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FROM THE BRITISH GROTESQUE TO THE AMERICAN
ABSURD: THE DRAMATIST'S DILEMMA

Edward Albee's reworking (1967) of Giles Cooper's play *Everything in the Garden* (1962) received diametrically divergent critical interpretations. While it was called "one of the ... most outrageous cop outs in recent theatrical history",¹ it was also referred to as "the first important American play of the season".² For Michael E. Rutenberg, the author of a full-length monograph on Albee, "Garden will probably be the most successful of the Albee adaptations ... Albee has added and changed just enough of the structure to warrant the new play's examination."³

Albee himself at first simply considered the Americanization of Cooper's work as a commercial commission, and did not even wish to have his name put on the theatre bill. But in the course of remodelling the play he caught himself in the act of recomposing, rather than simply adapting, the drama. In his own words, "Something happened, and by the time I was finished with my work there was hardly a word left of the original ... Cooper's play became a catalyst and set me to working my own variations on his theme ... the play ... is not an adaptation of another man's work but a much more intense collaboration."⁴

¹ Cf. M. E. Rutenberg, *Edward Albee: Playwright in Protest* (New York, 1969), p. 172.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.* Cf. pp. 180, 181, 229.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

A comparative close reading of Cooper's and Albee's versions may show that the American dramatist has not only transplanted but has also considerably transformed the British playwright's work. In composing his American variations on a British theme, Albee has also achieved a thoroughgoing reinterpretation of his model. His transformation of the original—despite parallel details of incident and accident—affects not only external circumstances but also internal qualities: the very focus and form of the play. His Americanization is, in fact, a reassessment.

He has kept the framework of his model—as he has in his dramatizations of Carson McCullers's novella *The Ballad of the Sad Café* (1963), James Purdy's novel *Malcolm* (1965) or Vladimir Nabokov's novel *Lolita* (1980—81)⁵—but his idiosyncratic fingerprint is nowhere more recognizable than in retouching and reshaping Cooper's *Everything in the Garden*, where Albee did not have to leave his own dramatic medium, and so he could use directly his own theatrical experience ranging from *The Zoo Story* (1958), *The Death of Bessie Smith* (1959) and *The Sandbox* (1959) to *The American Dream* (1960), *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1961—62), *Tiny Alice* (1964) and *A Delicate Balance* (1966).

Though no part of the oeuvre of a world-famous dramatist, Cooper's *Everything in the Garden* is more than a mere springboard for Albee; it is, in fact, a remarkable play in its own right. It was first presented by the Royal Shakespeare Theatre Company at the Arts Theatre in London on 13 March 1962; and it was shown by Michael Codron at the Duke of York's Theatre in London on 16 May 1962. First performed at Plymouth Theatre in New York City on 16 November 1967, and published in 1968, Albee's version was not only based on Cooper's play but it was also dedicated to the memory of the British playwright. The printed acknowledgement is not simply a statement

⁵ The place of Albee's theatrical adaptations and dramatic remouldings in his oeuvre has been analysed in: C. W. E. Bigsby, *Albee* (Edinburgh, 1969), pp. 71—95; R. E. Amacher, *Edward Albee* (New York, 1969), pp. 109—29; R. Hayman, *Edward Albee* (London, 1971), pp. 45—51, 64—7, 80—4; C. W. E. Bigsby, *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama 2: Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, Edward Albee* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 278—9, 287—9.

required by law; it is also an expression of personal warmth prompted by appreciation.

Initial stage directions: the Americanization of locale and the doubling of stage space. The fusion of the real and unreal

The first set of differences between Cooper's and Albee's versions appears at the first description of the stage-set. Cooper's representation of the sitting-room of a British suburban house is relatively long; Albee's presentation of its American counterpart is considerably shorter. Cooper enlists a number of objects (a television set, magazines, just a few books, the absence of pictures in the room and the presence of playing-fields at the bottom of the garden) which constitute a milieu determining and characterizing people; Albee cuts these out and concentrates on dramatically functional detail (a lawnmower, empty packets of cigarettes, etc). Cooper's emphasis on the environment sometimes leads to a kind of phrasing which not only turns to an actor or director but also to a potential reader: "*It is a fine evening in late April though cool enough for a fire to be burning in the grate.*"⁶ Albee has deleted the fire, the grate and the narrative turn of "*though cool enough*", and has restricted his stage instructions to a dramatically necessary minimum.

The practical lack of stage directions in Sophocles and Shakespeare indicates autonomous characters who create their conditions and dominate their surroundings even if in the last resort, at the peak of the tragic or comic conflict, they cannot disregard and avoid what makes them fall or err. The abundance of factual detail in the scene descriptions of the Ibsen—Shaw—Hauptmann—O'Neill period suggests the domination of circumstances over characters even if they make an effort to oppose them. Cooper's "aggressively normal"⁷ set links him with the naturalist-realist tradition. Albee's sketchy set signals a provisional, playful, imaginary and imaginative disregard of heavy determinism which the characters are

⁶ G. Cooper, *Everything in the Garden*, in *New English Dramatists 7* (Harmondsworth, 1963), p. 143.

