE GAME IS OVER” (136), but Martha doesn't listen to George and his threats and continues: “Imagine such a thing! A book about a boy who murders his mother and kills his father, and pretends it's all an accident!” (136). She uses abusive and filthy verbal attacks on George who has withdrawn into his own world of fantasy. George is made to feel the burden of his hollowness of existence:

I'm numbed enough... now, to be able to take you when we're alone.  
I didn't listen to you.... Or when I do listen to you, I sift everything. I  
bring everything down to reflex response, so I don't really hear you,  
which is the only way to manage it. (Albee 155)

While the guests, Honey and Nick are silent spectators, George and Martha creates a night of carnage and chaos indulging in convulsive giggles, guffaws and

smirks. Now George is worried about his game with Martha. Albee gives the metaphor of chess to describe the attacks and counter attacks of the players. They freely use fraud and duplicity to outwit others. Like a chess game, his game is of deceptions, frauds, and hoaxes. Nick and Honey function as contrasts to George and Martha. Nick is dominant, controls every situation and his wife Honey obeys him. He is young, bright and successful and his sexual attractiveness excites sexual passions in Martha. Honey is unfit to comprehend reality; she is quite passive in the drama. She is horrified at the words “violence, violence!” (135). Sexual and erotic gestures of Martha provoke laughter in the drama. George knows the sexual intentions of Martha who is taking physical liberties with Nick. He does not dissuade Nick. Unlike Martha, Honey is a weaker partner, she is slim hipped and infertile given to hysterical pregnancies. Honey is not a tall woman; she is not pretty as well. Martha calls her as “a mousey little type, without any hips, or anything” (20). In Act II, George refers to her as “monkey-nipples” and “angel-tits”. George is a psychologist; he can read what is going in the mind of Martha. George tells Nick: “One of the things I do not know about them is what they talk about while the men are talking. (Vaguely) I must find out some time” (42). Honey is quite a boring and a passive character; She giggles things like “Oh, isn’t this lovely!” (20) and “Well I had fun...it was a wonderful party” (21). She is un-offensive, always stupid and devoted to her husband. The games these married people play expose them bone and marrow. Now marriage provides Nick and Martha the opportunities for adultery. George flays Martha thus: “musical beds is the faculty sport around here” (34). The seriousness of marital relationship is lost in the whirlpool of fun and games they play. George sarcastically remarks that “the way to a man’s heart is through his wife’s belly” (34). George uses an opportunity to caricature his wife in the most deriding language calling her an incestuous mother who would sleep with her imagined son: “He couldn’t stand you fiddling at him all the time, breaking into the bedroom with your kimono flying, fiddling at him all the time, with your liquor breath on him, and your hands all over his... our son ran all the time because Martha here used to corner him” (120).

The climax of the drama comes when George takes a short-barreled shotgun and aims it at the back of Martha’s head and pulling the trigger. “You are dead!

Pow! You're dead!" George says (57). All his dramatic gestures provoke laughter and the other characters don't take George and Martha seriously. The red and yellow Chinese parasol released from the barrel of the gun symbolizes Martha's defeat. Now George takes Nick to task and plays a subtle game to entrap him. Nick is not very clever as he is easily entrapped. He again trusts Martha and this time also he is deceived. While Nick is struggling in their trap, appreciation does not last much, the destructive war of words begins again between George and Martha. The love-hate relationship between George and Martha continues. Martha calls him a bastard and hurts his ego. She alleges that he makes her sick. George tries to console Martha thus: "I thought you'd like it, sweetheart ... it's sort of to your taste ... blood, carnage and all. Why, I thought you'd get all excited" (152) .

Laing (1961) observes that "people engulfed in schizophrenic interactions are constantly puzzling over what is meant by any statement, for any statement can function in innumerable ways" (Laing 158). George and Martha are tied in a mysterious trap of games of lies and frauds. They are engulfed in the vicious cycle of attacks and counter-attacks. They desperately desire to end all games but they seem to be helpless. Albee exposes and ridicules the sacred institution of marriage and the concept of fidelity in a witty lyrical style. For Martha and George, Nick and Honey fidelity is a meaningless value, they derive pleasures only from fun and games. The turning point in Act I occurs when Honey tells George that Martha discussed with her about her son who will be twenty one the next day. George feels threatened by reality as he restlessly asks Honey twice, "She told you about him?" This illusory son serves as a comfort until Martha breaks the rule of the game by mentioning it to Nick and Honey. Needless to say there exists a solid bond between George and Martha in their endless verbal dueling.

Martha slowly tortures George by heaping indignities on him imitating Mrs. Fainall of *The Way of the World* of Congreve. She tells the guests that George is an unsuccessful writer, and an impotent husband. George cannot tolerate his humiliation and says to Martha: "I'm six years younger than you are" (15). George implies that she is old and useless because she is no longer pretty. Martha pays him back in the same tone and says: "Well you're going bald" (15). George feels

threatened and says: "I said I was impressed, Martha. I'm beside myself with jealousy" (49). George and Martha cry and make their tears frozen. However, the cycle continues. Nick discovers that Honey "is lying down on the floor again, the tiles, all cured up, and she starts peeling the label off the liquor bottle, the brandy bottle" (187). Nick asserts that "'tis the refuge we take when the unreality of the world weighs too heavy on our tiny heads. Relax; sink into it; you're no better than anybody else" (188). Martha makes sexual advances to Nick in front of Honey and George. The tone becomes aggressive and serious when the reference is to their "son" about whom they have promised to keep secret. The mystery about the "child" of George and Martha is the main pillar of the plot. The "child" expresses a desire for fecundity within their relationship. Their fictitious "child" is a symbol of their survival; it is the fertility symbol expressing their hopes and aspirations. Both are leading a life in this absurd world on the strength of this "fictitious child". The child symbolizes maturity and adulthood. The false illusion of the child sustains their life. But illusion cannot remain for long as it gets destroyed sooner or later. The child symbolizes all their hopes and aspirations, needs and problems of existence. The symbol of the child also connects George and Martha to Honey and Nick. Nick and Honey are also childless. Honey is afraid of childbearing. George pleads Martha to keep the secret of their child, it is an understanding of their private life and no outsider should know it. Martha grows violent and aggressive and thinks she knows how to outwit George in fun and games. Martha emerges a great manipulator of the game and makes George angry. She wins the power game. They dominate the show playing their fun and games of deceit before Nick and Honey. There are two major games running throughout the drama. Martha and George are playing a very humorous game. The other is between Nick and Martha. Martha starts sexual games with Nick just to excite jealousy in the mind of George. Martha is very uncertain in her attitude as she changes her colors like a chameleon. George is worried about Martha as he reads Martha's mind. He is sure that in her sexual mania she will divulge the secret of their "fictitious son" to Honey. George becomes violent and in a fit of frenzy he attempts to strangle Martha. He pushes her against a car and threatens to shoot her with a gun. George calls Martha a monster who refutes his accusation thus: Martha: "I'm loud and I'm vulgar, and I wear the pants in the house

because somebody's got to, but I am not a monster. I'm not". George: "You're a spoiled, self-indulgent, willful, dirty-minded, liquor-ridden" (33). Indeed, the funny games of Martha and George played before Nick and Honey are clinical in nature. The games are played not to pass time but to get release from the neurotic tensions and obsessions. George and Martha are virtually leading a hellish life since Martha is a barren lady and George is physically impotent. The problem with Martha is that she is scared of reality and George tolerates her: "I don't mind your dirty underthings in public...well, I do mind, but I have reconciled myself to that...but you have moved, bag and baggage, into your own fantasy world" (109).

Ironically Martha reels under pressures of false dreams and illusions. All the protagonists are bound to suffer ennui and boredom in life. Their options in life are limited, either they can end their life by committing suicide like Jerry or they can get lost in the world of fantasy and illusions. Pinter also dramatized the same situation in his play *Caretaker*. In this play the protagonists Aston and Mick play fun games with Dick who is an uninvited guest. Nick and Honey are unable to understand the malicious intentions of George. The guests are unaware of George's collusion with Martha. They go on participating in the games enjoying the drinks. The last scene is totally different to its preceding scenes. The violent atmosphere, the sharp language, tears and outbursts give a primitive feel to the audience. The marriage of George and Martha seems dysfunctional because Martha is childless. They try to deal in their own way with the absurd situation of their life. The absence of a child creates a void in their life. Martha becomes loud while George becomes pessimistic. Martha's "fictitious son" is a symbol as well as a "weapon they use in every one of their arguments". The imaginary son had been a source of hope and happiness for twenty one years. George cannot kill his "kid" since he is the only hope left in the world. Martha forgets that she has broken the rules of the game mentioning her "son" to Nick and Honey. The theme of death is predominant in the plays of Edward Albee. He came under the influence of Nietzsche, Ionesco, Camus, Genet and Beckett and evolved the nihilistic approach to life. The existentialists supported Nietzsche's assertion that "God is dead". No wonder, death is the main theme in the drama. Nelvin Vos in his article "The Process of Dying in the Plays of Edward Albee" observes that "with death man faces the mystery of Being and Nothingness. Death

brings man to the threshold of authentic existence” (Vos 123). The climax of the drama begins with the Act "The Exorcism", when George and Martha play the last game of "bringing up baby". Martha and George are at their best enjoying sadistic pleasure in venomous, cannibalistic attacks as they feed on each other's weaknesses. Albee follows Artaud in depicting the savage behavior of his protagonists. Artaud openly declared thus: "But whoever said Theatre was made to define character, to resolve conflicts of a human, emotional order of the present day psychological nature" (Artaud 28). Indeed, betraying a taste for crime, sexuality, savageness and perversion, George and Martha are conceived as the protagonists of *The Theatre of Cruelty*. The tragedy with this neurotic couple is that they indulge in private savage games rather than face their shared loneliness. In the last scene of the drama, Martha is intoxicated and exhausted. George wishes to win his deceitful game. She wishes to make Martha mad. The last game is a true test of George and Martha like a boxing match. George explains the whole situation to a baffled Honey, "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" (155). George finally realizes his compulsion to save Martha's very existence. The son-myth must be broken to exist in the real world. The marrow allusion signifies George's compulsion to strip away the illusion governing their lives.

The last Act is full of tension; Albee uses all his power to expose his characters. Martha is on the verge of total disintegration. She is seen talking to herself in a fit of neurosis. She confesses her defeat to herself. She acknowledges: "Martha, I've misjudged you. And I've misjudged you, too, George" (185). The trouble with an illusion is that it works for a time. George knows that he cannot afford to live in the illusive microcosm. No wonder, the Third Act is really ritualistic: George wants to destroy all demons of illusions. The ritual of "exorcism" is very effective. George decides to kill their "son" to take revenge from Martha. He is forced to take this harsh decision of life for a better future because it is not possible to spend the whole life in illusions. He is in rage and looks desperate. He does it to wound Martha deeply. He declares that the boy is killed in a car accident on a country road while trying to avoid a porcupine. Martha pleads with George not to go through with his plan, but George doesn't listen to her. " NO! NO! YOU

CANNOT DO THAT! YOU CAN'T DECIDE THAT FOR YOURSELF! I WILL NOT LET YOU DO THAT! I WILL NOT LET YOU DECIDE THESE THINGS ” (232). Martha tries her best to plead and dissuade George not to go with the cruel plan. Martha is horrified and cries in despair: “YOU CAN'T KILL HIM! YOU CAN'T HAVE HIM DIE!” (233). Martha asks George to show her the death telegram. George in a grotesque manner tells her that he ate the telegram. George interrogates Martha: “When man can't abide by the present, as it is, there are just two options open: people can either 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!” (178). Until now, George has brooded over the past, but from now on, he will “alter the future”. This commitment of George reflects his desperate attempt to reconcile with the existential agony of life. In spite of the protests of Martha, George breaks the illusive microcosm exorcising the child:

George: “Martha ...Our son is dead...He was ...killed...late in the afternoon...on a country road, with his learner's permit in his pocket, he swerved, to avoid a porcupine, and drove straight into a ...

