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EDWARD ALBEE'S *THREE TALL WOMEN* AND ITS EXISTENTIAL BACKGROUND

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Though Edward Albee has occupied a prominent position within the American theatre for nearly four decades, his career has been quite controversial. But whether one is an «Albeephile» or an «Albeephobe» –terms coined by Roudané to encapsulate the different attitudes to Albee (*Understanding Edward Albee* 7)–, it would be unfair to deny his artistic integrity. The easiest thing after the overnight success of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962) would have been to go on writing plays with a similar appeal to audiences. There were, however, other concerns and forms that he wanted to explore, and, conscious as Albee was of the difficulty and unpopularity of their pursuit, he did not flinch from the task; as a result, his plays after 1966 have been among the most obscure and experimental of the American drama. But with *Three Tall Women* (1991), one of his latest works, he has been welcomed back to the Olympus of successful Broadway celebrities.[1]

A close examination of this play reveals, however, strong connections with previous work by the dramatist. Among them are its Existentialist overtones, which this article will seek to unveil and which have been, as will also be shown, a permanent feature of Albee's dramatic production, in different degrees and forms, ever since its start. In Roudané's words, «*Three Tall Women* embodies major philosophical issues that have long been synonymous with Albee's work» (*American Drama* 25). If the subject matter of plays such as *The Zoo Story* (1958), *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962) or *A Delicate Balance* (1966), was the inauthentic kind of existence favoured by so many human beings in contemporary society, and that of *Seascape* (1975) was growing older and its implications, *Three Tall Women* takes us back to

[1] Though *Three Tall Women* is undoubtedly an outstanding play, Gradet probably exaggerates in calling it «the best American play of the last 65 years» (np).

all those subjects and also prompts a reflection upon the meaning of going through the last stages of human life and arriving at its precise end. Since Albee has never tried to soften or sweeten the truths people refuse to see, neither has he in *Three Tall Women*.

According to John MacQuarrie, «there is no common body of doctrine to which all Existentialists subscribe... Existentialism has been described as a 'style of philosophizing'... that may lead those who adopt it to very different convictions about the world and man's life in it» (14). Though MacQuarrie is probably right, it is also true that all Existentialist approaches share certain postulates, such as an outright rejection of the belief that human reality can be apprehended globally. Capitalism, Marxism or the very idea of Democracy are based on the contemplation of man as a social being and tend to assume a common will in humanity, best realized through collective and undistinguished action. But for existential philosophies, each person's *existence* is unique and can only be defined by means of its very singularity. Within this conception, the outside world is only a source of alienation for a human being who is moreover cut off from all other human beings by means of the uniqueness of his existence and who lacks any real chance of establishing meaningful communication with them.

Existentialism has been often thought of in connection with the so-called Theatre of the Absurd.[2] Though both certainly stem from a similar view of the world as cruel, meaningless and purposeless and the human being as mostly –whether consciously or not– alienated from it and incapable to communicate with other beings, existentialist plays tend to be serious in their approach to such a reality, while absurdist ones are highly satiric of society, trying to humorously expose the vacuity of social norms and conventions. Existential drama does not have a pleasant view of society, mostly regarding it as hostile to the individual's efforts towards self-knowledge and self-realization, but this does not tend to be the main focus but rather taken for granted. Existential plays are then less oriented towards social criticism and more towards a dramatization and problematization of ontological concerns. Finally, Existential pieces tend to be more conventional from a technical point of view than Absurd ones, which are more daring and like to break with Naturalistic patterns of plot and character construction as well as with «logical» discourse.

After Esslin's inclusion of Albee in the second edition of his influential *The Theatre of the Absurd*, his consideration as an Absurdist has been widely and undiscriminatingly accepted.[3] In truth, of all his plays only *The Sandbox* (1960) and *The American Dream* (1961), in which characters are mere props for a devastatingly

[2] The name derives from the title of Martin Esslin's 1968 seminal study of the dramatic trend inaugurated by Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* in 1952 and to which different pieces by Ionesco, Pinter and others are often said to belong. For Hartnoll, the Absurdist movement «liberated playwrights from many outmoded conventions,» though it soon «spent itself, but not before leaving a profound and lasting impression on the theatre everywhere» (548).