⁷ *Ibid.*

exposed to but momentarily—from moment to moment—try to dodge and strive to suspend. The dramatic situation in Albee is an inheritance from Cooper. Its treatment, however, is different.

The difference is dramatically expressed not only by the substantial extenuation, the breaking up and thinning down in Albee of the thick crust of the objective environment, but also by the reinterpretation of whatever has been left of that environment. Albee not only drops out a number of objects but also changes their character. A case in point is the lawnmower which in Cooper's description is a motor-mower heard going to and fro on the grass of the garden, but in Albee's presentation is a hand-mower heard *and* seen through the glass door of the sunroom. Since the protagonists of Albee's drama, Richard and Jenny (called, with American informality, by their first names even when they first appear), are obviously better off than are the main characters of Cooper's play, Bernard and Jenny Acton (introduced to the audiences and readers, with British reservation, by their Christian *and* surnames), it is unlikely that the American couple could not afford what the British couple could, and Richard should only dream about a power mower (neatly ironized by the mumbling nursery rhyme of its name), while Bernard is day-dreaming about a king-size motor-mower, a real Monarch (also ironized by the royal connotations of its trade mark). Richard, in fact, complains that he is the only natural-born citizen east of the Rockies who has not got a power mower.⁸ Cooper builds his world on actual reality. Albee anchors his on the border-line between what is likely and unlikely, what is real and unreal.

The reality and unreality of Albee's initial scene is simultaneously increased by doubling, as it were, the visible space of the stage. The audience is watching Jenny in the foreground frame of the stage, while Jenny is watching Richard in the background frame of the glass doors which serve as a "picture window".⁹ She is in an immediate theatrical space; he is in a mediated, withdrawn region. As Richard passes the picture window, mows, stops, mops, mows again, and cannot hear what Jenny tells

⁸ E. Albee, *Everything in the Garden*, in *The Plays IV* (New York, 1982), p. 8.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

him, he gains a queer, mechanical and marionette-like quality. Communication is difficult. Communion is doubtful.

The fusion of the real and unreal is a characteristic feature of Albee's plays written before and after *Everything in the Garden* as well. If a work of art is basically a sensuous values judgement, then "the substitution of artificial for real values"¹⁰ may logically lead to the absurd merger of the real and the unreal (Mommy's beige or wheat-coloured little hat, Grandma's neatly wrapped and tied boxes and Day-Old Cake, a bundle or bumble of joy in *The American Dream*; the death of the fantasy child in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*; the implications and consequences of Harry's and Edna's fear in *A Delicate Balance*; the cube in *Box* and the incongruously patterned yet ingeniously counterpointed stylistic stereotypes in *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung*). Richard's hand-mower in *Everything in the Garden* is a link in this chain. Bernard's motor-mower is just a tool.

Exposition: the Americanization of stakes, risks and dimensions. Prostitution as a symbol of social status

As the plays progress, differences increase. The exposition in Cooper's drama ranges over the whole of the first act, while in Albee's play it only covers the first scene of the first act: Cooper presents the milieu in more minute detail, whereas Albee builds the plot more dynamically.

The first section of the exposition reveals the narrow financial position of the protagonists. Jenny in Cooper, with a touch of sentimentality, saves the silver paper in cigarette packets to decorate her room with at a sometime party or ball, while Jenny in Albee, with American practical common sense, collects coupons to save money.¹¹

The second section of the exposition concerns Jenny's meeting a procuress of a high-class brothel. In keeping with his emphasis on the psychic gravitational pull of the environment, Cooper throws into relief the easy stages through which Jenny is transformed from a respectable

¹⁰ E. Albee, "Preface," *The American Dream*, in *New American Drama* (Harmondsworth, 1966), p. 21.

¹¹ Cf. M. E. Rutenberg, *Edward Albee: Playwright in Protest*, p. 172.

housewife into a part-time prostitute. Being short of money and a keen gardener, and wishing to help her husband, who is also a passionate gardener, she puts an advertisement in the local paper indicating that she is ready to take a part-time job. She gives her phone number, and Leonie Pimosz, the Polish pander, loses no time to call her and to call at her flat. After all, as her name may suggest, she has the relentless force of a lion, she is shrewd enough to know how to lionize a place and a person secretly, and she is sufficiently impudent to claim that "Nothing is disgusting, unless you are disgusted".¹² Since it is Bernard who answers the phone when Leonie is telephoning, and Jenny knows that her husband is opposed to her taking any job, she lies to Bernard that a dressmaker is giving her a ring, and so she becomes Leonie's accomplice before she has ever met her. When she does meet her, Leonie offers Jenny fifty pounds. Jenny refuses to take the money, and Leonie, with the gesture of Nastasya Filippovna in Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*, throws the bills into the fire. While, however, Nastasya thus rejects to be bought, Leonie tries to buy Jenny. At first Jenny suggests that Leonie had better leave her home, but when Leonie starts flinging another bundle of notes into the fire, Jenny is tempted to take the money as an advance of salary. The job is not difficult at all, Jenny is only supposed to work in the afternoons, the place (in Wimpole Street) seems to be respectable, the fee (twenty-five guineas each time) generous, and the clients are all gentlemen. For some time the nature of the job is unclear, but then the penny drops and Jenny orders Leonie out of her home.