”Martha: “YOU...CAN'T ...Do...THAT!”

George: “...large tree”. (231)

The entire is full of hilarious comedy and is packed with farcical elements. Ruby Cohen observes that George's decision is not merely “theatrically punitive” (Cohen 22), nor is it a response to “demonic spite” (Cohen 59), as Anne Paolucci suggests. It is an emotional outburst of Martha who is too weak to endure the existential reality. Schechner comments thus: “there is no real, hard bedrock of suffering in *Virginia Woolf*, it is all illusory, depending upon a child who never was born: a gimmick, a trick, a trap” (Schechner 77). George weeps, his bitter tears reveal that he is conscious of his loss. In fact, in punishing Martha, he is punishing himself. Martha still sees the child as a savior, a medium of reconciliation and redemption in a hostile world. Martha called him “Sonny Jim”, out of love and affection as a mother. Her imagined son had created an emotional bridge between



the husband and wife. George and Martha enjoyed the bliss of the married life through imagined reminiscences of the child's life. George and Martha are seen talking quietly together in anguish after George has killed the baby. George sees the baby not as Dionysus or Christ reborn to inaugurate a new age or to save people, but as a demon to be exorcised, the product of "Walpurgisnacht Orgy". Martha knows that life will be very horrible for her. Theirs is the tragedy of wasted life. George and Martha are bound to live in a void with no hope of future. They have to live in reality. But the power of the love they share lies in its transforming quality. Love is a fraud for them. Life becomes unbearable for George. Despite her near-infidelity, Martha truly loves George. She cries and confesses: "He is "the only man in my life who has ever [. . .] made me happy" (189).

Martha and George killed their fantasy child to live in a world of reality. The hopes of Vladimir and Estragon in Beckett's play are shattered because Godot doesn't arrive. The hopes of George and Martha are also shattered because they are relying on false and illusive ways of life. Both George and Martha feel the unendurable pain but they cannot live in illusion for long. Albee uses a new medium of communication to articulate the comic shock of George and Martha. George and Martha are alone on the stage ready to bear all the burden of reality.

Edward Albee's *A Delicate Balance* was first staged at Martin Beck Theatre, New York and Albee got first Pulitzer Prize for its rich experimentation and the themes of alienation, frustration from a new Bakhtian perspective. *A Delicate Balance* was also nominated for Tony Award for Best Play of the year. The triangular struggle Tobias, Agnes, and Julia is on the pattern of Bakhtin. The main protagonist is Julia whose marital problems bring disturbance in the lives of all characters. Julia's role is very significant in the drama. She serves a functional metaphor expressing her emotions and revealing the true nature of her family triangle. The plot of the drama depicts the rupture of relations of a wealthy couple Agnes and Tobias. Tobias is a retired person. He employs a gardener and several other servants. He is the member of a country club and is very fond of playing golf. His living room is adorned with crystal chandeliers. He is very fond of keeping books; his shelves are filled with books. He is "proud of his wines" (47). Harry and

Edna are their old friends; they bring a firestorm of doubt and recrimination resulting into the fracture of the delicate balance in relationship. C. W. E. Bigsby observed “that Albee’s whole work is “characterized by an overwhelming sense of loss” (12). Loss is a major factor that adds to the feeling of loneliness. Agnes in *A Delicate Balance* asked herself thus: “Do we dislike happiness? We manufacture such a portion of our own despair ... such busy folk” (132). Bigsby called him a “post-nuclear writer” (125) concerned about the disintegration of self.

John Simon viewed the central issue as “the limits of friendship” (628). *Newsweek* called *A Delicate Balance* “a parable of human responsibility and estrangement” (98). Ruby Cohen called it a “drama about the limits of love” (38). The main focus of Albee in the play is to depict the dysfunctional marital relations which bring untold miseries to the protagonist. All the major characters are bothered in dysfunctional marriage. Anne Paolucci observes that Albee builds his characters from his own character, “from the inside out” (5). Albee’s vision was metaphysical, he wanted to depict the acute sufferings of American people, the decline of American culture, the themes of human degradation, spiritual sterility and loss of security. Paolucci further contends that Albee tried out such diverse dramatic forms “as naturalism, surrealism, symbolism, one-act satirical farce, full-length tragicomedy, and metaphysical allegory” (33). Stenz investigated that his work is “reinforced by his use of extreme situations, heightened language, long operatic monologues, and the conscious visual effect of the staging” (Stenz 2). Stenz observes that the plays of Albee are packed with the scenes of lying, cheating and deception exciting grotesque laughter. The play is packed with serious and non-serious elements. There are tragic and comic scenes in the drama. The killing of the “imagined baby” by George in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* brings intense pain of loneliness and desperation to the old couple. The termination of pregnancies of Honey brings excruciating pain to her and ruins her married life. Both George and Martha emerge as spiritual derelicts lost in the sick culture of New England. Gussow opines that the play *A Delicate Balance* is a family drama recapitulating the old memories of Albee’s life: “of life in Larchmont... from his second childhood home, the Hommocks, the house that his parents moved to after the death of his maternal grandmother” (254). The main characters in the drama are Tobias and Agnes, who

are married and have a daughter, Julia. They were “inspired by real persons, Frances and Reed Albee and Sister Jane who was alcoholic” (254). In *Stretching My Mind*, Albee writes of the resurgence of *A Delicate Balance*, thirty years after its premiere:

The play concerns—as it always has, in spite of early-on critical misunderstanding the rigidity and ultimate paralysis which afflicts those who settle in too easily, waking up one day to discover that all the choices they have avoided no longer give them any freedom of choice, and that what choices they do have left are beside the point”.  
(174)

The setting of the play is “well appointed suburban house” (6). Albee himself described the play about the “loss of choice” and this loss is highlighted in the very opening of the drama. Act I introduces Agnes and Tobias who are seen discussing the abnormal behavior of Sister Claire. Tobias is a retired businessman; he is tolerant and tries to avoid confrontation and emotional topics that generate discontent. He loves tenderness, “good manners and pleasant tone” (4). There are some times when it’s all too much but nobody bothers what he says and the house becomes a hellish place. When Claire enters, Agnes goes out leaving Claire Tobias alone. Claire declares to Tobias: “It would be so much simpler if I were. An alcoholic” (19). Albee makes it clear that there the family is out of balance. Claire and Tobias talk about Agnes and her daughter Julia. The mood of pessimism and nihilism, failures and disappointments of Julia’s life disrupt the family order. The family triangle consists of Tobias, Agnes and Julia who has married several times. Julia returns home because of her family problems and is pregnant. She is passing through a serious crisis. It is ironical that old friends of the family. The presence of Harry and Edna makes her sick and despondent because she feels abandoned. Claire is another problem in the family, she “drinks by choice” (40), like Julia she is also a failure in life as she is dependent on her sister and her husband. Claire is a rebel; she is an old selfish woman, blunt and self-indulgent. Albee also introduces the mysterious Harry and Edna who are always haunted by some inner terror that they cannot explain. They are the outsiders who ruin the happiness of Julia. Edina heaps insults on Julia:

EDNA: You return to your nest from your latest disaster, dispossessed, and suddenly dispossessing; screaming the house down, clawing at order...

JULIA: You are not my... YOU HAVE NO RIGHTS!

EDNA:...willful, wicked, wretched girl...

EDNA: We have rights here. *We* belong.

JULIA: MOTHER! AGNES; (*Tentative*) Julia...

EDNA: *We belong here, do we not?*

JULIA (Triumphant distaste) FOREVER! (*Small silence*) HAVE YOU COME TO STAY FOREVER? (*Small silence*) (120)

In Scene Six Harry and Edna arrive signifying the development of confusion exciting the laughter in the drama. The purpose of their visit is unfolded through ambiguous language. They are like lost children who ask if they can stay. At first, they take permission to stay just for a night but then they announce their desire to stay forever. This irritates Julia who needs mothering because of her recent marriage dissolution. Julia feels jealous because her identity is threatened by the new couple. No one wants them to stay, Agnes doesn't like the visit of Harry and Edna since they brought a psychic plague with them. But Tobias has soft corner for the young couple. Tobias allows the old friends the stay after much discussion. In the very beginning of the play, Albee introduces the elements of madness, aging and fear in the plot. The epigrams of Agnes and Tobias: "we do what we can" (9), The mystery and abstraction is continued with the feelings and reactions of Julia who calls her mother "a pope, a drill sergeant, and a nanny allegorizing nor as she did her father earlier" (79-80). Agnes is irritated by the abnormal behavior of Julia: Agnes suggests: "Why don't you run upstairs and claim your goddamn room back! Barricade yourself there! Push a bureau in front of the door! Take Tobias' pistol while you're at it! Arm yourself!" (68-69). Tobias and Harry had a sexual relationship with some woman long ago. This mystery makes the plot complicated. Tobias never told Agnes about his infidelity to Agnes. The characters in *A Delicate*

*Balance*, run from one club and party to another as a hobby. When Harry and Edna visit all of a sudden, Agnes assumes that they have been to the club (41). Tobias also says that “he went to the golf club when Agnes questions him about what he did that day” (54). But in reality, all feel displaced; all are haunted by internal and external fears, fear of death, fear of disruption of family and loss of identity. No character in *A Delicate Balance* enjoys peace and rest as their loss of happiness is due to their failure to confront reality. Clurman notes that this play focuses on the “implications of the discovery of the void, the ‘nothing’ at the heart of the human experience” (66). Harry and Edna are gripped by a void, they are compelled to leave their home and move to the house of Tobias and Agnes to the chagrin of Julia. They express fears thus: Harry:

I... I don't know quite what happened then; we... we were... it was all very quiet, and we were all alone...(Edna begins to weep, quietly...) and then... nothing happened.

Edna: We...were... terrified. Harry: We were scared. (46)

The interesting in the drama is the use of the tools of comedy to alleviate the tensions and anxieties of the characters. Tension is very high in the house of Tobias and Agnes when Harry and Edna come to stay with the middle aged married couple. The arrival of Harry and Edna and the terror they bring with them threaten the peace and stability of the family. Albee does not specify the nature of terror but it is always there and each character fears it. The fear of loss, the doubt and despair of the characters is expressed through the literary devices of irony, wit and humor. Each character in the drama suffers alienation, old age, tensions and anxieties. Two powerful episodes, the death of Teddy and the four dissolution of marriage of Julia structure the main plot. Mel Gussow, described *A Delicate Balance* dealing with “the isolation of people who have turned their backs on fully participating in their own lives and therefore cannot participate fully in anyone else's life” (234).