[3] Banham ironically remarks that «[a]lmost every non-realistic modern dramatist has had this label affixed» (989).

satirical indictment of American society, can be termed Absurd drama. In the rest of Albee's production the focus has always been on specific individuals and their existential worries, though the vacuity of social beliefs and practices has indeed been made extensive use of as their background.

By now, many critics have pointed out Albee's Existentialist alignment. One of the first to do so was Sidney Finkelstein, who, in *Existentialism and Alienation in American Literature* (1965), undertook an analysis of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962) and *Tiny Alice* (1964). In the former, he probed into George's alienation, as seen in his detachment from the competitive and intellectually sterile university he works for. In the latter play, alienation is a consequence of Julian's loss of faith in a religion which has departed from its apostolic origins, invaded by materialistic and corrupting forces. Finkelstein, however, forgot a play which, up to this date, is Albee's most obviously Existentialist work: *The Zoo Story* (1958). To begin with, humour has only a marginal presence in it, which already refutes its frequent categorization as an Absurdist play. Moreover, its object seems to point beyond social criticism (though there is some fun at the expense of Peter's conventionality) and towards dramatizing its protagonist Jerry's, alienation from everything surrounding him and his permanent quest for some meaning out of a rotten existence. *The Zoo Story* has then a philosophic character –which does not mean it is not theatrical– and lacks the playfulness which constitutes one of the central characteristics of the plays of the Absurd. The basic situation presented in the play (a man trying to initiate a conversation with an unknown gentleman sitting at a public park and keeping the latter's attention with the promise, never fulfilled, of the story of something that happened at the zoo), though unusual, is not as incredible, «absurd» or utterly impossible as those employed by the Absurdist playwrights.

Three Tall Women[4] presents some of Albee's characteristic concerns, dramatized in a peculiar way. It is probably the most autobiographical of the plays of the author, the protagonist being an embodiment of his adoptive mother, with whom he had a difficult relationship. When first conceiving of *Three Tall Women*, Albee admits, «I knew my subject –my adoptive mother, whom I knew from my infancy... until her death over sixty years later, and who, perhaps, knew me as well. Perhaps» (*Three Tall Women* s.n.). It is obvious from that repeated and final, isolated *perhaps* that one of Albee's main complaints about his adoptive mother was her lack of understanding. That her refusal to accept the playwright's homosexual identity was what he could least forgive seems to be suggested when Albee contends he «did not like her much, could not abide *her prejudices*, her loathings, her paranoias» (*Three Tall Women* s.n.; emphasis added). Nonetheless, he admits that he was not seeking revenge in writing

[4] The play was first produced at the English Theatre of Vienna on 14 June 1991. It was then performed on 30 July 1992 at the River Arts Repertory of Woodstock, New York, and finally premiered in a regular production on 27 January 1994 at the Vineyard Theatre in New York City. It was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1994. Will Stackman contends ironically that Albee's play «is one of those pieces of serious writing the Pulitzer jury seems to prefer, full of implication, but not necessarily a play» (np).

the play, having overcome all ill-will towards her and even developed a certain respect for her pride and «sense of self:» «As she moved toward ninety, began rapidly failing both physically and mentally, I was touched by the survivor, the figure clinging to the wreckage only partly of her own making, refusing to go under» (s.n.).

Nonetheless, there is more to *Three Tall Women* than such connections with Albee's biography, about which the play actually says very little. The dramatist further adds that he was not trying to find out anything about himself in writing the piece and that «what I wanted to do was write as objective a play as I could about a fictional character who resembled in every way, in every event, someone I had known very, very well» (*Three Tall Women* s.n.). In other words, Albee uses his own life –or part of it– to write the play but does not use the play to approach his life in any significant way. Final confirmation of the eventual distance between the character and the real person are Albee's concluding remarks in his introductory piece for *Three Tall Women*: «Is the woman I wrote in *Three Tall Women* more human, more multifaceted than its source? Very few people who met my adoptive mother in the last twenty years of her life could abide her, while many people who have seen my play find her fascinating. Heavens, what have I done?!» (s.n.).