Leonie, however, is not offended, tells her that one of Jenny's friends has already undertaken the job, offers Jenny a cigarette which she badly needs and automatically accepts, though immediately throws away. Jenny's resistance is gradually weakening. She may tell the police, but then Leonie would admit how Jenny has approached her through advertisement. So Jenny does not summon the police, Leonie gives her time to think the matter over, asks her to telephone to her, establishes her superiority by

¹² G. Cooper, *Everything in the Garden*, p. 156. It may be merely coincidental, yet worth noting, that "pimasz" in Hungarian, if not in Polish, means impudent, cheeky.—If, for an English-speaking audience, Mrs Toothe is a more natural name than Leonie Pimosz, similarly, Richard is also a more common name than Bernard.

warning her not to call her before ten o'clock in the morning, leaves Jenny's home peacefully, and Jenny picks up the bills from the floor. After all, it is money. She locks it up in a drawer, and takes her husband out to dinner.

The *chief* motive underlying Jenny's choice is not voluptuous inconstancy, or capricious coquetry, or inexperienced levity as is the case with Cressida in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*. Nor is it poverty, the plight of Mrs Warren in her early years in G. B. Shaw's *Mrs Warren's Profession* and the predicament of Anna in O'Neill's *Anna Christie*. Nor is it greed, the propelling force in Mrs Warren's later career or in Leda's attitude in O'Neill's *The Calms of Capricorn*. Nor is it the momentary excitement of a cheap, if lucrative, adventure as it is with the nameless Woman in Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. It is not even pathological disintegration of the personality as it appears to be in the case of Blanche in Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Jenny's decision is fundamentally motivated by the garden as a symbol of social and financial status.¹³ This is where Cooper's originality lies in the conception and elaboration of *Everything in the Garden*; and this is the *leitmotiv* which caught Albee's ironic attention.

In the exposition of his play, however, Albee traces Cooper's dramatic blueprint with a difference. He removes Leonie's Jewish background, deletes her concentration camp experience, obliterates her Polish nationality, does away with her uneducated, racy and foreign accent, makes her English, and rechristens her as Mrs Toothe, a tag-name with a different connotation. In this way, Mrs Toothe's profession ceases to be a matter external to middle-class life, and the conflict becomes internalized, generalized and sharpened. Accordingly, she is no longer Cooper's "squat, square figure", "an extraordinary creature"¹⁴ but "an elegantly dressed, handsome lady, 50 or so",¹⁵ as she would usually appear and appeal to people of good society, where everybody is "pleasant-looking" (like Richard

¹³ Cf. M. E. Rutenberg, *Edward Albee: Playwright in Protest*, p. 173.

¹⁴ G. Cooper, *Everything in the Garden*, p. 152.

¹⁵ E. Albee, *Everything in the Garden*, p. 1.

and his neighbour, Jack), "nice-looking" (like Roger, Richard's son), and "attractive"¹⁶ (like Jenny), to the repeated point of patterned parody.¹⁷

The Americanization of Cooper's theme involves not only a change of place (from the outskirts of London to the suburb of an American city) but also a raise of stakes: Mrs Toothe throws on the burning logs of the fireplace a thousand dollars rather than fifty pounds; Jenny is supposed to get a hundred dollars rather than twenty-five guineas for an afternoon; Richard is a research chemist, while Bernard, his counterpart in Cooper, is employed as a clerk at a firm making office furniture; Jenny's admirer, Jack, in Albee is a rich painter, who is going to leave more than three million dollars to the couple and can afford making irreverent, if irrelevant, remarks about the colours of Jenny's panties, while Jack in Cooper makes his living by contributing to fashion magazines and drawing strip cartoons.

In Albee's drama Jenny's trapping by the brothel-keeper is a less transitional and more abrupt matter than it is in Cooper's play. The American dramatist has cut out much of the British playwright's circumstantial evidence (including references to the pimp's past and drinking habits as well as Jenny's advertisement), and has replaced Cooper's often understated conversations by a more direct, incisive and dynamic dialogue.¹⁸

Albee also makes the dramatic texture more closely-knit by focusing the leading motive of the garden as a symbol of social status more emphatically, and finishes his exposition with Richard wondering about the cost of a greenhouse.