To conclude we can say that the entire play of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is full of hilarious comedy and is packed with farcical elements. Both George and Martha look ridiculous and instead of expressing their genuine concern

for the painful experiences of life they indulge into false and superfluous fun and games. George and Martha emerge as helpless neurotics, victims of their hysterical cravings. There is absolutely no tragic grandeur in George's act of exorcism; it is an emotional outburst of the neurological tensions that gripped the soul of George. Martha has no choice but to accept the bitter reality. Agamemnon, Orestes, Electra also have illusions which urge them to seek confrontation with the gods and thus create a niche in the hall of heroic fame. Their illusions lead them to tragic sublimation or redemption. But George's predicament is that his desperate struggle to keep the illusive microcosm intact leads him to spiritual sterility, chaos and mental paralysis. Adler observes thus:

George's shattering of the illusion of his and Martha's son is his answer to Martha's desire for him to ...assert his strength against her .....many masculine qualities...[which] feeds off of George's emasculation. (Adler 69)

While the tragic illusions inspired Oedipus and Agamemnon with nobility and the spirit of invincibility, George's neurotic illusions result into his corrosion of self. He becomes arrogant, haughty, bestial and pervert. Martha too behaves like a monster. Othello emerges as a strong man with tragic limitations, but George is a "flop", a "zero" with illusions of potency.

Harry and Edna in *A Delicate Balance* are leading a life of anxiety; this existential anxiety put pressures on their psyche making them sick and despondent. The entry of Harry and Edna disturb the peace and harmony of Tobias's house. Matters are further complicated with the arrival of Julia after the failure of her fourth marriage. Paolucci also suggests that the Harry and Edna are fear-ridden, they are highly vulnerable, too weak to cope with the existential anxiety (107). Like George and Martha they may invent any illusion; the anxiety doesn't allow them peace and rest in life. Tobias and Agnes lead a hellish life. There are very deep secrets between them. A mysterious sense of sorrow lurks in their life and this fact excites the atmosphere of the black comedy.

Images of existential dilemma play a crucial role in Albee's theatre. No wonder, Beckett freely experimented with stage images: their corporeality, spatiality

and their power of effect on the audience. In the words of Garner (1994) “The stage in Albee’s plays is turned into a visual field, or seeing-place; it is not a theatre of action. His characters are very much concerned with being perceived” (Garner 123). Albee has taken up the inexplicable themes of human misery, existential despair, and futility of life and shapelessness of human existence. Garner further contends that Albee uses the devices of pictorial art to portray human sufferings. The characters of Albee do not share this private sorrow with each other. Ironically, both Tobias and Agnes hide their emotional estrangement. Stenz says that the “false air of the superficial harmony between this husband and wife who practice concealment of emotion are close to disruption at the moment the curtain rises” (73). When Tobias says, “You who make all the decisions”. Agnes points out, “That is an illusion you have” (74). Earlier in the play, she says:

the reins we hold! It’s a team of twenty horses, and we sit there, and we watch the road and check the leather . . . . But there are things we do not do . . . we don’t decide the route . . . . We follow. We let our . . . men decide the moral issues. (Albee 72)

Claire is a problem sister who is alcoholic, careless, blunt and depressed. Claire goes on drinking, which is unbearable for Agnes, who ignores Claire’s “presence in the room” (34). Claire is indifferent to the sufferings of Julia as she sings a song to mock Julia’s marriage. Agnes cries out in desperation: “Will you stop that? Claire: Ooh, I am here, after all. I exist!” (37). When all people try to coexist peacefully conflict arises, shocking discoveries are made and each character derives a sadistic pleasure hitting at other. Claire exhibits unusual behavior patterns. Julia is very much upset and bursts out that she does not want Harry and Edna in her room (77-78). Claire puts on her accordion again stating: “I think it’s time for a little music, don’t you kids!” (82). The play is a fine juxtaposing of seriousness and comedy; illusion and reality and grotesque and burlesque.

## Chapter: Six

### A Comparative Study of Eugene Ionesco and Edward Albee

Eugene Ionesco and Edward Albee are also categorized as ‘New Wave Playwrights’ have shown their concern with the predicament of man in the universe, essentially as summarized by Albert Camus, in his essay *The Myth Of Sisyphus* (1942). This book is a very serious study of the helplessness of man and the futility of human labour and attacks the very existence of man. Camus’s Sisyphus is a typical absurd hero personifying the real quality of an absurd life. He sees the boulder rolling down back to the lower world from where it will have to be lifted again and so he returns back to the bottom.

It is during that return that pause, that Sisyphus interests me. A face that toils so close to stones is already stone itself! I see that man going back down with a heavy yet measured step towards the torment of which he will never know the end. That hour...is the hour of consciousness. (Camus 89)

These moments of consciousness open up the world of the absurdity. The world of never-ending effort goes on eternally. There is no escape possible from this world which is characterized by the world of estrangement, loneliness, waiting and continual endurance. The characters are helpless at the hands of cruel fate. They sit passively waiting earnestly for a change in their circumstances. Kierkegaard in *Being and Nothingness* (1943) avers in this context thus:

I don’t know whether this world has a meaning that transcends it. But I know that I do not know the meaning ....What can a meaning outside my condition mean to me? I can understand only in human terms. (*The Myth of Sisyphus* 5)

Death and meaninglessness appear to be at the basis of the philosophy of absurd. The ‘absurd’ is a philosophical vision of cosmic, social and psychological disorder. Camus next puts a question: What is the point of living on if life is absurd? Why shouldn’t we commit suicide and hasten our fate? In his essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*, he attempts to answer this question and presents an alternative to suicide.



How to live with the consciousness of this absurdity of life is the central question of Camus' philosophy. He puts a question, "Does the absurd dictate death?" (Camus 16).

Nihilism is another powerful factor that led to the growth of the drama of absurd. Friedrich Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1833), made the revolutionary statement that "God is dead, buried Him long long ago!" (Nietzsche 2). He propagated skepticism, doubt and despair. There was no unifying principle left to give direction to human beings. All hold there is "none imposed on you from the outside or that can be discovered from a search. Only Nihilism holds, however, that you cannot manufacture some kind of meaning if you wish" (Camus 43). The thinkers of avant-garde drama recognize that people make their own purpose in life; they just question the value of doing so. It may seem really important to Sisyphus to push that rock up the hill but everyone on the outside can see how pointless it is. Similarly, there are some values that absurdist tend to hold whereas nihilists technically reject all values. Absurdist often appreciate beauty, complexity and life itself; they often devalue reason, ethics, and systematic processes. Life can be joyful as long as you just lie back, appreciate the scenery, and don't get too hung up on where and when it is going to end.

Absurdity is a key word in Beckett's dramatic writings as well as of the whole Theatre of the Absurd. Martin Esslin refers to Ionesco's concept of absurdity: "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, useless" (Esslin 20). Man stands opposite to the world of things, which permanently makes an attack on him. Absurdity appears in the moments when man realizes his situation, in the moments of awareness of his position in the world. Camus describes this situation of realization and understanding in these words:

Thursday, Friday and Saturday according to the same rhythm-this path is easily followed most of the time. But one day the "why" arises and everything begins in that weariness tinged with amazement. ...Weariness comes at the end of the acts of a mechanical life, but at the same time it inaugurates the impulse of consciousness. (Camus 35)

In other words, absurdity arises from moments when all the facts of life that flow mechanically stop, and when consciousness starts to wake up and move. This means that the non-sense of life has been opening in the only one incomprehensible feeling. “Beginning to think is beginning to be undermined” (Camus 45). Having lost his identity, he is swept along by the tide of events. This “absurd” hero bears the knowledge of his own insignificance in the cosmic scheme of things. He cannot say confidently: “I am myself”. Instead, he says, like the Old Man in *The Chairs*, “I am not myself. I am another. I am the one in the other” (Ionesco 145).

When the plays of Ionesco and Edward Albee first appeared on the stage, the audience underwent a unique and completely new kind of experience. These plays puzzled and outraged the critics as well as the audience. These plays flouted all the standards by which drama has been judged by many centuries and provoked the audience who came to the theatre expecting a well-made play which is supposed to present well-observed characters. On the other hand, these plays presented hardly any recognizable human beings with their witty dialogues, rather the dialogues, here, seem to have generated into meaningless babble. As described by Esslin, “Characters are frequently stereotypical, archetypal, or flat character types as in Commedia dell’arte. The more complex characters are in crisis because the world around them is incomprehensible” (Esslin 402). The characters in Absurdist drama are lost and floating in an incomprehensible universe and they abandon rational devices and discursive thought because these approaches are inadequate. A well-made traditional play has a beginning, middle and a neatly tied-up ending but the absurd plays start and end arbitrarily. Martin Esslin states that, “By all the traditional standards of critical appreciation of drama, these plays are not only abominably bad; they don’t even deserve the name drama” (Esslin 1).

In their avant-garde theatre, setting, plot, character, and form have totally vanished and there is no heroism, nothing to admire, not even much illusion. No wonder, Leonard Pronko sees in Albee’s *The Zoo Story* a picture of the “disintegration of a human universe” (Pronko 30). Ionesco wrote without any specific point of view because, for him, all points of view are useless. Life is projected as hell in which each person is imprisoned in his own private cubicle,

invisible and inaudible to others. The so-called communication being nonsense, the world of Ionesco is populated with weak, helpless and artless lost souls who “cannot defend themselves either against machinations of bourgeoisie society...or against the demands of their spouses...or at least of all against their own natures” (Wulbern 143). Albee’s characters live in the world of illusion and when all the layers of illusions are stripped off, the cycle of the corrosion of self is complete. They do not exist at all. Living in the world of illusion, they have no selves, except as illusions, they are not even protagonists, for they do nothing. In fact, the avant-garde theatre of France demolished the very concept of hero. Influenced by it, Ionesco and Edward Albee, depicted a godless universe. The play best expresses the turn of the events of the twentieth century as the protagonists struggle to escape from self because they are too fragile to cope with their existential realities. In the words of Ionesco “man is lost in the world; all his actions become senseless, absurd, and useless” (Ionesco 34).

Bakhtin traces the roots of parody and satire and explores the contribution made by Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift. Bakhtin comes to the conclusion that the carnival parody and satire are entirely different from the writers of the Augustan Age. They are crude and uncouth; not polished and sophisticated as found in Pope’s *The Rape of the Lock* or in Swift’s *The Battle of the Books*. The modern writers rely upon ironic inversion for the parody and satiric effect. Bakhtin sums up the evolution of Carnavalesque grotesque humor and parody thus:

A special idiom of forms and symbols was evolved; an extremely rich idiom that expressed the unique yet complex carnival experience of the people. This experience, opposed to all that was ready made and completed, to all pretence at immutability, sought a dynamic expression, it demanded ever changing playful, undefined forms. All the symbols of the carnival idioms are filled with pathos. (Bakhtin 11)

Bakhtin also expressed his ideas on grotesque realism stating that grotesque realism mirrors the structural ambivalence of the Carnavalesque. Michael Holquist observes that carnival themes are vulgar and the language is crude and uncouth. Holquist comments thus:

His folk are blasphemous rather than adoring, cunning rather than intelligent, they are coarse, dirty, rampantly physical, reveling in oceans of strong drink, poods of sausages, and endless coupling of bodies. (Holiquist 19)