The three nameless characters of the play, A, B, and C, can be taken to correspond to as many different women in Act One: A is a wealthy widow whose fortune is steadily shrinking, B is her nurse and C works for her lawyer. In Act Two, B and C abandon their previous roles and become A when she was fifty-two and twenty-six, respectively.[5] Thus, *Three Tall Women* offers a detailed portrait of a woman's existence, even if it is presented to the audience by means of a discontinuous narration of broken memories, which Roudané even regards as «Beckettian» (*American Drama* 24). The frequent difficulty in following A's trail of thought reflects her uniqueness and impenetrableness, defining traits of human nature when it is approached from an Existentialist perspective, a «strong emphasis on the uniqueness of the individual in this world, and the painful choices which confront him there» being for Hodgson a central feature of Existential drama (125). Though the play is highly experimental in character, something helped by the absence of a conventional plot, there are also Naturalistic elements, including the setting or a dramatic discourse which is fully coherent.[6]

The protagonist had been born within a humble family. Her parents had been strict with her and her sister, so much so that the pressure was too strong for the latter, who became an alcoholic. They were sent to the city, where they had to live on a small allowance and the little money they could earn by working as mannequins for one of the fanciest stores in town. The adjective *tall* epitomizes much of what

[5] In Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958) a similar device had been employed. Through a tape-recorder we are allowed to hear Krapp's voice at different ages, thus offering the possibility to compare various moments of his existence.

[6] The playwright himself has held that «all my plays are naturalistic» (Samuels 38). Though they are far from being only that, all of them have an undeniably naturalistic side.

A is. An extraordinarily tall woman, she was acquainted very early with the feeling of isolation that being different implies. As a result both of her upbringing and physical singularity, she developed a superior strength, which allowed her to take care of everything when those surrounding her were weak, in low spirits or simply lacking in the courage to face reality. This made her distrustful of others, as very often she has had just herself to rely on.

Albee has undoubtedly based A's guidelines on Agnes, the protagonist of his *A Delicate Balance*. This is at least what the author seems to mean with the following words: «[*Three Tall Women*] is not meant to be a knee-slapper. It's a fairly subtle play, and all of the 'delicate balances' –how's that?– have to be there» (Samuels 38). Agnes was the one who had to sustain others when they could not sustain themselves, instil some self-respect in her husband, Tobias, when he had none left, prevent her alcoholic sister, Claire, from destroying herself, and then put up with everybody –and particularly her daughter, Julia– hating her, for the simple reason that she had greater strength and endurance than they did. The similarity of A's role in *Three Tall Women* is clear from her own words:

> There's so much: holding on, fighting for everything; tell him how handsome he was, clean up his blood. Everything came on me: Sis being that way, hiding her bottles in her night things where she thought I wouldn't find them when she came to stay with me for a little; falling... falling down the way she did. Mother coming to stay, to live with us; he said she could; where else could she go? Did we like each other even? At the end? Not at the end, not when she hated me. I'm helpless, she... she screamed; I hate you! She stank, her room stank, she stank... I think they all hated me, because I was strong, because I had to be... I was tall and I was strong. Somebody had to be. If I wasn't, then... (60)

A has been successful in keeping the «delicate balance» but, like Agnes, has been extensively hated for that.

From the beginning, she knew exactly what she wanted and how to attain it. Though she flirted with young men, she was perfectly certain that all of them were but pastimes. Having fun or liking a man was one thing; marrying was another, not to be carelessly carried out. But when she found a suitable candidate –that is, a rich, foolish and weak man, who was madly in love with her and whom she did not love or even like– she married him. Nevertheless, her strongest recollection from the early years of their marriage was the time she spent with horses, trying to mitigate her loneliness. Other problems arose soon, for instance with her husband's family. They disliked her, mostly because her father-in-law had developed a sexual attraction for her and his wife had somehow sensed it.

A was not a monster, though. When her husband was hit by a bullet and about to die, she did her best to save his life, even if that included frankly disgusting things. Though he managed to recover, their relationship was however bound to fail.

Albee offers a hint that this could have been aided by sexual factors in the scene in which she cannot bring herself to make a fellatio to him. Disappointed, he decided to cheat on her. When she found out, she chose to take revenge by acting in the same way.

But new complications resulted from the affair she went into with the groom. She had never got on well with her son, as she was too demanding with him and he was too independent to be told what to do. When he discovered that his mother was having an affair he decided to leave home. Mutual hate was to be a permanent feature of their relationship, but they managed to reach a compromise, roughly at B's period: she allowed him to come and visit her from time to time and, though their behaviour towards each other was always cool, they at least managed to hide their resentment during his visits, so as to give a semblance of normality. A and B's outbursts of anger towards him in Act Two reveal however that the balance was not easy to keep.