Imbroglío, culmination and dénouement: the Americanization of form. Dual ending. Cooper and Albee: from incongruity to absurdity

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ In an interview M. E. Rutenberg had with Albee on 7 August 1968, the dramatist explained his reasons for changing Leonie Pimosz into Mrs Toothe like this: "I wanted a symbol of something that Americans would be terribly impressed by. Since Americans *are* terribly impressed by money and by the English, it seems that the offering of money should come from the British." M. E. Rutenberg, *Edward Albee: Playwright in Protest*, p. 228.

¹⁸ Cf. E. Albee, *Everything in the Garden*, p. 38.

The imbroglio or intrigue phase of the plot presents the arrival by post of a package containing £198 in Cooper and \$4.900 in Albee, which leads to the husband's discovery of the wife's profession (Act Two in Cooper and Act One, Scene Two in Albee), and to a big celebration and party which reveals the fact that all the wives are involved in the business with the connivance of all the husbands,¹⁹ who, when the police has found out about the brothel, cooperate with the madam in finding a no less lucrative but safer and more appropriate place (the bulk of Act Three in Cooper and of Act Two in Albee).

The culmination or crisis point of the action comes when Jack, who knows too much and, when drunk, talks more than desirable, is murdered in the room and buried in the garden ("Everything in the Garden"). In Cooper's play it is Jenny whose warning "Don't let him go!"²⁰ triggers a series of unavoidable actions leading to Jack's death. In Albee's drama it is the madam's "Stop him"²¹ which starts the fatal act. In Albee the conflict is sharper: it is in the madam's presence that Jack identifies Mrs Toothe as a brothel-keeper he knew in London, and her "He'll talk" is "*a command*",²² just as her "You must make him be quiet" is the order of "*a commander*".²³

¹⁹ M. E. Rutenberg refers to "a similar operation blossoming in Long Island's suburbia (*Edward Albee: Playwright in Protest*, p. 175.), but he thinks that the dénouement in Albee's play is contrived in that "all of Jenny's friends turn out to be part of the same prostitution ring. Had Mrs Toothe given the party and invited Richard and Jenny, the ending would have been more convincing. It is simply too coincidental that every friend of Jenny's is a whore—unless Jenny knew who the other members of the ring were and invited only them". *Edward Albee: Playwright in Protest*, pp. 175—6. Such coincidences, freaks of fortune, accidental events, however, are dramatic means of concentration and generalization. Without them neither Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* nor Gogol's *The Inspector-General* and Dürrenmatt's *The Visit* could have been written. Artistic plausibility differs from everyday probability. The same applies to "Jack's recognition of Mrs Toothe", which in M. E. Rutenberg's opinion is "too coincidental". *Edward Albee: Playwright in Protest*, p. 178.

²⁰ G. Cooper, *Everything in the Garden*, p. 211.

²¹ E. Albee, *Everything in the Garden*, p. 183.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 184.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

The dénouement or solution section of the plot shows the way in which the members of good society, after the shock of the murder, are reconciled—albeit sulkily—to the state of affairs (the rest of Act Three in Cooper and of Act Two in Albee).

It is remarkable that before finally resigning to having participated in an act of murder, both Bernard and Richard suggest that the police ought to be informed. In Cooper's play Jenny rejects her husband's idea with her "Don't be absurd".²⁴ It is at this point that Cooper's sense of incongruity comes closest to Albee's view. Cooper's casual insight is, in fact, the American dramatist's starting point and vantage point. It is the recognition of the fact that in a world where artificial values are substituted for real ones, absurdity prevails.²⁵ But exactly because Albee takes this reverse situation for granted, if unacceptable, he does not need to formulate its absurdity in a single admonishing sentence (which, absurdly enough, makes the right appear absurdly wrong). It is the entire form of his whole play which conveys the sense of absurdity. So in the course of rewriting Cooper's drama, Albee cut out Jenny's absurd reference to an alleged absurdity and made Mrs Toothe prove to everybody present how dangerously unfeasible Richard's idea to call the police was.

A play of this kind is very difficult to finish. Cooper, in fact, experimented with two endings. His first idea was to make the actor playing the part of Bernard revolt against his role. This "Pirandellian dodge"²⁶ openly confronted ideal with reality, but later Cooper found this solution was disturbing and discarded the idea. In Cooper's second (and final) ending Bernard and Jenny sink back to their ordinary life and bury their remorse in a routine conversation about pipe-cleaners and keeping up the garden of the new brothel. "Ours must look like all the others",²⁷ Jenny concludes. This is a fine and convincing ending which corresponds to Cooper's general concept about the deterministic power of external circumstances. It makes the author's indictment indirect.

²⁴ G. Cooper, *Everything in the Garden*, p. 214.

²⁵ E. Albee, *Everything in the Garden*, pp. 123—5.

²⁶ Cf. J. W. Lambert, "Introduction," *New English Dramatists 7*, p. 12.