Holiquist further argues that the vulgar reality of the folk of Bakhtin provides a fertile ground in which the grotesque realism flourishes. The grotesque social realism manifests just because of the vulgar nature of the carnival festivals celebrated by the folks. At every level the theatre of Eugene Ionesco and Edward Albee abounds in burlesque elements. In the 1960s, grotesque was applied to clowns buffoons but after the Second World Wars, Korea, Vietnam and the Russian invasion of Hungary the trends change. The writers were horrified by the fear of nuclear warfare and they used stylistic variations on the world as grotesque to emphasize their themes. The characters are confused and bewildered living in dark atmosphere struggling for an identity. Ionesco's pessimism and Albee's burlesque parody supply real entertainment to the audience. Martin Esslin (1968) also praises Ionesco and Edward Albee for their poetic images and symbols employed to depict the metaphysical despair of the characters. In *The Chairs*, a poetic image brought to life-complex, ambiguous and multi-dimensional. The image intensifies "the beauty and depth of the drama and transcends any search for interpretations" (Esslin 148). The play *Rhinoceros* of Ionesco provokes immense laughter as the audience hears the menacing sounds of the ugly animal. In *Amedee*, Ionesco gives the visual metaphor of the corpse to provoke laughter through grotesque realism. In America and Europe the concepts of grotesque became popular in after the World War II. The *Oxford Universal Dictionary* defines grotesque: "A kind of decorative painting or sculpture in which portions of human and animal forms are fantastically interwoven with foliage and flowers". The important examples of grotesque can be found in James Joyce's *Ulysses* and Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. Beckett's play *The Endgame* is packed with the elements of terror, fear, beauty and cynical laughter. In Germany Gunter Grass and in France, Beckett, Genet and Ionesco give new versions of grotesque realism in their works. In Europe the grotesque is defined as "fantastically absurd" and this led to the major theatrical style called "The Theatre of the Absurd". In the postmodern society the constant threat of nuclear warfare

motivated the writers to invent new themes and stylistic techniques to depict the menace and cruelty of modern man who is growing greedy for power and territorial expansion. Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*, Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Pynchon's *Gravity Rainbow* are some of the best examples of grotesque realism. Today the people have started appreciating the role of grotesque realism in America. In America the goal of individual materialistic success also led to the evolution of grotesque realism. Wright Morris expressed his views in his photographic novel *The Home Place*: "Independence, not abundance, is the heart of America". The people of America were lost in the mad rush of money as technology accelerated and money flowed in every part of the country. The image of America in the plays of Brecht is puzzling, fantastic, brutal, chaotic, materialistic and primitive. There is a fine blending of feelings of attraction and repulsion in his plays. This chapter offers a pragmatic study of carnivalesque and grotesque realism found in the plays of Eugene Ionesco and Edward Albee. The plays of Arthur Miller and Tennessee William were realistic based on the themes of society but Ionesco and Albee transformed the theatre following the anti-theatrical techniques of the Theatre of the Absurd. They followed Artaud's "The Theatre of Cruelty" and made many experiments in language and stylistic techniques. They turned to Bakhtin and heavily borrowed the tools of parody, grotesque and Carnavalesque with a view to depict the contemporary malaise. Albee's portrayal of characters from *The Story* to *Tiny Alice* is done in an unmistakable style. He has an ear of puns, allusion and repartee and inventiveness of excellent quality. Albee draws upon everything from the grand styles of literature down to the vaudeville routines of popular tradition. In the innovative and catchy dialogues of Edward Albee there is an exclusiveness of reference, joke, nuance, parody, menacing laughter and grotesque realism. There is mockery with an elitist vengeance in his plays as he recognizes the humor and poetry latent in cliché. He has invented a pastiche-made dialogue to depict grotesque realism in his plays. He turned to Beckett, Ionesco, Genet and Artaud and used all possible postmodern techniques of drama to structure his plots. No one is safe and nothing is sacred in the world of Edward Albee. Using metaphor as cliché and cliché as metaphor, Albee pushes them as far as they will go, exposing established systems and personal arrangements which outworn metaphor thoughtlessly would perpetuate. There is a unique variety and richness in the dialogues of Albee. His characters give

voice to both an existential and artistic dilemma. Caught in the web of weaving words, the characters of Albee alternate between exposing and hiding what they would say. In his plays *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, *Tiny Alice*, *The Ballad of Safe Café* and *The Goat*, Edward Albee produces flat, boring, and ludicrous dialogues to depict the deflation of self of the characters. In the plays of Ionesco and Albee there is repartee in which words and phrase are modified, paraphrased and corrected. In each of the plays of Ionesco and Albee one character refines another's talk, improvising as well at will. Language is playful and deadly game, forces Martha and George and Jerry to indulge in fun games of love and sex. Consider for example the expression of Mommy in *The American Dream*:

Mommy: Nonsense. Old People have nothing to say: and if old people did have something to say, nobody would listen to them. (To Grandma) You see? I can pull that stuff just as easy as you can. (Edward Albee, *The American Dream* 44)

The same tone and menacing cruelty blended with grotesque is found in the plays of Ionesco. Ionesco himself admitted that he distorts language to achieve the cumulative effect of absurdity and grotesque. Laude Bonnefoy (1971) in his *Conversation with Eugene Ionesco* has particularly reported the unique style of the playwright observed in *The Bald Soprano*: I started with clichés, reflex phrases, and readymade truths. There comes a point when these truths go berserk. It comes from the fact that the characters are puppets, members of a universal petty-bourgeoisie. They live on slogans. Basically, all I had to do was to listen to the people around talking (Bonnefoy 20). Ionesco firmly believed that the comic and tragic are mixed in real life. He saw laughter as the only power we have against the tragedy of living. He coined new phrases and used anti-theatrical techniques to depict the inner turbulent world of his characters who were trapped in the abyss of darkness and despair. Ionesco turned to Bakhtin and borrowed from him the carnival humor, grotesque social realism as he admits: Humor is liberty. It is the only possibility we possess of detaching ourselves to become conscious of what is horrifying and it laughs at. It is to become master of that which tragedy is horrifying. The comic alone is capable of giving us the strength to bear the tragedy of existence (Bonnefoy,

20). Ionesco enhances the contrast between evanescence and opacity by using a technique called the proliferation of objects by the critics. Ionesco uses the new dramatic devices to crush the power of the material universe. Proliferation occurs with every kind of object imaginable; eggs, coffee cups, noses, rhinoceros, furniture, and even words. The objects are added to the stage until their presence is ludicrous and awesome. This absurd technique is used in the play *The Chairs*. The dream of joy is there, although not so defined as in the play *The Killer*. The Old Man and Old Woman begin the play with a game of make believe like Gorge and Martha of Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* but as the play progresses the fun and games of love and sex become menacing. The Old couple tells the story of their arrival in the "city of light" Paris. Ionesco refer to "the garden" "the Church" and a "road" evoking the imagery of Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot*. The imagery is broken by the tears of despair from the Old Man. His wife playing the role of his mother comforts him explaining that when the guests arrive he will deliver his message and then his life will have meaning. The play proceeds with the arrival of imaginary guests. More and more chairs are brought onto the stage for the host of people who have come. When the orator finally arrives, the Old Man and Woman know their message will be told. They wish to die with the fame of their lives intact. But as the play ends, they jump from the windows on either side of the room and plunge to the water below. There is no one in the room except the orator. When the orator speaks he only utters guttural sounds, he says nothing. The lives of the old couple were meaningless. In their suicides the heaviness of death; helplessness of man and the randomness of universe is depicted by Ionesco. Shakespeare had used this technique in his plays *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. However Shakespeare didn't directly mix the comic and the tragic as did Ionesco. His humor came only in moments of relief. The drunker porter in *Macbeth* is not a main part of the action, neither are the gravediggers in *Hamlet*. Ionesco does something unique with humor; he mixes it directly with the central line of action. He explains thus:

At the start, you have a little of something mechanical encrusted on the living. It's comic. But if the mechanical gets bigger and bigger, and the living shrinks and shrinks, things become stifling and then tragic. (Bonney 108)

This type of pattern can be seen in *Rhinoceros* of Ionesco. When the first pachyderm snort runs across the stage in a cloud of dust, the audience laughs. When the second pachyderm tramples the housewife's cat, the audience again laughs. When Mrs. Boeuf gallops on her "tenderly trumpeting" husband, the audience again laughs. Slowly, however, the infection has begun to grow. Ionesco devotes Act One and half part of Act Two for one transformation but by the end of the Third Act of the drama, every character except Berenger has been afflicted. Laughter has turned into horror and one comic rhinoceros has proliferated into hundreds who become awesome in their power. Like Ionesco, Albee employs anti-theatrical speech and dialogues. Mirth and gloom, laughter and tears amalgamate to produce "dark humor". The plot of the play supplies sadistic humor as the characters hurt each other. Albee depicts the dark humor and at the same time underscores the role of illusions in human life. George and Martha are old depressed people relying on an illusion of an unborn baby. They are aware of reality but even then they stick to illusions and go on living in life. Albee depicts the existential condition of the modern man who remains happy in a make-believe world. Their fun and games to escape from the terrors of the world are funny; they take flight into the world of fun and games and look ridiculous and grotesque. Albee's characters learn from hurting others and they go on changing their roles realizing the efficacy of language. They manipulate, deconstruct language controlling themselves and others, and the unknown. In the play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* the rules go on changing and the humor becomes dark and destructive. The dialogues are bitter and biting; erotic and evocative and language as dialectic, becomes a menacing game. George and Martha know that their life is hellish and the absurdity of life is unbearable; they embrace grotesque reality to escape from the terrors of life. From Peter in *The Zoo Story* to Julian and Alice in *Tiny Alice* is an awareness of mind and language as subterfuge, of concealment and expose. Albee gives a nightmarish journey of the protagonist through the process of stripping down reality. Language is employed dialectic and exorcism –in *The American Dream* Albee uses the metaphysics of cliché to indicate the sterile lives of Mommy and Daddy. In the drama, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* the plot moves toward a ritualistic destruction of the imaginary child. Words both white and black magic are wielded as weapon and talisman. The



ending of the play is very much like the ending of *Waiting for Godot*. At the end of the drama, the hopes of Godot's arrival are shattered. Like Ionesco, Edward Albee gets beyond the verbal and mental façade and each drama of Albee: *The Zoo Story*, *The Death of Bessie Smith* and even *Tiny Alice* become a moving experience. Albee fills up the time and tedium through dialogues. Albee's characters employ words as a means of getting through to one another, the words are splashed on other as arrows to pierce the heart or to wound others. No wonder, the audience hears all that is painful and pathetic as Peter and Jerry use words to outwit others. Edward learnt many techniques from Bakhtin; he uses words self-generative and unending becoming substitutes for real action. No wonder, his play *Tiny Alice* becomes a verbal and "mental sex play" (112), language turns into masturbation, and speeches in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* comments upon this most revealingly:

George: But you've moved bag and baggage into your own fantasy world now, and you've started playing variations on your own distortions. (153)

George (Chuckles, takes his drink): Well, thought, Martha...hung it close...run Me? I'm going to sit down...if you'll to sit over there and read a book. (168)

Ionesco was a Romanian playwright who was greatly impacted by the philosophy of nihilism and death. He ridiculed one of the French Avant-garde theatre; his plays depict alienation and futility of human existence employing the tools of parody, irony and black humor. Bakhtin gave the concept of carnival laughter, grotesque realism as the most innovative current of modernity. Bakhtin averred that carnivalesque literature unfetters human spirit and allow human beings to break away from the tensions, anxieties and tensions of life. He wrote plays in imitation of Bakhtin, Rabelais and Dostoevsky. Ionesco employs Bakhtin's theories of the carnivalesque and grotesque realism as a means to expose the malady of the modern civilization. In the world of Ionesco laughter is the nervous laughter of pain, the laughter that comes from a tortured consciousness. The laughter shades off into the tortured, hysterical laughter of near madness: the laughter of a great mind reduced to trivialities. Ionesco uses three types of laughter; the absurd laughter of

the half-destroyed mind employed by Beckett and Adamov. Then there is a laughter that is the salvation of the mind and its pain and the dark and sadistic laughter. Camus says that the absurd is lucid reason stating its limits; this means that we can laugh at reason because we know its limits. An absurd universe is a free universe. Bakhtin's theories of the Carnavalesque and grotesque realism developed within his work on *Rabelais and Dostoevsky* are useful when evaluating Ionesco and Albee. Consider for example, petty piece of metaphysic in his play *The Bald Soprano*: Mr. Smith:

As for myself, when I go to someone's house. I ring to enter. I think that everyone does the same, and that each time someone rings it is because someone is there. Mrs. Smith: That's true in theory. But in reality things happen differently. You saw that just now. (67)

Hope and expectation are the severest forms of bondage; they bind one to events. It is absurd to believe that for every effect there is cause. In Beckett's plays there is agony but in the plays of Ionesco reality is distorted; characters are transformed. The plot of Ionesco is always a distortion of facts and the employment of anti-theatrical devices is the chief feature. The plot never leads to traditional climax and it is always circular. There is no moral message and no completion at the end of the drama: "the characters themselves do not appear to understand what they are communication" (Ionesco 20). The circular quality is also shown in the plot as the characters go on repeating the dialogues looking grotesque on the stage performing ludicrous actions. The circularity and repetitiveness reveal the anti-theatrical pattern of the drama. In all the plays, like *Rhinoceros*, *The Chairs*, *Amedee*, *The Bald Soprano* etc Ionesco employs the spirit of Carnavalesque and grotesque realism to depict the terrors of life. Edward Albee imitates Ionesco in portraying the characters living in a world of fantasy and false illusions. The monologue of Julian in the Act III when language is totally distorted and the communication becomes problematic:

Daddy: I cry all inside, so no one can see me. I cry all the all the time, too. We both cry all the time, we cry, and we take our tears, and we in the goddamn ice trays (Begins to laugh" (Laughs even more) and then ...we put drinks. (185)

The end of each play is claustrophobic as we observe the amount of drinking and hacking bitchiness in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* The language of George and Martha is sickening and depressing. There is nothing glorious in their life and the power of grotesque is supreme as Albee dramatizes the inner turbulent world of his characters employing parody, wit and dark humor. Albee criticizes the emptied relationships within the American family. The domestic hostilities devoid of any true meaning provide good material for his grotesque drama. He is concerned with the problem of rejection of the aged people especially in his early plays *The Sandbox* (1959) and *The American Dream* (1960). Albee depicts the social theme of the indifference of the closet relatives as the old people decide for a voluntary death in order to escape the terrors of life. These two short plays are related to each other dramatizing different situations. Mommy is a dominating wife and her husband Daddy is opposite. Grandma is full of vitality but a victim of callousness. The plots of both *The Sandbox* and *The American Dream* are loaded with the images of fantasy, burlesque and terror of life. Grandma complains sardonically of her bad treatment:

Honestly! What a way to treat an old woman! Drag her out of the house...stick her in a car...bring her out here from the city...dump her in a pile of sand...and leave her to set. I'm eighty-six years old!  
(Edward Albee, *Sandbox* 149)

Albee uses the humorous language to provoke laughter; the old woman is living in the house of her daughter; her language is funny and ironical: "They moved me into the big house with them...fixed a nice place for me under the stove...gave me an old blanket...and my own dish...my own dish! So, what have I got to complain about?" (152). The dialogues between Mommy and the grandma are thrilling and exciting; she has become a domestic animal with Mommy treating her like an object or a naughty child. She has been reduced as a pet and she loses her identity in the family. In *Sandbox*, Mommy and Daddy decide that it is the time for Grandma to die and they callously dispose of her in a children's sandbox. Ionesco exposes the callous and indifferent attitude of the young people employing the tools of carnival parody and grotesque thus:

Most people think that when you get o old, you either freeze to death or you burn up. But you don't. When you get so old, all that happens is that people talk to you that way...sense of dignity; that's all that's important...When you get so old, you can't talk to people because people snap at you. When you get so old, people talk you that way. That's why you become deaf, so you won't be able to hear people talking to you that way. And that's why you go and hide under the covers in the big soft bed, so you won't feel the house shaking from people talking to you that way. That's why old people die, eventually. People talk to them that way. (Edward Albee, *The American Dream*, 86)

This dialogue of Albee is very simple in language but each word is satirical and the repetitive words reveal the inner void of the speaker and the callous attitude of the younger generation. Mommy dismisses Grandma easily: "Old people have nothing to say; and if old people did have something to say, nobody would listen to them" (85). The ironical remark in the play is repeated again and again intensifying the horrifying atmosphere, Mommy warns Grandma: "Be quiet Grandma" (77). Mrs. Baker is another cruel woman who behaves like Mommy and says: "Old people don't go anywhere. They're either taken places, or put places" (99). The sentence is very short but is like a dagger depicting the callousness of the system in satirical language. When the play was performed, it didn't evoke any sympathy for the old people but it was hailed as a hilarious social comedy of Albee. Mrs. Baker agrees with Mommy with her everything saying: "I remember when I had my mother carted off" (117). Albee exposes the cruelty of the people in a satirical language giving the message that the merciless treatment of the old people is widespread; the young are heartless and materialistic, concerned only about possessions. The old Grandma goes away and all think that she has "stolen something" (121) but she takes away all the old memories with her. Imitating Charles Dickens, Albee uses the elements of pathos and humor in the drama in the climax:

Grandma did take her little boxes with her...Some old letters, a couple of regrets...Pekinese...blind at that...the television...my Sunday teeth...Eight-six years of living-some sounds...a few images, a little garbled by now...And, well...(She shrugs)...you know ...the things one accumulates. (120)

The critics of Albee such as Bigsby, Amacher, Paolicci, Brustein believe that Albee imitates the stylistic techniques of Ionesco and Beckett. His *American Dream* is a parody of theatrical conventions and that the absurdity in the play is not gratuitous. His technique is not based on piling words on top of word, but rather an attempt to use powerful visual image of the sandbox. Stenz observes thus: "The author deliberately parodies theatrical conventions in order to satirize the vacuity and hypocrisy of a death watch" (Stenz 34). Albee is an expert in making pastiche-made dialogues. Albee bitterly exposes the ready-made formulas and established clichés. When they think Grandma is dead, Mommy says: "Our long night is over. We must put away our tears, take off our mourning...and face the future. It's our duty" (34). Grandma plays dead but continues to encourage the children with her double talk: "That's right, kid; be brave. You beat up; you'll get over it" (154). Admittedly, Albee's plays are full of the elements of grotesque realism. In *Sandbox* and *American Dream*, his focus is family and society, in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* vision of Albee is social and the texts are impressive and the tone is satirical. Albee accomplishes too much through subtle dialogues and following Bakhtin his dialogues are multidimensional. His characters remain realistic because he is portraying a contemporary social malaise and its psychological effects on real persons. The action of the play demonstrates that not only Bessie Smith and her companions suffer from racial prejudice but so do member of the Southern white community pictured in the play. In his play, *The Death of Bessie Smith*, Albee uses the cinematic techniques which intensify the thematic action and interestingly action jumps from one geographical location to another. The audience sees a Memphis bar, the Nurse's home, the admissions desk of one hospital, then that of another hospital and other locales described in rapid succession. Albee gives the message that life continues in each of these milieu.

Albee introduces multiplicity of settings in each of his play creating an impression of complex and absurd world. The multiplicity of stage settings dramatizes the absurdity of life; randomness of the universe and fragmentation in the life of characters. Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is excellently designed to depict the social grotesque realism. The plot of the play depicts the picture of an arid academic world governed by human depravity and decadence. The language of Albee is piercing exposing the hollowness; ribaldry, perversions, moral turpitude and sycophancy through the weapons of parody, repartee and humor. The sex games of Nick and Honey; open flirtations and erotic fun and games depict the debasement and human degradation in a unique style by Albee. Martha is voluptuous and Nick is "young...and blond and ...well built" (9). Professor of Biology in the college run by Martha's father and his wife Honey supplements and fills the void left by George and Martha in portraying a very honest picture of the vitiated and shallow campus life. Albee creates sensational and ludicrous situations; the characters fight over trifles; they are engaged in petty issues and squabbles and hurt each other to enjoy the sadistic pleasure. They cross every human limit and the audience witness a dark environment where only animals live:

George: (Putting ice from his glass into hers) I always put ice in your drink. You eat, that's all. It's that habit you've got of chewing your ice cubes like a cocker spaniel. You'll crack your big teeth. (14)

Ionesco was a trend setter in the European drama who struggled to evolve a new form to depict the age of malaise of Nazi conformity and the growing sense of absurdity being caught in the age of concentration camps. Martin Esslin has traced the forces that brought about the interest of the writers in creating a grotesque world in which man had become an absurdist cipher. Albert Camus expresses the absurdity thus:

A world that can be explained by reasoning, however faulty, is a familiar world. But in a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and light, man feels a stranger. He is an irremediable exile, because he is deprived of memories of a lost homeland as much as he lacks the hope of a promised land to come. This divorce between man

and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of Absurdity. (Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* 123)

Ionesco realized as a playwright that it is not an easy way to depict the moral and spiritual abyss of the modern world. He took the challenge and many innovations in European theatre employing Bakhtian techniques of carnival humor and grotesque in setting and in the life of the characters. His *Rhinoceros* is an allegory; the real theme of the play is depicted through an allegory. Pronko observes that “Rhinoceros is a commentary on political dictatorship” (106). George Wellwarth observes that the play is “an attack against fanaticism and conformism” (290).

To conclude, Eugene Ionesco and Edward Albee are contemporary playwrights belonging to the tradition of The Theatre of Absurd. Both employed the theatrical devices such as Carnavalesque, grotesque realism, parody and satire in structuring their plots. Ionesco wrote *The Bald Soprano* (1950), *The Chairs* (1952), *Rhinoceros* (1959), *The Hard Boiled Egg*, (1966), *The Duel* (1971) and *Double Act* (1972). And Edward Albee wrote *The Zoo Story* (1960), *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962) *Tiny Alice* (1964) and *A Delicate Balance* (1966). In all these plays the elements of Carnavalesque, parody and grotesque realism are found in abundance. His parody is bitter and sadistic; cliché is excessively mocked, dwindles from metaphysics and satire into “sophomoric conundrum” and “semantics”. Salinger eulogizes Albee for his inventive prose style in dramatizing the social ills of society employing the subtle devices of parody and grotesque realism. Language of Albee has its own ways of putting the audience off and of deflecting the attention from what is central. The humor, the repartee, the self-creative inventiveness often overwhelms the audience. Albee’s style is consciously circuitous as the words become ends in themselves. Mommy is responsible pushing the Grandma out of the house, begin crying but Grandma tries to assure her daughter: “I’m fine! I’m all right! It hasn’t happened yet!” (154). Bakhtin insists that the Carnavalesque creates a “special type of communication”. People enjoy liberty to use unconventional phrases; humorous and farcical details and grotesque scenes to express their problems. Bakhtin admits that parody and satire are often used as tools in the Carnavalesque:

We must stress, however, that the carnival is far distant from the negative and formal parody of modern times. Folk humor denies, but it revives and renews at the same time. Bare negation is completely alien to folk culture. (Bakhtin 11)

Ionesco and Edward Albee uses the literary devices of Bakhtin to intensify the absurdity and emptiness of the modern world. In this study, the main focus is not on existentialism but on the Carnavalesque and the carnival which help the playwrights to depict the alienation, emptiness and morbidity of the modern man.



