

## ALBEE PAPER #1

Due Thursday February 28th, a 5-page typed or wordprocessed paper on one of the topics below. (You may also devise a topic of your own in consultation with me). The paper must be at least 5 full pages long and formatted according to the paper format instructions at the end of this document (for purposes of objectively determining length). The plays on which you may write this paper are *The Zoo Story*, *The American Dream*, *The Sandbox*, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, *Tiny Alice*, *A Delicate Balance*, and *Box* and *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung*. Many of the topics below would be appropriate for the research paper as well as this assignment.

Note: You are not required to answer every question within a topic question. The questions are meant to provoke thought on the issue and may provide individual points to support your thesis. However, do answer or address anything that is underlined within the topic question. Also, be sure to review the guidelines on SOCS for how to write literary analysis essays, especially if you choose a C/C topic. (Don't write a mini-essay on each and never the twain meet; rather, alternate between the two plays with each point or category.)

### TOPICS

1. Through close reading of the text, support the interpretation of *The Zoo Story* or another play we've read as a **BIBLICAL ALLEGORY** (For example, in *The Zoo Story*, Jerry as Jesus or Jerry as Jeremiah). Textual evidence may include names, personality types, actions, dialogue, setting, stage directions, etc. Even if these traces of the Bible were unintentional (i.e., they came from Albee's unconscious), how would a Christian underpinning work in harmony with a more literal reading of what Albee's play is about?
2. According to Albee, he wrote *The Sandbox* in the middle of writing *The American Dream*, making two plays out of the same characters by placing them in a different situation. Write an essay C/Cing the two plays. Are the characters really the same in both plays? Are the situations actually different? Are the tones or worldviews or genres of the two plays different or similar? What about the dramaturgy (the construction of the play, the dramatic structure) and the theatrical style (break fourth wall? set realistic or non-realistic? anything about dialogue or stage business?)
3. Is *Tiny Alice* as clear as Albee claims? Write an interpretation of TINY ALICE in which you address the significance of the characters, actions, and obvious symbols such as the model, the phrenological head, Miss Alice's old woman disguise, or anything else we discussed or did not discuss that you think you can interpret. It may help to classify *Tiny Alice* as allegory or satire or tragedy or mystery play or theatre of the absurd or . . . You do not have to interpret everything or every character, especially if you are considering this as a research paper topic. (In other words, you might focus on the symbols in this paper and leave the characters and the action for the research paper that also synthesizes this paper.)
4. "Truth or illusion, who knows the difference?" George asks Martha in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Who does know the difference? Can anyone know what is **TRUTH** and what is **ILLUSION**? What is reality? How do we know? The attempt to answer these questions, known in philosophy circles as ontology and epistemology, is an action we see many of Albee's characters perform. Write an essay on one or more plays that explore these issues in intellectual or practical terms. Does it matter if something is truth or illusion? If one cannot know the difference, cannot know what is real, what are we to do with that awareness? What are the implications of what happens to truth seekers or truth evaders in Albee's plays? Is there another action relevant to truth a character takes?

**5.A.** Write in-depth on one play or C/C two of the plays we've read thus far as examples of Juvenalian ("the club") or Horatian ("the needle") **SATIRE**. (see a handbook for definitions.) What are their respective targets? Why might the attack be less bitter in one play than in the other? Which character functions as Albee's spokesperson? Even if the character has his or her own vices, from what moral base does he or she direct his or her attacks? In other words, what are the values in the plays that you infer the spokespersons to implicitly affirm because of the things they attack? Is the play hopeful that people can learn, can change, can grow? **5.B.** Since Albee has Grandma label *The American Dream* a **COMEDY**, you could also argue that *The American Dream* can be classified as such (or more specifically, a comedy of manners) using some of the standard theories of comedy. (Again, use a handbook of literature or theatre for a technical definition; do NOT use a generic dictionary like Webster's, etc.)