²⁷ G. Cooper, *Everything in the Garden*, p. 221.

Albee seems to have adopted, adapted, developed, changed and reversed both of Cooper's solutions in a single play. His first ending is Cooper's quiet acquiescence. What Mrs Toothe has to say to Jenny and Richard about the place in the garden where—along the cesspool line—Jack has been buried can be considered the equivalent of Cooper's second conclusion: "The grass will grow over; the earth will be rich, and soon—eventually—everything in the garden ... will be as it was. You'll see."²⁸

Albee, however, appears to have been dissatisfied with such a peaceful, if ironical, solution at the end of such a violent play, and makes the otherwise dead Jack return in dirty clothes and with sod in his hair to draw the conclusion, speaking about himself as somebody who *was*, in the past tense. At this point of the plot he is an "Absurd Person Singular", to quote and adapt the title of Alan Ayckbourn's play. Since Jack now is neither alive nor a ghost but a *persona* standing for the author's idea, ideal and ironical position, he clearly corresponds to Bernard rebelling against his part. Is Jack's resurrection dramatically acceptable?

The answer to the question cannot be given in terms of everyday likelihood. The problem is a matter of artistic plausibility, of how far Albee has been able to create a dramatic medium in which such a solution is organic. Not only has Albee *used* the traditional dramatic structure of exposition, imbroglio, culmination and dénouement, crystallized by Sophocles, dynamized by Shakespeare, cross-bred with an analytical research of the past by Ibsen and Shaw, embedded and blurred in a more or less deterministic milieu by Hauptmann and O'Neill, and pointed and simplified in their well-made plays by Scribe, Sardou, Pinero, Jones, Boucicault and Belasco. Albee has also *relativized* this structure. Jack's return after his death is no less a corroboration and relativization of the dramatic climax of his murder than is George's announcement of the death of the imaginary son in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* The simultaneous use, misuse and abuse of the dramatic tradition results in an ingenious fusion of a realistic framework and an absurdist texture, which characterizes

²⁸ E. Albee, *Everything in the Garden*, p. 197.

Albee's dramatic form.²⁹ Hence is derived Cooper's importance for Albee: Cooper has provided him with the traditional frame which he could adopt and adapt, use and change, follow and reinterpret at the same time. Albee's difficulties in weaving a dramatic plot and building a firm structure in the traditional sense *after* his adaptations (in, for instance, *All Over* 1975, *Listening* 1976, *Counting the Ways* 1977 or *The Lady from Dubuque* 1978—79) point in the same direction.

For all these reasons, the dramatic validity of Jack's unexpected and grotesquely absurd resurrection at the end of Albee's *Everything in the Garden* largely depends on how persistently the American dramatist has been able to combine the adoption and relativization of dramatic tradition as he found it embodied in the British playwright's work. Scenic and reading evidence shows that Albee has, in fact, been doing this throughout his play.

A case in point is dialogue in Cooper and Albee. In Cooper's play Jenny defends her wish to take a job by a timid reference to Strindberg. She says she would like to be a useful person rather than a mere slave in the house like "that woman in that play"³⁰ by Strindberg. This is no more than a thematic element in a casual and natural conversation. With Albee the corresponding dialogue also seems to be real and actual, but at the same

²⁹ For the relationship of Pinter, Beckett and Albee compare: R. Dutton, *Modern Tragicomedy and the British Tradition: Beckett, Pinter, Stoppard, Albee and Storey* (Brighton, 1986), pp. 114, 123. For a graphic "distinction between the European absurdist stance and Albee's" see: C. W. E. Bigsby, *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama 2*, pp. 160, 263.—As G. Cooper's example also suggests, the dichotomy of ending a play idealistically or realistically is not unknown in Europe either. But the duality became especially acute in twentieth-century American drama. In E. O'Neill's *Days Without End*—a play which has eight draft versions and a number of different endings—the question of how to finish the work is the central problem both for the protagonist and the author. The final solution makes the ideal stand out victoriously with a loud gesture. In O'Neill's greatest play, *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, the conclusion is quiet, and the ideal is realistically mediated by a tragic situation which renders its manifestation indirect. At the end of T. Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* the ideal appears directly in Tom's sentimental and nostalgic reminiscence. By contrast, in the "Requiem" section of A. Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, Happy's sentimental pledge is effectively counterpointed by Biff's realistic position.

³⁰ G. Cooper, *Everything in the Garden*, p. 150.

time it is also repetitively ritualistic,³¹ it expresses quick and abrupt changes of mood from tender feelings to savage disagreement, and it may lead to sheer absurdity, as it does in Richard's emphatic statement to Jenny: "You're up to hock in your eyebrows ... (*Realizes what he has said, tries to fix it, retaining dignity*) ... up in hock to your ... in hock up to your eyebrows, and why!"³² Undercutting pathos by bathos and quarrelling in patterned "rounds" relativize the difference between sense and nonsense, raise the Strindbergian element from a thematic to a formal level, and create a dramatic atmosphere of conversational absurdity which is latent in Strindberg's *The Dance of Death* and becomes overt in Dürrenmatt's wittily parodistic *Play Strindberg* or Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* The dialogue in Albee's *Everything in the Garden* uses the element of absurdity not to destroy but to modernize Cooper's traditional style and naturalistic-realistic tradition in general. In this it is different from Beckett's grimly grotesque and ingeniously patterned buffoonery.