## Conclusion

The present study on the selected plays of Ionesco and Edward Albee has been quite different from the points of view of a number of critics of drama. In the present study, the main focus is on the investigation of the plays of Eugene Ionesco and Edward Albee through the lens of Mikhail Bakhtin's Theory of Carnavalesque and Grotesque.

Ionesco and Edward Albee wrote under the influence of existential philosophy propounded by Camus and Sartre. Martin Esslin called all the plays written by Ionesco and Edward Albee belonging to the movement of the Theatre of the Absurd. The protagonist of Albee merely waits to be “physically or psychologically emasculated, invites his doom with a self-immolation passivity that masochistically converts pain into pleasure” (Henry Hewes 60). Esslin identified Eugene Ionesco and Edward Albee as the leaders of the avant-garde movement. The protagonists in the Absurdist drama experience corrosion of self. They are the victims of psychological ailments such as depression, nausea, neurosis and Schizophrenia. They are too fragile to confront the absurdities of life and get distracted. They suffer corrosion of self and look sick and decadent. They are called absurdist playwrights; they have used different artistic means to convey what is supposed humanity.

If the critical touchstones of conventional drama did not apply to these plays, this must surely have been due to a difference in objective, the use of different artistic means, to the fact, in short, that these plays were both creating and applying a different convention of drama. (Esslin 1)

In the first chapter of the thesis, a detailed analysis of the literary devices of Bakhtin has been done to facilitate the readers to understand the main concepts of Bakhtin. Bakhtin was the Russian philosopher and critic who published *Art and Responsibility* (1918), *Rabelais and His World* (1965) and *Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1984). He propounded the theories of carnival, Carnavalesque and grotesque realism. Bakhtin believes that comic and farcical elements act as a safety valve to

get release from the existential despair and absurdities of life. The majority of the critics and reviewers of Ionesco and Edward Albee examined the plays of these dramatists from different perspectives; Harold Clurman, Brooks Atkinson, Tom Driver, Martin Esslin, C.W.E. Bigsby have expressed their opinions on the themes and stylistic techniques of Ionesco and Edward Albee. This study is quite unconventional and is done from the fresh perspective; the plays of Ionesco and Edward Albee are analyzed through the lens of Bakhtin's theories of carnival; Carnavalesque and grotesque realism. Bakhtin's theories are influential in the linguistic, political, social, cultural, philosophical and many other disciplines. The Carnavalesque is associated with riot, disorder and pandemonium. Bakhtin argues that carnival is an event of great power and spontaneous creativity; it is a time when all members of society are actively engaged in the carnival as participants. Ionesco observed that in the absurdist drama there are no heroes but an individual is presented as a lost individual, cut off from his roots and religious rituals. All his actions seem senseless and useless and his entire struggle ends in despair. The Theatre of the Absurd re-establishes man's communion with the universe. The Theatre of the Absurd was the result of the chaos and uncertainty faced by modern man. Ionesco, Genet and Beckett were influenced by the techniques of dark humor of Surrealism and Expressionism. Ionesco's plays depict the solitude and insignificance of human existence in a tangible way. Ionesco was a prolific writer as he wrote more than a dozen plays and was acclaimed as one of the best playwrights. His famous plays are *The Bald Soprano* (1950), *The Chairs* (1952), *Rhinoceros* (1959), *The Hard Boiled Egg* (1966), *The Duel* (1971) and *Double Act* (1972). Many prominent critics have analyzed and examined the plays of Ionesco from the perspectives of absurdity and existentialism. Ionesco uses language to provoke the audience; he uses the foreign words, forceful uncommon phrases and irrational statements in his plays to provoke laughter (R. Schechner 1962). In the preceding chapters all the major plays of Ionesco are investigated from the fresh perspective. It is observed that the plays of Ionesco have modern relevance as human beings all over the world can get relief from the depression and stress as the plots of the plays of Ionesco provide comic relief. Bakhtin observes that the laughter is a therapy to overcome from the anxieties and tensions of life. No wonder in the modern world

the comic shows and the comedy channels are growing popular. Modern man doesn't like the tragic scenes as the impact of tragic scenes is always nihilistic, depressive and pessimistic. The fun and games dramatized by Ionesco in his plays provide a safety valve to get release from the tensions of life. Bakhtin seriously examined the dialogic process found in a drama and came to the conclusion that it refers to thoughts of a character and the delivery of the thoughts to another character. In his *The Dialogic Imagination* Bakhtin observes that in the dialogic process every "word is directed toward an answer and cannot escape the profound influence of the answering word that it anticipates" (280), and "the internal dialogism of the word includes the subjective belief system of the listener" (282). In the first chapter entitled "*Mikhail Bakhtin: Carnavalesque and Grotesque Realism*" the life and achievements of Ionesco are explored since he is called as the father of modern anti-drama with the vision of nihilism and absurdity. Ionesco broke from the traditional drama articulating the futility of human communication like Beckett and Genet. Martin Esslin describes an absurd play as a "sequence of events of progression and without sequence". Ionesco came under the influence of many prominent writers such as Cervantes, Moliere, Chaplin, and Bakhtin. He was disgusted with the traditional techniques and in the words of Pronko Ionesco evolved his vision and techniques of drama to depict the contemporary malaise in a farcical and comical style. He discarded the coherent dialogues and followed the theory of Bakhtin in writing dialogues creating a perfect illusion of reality. Richard Coe observes that the style and the dramatic techniques of Ionesco are very unique; he has the potential to create an impossible situation. He borrowed many tools of drama from Bakhtin and believed that the comic feast is the best way to escape from the tensions and anxieties of modern life. Ionesco uses language to provoke the audience; he uses the foreign words, forceful uncommon phrases and irrational statements in his plays to provoke laughter. R. Schechner (1962) observes that Ionesco in his drama *The Chairs* presents a "world of teeming life where not only words, but gesture, clocks, doorbells lead to the process of dehumanization" (24). Voloshinov eulogized Ionesco for his concern of the social problems.

Ionesco wrote *The Bald Soprano* (1950), *The Chairs* (1952), *Rhinoceros* (1959), *The Hard Boiled Egg* (1966), *The Duel* (1971) and *Double Act* (1972).

Bakhtin observes that the real drama must depict unnatural and bizarre situations to provoke laughter. Ionesco had the potential to bring on the stage a girl with several noses and a man being transformed into a Rhinoceros. Kafka also depicts the bizarre situations dramatizing setting, characters and actions. Ionesco is seriously concerned about the plight of man in confronting the absurdities of life and the loss of identity. Ionesco's vision of life is quite clear; he observes that man is confronted with the material world and the threat of death. In the modern industrial set up man has to live with fractured identity resulting into the breakdown of communication through the distortion of language into clichés and slogans. Ionesco's plays deal with the questions of society and politics, corruption and power, death, language and communication breakdown. In his play *The Bald Soprano* (1948) Ionesco depicts the theme of stagnation of man through his language presenting the character of Mrs. Smith who becomes an alienated individual in the plot of the play. Her speeches are packed with platitudes and in the process she becomes a mechanical being- a robot of language. In *The Chairs* (1951) this process of disintegration continues as Ionesco depicts the mental deterioration of the old couple in shocking language through the use of the tools of grotesque realism.

*Rhinoceros* and *The Bald Soprano* depict the impact of Nazi ideology on the mind of the Europeans. Ionesco struggled day and night and at last he was able to find a metaphor that could express the ugly and destructive nature of Nazism. Ionesco wrote his famous drama *Rhinoceros* with a vision of absurdity and existentialism. Ionesco introduced the multiple themes of existential despair and the absurdity that had engulfed millions of people in the world after the World War II. The main purpose of Ionesco in this drama is to dramatize the pervasive vogue of conformity and the Nazi ideology that infected the people of his time. *Rhinoceros* is an animal; it is deadly and destructive and is huge in body and structure. Ionesco used all these characteristics of the ugly animal in his play and took up the theme of transformation of human beings. He borrowed from Bakhtin the tools of grotesque and burlesque to expose the violence, love betrayal, exploitation, apathy and the loss of individuality. Nietzsche's philosophy of nihilism and Kierkegaard's ideas of nothingness led to the loss of faith. Ionesco realized that the world didn't make any sense after the Holocaust and brutalities of war. Ionesco is the Franco-Romanian

writer who was greatly impacted by the ideas and philosophy of nihilism and death. Ionesco stated in the *New York Times* he wrote plays to depict the banal and mundane and the insignificance of life. Ionesco used new unconventional imagery, formless plots and broken communication to depict the loss of centre. Pirandello's work evinces wide range of tools of parody and comedy and even madness and humor. Like Pirandello, Ionesco's plays are packed with the episodes of the grotesque, the fantastic, tragicomedy, humor and irony. Ionesco took inspiration from Surrealism and Dadaism. Ionesco observed that even Shakespeare used the tools of grotesque in his *King Lear*. He came to the conclusion that the grotesque style has the power to depict human nature. The grotesque can depict the scenes of horror, comedy and exaggeration effectively. The grotesque can be applied in other genres successfully such as the gothic or the absurd. Human beings are often torn between the gory or disturbing.

From Greeks to Shakespeare and from Shakespeare to Brecht, dramatists portrayed life- like characters and thus what happens to Oedipus and Lear is partly the result of what they are. In epics, the problem of man is linked with the destiny of the nation, for instance, the fate of Oedipus is linked with the destiny of Athens; he himself is a presence making history. Action and limits, violence and organization, the individual and collective norms-these are the polarities that the epic hero has to experience. On the level of ritualistic pattern, his experience culminates in rebirth. He passes from guilt through suffering to purgation and emerges "a new man". But in the modern drama, the myth of rebirth, renewal, and re-dedication has degenerated into a grotesque parody of their classical versions. The heroes of the quest are tattered and fallen beings suffering from eternal disillusionment and frustration. But an absurdist "gives nothing we can envy or admire; no courage, no gallantry, no glamorous lovers, beautiful costumes, handsome settings or desirable furniture" (Hayman 4).

The grotesque is a source of entertainment and moral instruction. Grotesque is an old technique of drama as Hadas (2006) traced the history of grotesque beginning from the famous old comedies of Aristophanes old comedy in his book *The Complete Plays of Aristophanes*. Hadas argues that the comedies of

Aristophanes were packed with the images of grotesque and were intellectual in nature. The plays of Aristophanes depict the images of the lower parts of human body. His plays are loaded with the images of sexuality, "obscenity and excretory functions" (Hadas 5, 6). Bakhtin explored the significance of the Grotesque Realism in life and art. This term was very popular in the Middle Ages of Europe. In the carnival feast the scenes of grotesque were enjoyed by the masses. Bakhtin (1984) investigated the causes and the consequences of the freedom speeches of the lower class people. Francois Rabelais explored the significance of the grotesque realism and Ionesco took inspiration from Bakhtin in introducing it as an important tool. He wrote *Rhinoceros* and used burlesque and grotesque as medium to exorcise the tensions and anxieties of life. Ionesco used the metaphor of Rhinoceros to describe the structure of the drama. He expressed his disgust observing that "religion is in ruins". Ionesco's *Rhinoceros* gives its message of anti-conformity lashing on the ideology of the Nazi. His anti-theatre approach greatly influenced the various historical moments of Europe and America. Ionesco created characters living alone struggling in the trap of absurdity expressing their impulses, desires and nightmares. The plot of the play is circular in nature and the characters who verbally repeat themselves. Ionesco gives a critique of the "universal petty bourgeoisie" (34).

