

Doomed Eternality of Desire and Fear in *A Delicate Balance*

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Abstract:

A Delicate Balance is a play of fear and threat. The characters in this play show an unknown dread of the outside world and try to maintain the status quo. The sense of communication is bound to a protective behavior which results in their avoidance of any outsider. Laing's theory on the condition of the schizoid and the divided selves which torture his existence has become the framework through which this study will show how collusions at work create divided selves and how these selves find themselves in their encounter with the real world. In this article, the attempt has been made to demonstrate the deepest layers of relationships between the characters of the play, while delving into the conflicting forces which are at work in each character's inner world resulting in their ironically opposing and conflicting behaviors. This study will also reveal how masks act as important tools to protect the characters' existence from the threat of the outside invaders. These schizoid characters suffer from, deal with and behave differently towards their inner split and the conflict it arises from within, so that their main focus will be to preserve their existence.

Keywords: Edward Albee, *A Delicate Balance*, R. D. Laing, Divided Self, Self and Others

Introduction

Albee in his play, *A Delicate Balance*, depicts the situation of the individuals who fight the futility of their struggle to maintain the order they need to survive. The struggle is known by some critics to be staying safe in the face of "seemingly inexplicable 'terror' of the collapse of traditional values and the resultant emptiness of their selfish, affluent, and hitherto complacent lives" (Hutchings, 1988: 59). Considering the fact that this play is a confrontation between the dialogues and is "a play of words rather than action" (Kitching, 1966: 72), some critics emphasize the play's insistence on language as Walter Kerr maintains "Albee adds a wrinkle to the Pinter's cloak of anxiety, suggesting, 'life is language and nothing more.'" (1986: 52). In this play, "the danger",

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however, “is that the protective schizophrenia may become a total substitute for reality” (Biggsby, 1968: 226). The absence of action in this play of dialogues disappears if one delves into the semi-communicational dialogues into the hidden forces which function behind the scene in order to form the dialogues.

As the seeker of the “truth of human existence” (Singh, 1987: 1), Albee shows the condition of the modern man and the chaotic reality of the modern age. Considering the responsibilities of the playwright, he says “I’ve always thought that it was one of the responsibilities of playwrights to show people how they are and what their time is like in the hope that perhaps they’ll change it” (Stenz, 1978: 3). The chaos without corresponds to the chaos within and his characters all suffer from a terror from which they cannot escape “with ‘time running out, not only for the dying man but for a dying civilization’” (Horn, 2003: 15). The world which the reader is exposed to in Albee’s play is “...a world whose order has decayed. God is dead. A new one must be constructed by the mind and imagination operating through a language which itself offers evidence of decay” (Biggsby, 2000: 136). “Alienation, estrangement, disaffection, anomie, withdrawal, disengagement, separation, non-involvement, apathy, indifference, and neutralism” (Keniston, 1965: 1) all are reflected in the behavior of his characters while their desperate need for existence urges them to function and act from within.

R. D. Laing, Divided Self, Self and Others

Laing in his book, *The Divided Self*, begins to analyze the condition of the schizoid from an existential perspective. In his theory, he proposes two types of individuals. The first one, which he knows as the “ontologically secure” individual, possesses a sense of realness in himself and the world around him while being prepared to “encounter all the hazards of life, social, ethical, spiritual, biological, from a centrally firm sense of his own and other people’s reality and identity” (Laing 1960: 39). The ability to differentiate between himself and others give him the power to function in the society in a way that “his identity and autonomy are never in question; as a continuum in time; as having an inner consistency, substantiality, genuineness, and worth.” (Laing, 1960: 42)