The simultaneity of maintaining and transforming naturalistic-realistic tradition can also be observed in the relationship of Cooper's and Albee's stage directions not only at the start but throughout the two plays, and especially in the later phases of presenting the conflict. Cooper, as a rule, uses descriptive stage instructions. His procedure corresponds to the deterministic importance he attributes to the external conditions of human action. Albee, to a certain extent, keeps the descriptive element, but, in a considerable degree, also relativizes and modifies it. His technique is in keeping with his dramatic concept of delayed determinism and playful absurdity. Accordingly, Albee's stage instructions are sometimes short key phrases indicating a change of attitude by a playfully pretended change of person. When Richard feels he is going to hate the party, he is simply referred to as "*Little boy*".³³ The instruction plays a part. It can also speak and warn ("*Not in front of Roger*"),³⁴ it can combine an emotional state and a colloquial inference ("*Naked and embarrassed, but if you're in a nudist*

³¹ E. Albee, *Everything in the Garden*, p. 18.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 16. Cf. pp. 18, 19, 22, 111—3, 118, 135, 143.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

colony...”);³⁵ and on occasion it could be a spoken line removing completely the difference between description and dialogue (“*What else?*”).³⁶ Quite often Albee even provides experimentally optional stage directions leaving it to the actor or director which alternative to take.³⁷

In a consistently composed play each constituent part or particle is an Archimedian point. In Albee’s drama even an “aside” *is* and at the same time *is not* an “aside”: Roger’s *is* heard by Richard from whom it is supposed to be concealed.³⁸ Is it not natural then in this play that Jack, who in a sense is a continuous “aside” and a running commentary, could be raised from the dead to return for a final comment? Throughout Albee’s drama he steps into and out of the action, his remarks are sometimes heard by the other characters in the play, and sometimes only by the audience. In Cooper’s drama his resurrection would be unimaginable and unacceptable. The fact that his return is imaginable, imaginative and acceptable in Albee’s play is indicative of the fact that the Americanization of a British drama in this case is a special and complex phenomenon. It certainly includes a change of locale from British to American (as it does in the American play and film version of Brian Clark’s *Whose Life is it Anyway?*).³⁹ It also involves an expansion of dimensions (as it does in the Hollywood film adaptation of Peter Shaffer’s *Amadeus*).⁴⁰ At the same time, however, it also implies a

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 66—7, 90, 101, 103, 117, 145, 155, 160. G. Cooper’s instructions offer a choice only once: *Everything in the Garden*, p. 212.

³⁸ E. Albee, *Everything in the Garden*, p. 128. Cf. p. 20, where Jenny speaks “Sniffing; the whole act which is not an act”.

³⁹ For the Americanization of locale, cultural context and language in the Broadway version of Brian Clark’s *Whose Life is it Anyway?* compare: A. R. Glaap, “*Whose Life is it Anyway?* in London and on Broadway: a contrastive analysis of the British and American versions of Brian Clark’s play”, in *The Play Out of Context: Transferring from Culture to Culture*, eds. H. Scolnicov and P. Holland (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 214—23.

⁴⁰ The filming of a play has the potential of increasing visual dimensions, replacing accents and focuses anyway. The *American* movie used this potential to a very great extent. Yet, as Milos Forman, the director of the film version of *Amadeus* has pointed out to Peter Shaffer, the novelty which the translation of play into film achieves is, in fact, “another

thorough-going reinterpretation of the original work both in matter and manner. If Jack's reappearance after his death relativizes, though does not annihilate, the validity of the dramatic climax in Albee's version of Cooper's play, then it is only the last link in a well-forged dramatic chain where *each* element performs the theatrical miracle of simultaneously upholding and undermining its own sense and significance.

Yet even if Jack's resurrection in Albee's play is dramatically organic and defensible, his drawing a conclusion, teaching a lesson and preaching a sermon are disturbing.

On the other hand, to embarrass his audience, to make it feel uneasy, to tip it out of its habitual expectations, to jolt and shock it out of its traditional complacency have invariably been Albee's characteristic dramatic gestures. In his wittily worded paper "Which Theater Is the Absurd One?" Albee claims in no uncertain terms that

The Theater of the Absurd, in the sense that it is truly the contemporary theater, facing as it does man's condition as it is, is the Realistic theater of our time; and ... the supposed Realistic theater—the term used here to mean most of what is done on Broadway—in the sense that it panders to the public need for self-congratulation and reassurance and presents a false picture of ourselves to ourselves, is, with an occasional very lovely exception, really and truly The Theater of the Absurd.⁴¹

fulfilment of the same impulse which has crated the original". P. Shaffer, "Postscript: The Play and the Film," in *Amadeus* (Harmondworth, 1985), p. 109.