A's strength and loftiness in the past contrast with her present state at ninety-two, surrounded by signs of wreckage. Like Hamm, in Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* (1958), A is ill, whimsical, proud, isolated, abandoned and disappointed. She is, like Hamm's parents by theirs, hated by her son. Physically, she is shorter than she used to be, a fact that B associates with advancing towards death: «It happens with time: we get shorter. It happens every day, too: we're taller in the morning than we are at night» (46); the idea is that we are dying every minute that we live. A also suffers from osteoporosis –her bones are disintegrating–, one of her arms is useless and she cannot control her bodily functions. Her memory is so poor that she cannot have a normal conversation with other people. She is also losing her money, partly as a result of her insistence on handling her own affairs, when it is evident that she cannot do it any longer. All these are symbols of the life she is steadily running out of. But she will not surrender peacefully, as shown in her refusal to have her useless arm taken off or in her remaining pride, and keeps exacting attention and respect from others and not accepting pity or compassion in their place.

In the account of the protagonist's life, there is then a sharp focus on pain, frustration, and sickness, all of these being common motives in Existentialist literature. But the play not only dissects an old woman's existence but also deals with a young lady –C– trying to come to terms with her own present and future and with essential truths about human existence in general which she had always preferred to ignore. In handling this material Albee is revealing his Existentialist standpoint too.

Three Tall Women's opening speeches reveal already some of the play's central concerns. A announces that she is ninety-one, and B, though not wholly believing her, dismisses the subject as irrelevant. C, however, is obsessed with establishing facts as they are and, ridiculously enough, insists that A is ninety-two. She subscribes to the popular belief that taking years off is only attributable to vanity: «C. Vanity is amazing. B. So's forgetting» (3). B's superior knowledge is reflected in her assessment of the true reason why A mistakes how old she is: she has forgotten. C's evaluation of causes proves to be deficient as she has no familiarity whatsoever with old age

and its characteristics. Fortunately, B is there «to explain A to C» while shielding the former from the latter (Gradet, website). A similar situation comes up when C's anger at hearing what she takes to be racist remarks by A is met by B's cool and probably clearer view of it: «Why not? Wop, nigger, kike? I told you: it doesn't mean anything. It's the way she learned things» (45). Very early in the play, a sharp contrast between B and C is drawn. The former represents experience, self-knowledge and truth, as reflected in her cool, assured and professional manners; linguistically, her speeches are brief and concise and sentences are usually finished. C stands for an apparent innocence, complete ignorance about herself and self-deceit; her speeches are long, winding, and include innumerable hesitations: «C. To begin to lose it, I mean –the control, the loss of dignity, the... B. Oh, stop it! It's downhill from sixteen on! For all of us! C. Yes, but...» (13).

Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), a major exponent of German Existentialism, argued in both *Being and Time* (1927) and *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (1953) that, in order to attain some degree of self-realization, the human being must abandon his false and superficial life and undertake a thorough exploration of his inner reality. One of the first steps in that process would be a rightful assessment of the line that separates truth from deception. This is what B –the character of *Three Tall Women* who most clearly takes an Existentialist stand– tries to show to C, despite the latter's fierce opposition. As a matter of fact, no subject has had greater prominence throughout Albee's career than the deceitful way in which human beings try to screen themselves from the truth, clinging to social conventions or a contrived innocence. This is so in plays such as *The Zoo Story* and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, to name only two of his most famous dramas. It is moreover the same kind of deception the protagonist of one of the best-known plays of Existentialism, Albert Camus's *Caligula* (1938), also tries to fight throughout that play.

In Albee's *The Zoo Story*, Jerry tries to unmask the hideousness of Peter's unconvincingly-displayed «homely bliss;» Peter never abandons his mask though his reactions are less determined by social clichés at the end of the play. In *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, George manages to expose the falsity of Nick's pretended naïveté by getting him to acknowledge his boundless ambition; similarly, his apparently sweet wife turns out to have forced him into marriage by making up a false pregnancy. George's wife, Martha, will undergo a similarly painful process of gradual acceptance of the truth once games are over and the question in the title of the play is answered by her in the first person. In *Three Tall Women*, C is forced to confront the reality of human existence, as well as its ultimate destiny. Just as the characters of Jean Paul Sartre's *No Exit* (*Huis clos*) force one another to face their respective truths, A and particularly B will help her to leave prejudices and lies behind and acquire a certain degree of awareness regarding her own self.