The second type is the individual who is suffering from ontological insecurity. This individual has lost his sense of being real in the world and therefore feels “more dead than alive” (Laing, 1960: 42). Having a precarious sense of identity, he constantly lives with the fear of losing his self in the other. Thus, the sense of being related to the other is interpreted as a threat to his identity as Laing explains: “What are to most people everyday happenings, which are hardly noticed because

they have no special significance, may become deeply significant in so far as they either contribute to the sustenance of the individual's being or threaten him with non-being" (1960: 43). The individual's escape from the real world is not due to his indifference but due to his intensive sensitivity towards the ordinary events of life. The isolation which shelters him from the real and the others gives him some fears and anxieties with which he must live. Laing names three types of anxieties for an ontologically insecure individual. The first one is the fear of "engulfment" which he explains as "a risk in being understood (thus grasped, comprehended), in being loved, or even simply in being seen" (1960: 44). The individual dreads any interaction with the other, since he believes that by having other's attention and love his self will be under attack. Laing says: "In this the individual dreads relatedness as such, with anyone or anything or, indeed, even with himself, because his uncertainty about the stability of his autonomy lays him open to the dread lest in any relationship he will lose his autonomy and identity" (1960: 44). The precarious sense of identity in this individual, faced with this fear, shuts all the doors to the outside world and keeps him isolated inside.

The second anxiety is the fear of implosion. This fear happens as a result of the emptiness the individual feels inside. The isolation in which he is condemned to live deprives him of the realness he needs in order to feel alive. Therefore, the isolated self within becomes more withered gradually and the space inside him grows bigger and bigger. "Although in other ways", Laing explains, "he longs for the emptiness to be filled, he dreads the possibility of this happening because he has come to feel that all he can be is the awful nothingness of just this very vacuum" (1960: 46). When the space inside grows bigger, the outside threat becomes more murderous since the identity of others can easily occupy that empty space within.

The third anxiety proposed by Laing is the fear of petrification or depersonalization (1960: 46). When faced with the threats of the real world, the individual dreads being petrified, or depersonalized by the other. He believes that the other has the power to deprive him of his human power and turn him into an 'it'. Therefore, he begins the act of petrification in the first place to disarm the other and to guard his own self from being attacked by the other. The murder occurs and the individual's identity is safe. However, he feels more isolated and empty since his existence depends on the existence of the other. "[...] unnourished by the outer reality, alone and isolated in an inner nothingness", Terrell Butler maintains, "the unembodied self becomes increasingly infused with fear, hostility, despair, and a sense of its own nonbeing" (1977: 213). This is what Laing calls the vicious circle of the

life of this individual in which the more he kills the other, the more he becomes empty, and the emptier he becomes, the more he longs for the other, and the more he longs for the other, the more he kills the other.

Laing further believes that the ontologically insecure individual suffers from a division of selves. Faced with a threatening world, the individual may decide to divide himself into at least two selves. One being his true self and the other being his false self. In this sense, the individual becomes, as what Laing calls, “unembodied”, since “The body is felt more as one object among other objects in the world than as the core of the individual’s own being” (Laing, 1960: 69). The true self within is the one the individual believes to be himself while the false self or his body is the agent of the communication with the real world and “which a detached, disembodied, ‘inner’, ‘true’ self looks on at with tenderness, amusement, or hatred as the case may be” (Laing, 1960: 69). However, the true self being merely mental, loses its vital energy to live and withers gradually in isolation. The false self becomes the mask the individual wears in his life and which has no gratifying role for him. This mask has the power to torture the true self inside, since it does things which the true self detests. Unless the true self riots and disarm the false self, the individual may appear as a normal human being in the society with no symptom of the psychosis growing inside him.

Laing in his book, *The Self and Others*, analyzes the origins of such a division in the schizoid individual. The situation that he names “collusion” is “a game played by two or more people whereby they deceive themselves – a game involving mutual self-deception” (1961: 98). “Laing was keen to demonstrate”, Scott and Thorpe maintain, “that the self is born into a world of others to whom one’s action must be orientated, (2006: 336). The collusive bound between the individuals is due to their need to appear in a particular way to the other. In order for one individual to have a particular identity, the other person needs to have a particular identity corresponding to the individual’s identity so that the person is able to see the individual the way he wishes to be seen (Laing, 1961: 99). At this point, if the person’s view of himself, his identity for himself, does not correspond with his identity for the individual, the person may break out and seek his own true self. However, the need for confirmation, many times, urges the person to stay and form a collusive bound with the individual which is based on false selves or masks. Thus, Laing believes that when an individual senses a definite threat to his true self from the outside world in situations where the family which nurtured him did not give him the opportunity to be himself, he may choose to keep his true self within and wear masks corresponding to the demands of the family. As far as it remains a choice, this relationship is called a collusion (Laing, 1961: 99).