Ionesco's *Rhinoceros* doesn't reflect existential despair but presents the protagonist as a victim pitted against the forces of absurdities and irrational forces. Ionesco is seriously concerned to liberate his protagonist from the illusion, social pressures, loss of faith and mechanization. Berenger emerges as an anti-hero through his conformity and adherence to the ideology of conformity propagated by the Nazis. He is a ridiculous character as Ionesco parodies him in comparison with the great tragic heroes of the Greek and the Shakespeare world. Berenger is a grotesque character exhibiting his cowardice, ignorance, and laziness (Eugene Ionesco *Rhinoceros* 75). Berenger stands alone; a face in the crowd and his ignorance of all political values allow him to remain human. In the third Chapter the texts of two important plays of Ionesco are investigated through the lens of Bakhtin.

Catherine Hughs (1961) hailed Ionesco as a revolutionary dramatist who brought incongruity in the theatre. In this chapter all the dramatic elements of

Ionesco such as paradox, parody, burlesque and grotesque realism are discussed. His play *The Chairs* is considered as the master comic piece of art dealing with a bizarre situation provoking laughter. The director of the play Nicolas Batallie called *The Chairs* as a “parody of theatre”. Ionesco is a great experimenter as he introduced so many new techniques but his comic vision is shaped by the imitation of Bakhtin, Rabelais, Dostoevsky and Antonin Artaud. Ionesco was fascinated by the social relevance of the carnival festivals and found that they are a platform to expose the social vices. From Artaud’s *The Theatre and its Double* (1935) Ionesco learnt the theories of comedy and cruelty. For Artaud the comic situation in Marx Brothers evolves into a revolutionary grotesquerie whose overtones are at once political, social, and metaphysical. Michel de Ghelderode was an avant-garde Belgian dramatist who wrote in French like Ionesco. He created fantastic and macabre world populated by puppets and the ridiculous women. There is nothing glorious neither about his men nor about his women either. Ionesco wrote *Fragments of a Journal* and *Notes and Counter Notes* and discussed in detail the anti-theatrical techniques used by Beckett in his plays. In 1970 *Conversations with Eugene Ionesco* appeared in 1970 containing valuable information about Ionesco’s theatre and his experimentation in grotesque and burlesque. Colin Duckworth (1971) called Ionesco “the dramatist of darkness” of France as his plays depict exaggeration of the feelings with power to dislocate reality. Ionesco achieved this through his unconventional language like Beckett and Genet. Following Bakhtin, Ionesco employed new uncanny and bizarre situations to achieve unpredictable comic effect in his dramas. He wrote in *Notes and Counter Notes* thus: “For my part, I have never understood the difference people make between the comic and the tragic. As the comic is an intuitive perception of the absurd, it seems to me more hopeless than the tragic the comic offers no escape” (26-27).

Ionesco also used the elements of Surrealism to dramatize the modern malaise and absurdity. For Ionesco the comic is the unusual pure and simple; nothing surprises me more than banality; the "surreal" is there, within our reach in our daily conversation (165). Ionesco came to the conclusion that the stage is the only effective medium to dramatize the anxieties and tensions of life. He believes that laughter is the best medicine to relieve the distress of life. He writes: “When I

manage to detach myself from the world and feel able to take a good look at it, it seems to me comic in its improbability". No wonder, since the publication of *The Bald Soprano* (1950) the Ionesco focused on to dramatize "comic improbability as he wanted to push drama out of that intermediate zone" and to go out "for caricature and the grotesque". He outrightly rejected the witty drawing-room comedies of the traditional playwrights. Ionesco is devoted to the writing of plays packed with the elements of humor and comic scenes using the methods of burlesque. It is interesting to observe that the characters of Ionesco give a comical relief throughout the drama. Bergson also contended in his essay on *Laughter* that laughter is a suitable tool to get freedom from the anxieties of life. Laughter distances human beings from disappointments and depressions. He used farcical and comical elements in all his plays because the comic empowers a man to endure the tragedy of existence. Ridiculous and "Fantasy can reveal the truth and life is impossible without freedom and humor" (Ionesco, *Notes and Counter Notes* 150). Ionesco puts faith on grotesque and comic realism and his use of comic is essentially moral. For Ionesco theatre is a place in which human beings can study and explore the nature of their own actions. He chooses to write comedy fundamentally because it provides greater depth for such study: "A tragic character does not change, he breaks up; he is himself, he is real. Comic Characters are people who do not exist" (150). Ruby Cohn explored the Beckett's comic devices and their impact on the audience. He observed that Beckett used puns, twisted quotations, hyperbole, litotes, irony, jargon, incongruity, parody and paradox in his plays to demonstrate metaphysical problems of modern man. Ionesco and Adamov put faith in grotesque tradition of Bakhtin to confront the absurdities and existential realities of the society. Ionesco created the grotesque situation in his famous play *Amedee* introducing the corpse in the plot. The critics raised hue and cry against the theatricality of Ionesco but on the stage the drama was a grand success and Ionesco was successful in upsetting all conventions and habits of the past. Ionesco commented thus in *The Alma Impromptu*: "The creator himself is the only valid witness to his own time, he discovers it in himself, he alone, mysteriously and freely, expresses it" (123). Ionesco had the courage to dramatize the nightmares experienced by modern man on the stage with a passion to depict reality of existential absurdity. In *Victims of Duty* Ionesco averred that he



dramatizes strange and disconcerting situations and creates a world of dream and delirium. He has evolved a theatre of decomposition because modern life is decomposed and disintegrating. In Ionesco's world man is left alone to live with a void and to suffer an endless despair. He has the alternative to laugh at the existential realities and to drink the cup of sufferings. He wrote *The Chairs* (1951) and called this drama as a "tragic farce" expressing his firm faith in the power of the ridiculous and grotesque. The plot of the play deals with issue to be human in the harsh and contradictory absurd world. The play echoes the anti-dramatic techniques of Beckett such as vaudevillian characters, old and sick characters living in the desolate space. They live in a place where there is bad smell as the Old Woman expresses her fears: "There's a bad smell from that stagnant water and besides the mosquitoes is coming in" (Eugene Ionesco, *The Chairs* 1). The place in the drama is circular room surrounded by water. The play is about Old Man and Old Woman caught in the web of failures and defeats of life. The Old Man expresses his agony thus: "I am not myself. I am another. I am one in the other" (18). Ionesco gives the imagery of dirt, smell and darkness in the exposition of the drama to depict a world in disorder and chaos. As the play progresses the comic power of Ionesco intensifies. The Old Woman is extremely worried about her dismal future; she is too old to grapple with the existential despair:

Doctor, Doctor, I feel squeamish, I have hot flashes, I feel sick, I've aches and pains, I haven't any feeling in my feet, I've caught cold in my eyes, I've a cold in my fingers, I'm suffering from liver trouble, Doctor, Doctor! ... (11)

The major theme of emptiness of life is depicted in the plot of the drama employing the tools of comic of Bakhtin. *The Chairs* gives Ionesco's vision of death. When he was two years old his sister Marilina was born but she died at the very young age. Her death gave a traumatic shock to Ionesco who formed a pessimistic and nihilistic vision of life and death. Loss of life, inevitability of death remains a continual thematic reference point in all his plays and the ending of *The Chairs* is also based on his vision of death. The emptiness of death is portrayed through the empty chairs, empty of people and the menace of emptiness engulfing

all the visitors. In *The Chairs* Ionesco explores the husband and wife relationships as the Old Man reverts back to dependence on his wife in the last scene when confronted with imminent death. In the first scene of the play the audience watches him “seating on the lap of the Old Woman” (13) like a child. There is a sense of loyalty and commitment even in the mouth of death.

Bakhtin and his carnival ideology *The Zoo Story* of Edward Albee deals with the theme of loss and human depression. The drama is packed with the tools of Bakhtin as Albee follows Bakhtin in dramatizing the theme of human despair and alienation. Albee’s first play *The Zoo Story* (1958) dazzled the audience winning his third Pulitzer Prize in 1991. The performance of the play surprised the drama critics of America as Albee depicted unconventional themes of alienation and anxiety of people. Albee was inspired by the Theatre of the Absurd as he borrowed heavily from the French dramatists Ionesco, Genet and Beckett. But he made new innovations in drama and turned to Bakhtin for the comic tools. The new themes and challenges of the American Society were depicted in *The Zoo Story* with new methods and techniques. Albee’s *The Zoo Story* brought him world-wide recognition since he borrowed heavily from the Theatre of the Absurd and Bakhtin. It is a drama of language. It is quite interesting that Albee uses the tools of Bakhtin to structure the plot of the drama. Albee soon realized that the loss of self is a reality. In the contemporary drama the protagonist is a schizoid personality. He was greatly impacted by the works of Strindberg Pirandello, Dostoevsky, Proust, Joyce, Beckett and Ionesco. Albee’s protagonists are lost fragmented souls, victims of instincts and therefore look grotesque. Albee uses several comic devices to depict the ridiculous actions of the protagonists. Peter and Jerry are involved in nonsensical exchange of dialogues that provoke laughter. Stephen Bottoms avers thus: “Albee empowered the disempowered. Jerry appears a grotesque figure in gradual stages. He behaves like a crank and doesn’t know what to do and what to avoid in his encounter with Peter. He fabricates grotesque illusions and all his actions are meaningless, futile and communication is lost. Albee traces the history of the dissolution of Jerry bound to the wheel of time and headed for collapse like the joker of circus who falls from the height willingly to provoke tragic laughter Jerry is a fragment of debris, thrown up by “time”. Jerry cannot say “I” with any measure of conviction and certainty.