One of the first things C has to face is what old age is like. At the beginning of the play, she reacted to A with a mixture of pity, distaste, irony, and even a detached curiosity. All of them were attitudes evidencing her uninvolvement in what she was contemplating. Of course, it had not occurred to her that A's present

state is the one she or anybody else would be thrust into in due time: «B. You'll get there. C. I can't project. B. *(Comforting)* Well, think of it this way: if you live long enough you won't have to; you'll be there» (57-58). Like so many other characters throughout Albee's production, C shows a particular relish for deceiving herself. Referring to her relationship with men, she tries to disguise as innocent «flirting» what was really rather less harmless, as A's previous account of it had revealed: «A. *(To C)* I remember it differently, little one. I remember more... design. I remember a little calculation. B. Oh yes, a little calculation; a little design. C. *(To audience)* Don't listen to them. Design? What are they talking about?» (72).

As B points out, the human being is usually educated to remain as far as possible from existential truths:

> They lie to you. You're growing up and they go out of their way to hedge, to qualify, to... to evade; to avoid –to lie. Never tell it how it is –how it's going to be– when a half-truth can be got in there. Never give the alternatives to the 'pleasing prospects,' the 'what you have to look forward to'... Parents, teachers, all the others, you lie to us. (93)

Heidegger regards the kind of existence resulting from such an educational agenda as «inauthentic.» Though its consequences are obvious in C, some of A and B's «lessons» can be said to have entered her by the end of the play. She starts acknowledging some facts, such as her own identification with A and B: «Why do you... why do *we* bother?» (102). For the first time, she replaces the second person pronoun –used until then as she was not certain of her eventually going to become A and B– by a first person one. Her slightly greater evaluation of herself has consequently led to an increasing identification with the other two. According to Jacquelyn Chou, «[a]s the play comes to an end, it is 'C' who gains the deepest insights about what life may hold in store» (np). Indeed, she even grasps the meaning of petty items in her surroundings, to which she had always attached a wrong value: «A. The big diamond and most of the rest. Well, what does it matter? It's all glitter. C. *(Protest)* No! It's more than that! It's tangible proof that we're valuable... *(embarrassed)*...that we're valued» (103).

But the most important Existentialist discovery that C is bound to make has to do with the need to incorporate death –another recurrent subject in Existentialism– into human existence, not as a distant stop to life but as the natural destiny of all human beings. Though this can have terrible consequences –such awareness prompts Camus's Caligula, once free from fear of death, to yield to all of his whims, no matter how cruel or despotic– only when death is seen in this light can existence acquire a transcendental dimension and its real meaning be understood. B's commentary to A, «If you fell I'd either hear you or you'd raise a racket, and if you died what would it matter?» (17), is laughed at by A and B but not by C, who remains serious. For her, death has always been something terrible; for them it is just another part of life.

Heidegger considered that a true coexistence between human beings could only take place through the acceptance of that common destiny. The concept of death discloses moreover an essential feature of human life, its finitude, which, once understood, places man in the only path to authenticity. For the German philosopher, the aim of all human beings should then be «to shift attention from death as the once-for-all observable fact at the end of life to the existent's inward awareness that his being is a being-towards-death» (MacQuarrie 195) or, in other words, «an anticipation of death, a realistic inclusion of the death-factor among our projects and the way we evaluate them» (MacQuarrie 197).

B's words share Heidegger's concern:

> You take the breath in... you let it out. The first one you take in you're upside down and they slap you into it. The last one... well, the last one you let it all out... and that's it. You start... and then you stop. Don't be so soft. I'd like to see children learn it –have a six-year-old say, I'm dying and I know what it means... Start in young, make 'em aware they've got only a little time. Make 'em aware they're dying from the minute they're alive. (13-14)

The ancient literary motif of «tempus fugit» is not associated here to the Horatian «carpe diem.» What B means is: 'Start early to face the truths about yourself as you are only given a little time to do so.' Furthermore, any exploration of the human self must begin by accepting the finite character of existence and proceed thence. From time to time in the play, B repeats the sentence «And so it goes,» to which a double meaning is attributable: firstly, that of moving forward or continuing a process, which obviously refers to life; secondly, that of finishing or leaving something behind. Life is thus seen as an ambivalent impulse, advancing but wasting itself in the effort.