Laing, also, demonstrates another situation which he calls the double bind. He defines double bind as “a situation which involves two or more persons, of whom one is regarded as the ‘victim’” (1961: 138). The individual as the victim “is caught in a cross-current of contradictory injunctions, or of attributions having the force of injunctions, in the midst of which he can do nothing right. There is no move he can make that will meet with unqualified confirmation by the other(s)” (Laing, 1961: 136). As Laing maintains for this situation to occur, there needs to be contradictory injunctions between at least two people of which one is the victim. Repetition is inevitable in this situation. First, a primary injunction is given in the form of a threat for punishment following which the second injunction comes and contradicts the first one yet in a non-verbal form which is also threatening to the individual. The third injunction now happens and shows the individual that the situation is inescapable. This inseparability is in its highest form between a mother and her child. In a situation where the mother who biologically is the shelter the child seeks in the face of danger, what the child will do when the mother herself becomes the source of danger? The child cannot leave the mother while being unable to stay with her and feel safe.

Laing and *Delicate Balance*

As the play opens, the reader embarks on a journey through the disordered and inconsistent lines and words to the chaotic world of Agnes’ mind:

What I find most astonishing-aside from that belief of mine, which never ceases to surprise me by the very fact of its surprising lack of unpleasantness, the belief that I might very easily – as they say – lose my mind one day, not that I suspect I am about to, am even ... nearby ...[...]... for I’m not that sort, merely that it is not beyond ... happening: some gentle loosening of the moorings sending the balloon adrift-and I think that is the only outweighing thing: adrift; the ... becoming stranger in ... the world, quite ... uninvolved, for I never see it as violent, only a drifting – what are you looking for Tobias? (Albee, 1966: 1)

In the lines above, the reader is trapped in the web of anticipation. Agnes’ effort to attract the reader is shown in her ability to encourage the reader to move along the lines in order to find the information. However, it is not delivered. Through this experience which begins with the words “what I find most astonishing”, the reader slips down deeper and deeper into the unknown realms of Agnes’ mind, being unable to return to the world outside. Through this world, the reader faces the “belief” upon which her perceptions lie, both of herself and the environment around her. The “surprising lack of unpleasantness” which she feels as she ponders on the idea of “losing [her] mind one day”

speaks for her latent desires and the conflict she suffers from within; the conflict which imprisons her between two opposing forces. The first one shows her the inevitability of going mad and the pleasure which follows it, and the second confronts her with her undeniable yearn and need to step out of her inner world and embrace the real. This conflict arises when, according to Laing, the individual is suffering from ontological insecurity.

As mentioned earlier, the emptiness within the individual makes him fear any relatedness with the other following the fear of implosion and his death. His inability to step into the real originates in his fear of losing his identity, his self, into the others. Therefore, his true self lies within, unscathed by the outside reality. However, this individual, being conscious of his gradual death in the unreal, paradoxically, yearns for this contact which he dreads. These conflicting forces are evident in Agnes' perception of her madness as a balloon going adrift (Albee: 1) and her inability to hide her pain when she will become "a poor old thing" being "put in a bin somewhere" as her husband will "live to be a hundred and four" (Albee: 4). The isolation yearned by this insecure individual is her own murderer. It will deprive her of her existence and Agnes' awareness of this ending is implied in the imagery of "some autumn dusk" with which she compares herself (1966: 4). The atmosphere of a near nonexistence is felt both in the image of "dusk" and "autumn". The ironical outcome persists to move forward towards her as she struggles to protect her existence from the outside invasions. For this individual death becomes inevitable, both in contact with the outside world and in isolation.