Albee's *The Zoo Story*, dramatizes the impotency, sterility, alienation and anxiety of Jerry. Groping in the abyss of darkness, Jerry and Peter are sticking to their neurotic fantasies and illusions. As Kolin and Davies point out, "Albee is the most absorbing postwar American dramatist, ranking only second to O'Neill as a subject for critical exegesis" (Davis 2). Robert Brustein dismissed Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story* (1960) as "sexual-religious claptrap" (Brustein 22), as Jerry has all the attributes of a homosexual pervert. In the words of Harold Clurman: "But when he succeeds in approaching an animal or a person, it is always through a barrier of mistrust and in a tension of disgust, fear and despair" (Clurman 13). Jerry ambles up to Peter and announces:

I've been to the Zoo... I said, I've been to the Zoo. MISTER, I'VE BEEN TO THE ZOO. (Albee, *Zoo Story* 12)

His declaration confounds and baffles Peter and provokes laughter in the audience. The myth about the Zoo is exploded only when he narrates his harrowing experiences of the "The Lady and the Dog" in a neurotic volcano. Jerry's insistence tone, his broken language, repetitions, pauses and incoherence in conversation excites guffaw of laughter. Jerry moves around Peter's bench and asks direct questions in an incoherent language: "You're married...How many children you got?...Any pets?" (*The Zoo Story* 16-17). The entire encounter of Jerry with Peter symbolizes the ironical parody of the quest of the traditional hero. The quest of a Shakespearean hero is for social and moral order but Jerry seeks the contact with Peter to release his psychic tensions. Jerry represents the lost intellectuals of America who are homeless. He belongs to a world in which everyone is "a permanent transient" (177). In his *Introduction* Albee observed that the conflict between Peter and Jerry forms the core of the drama. His personal vision of the world becomes "an image of the communication loss" (12). Language in Albee's plays is clichés ridden and marked by emptiness and insignificant repetition, which mirrors a void existence. Jerry decides to deal with in his own neurotic manner. The speeches of Jerry are filled with incoherent images since he is a fit case of a borderline. Jerry's harrowing experiences are articulated in a farcical style portraying Jerry an animal of a circus. Left with no alternative, he must make

contact “WITH ANIMALS!” (42). Like Hamm in *Endgame*, Jerry has his morbid “course”, which brings him to the realization of human isolation. Jerry struggles to break his isolation but Peter is adamant. At last Jerry is “Grotesquely fatigued” at the end of the story. Jerry is exhausted and for the first time he sits down on the bench besides Peter. He observes that he has annoyed Peter. Suddenly Jerry “tickles”, “pokes”, “punches” and “pushes” Peter off the bench. Jerry uses the tool of suicide to survive in modern society. There is a blend of mockery, contempt and desperation in his long speech but at the end he does feel his sense of hopeless alienation: “Oh..... my... God (He is dead)” (61). Having been reduced to Darwin to the product of natural selection, by Marx to the victim of economic determinism, and by Freud to the slave of unconscious forces, man has no height from which to fall. Jerry provokes laughter as his psychological ailment is dramatized through the literary devices of parody and burlesque. He behaves in an abnormal manner and belongs to the world of circus. Edward Albee’s play *The Goat or Who is Sylvia?* (2002) got him the Pulitzer Prize and the prestigious Tony Award in 2002. Albee used the animal imagery of dog and goat to depict the traumatic alienation of the American people employing the techniques of the farcical comedy and grotesque realism of Bakhtin. Edward ridicules the liberal American society through the characters of Martin Gray, his wife Stevie Gray and her son Billy. Albee borrowed the title from Shakespeare’s comedy *Two Gentlemen of Verona* in which Proteus sings a song to woo Sylvia. The critics observe that “the play is about love, and loss, the limits of our tolerance and who, indeed, we really are” (Albee, *Stretching* 262). The very fact that Martin feels that he is connected with the goat is funny, unnatural and a taboo. Martin is the main protagonist who expresses his connection thus: “I didn’t know what it was what I was feeling... There she was just looking at me, with those eyes of her” (Edward Albee, *The Goat* 21). Martin is the hero of the drama and he is conceived as Everyman by Albee. Often in the drama his responses are ambiguous and ironical as his remarks provoke laughter. The plot belongs to the carnival world of Bakhtin as the situations described are funny and unthinkable. Martin looks helpless and bewildered in the very first part of the drama. He is seen correcting the grammar of other characters. He corrects the sentences with arrogance and a sense of superiority. He struggles to live in “black and white” and tries his best to tell the

truth to his family. He wants to tell all the grey area of his love for Sylvia. Billy is another important character who loses his fraternal connection with his father at the discovery of Martin's secret and at the end of the drama he establishes his connection with a sensual kiss. The play is packed with the images of chaos and disorder but Albee creates funny situation to laugh away the tragic emotions. Martin writes a letter to Stevie. She is smart and funny whose marriage is also a source of fun. She talks about her marital expectations as she says: "We prepare fix things, for lessening, even; unevitable lessening" (39). It seems she is worried about the intricacies of human relationships and medical issues "emotional disengagement" (29). The real mystery of sexual relationship is revealed when she is confronted with the reality: "You have bought me down to nothing! You have brought me do".

*Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and *A Delicate Balance* depicts the experimentation of Edward Albee in his plays. Edward Albee examined the themes of breakdown of marriage, love and sex in his play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962) using the tools of grotesque realism and the farcical elements of the comedy. Martha, George, Nick and Honey are the major protagonists who are living with a void but Albee make them to play fun and games to laugh away the painful memories of the past. Edward Albee employs the tools of sarcasm and cynicism, grotesque realism and burlesque borrowing from Bakhtin to expose and ridicule the contemporary bankrupt American society. He was greatly influenced by the stylistic techniques used by Ionesco, Genet and Beckett. The main focus of Albee is to explore the inner turmoil of his protagonists in his play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*. Both George and Martha are the victims of anxiety and absurdity but Albee uses the tools of the carnivalesque feast to ridicule their disintegration of self. Paolucci observes that Albee's "experimentation in allegory, metaphorical clichés, grotesque parody, hysterical humor, brilliant wit, literary allusion, religious undercurrents, Freudian reversals, irony as irony, here for the first time appear whole in a mature and completely satisfying dramatic work" (Paolucci 45). *Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is a grotesque comedy and the main focus of Albee is to puncture all illusions of George and Martha. Albee was familiar with such games which symbolize the different forms of pathological relationships. The fun and games are not new to Albee alone. The other dramatists like Harold Pinter, Eugene O'Neill,

and Tennessee Williams have used this dramatic device to portray the inner turbulence of the protagonists. Pinter's *Caretaker*, *Betrayal* and *The Birthday Party* are interesting plays dealing with such situations. The motive behind is to expose and ridicule the funny and ridiculous characters of George and Martha who are too fragile to confront the reality. George and Martha indulge in delusive fun and games. George and Martha rely on the value of self-delusion and believe that it is the only source of their happiness and survival. George and Martha play many games to amuse themselves. The first game is called "Humiliate the Host". George directs Martha to start blue games to entertain the guests, Nick and Honey. But George himself is the victim of the game. The entire situation about George and Martha is based on a funny and grotesque imagination. Then follows the humorous game of the carnival feast "Humiliate the Host" and George takes the charge to take revenge from Martha. George calls Martha a "book dropper! Child mentioner!" (140).

George proposes: "We'll play a round of Get the Guests. How about that? How about a little game of get the guests?" (140). Martha's infidelity and her sexual advances provide basis for 'Hump the Hostess' (15). Martha's disclosure to Nick that she and George have a son provided the basis for "Bring up Baby". Each game in the drama unravels the psychic pressures of the individuals and their inner void. The games create a miniature culture with rules and regulations and a fluid value system. The breach of confidence is very common; each character assails the other to derive sadistic pleasure. Martha is at her best in showing her vulgarity and in desperation, George cries out:

THE GAME IS OVER! (136). Martha refuses to stop and goes on insulting George who with new energy declares to take revenge from Martha: This is my game! You played yours... you people. This is my game. (142)

George and Martha play fun and games strictly according to the rules. Each game has an internal order. Again each game has an end in itself. Each game excites tensions and promotes feelings of competition. In the sixth chapter of the thesis entitled: *A Comparative Study of Eugene Ionesco and Edward Albee*, the main focus is to explore the elements of grotesque realism in the plays of Eugene Ionesco and

Edward Albee. Eugene Ionesco is known for a comedy of anguish and despair as most of his plays depict the existential absurdity of life. Most of his critics discussed and reviewed the plays of Ionesco from the existential perspective. But in this study, the plays of Eugene Ionesco and Edward Albee are investigated through the mirrors of Michael Bakhtin's theories of Carnavalesque and grotesque realism. The majority of people believed that there are three important elements of grotesque; distortion of facts, fantasy and ugliness. Briefly stated, grotesque deals with the distorted, fantastic and ugly situations and events and the purpose is always to bring into the limelight the power of comedy and humor.

Grotesque realism has become a major tool in literature and in drama Ionesco and Edward Albee wrote plays that were great success on the stage. The tradition of grotesque realism in art and literature is followed by many prominent writers today. Bakhtin published *The Grotesque in Art and Literature* (1968). Peter Smith (1968) contends thus: The grotesque was viewed as an absurd distortion of nature, with an exception being the viewpoint of Victor Hugo who in his "preface" to *Cromwell* (1827) insists that the grotesque, transmitted through the medium of comic drama, is to be the hallmark of literature" (qtd. in Thomson 17). Bakhtin observes that the language of grotesque is paradoxical in form:

The grotesque is formed in the extremities and margins of art, both in exaltation and debasement; especially in the paradoxical process of exaltation through debasement. (Bakhtin 370)

Martin Esslin (1968) also praises Ionesco and Edward Albee for their poetic images and symbols employed to depict the metaphysical despair of the characters. In *The Chairs*, a poetic image brought to life-complex, ambiguous and multi-dimensional. The image intensifies "the beauty and depth of the drama and transcends any search for interpretations" (Esslin 148). The play *Rhinoceros* of Ionesco provokes immense laughter as the audience hears the menacing sounds of the ugly animal. In *Amedee*, Ionesco gives the visual metaphor of the corpse to provoke laughter through grotesque realism. In America and Europe the concepts of grotesque became popular in after the World War II. He turned to Beckett, Ionesco, Genet and Artaud and used all possible postmodern techniques of drama to structure

his plots. No one is safe and nothing is sacred in the world of Edward Albee. Using metaphor as cliché and cliché as metaphor, Albee pushes them as far as they will go, exposing established systems and personal arrangements which outworn metaphor thoughtlessly would perpetuate. Ionesco enhances the contrast between evanescence and opacity by using a technique called the proliferation of objects by the critics. Ionesco uses the new dramatic devices to crush the power of the material universe. Albee depicts the dark humor and at the same time underscores the role of illusions in human life. Albee's characters employ words as a means of getting through to one another, the words are splashed on other as arrows to pierce the heart or to wound others. No wonder, the audience hears all that is painful and pathetic as Peter and Jerry use words to outwit others. Edward learnt many techniques from Bakhtin; "he uses words self-generative and unending becoming substitutes' for real action. No wonder, his play *Tiny Alice* becomes a verbal and "mental sex play" (112).

The comic tools of Bakhtin can be applied in other tests also; the novels of Angela Carter can be reinterpreted relying on the tools of Bakhtin. Angela Carter has deconstructed the male hegemony in her novels such as *The Magic Toyshop* (1967), *Shadow Dance*. Carter uses all the elements of grotesque and fantastic to create an atmosphere of burlesque and horror and Carnavalesque. The plot of the novels run on two levels; on the surface level the forces of darkness intensify the atmosphere of horror and on the other level, Carter uses the farcical elements to achieve thematic unity. Carter's *The Passion of New Eve* and *Wise Children* depict the radical themes of the female body and her defilement. She gives her own vision of love, sex and disruption of archetypes and myths. Carter's focus is on creating a new woman employing the strategies of deconstruction of phallogentric assumptions about gender. The tools of Carnavalesque helped her to create a new eve destroying the old images of the Eve as a 'temptress', 'sinful', 'ugly' and 'inferior'.

To conclude, Eugene Ionesco and Edward Albee added new flavor in the Theatre of the Absurd employing the theatrical techniques of Bakhtin's theory of grotesque realism and carnival feast. In this study all the major plays of Ionesco and Edward Albee have been examined and investigated through the lens of Bakhtin



theory of comic art. Life is full of anxiety and absurdity and modern man has to confront the harsh realities of life. Ionesco and Edward Albee believe that the comic experience is the best way to get relief from the modern sordid and mundane life. No wonder in the modern times the comedy shows have become very popular as there is great need of modern man to escape from the worries and tensions of life. Life is transient; death is inevitable and future is uncertain and in these days the modern youth struggle to escape from the routine tensions of life. The comic strategies of Bakhtin are relevant today as there is great demand for the farcical and comical theatre. The thesis has social relevance and will contribute to the growth of Bakhtian criticism. This study is just the beginning and not the end and will definitely bring new awareness in the students of criticism.

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