As indicated, B's lessons about the role of death are addressed to C: «B. Grow up! Do you know it? Do you know you're dying? C. Well, of course, but... B. *(Ending it)* Grow up» (14). C is reluctant to think about death in the way B wants her to, as her approach to the subject so far had been the one expressed by A: «There's a difference between knowing you're going to *die* and *knowing* you're going to die. The second is better; it moves away from the theoretical» (109). B's purpose is to turn that «theoretical» knowledge into a nearby and practical one. Act Two begins with an attempt, on her part, to make C consider that death could come at any moment, and that it is not something to be feared or evaded but internalized and taken advantage of. Of course, she meets the young lady's radical opposition: «C. (*Hard*) I don't want to talk about it; I don't want to think about it. Let me alone. B. (*Sharp*) It's worth thinking about –even at your age» (65).

The final reflection posed by *Three Tall Women* is about which the happiest time in life is. Both A and B argue that theirs is. A's reasons are, however, much more convincing; she claims that hers is the only time when «you can think about yourself in the third person without being crazy» (109). Old age, Albee is trying to suggest, is

the only time when it is possible to attain a certain degree of self-knowledge, as the act of living is frequently contradictory with the business of broadening awareness of one's existence. Hence, the play's final words are «That's the happiest moment... when we stop. When we can stop» (110), thus associating happiness with freedom to stop living on and take a look at ourselves. Similarly, in Sartre's *No Exit* (*Huis clos*), another master-piece of dramatic Existentialism, any situation which allows for extended self-introspection is constructed as the true human «Heaven.»

Both Existentialism and the Theatre of the Absurd share a distrust of language. Everyday speech is, for them, stereotyped to such a degree that meanings can hardly be derived literally from it. The «inauthentic existence» which characterizes so many human beings is then reflected in language as well. In Camus's *Cross Purpose* (*Le malentendu*) characters' intentions are impossible to infer from their words and they are too much in their world to understand the others or to make themselves understood. Albee has also made use of the conventionality and meaninglessness of language very frequently (for instance by often making characters resort to empty talk to skirt the subversive potential of silence) and he does so in *Three Tall Women* again. He is particularly concerned with its use as a means of asserting power and authority. There is not a single play by him in which one or several characters do not try to signal their superiority by correcting the grammar of other characters. In *Three Tall Women*'s Act One, B tries to do that with C: «C.... it might not be him. B. *(Small sneer)* He» (5). After trying to convince C that the subject she is bringing up is irrelevant, B corrects her wrong choice of pronoun; she is actually signalling, once more, her better understanding of A. Later on, C intends to do something similar with A, taking advantage of her senility: «A.... my father was an architect; he designed furniture; he made it. C. That's not an architect, that's... B. Let it be» (23). B cannot let C believe she is superior and will not put up with her attempts at being cute: «A.... she missed more boats that you can shake a stick at. C. *(Examining her nails)* I've never shook a stick at a boat. B. *(Dry)* Well, maybe you should give it a try. Shaken; not shook» (42). Allowing C to mock A would be contradictory with B's task of making C aware of her existential ignorance.

It is also characteristic of Albee to twist around stock and commonplace expresions in order to reveal their meaninglessness: «B. *(To A)* A good cry lets it all out. A. *(Laughs; sly)* What does a bad one do?» (7-8). Given the fact that everyday language is full of such phrases, one is led to conclude that they play a considerable part in further depriving it of meaning and hampering communication. Something similar happens when one disguises a fear by means of a linguistic trick of some sort, as for instance when A does not acknowledge her terror at being left alone in the bathroom and says: «A person could die! A person could fall down and break something!» (14). The question –by B– was to be expected: «[W]ho is this person?» (15).

I hope to have shown the usefulness of approaching *Three Tall Women* from an examination of fundamental tenets of Existentialist thought. However, just because

in it Albee has touched on recurrent Existentialist subjects and approached them in the way some of the philosophers of existence have done, he cannot be said to have consistently adopted a philosophical stand. As John MacQuarrie points out, «[i]n some cases the 'Existentialism' of a novelist or an educator has arisen independently of the former philosophical inquiry and is a parallel expression of the same attitudes as these have emerged in recent times» (257). But Albee's conception of death and the importance he attaches to self-exploration, whether resulting from philosophical reading or, more unlikely, sheer chance, are undeniably close to the Existentialist credo.

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