However, she expresses her inability to go adrift due to her concern for her husband and her family: "but I could never do it – go adrift – for what would become of you?" (Albee, 1966: 2). Here, the sincerity behind her words is questioned considering her inability to feel concern for no one but herself. The question of sincerity is prevalent throughout the play and is a key concept in the interactions between the characters and their behavior. Agnes as an insecure individual needs to preserve her view of her own identity. She struggles to make the others see her the way she desires to be seen. Therefore, a 'collusion' is created to run the game. As mentioned earlier, collusion is a game which is played by two or more individuals. This game of identities allows the individuals to be seen as the person they want to be seen. The masks they wear give them the opportunity to delve into the illusion of a particular yearned-for identity. This situation is further clarified by Laing through an example:

If we consider this situation as a counterfeit of genuine relatedness, one can see that either Peter or Paul may try to establish an identity for himself by achieving a particular identity for the other. The need for such a venture depends for Peter (p)

on the extent to which he finds it necessary for Paul to see him (p) in a particular light, in order for him, Peter (p), to feel that he (p) is the person he (p) wants to be. Peter may feel that he needs Paul to be a certain person in order for him (p) to have the opportunity to be the person he wishes to be. (1961: 100)

The situation mentioned above can be seen in Agnes' behavior toward the others in the family. The first hints of the existing collusion is her insistence to create an enjoyable image of what is going on in real between herself and Tobias: "well, I don't want to use an unkind word, 'cause we're cozy here, aren't we?" (Albee, 1966: 5). She tries to make Tobias believe that their company is pleasant and desirable since this belief is needed for her to have the identity she wants to preserve. However, Tobias is not the only member in the family who has taken part in the collusion. Clair, Agnes' sister, is implied to be the outer force which pushes Agnes towards madness, as Agnes, addressing Tobias says: "To revert specifically from Clair to ... her effect, what would you do were I to ... spill my marbles?" (Albee, 1966: 8). Clair is the destroyer of the image Agnes yearns to create. She deprives her of her stability in her illusions. Clair, as the other member of the family which nurtures Agnes, in her childhood and later in her life, wears different masks to gain different identities, different false selves. She was the child who was trapped in the web of lies and expectations of her family: "I have never known whether to applaud or cry. Or, rather, I never know which would be the more appreciated-expected." (Albee, 1966: 14). The situation she depicts in her memories for the reader resonates with the situation Laing describes for an individual who is suffocated by the identities of the others. Being unable to show his self, this individual, under the pressure of a certain pre-established norm, acts in a way desirable to the others.

But I'm not an alcoholic. I am not now and never was. [...] it would be so much simpler if I were. An alcoholic. So, one night, one month, sometime, I'd had one martini – as a Test to see if I could – which, given my stunning self-discipline, had become three, and I felt ... rather daring and nicely detached and a little bigger than life and not snarling yet. So I marched, more or less straight, straight up to the front of the room, hall, and faced my peers. And I looked them over-all of them trying so hard, grit and guilt and failing and trying again and loss ... and I had a moment's-sweeping-pity and disgust, and I almost cried, but I didn't-like sister like sister, by God- and I heard myself say, in my little girl voice-and there were a lot of different me's by then- I am a alcoholic. (Albee, 1966: 24-25)

In her recollections, Clair discloses her suffering as a child with different "me's". According to Laing, when an individual is unable to show his self the split occurs under the pressure of expectations. Through this split, the individual is divided into his true self and his false self or selves. These false selves are the masks the individual wears

in order to meet with the expectations of the other. This individual is now captured in a collusion in which he should play the roles with the masks he is given. The family that nurtures Clair and leads her to such condition runs the collusion from which Clair finds no escape. The expected lady-like behavior which is evident in her unexpected bow is the force she desires to demolish by creating for herself another false self which is an alcoholic; yet, the power of the collusion is so strong that she cannot break it:

My name is Clair, and I am an ... alcoholic. Now, I was supposed to go on, you know, say how bad I was, and didn't want to be, and how it happened, and what I wanted to happen, and Would They Help Me Help Myself ... but I just stood there for a ... ten seconds maybe, and then I curtsied; I made my little-girl curtsy, and on my little girl feet I padded back to my chair. (Albee, 1966: 25)