⁴¹ E. Albee, "Which Theater Is the Absurd One?," in *The Modern American Theater: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. A. B. Kernan (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1967), p. 173. Albee's interest in an updated version of realistic drama is also revealed in his appreciation of Chekhov. Cf. Ch. S. Krohn and J. N. Wasserman, "An Interview with Edward Albee, March 18, 1981," in *Edward Albee: An Interview and Essays*, ed. J. Wasserman (Houston, Texas, 1983), pp. 1, 4, 18, 22. For Albee's description of himself as an American dramatist compare: *ibid.*, pp. 12—3.

Albee's dramatic practice often cuts across and goes beyond the scope of this witty paradox. Unlike Beckett, who in *Waiting for Godot* has created an openly absurd universe in which the dramatic principle is ingeniously saved by referring the plight of inaction to the need of action, and unlike Pinter, who in plays like *The Birthday Party* has brought about a pseudo-naturalistic world where behind the seemingly solid crust of external reality absurdly irrational violence proves human action senseless and futile, in several of Albee's plays including *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and *Everything in the Garden* a cross-breeding of realistic and absurd drama is achieved in a characteristically American fusion. In these cases, however, realistic drama is not a well-made Broadway farce, melodrama or musical, but serious drama with a critical intent and cathartic action. In twentieth-century American drama it has been a well-established procedure and a long-standing practice to modernize traditional realism by cross-breeding it with aspects of other trends. Thus O'Neill in *The Hairy Ape* fuses realism and grotesque expressionism; Miller in *Death of a Salesman* uses modern simultaneity and expressionistic-surrealistic treatment of time; and Williams in *A Streetcar Named Desire* combines realistic characterization with symbolic effects. In uniting realistic and absurdist aspects, Albee continues this achievement of modern American drama, and places his dramatic art in the mainstream of the dramatic movement. In this fusion the traditional realism of Cooper's *Everything in the Garden* proved a reliable factor.

At first, when Albee simply set out to retouch Cooper's play as a routine venture for the commercial stage, he no doubt cherished the idea of starting his task in terms of his parodistic paradox. Later, when he saw that Cooper was a more serious, original and innovative playwright challenging the spectators' complacency by treating prostitution as a status symbol, Albee's imagination was captured, and the process of adaptation—external Americanization—also became a more serious matter. "If you find something congenial to your own point of view," Albee observed, "then your adaptation of it becomes far closer to what you would have done";⁴² and what he would have done was certainly increasing the grotesque elements

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 17.

in the plot. When in the course of recomposing his British predecessor's drama Albee realized that the adaptation had given way to a real collaboration, the enhancement of the grotesque aspect in the original reached the point of absurdity. By using and relativizing the dramatic means, the structure, indeed the entire form of Cooper's play, Albee has generalized and intensified the aura of incongruity, already inherent in Cooper's theme, into a sense of absurdity. In the context of the Cooper—Albee relationship it is in this sense that Albee's Americanization⁴³ has achieved its internal stage and ultimate degree of modernization and reevaluation. This was the way in which Albee has composed his absurd American variations on a grotesque British theme.

Cooper and Albee: a contrastive summary

A conclusion hardly needs an exposition either in a drama or in a dramatic analysis.

COOPER

ALBEE

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| 1. Stage directions tend to be long. | They are much shorter: the field of play for individual initiative is broader. |
| 2. The dramatic action is embedded in an epic milieu. | Descriptive detail is dramatically functional: the gravitational pull of circumstances is challenged. |
| 3. The viewers of the play are also considered to be potential readers of the text: a Shavian inheritance (cf. <i>Pygmalion</i>). | The spectators have only been assigned the role of an audience: the dramatic edge is sharper. |

⁴³ Albee himself named the process as writing "the American version of that particular English play", Cf. M. E. Rutenberg, *Edward Albee: Playwright in Protest*, p. 229.

COOPER

4. External determinism is heavy.
5. Characters are introduced with British reservation and a measure of formality.
6. The action of the play takes place in a real world; the reality of the actual is taken seriously even if it is ironized.
7. The theatrical space is immediate and calls for a direct emotional relationship.
8. The plot evolves relatively slowly.
9. The procuress is socially and racially an outsider. The conflict between her principles and those of middle-class society is external.

ALBEE

It is, for a long time, playfully suspended: the possibility of a personal choice, or at least the illusion of an alternative are suggested.

They are presented with American informality (first names, more common names).

The dramatic action unfolds in a belt between the real and the unreal; the actual is reduced to a mere semblance of the real.