Her inability to break the chain lies, partly, in her inability to ignore her need for the complement from her family. After drinking martini, Clair expresses her feelings of being "... rather daring and nicely detached" (Albee, 1966: 25). This detachment is needed if she desires to escape the chains, yet, she, herself, is aware of the futility of this struggle, since she knows that wherever she goes she will finally be hidden behind the masks: "[...] But the one lady was nice. She came up to me later and said, 'you've taken the first step, dear'. [...] she didn't say the first step toward what, of course. Sanity, insanity, revelation, self-deception ..." (Albee, 1966: 26). The persisting power of the collusion which nurtures her is so strong that all her life Clair struggles to save herself from its claws. Agnes is the preserver of the collusion Clair strives to escape. Clair's insistence on being an alcoholic originates in her struggle to nullify Agnes' impact and force. She encourages Tobias to play a game, a game that will ruin Agnes' existence:

Warn me when she's coming; I'll act drunk. Pretend you're very sick, Tobias, like you were with the stomach business, but pretend you feel your insides are all green, and stink, and mixed up, and your eyes hurt and you're half deaf and your brain keeps turning off, and you've got peripheral neuritis and you can hardly walk and you hate. You hate with the same green stinking sickness you feel your bowels have turned into yourself, and everybody. (Albee, 1966: 23)

Her insistence on pretention as an easy and flowing behavior speaks for the masks she wears in her everyday life in order to ward off the invasion pointing at her by her sister. Agnes, faced with this behavior, considers it as an act of petrification and defends her existence through turning Clair into non-being. Agnes' procedure is to ignore Clair and to insist on considering her an alcoholic:

Clair (Little-child statement, but not babytalk): I am not a alcoholic!

Agnes: we think that's very nice. We shall all rest easier to know that it is *willful*; that the vomit and the tears, the muddy mind, the falls and the absences, the cigarettes out on the tabletops, the calls from the club to come and get you please ... that they are all ... *willful*, that it can be helped. (Scathing, but softly) if you are not an alcoholic, you are beyond forgiveness. (Albee, 1966: 28–29)

When Clair is considered an alcoholic, she is deprived of the power of will and in turn her characteristics as an active human being are taken away from her. When disarmed, Clair cannot be seen by Agnes as a threat to her existence. When Clair, having been preserving her true self within, decides to enjoy the game by accepting to be an alcoholic, Agnes begins to ignore Clair that has, successfully, turned into an “it”. The pressure of Agnes' collusion is seen in Clair's words: “If we are to live here, on Tobias' charity, then we are subject to the will of his wife” (Albee, 1966: 29). Tobias is himself an individual who is captured in this collusion:

Agnes: [...]. There are no mountains in my life ... nor chasms. It is a rolling, pleasant land ... verdant, my darling, thank you.

Tobias (Cutting a cigar): We do what we can.

Agnes (little laugh): Our motto. If we should ever go downhill, have a crest made, join things, we must have that put in Latin – We do what we can – [...].

Tobias: Do you think I should go to Clair's room?

Agnes (Silence: then stony, firm): No. (Tobias shrugs, lights his cigar) Either she will be down, or not.

Tobias: We do what we can.

Agnes: Of course. (Albee, 1966: 9)

Agnes' need for Tobias is so crucial to be seen as the person she wants to be seen. “we do what we can” implies the restriction and the force which run the family towards a definite destination. Agnes needs Tobias to see her in a particular way desired by her and in order for this to happen Tobias is needed to be a particular person to complete her identity; as Laing explains: “If Peter needs to be appreciated, then Paul has to be seen as someone who is capable of appreciating him and does” (1961: 100). Tobias' reaction towards this act of make-believe is “we do what we can”. He is aware of the artificiality of this identity while showing pseudo-confirming behavior to Agnes. In his interactions with Agnes, Tobias shows contentment towards his situation and Agnes' demands:

Agnes: You have hope, only, of growing even older than you are in the company of your steady wife, your alcoholic sister-in-law and occasional visits ... from our melancholy Julia. (A little sad) That is what you have, my dear Tobias. Will it do?