It is often distanced and alienated; sometimes it is doubled. Alienation, certainly not unknown in European drama, is one of the central concerns and formative principles of the American dramatic tradition from O'Neill through Miller and Williams to Albee.

The action develops energetically: people take risks with less hesitation.

She is within the social sphere of "good society". The conflict has been internalized and sharpened.

COOPER

10. Anti-Semitic views are voiced in Jenny's party; they are obviously not shared by Cooper. He also rejects outdated colonial consciousness.
11. The setting is emphatically British (the outskirts of London).
12. The prices of people, the stakes of the game are moderate.
13. The conversation of characters is interspersed with understatement; it is sophisticated, urbane and suave. Only the madam speaks a coarse and curt language.
14. The motivation of prostitution by a status symbol is basically a thematic element. The "garden" is an umbrella term.

ALBEE

Anti-Semitic opinions *and* anti-black prejudice are ridiculed by Albee. The thrust, focus and concern are unmistakably American.

To meet the requirements of an American audience, it has been transferred to the suburbia of an American city.

They have been substantially raised to suite American conditions. Dimensions *are* greater in the States both outside and inside the theatre. So are the expectations of the audience.

The dramatic dialogue is straightforward, incisive and dynamic; it is more jerky, rough and rugged, hitting harder and cutting deeper. It is part and parcel of the emotional range and passionate charge of American drama from O'Neill to Albee.

The status symbol is a fundamental principle of form, and so it is generalized. The "garden" is a leading motive, a structural element, a point of reference, and a linguistic unit of tightly controlled recurrence.

COOPER

15. The contrast between expected and actual standards leads to grotesque incongruity.
16. Cooper's sense of incongruity is summarized in his ending the play in ironic acquiescence (after what he later considered was a false attempt at revolt).

ALBEE

The substitution of artificial for real values results in absurdity.

Albee's absurd vision made him contrive a double conclusion, one of realistic resignation and one of absurd rebellion. Cooper's more traditional approach is thus both understood and undercut, adopted and relativized, continued and revalued, appreciated and Americanized in Albee's pattern of cross-breeding acute social criticism with an awareness of absurdity.

What is true of the work (*Everything in the Garden*) also holds good for the life-work: Cooper and Albee developed in opposite directions. Relying on his life-experience gained during the Second World War when he served in Burma as an infantry officer, and depending on his professional experience obtained as actor and as author of radio and television scripts, adaptations and full-length plays for the theatre, Giles Cooper developed an ever keener eye for external facts and underlying truths. He had an increasingly firm grasp on theme, character and plot. As John Russel Taylor puts it in *Anger and After*,

From Never Get Out! (1950), an elusive duologue between an army deserter and a disconsolate woman with a death wish set in a house supposedly about to be bombed, Cooper has specialized in the exploration of strange emotional states in the margin of human experience, sometimes with strongly macabre overtones and generally on the surface at least in terms of comedy. A whole series of progressively more experimental plays culminated in *Mathry Beacon* (1956), a composite picture of the lives of a group of soldiers looking

after a deflector hidden away in the Welsh mountains (and guarding the beacon well after the end of the war). His characteristic sinister-comic mode has subsequently been seen to advantage in such fantasies as *Unman, Wittering and Zigo* (1958), an obsessive tale of a teacher's persecution by his pupils; *Part of the View*, in which a Nigerian governess takes a roundabout revenge on her English employers for their condescension and ironically thereby saves their marriage; *Before the Monday* (1961), in which an innocent and a would-be suicide gradually change places; *Without the Grail* (1961), about mysterious happenings in the Assam hills, and *The Return of General Forefinger*, in which the desire of a general's widow to recover all the statues of her husband scattered round the world is met by a sculptor who secretly makes them himself.⁴⁴

Thus the tangible solidity of theme and the actable narrativity of plot witnessed in Cooper's *Everything in the Garden* can be viewed as the results of an accumulating experience and a tentative development achieved in a prolific though short career (1918—1966).

By contrast, in Albee's case it is the plays of his early period written before his Americanized version of *Everything in the Garden* (*The Zoo Story*, *The Death of Bessie Smith*, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* or *A Delicate Balance*) which are characterized by a marked theme and a firm plot, and it is the later plays composed after *Everything in the Garden* (*All Over*, *Listening*, *Counting the Ways* or *The Lady from Dubuque*) in which patterned variation and stylistic orchestration seem to carry more of the sense and significance of the drama than stating and developing a theme do. Hence is derived the importance of Cooper's *Everything in the Garden* for Albee: the Anglo-Irish playwright provided the American dramatist with a grotesque theme which was sufficiently compact and weighty to survive its own relativization in Albee's absurd treatment and to support its American

⁴⁴ J. R. Taylor, *Anger and After: A Guide to New British Drama* (Harmondsworth, 1963), pp. 26—7.

variations that made it increasingly memorable. This is the way in which aspects of the pre-modern and the post-modern can invigorate and reinforce one another.

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