Tobias (A little sad, too, but warmth): It will do.

Agnes (Happy): I've never doubted that it would. (Albee, 1966: 12)

Some critics believe that “the play organizes the claims of family and society into a pressure brought to bear on one man: ‘poor Tobias, surrounded by his women.’” (McCarthy, 1987: 90). The contentment which Tobias shows under the forceful pressure of his wife originates not in the power of this collusion, but in the experiences he had as a young individual. An unexpected purging of memories changes the direction of the play and takes the reader to the time when Tobias lived with his cat. The cat has been his only companion for fifteen years. It is the source of attention and love for the young Tobias who has withdrawn from the rest of the world to fill the gap a non-human friend. As Laing believes, when an individual suffers from a division of selves, in order to protect his true self, his interactions tend to be limited to his own phantasies, things or animals, since they do not have the power to petrify him (Laing, 1960: 77). This situation is what one witnesses in Tobias’ life with a cat and the importance it has on his behavior and which still persists on his mind. Tobias’ decision to kill the cat after fifteen years is a result of his ability, as an insecure individual, to be conscious of both himself and his environment and, as Laing mentions, this consciousness always leads the individual to the belief that others are constantly criticizing him (1960: 77). The decision is made when some changes appear in the cat’s behavior. To Tobias, these changes have only one origin, and that is hate. He believes that the cat is showing hate towards him: “She didn’t like me anymore. It was that simple. [...] I had lived with her; I had done ... everything. And ... and if there was a, any responsibility I’d failed in ... well ... there was nothing I could do. And, and I was being accused” (Albee, 1966: 34).

The belief that he is being accused for an unknown reason is confirmed when he receives a violent reaction from the cat:

I said, “damn you, you like me; God damn it, you stop this! I haven’t done anything to you.” And I shook her; I had my hands around her shoulders, and I shook her ... and she bit me; hard; and she hissed at me. And so I hit her. With my open hand I hit her, I hit her, smack, right across the head. (Albee, 1966: 36)

The hissing and the biting are considered by Tobias as signs of the cat’s hatred towards him. As an individual conscious of himself and the world around him, he is always trapped in the need for attention while this attention from a human being can deprive him of his identity. When the cat changes, his long-persisting fear of losing the attention views the situation and interprets it as a threat to Tobias’ existence. Hatred leaves him with nothing but the emptiness which will devour him soon. Therefore, killing the cat is the only way for him to live and stay protected.

Julia, as another member of this collusion, is imprisoned in the protected realm of her mother. She “is the needy child, a recurrent figure in Albee plays, filling an undefined void in the lives of parents while she herself craves love and understanding.” (Dircks, 2010: 46). The repeated unsuccessful marriages and the divorces speak for her inability to leave the safe environment of living with her mother which formed her identity. Her situation can be analyzed as a double bind which Laing explains as a trap between the mother and the child. According to Laing, the double bind situation demands repetition. Cathy’s case is an example of a double bind situation which Laing explains in his book. According to him “even though she [Cathy] was put in a mental hospital, this did not stop her from escaping from the hospital repeatedly in order to run home, where she would arrive at any hour of the day or night and have to be dragged away again.” (1961: 142). In Julia’s case, the first injunction is “I want to see your marriage and happiness, Julia my daughter” (Albee, 1966: 90). The second injunction, opposing the first, steps in through Agnes’ behavior towards her as she cuddles her, brushes her hair and pulls her back to the collusion. Julia, being trapped in the paradoxical demands, is uncertain about her situation. Thus, her life with others is, ultimately, interpreted as threatening to her existence and leads her back home to her mother and her room:

Julia (Rushes to the sideboard, her back to it, spreads her arms, protecting it, curiously disturbed and frightened by something): No! Don’t you come near it! Don’t you take a step!
 Harry (Patiently, moving forward a little): Now, Julia ...
 Julia: No!
 Edna (Sitting, relaxing): Let her do it Harry. She wants to.
 Julia: I don’t want to.
 Harry (Firm): Then I’ll do it, Julia.
 Julia (Suddenly, a little girl, crying): Mother!? Mother!? [...] Mother!? [...] MOTHER? FATHER! HELP ME! [...] They want!
 Agnes (kindly, but a little patronizing): Perhaps you had better go upstairs.
 Julia (Still semi-hysterical): Yes! Where!? What room!?
 Agnes (Patient): Go up to my room, lie down.
 Julia (An ugly laugh): Your room!
 Edna (Calm): You may lie down in our room, if you prefer.
 Julia (A trapped woman, surrounded): Your room! Your room? MINE!! MINE!! (Albee, 1966: 99)

Julia’s hysterical reaction towards Edna and Harry who have occupied her room originates in her fear of being thrown alone into the unknown world. As an individual who has always been trapped in the perspective of her mother, Julia is unable to see beyond and the identity which her mother has created for her only makes sense in the collusion which, although being a prison, is safe and secure. As an insecure

individual, Julia's sense of others is defined by her mother's vocabulary. To her, others and the outside world are a threat to her existence. The room she struggles to regain stands for her place in the collusion without which she loses her self. She cannot breathe outside of this secure place which secures her identity.

Edna and Harry, on the other hand, are the outsiders who threaten the existence of this collusion. The isolation that has surrounded this family in order to protect them from the outside threat is now broken by the outside world. Agnes explains this threat vividly in the following paragraph:

Let me tell you something about disease ... mortal illness; you either are immune to it ... or you fight it. If you are immune, you wade right in, you treat the patient until he either lives, or dies of it. But if you are not immune, you risk infection. [...]. It is not Edna and Harry who have come to us – our friends – it is a disease. (Albee, 1966: 151)

The security and the immunity pointed out by Agnes speaks for the existential immunity of the individual in his interactions with others. The sense of being absorbed by the identity of other is so strong that isolation becomes inevitable. Edna and Harry as the invaders of the comfort zone of this collusion are “passing through” (Albee, 1966: 88) to shake the foundation of this bond and to spread the disease of reality. The terror which is filling the gaps in this family is an existential terror of losing oneself into the other. This terror “from without brings into play all of the terrors from within that denial and habituation keep precariously in place for Tobias, Agnes, and Julia” (Marcia, 2017: 40). When this collusion is occupied by the other and each loses his or her identity in the identity of the other, they will be killed by the other. Therefore, this invasion should be avoided undeniably. Harry and Edna, who have taken refuge in this family from an unknown terror, are the reflections of the future of this family. The terror which frightens them and urges them to seek shelter in this family is the fright of death due to the emptiness within. When in isolation, the individual is deprived of realness and aliveness needed to survive. The vicious circle casts shadow on him and leads him to the conflicting desires of being in isolation while yearning for the other and the real. He is aware that his existence is bound to the existence of the other. Many critics believe that the final events of Albee's plays show that “epiphany remains a possibility” (Biggsby, 2000: 133), yet the possibility of epiphany for Agnes, Tobias, Clair and Julia in this play is predicted in Edna and Harry's epiphany and their need to survive.

Conclusion

In his play, Albee depicts a family who are thrown alone in a threatening world. The world he shows to the reader is a world of insecurities and invasions. His characters are ontologically insecure individuals who have isolated themselves in a collusive bond in order to stay safe from the invasions of the real world. Agnes, Tobias, Julia and Clair, each suffers from a precarious sense of identity due to which any sense of relatedness to the other is interpreted by them as disastrous and murderous. Their division of selves urges them to seek isolation and take refuge in masks and a collusive bond. However, this collusion lacks the power to hide the inner torture of its members for the real. The vicious circle, along with the double bind force, urges Julia to make interactions with another individual from the outside of this collusive bond. Tobias also needs Edna and Harry in order to receive that outer source of aliveness; yet, the isolation persists, since no one is able to tolerate the sudden invasion and the murder which follows it. The world which Albee depicts is the world of loneliness and fear. The isolation surrounding the characters of the play is inevitable when each struggles to protect their true selves from the outside threat.

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