**6.** Choose one play and argue that it should or should not be viewed as an example of THEATRE OF THE ABSURD. You should probably apply a handbook definition of the theatre of the absurd (not an all-purpose dictionary like Webster's), or you might quote parts of Martin Esslin's book *The Theatre of the Absurd*, or you could refer to the quintessential example of Theatre of the Absurd, Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. (But don't write a full-fledged C/C essay.) If you do use a source other than our text, provide a works cited page. **Very Important:** The definition of theatre of the absurd has two parts: the worldview or philosophy of absurdism, and the nonrealistic dramaturgical/theatrical style. The philosophical part developed out of the atheistic branch of existentialism. An absurdist sees the universe and life as meaningless, illogical, irrational; communication is fragmentary at best; and there is no hope or progress, only infinite repetition. For this topic you must discuss the worldview of theatre of the absurd; the theatrical style part is optional.

**7.** Argue that one of the plays we have read is Albee's attempt to write a **TRAGEDY**. There are many theories of tragedy; apply at least one of the following: the **Aristotelian** definition (tragic hero, *hamartia* ("near miss" so that the tragic hero is an almost perfect person except for the one *hamartia*, defined both as tragic flaw and mistake, sin, or error in judgment), reversal of fortune, *anagnorisis* (recognition or epiphany), catharsis of compassion and terror); **Hegel's** philosophical version of the old sayings, "Damned if you do, Damned if you don't" or "Choose your poison" in which human values are in conflict with each other and the tragic hero is forced to choose between two goods or two evils and will suffer either way; **Nietzsche's** symbiotic relationship between the Apollonian and Dionysian; **Kierkegaard's** comparison of ancient versus modern tragedy; **Krieger's** theory of the subversive, heretical, and demonic tragic vision, which is the psychology of a Tragic Visionary who is an extremist in an extreme situation and experiences cosmic shock; or **Arthur Miller's** "Tragedy and the Common Man." (All of these theories may be found in *Tragedy: Vision and Form*, ed. Robert Corrigan, two copies of which are on reserve at the library under my name.

**8.** C/C the **FAMILIES** in two plays we have read. What do these families show us about "the family"? What is the function of the family in a society? What about individual roles within the family (parents, children, siblings, spouses, mistress)? Does Albee portray the family as inherently tragic or as doomed by certain historical movements or metaphysical forces or psychological illness? Is there any implicit suggestion of what a family should be?

**9.** C/C masculine and feminine **GENDER** roles in one play, **OR** C/C the feminine or masculine gender roles in two plays. What do the male characters want? What do the female characters want? Do the women have any power or are the men all-powerful? Are there different powers for each gender? At the end of the play(s), has anything changed, or are the women still in a subservient role? Are the women doomed by fate or something that functions as fate? Is Albee sympathetic to the plight of women in patriarchal society? Is gender a matter of nature, nurture, or both? Is there a feminine way of doing things versus a masculine way of doing things? Are there examples of each gender in the play(s) that are the epitome of what is wrong with gender roles or what gender roles should be?

10. Although Albee was American, in scholarly studies he is usually treated as a modern dramatist influenced by European writers. In one or more of the plays that we have read, what does Albee have to say about **AMERICAN** values, institutions, history, etc.? Does he question the principles upon which the nation was founded, or criticize American society for falling away from those principles, or what? Is there anything particularly American about what or how Albee writes? Are there “codes” of America (in other words, signifiers of America such as “baseball, hot-dogs, apple pie, and Chevrolet”) sprinkled throughout the text(s)?

11. C/C the view of **SEXUALITY (HETEROSEXUALITY OR HOMOSEXUALITY)** in two of the plays we've read. Do the plays you choose link sexuality with love? What is the view of love in these plays? What are the joys and sorrows of love? What is gained, what is lost? Is there such a thing as true love? Or is sex what makes the world go round? How is sex related to love? How do we know if love is true? How should lovers express their love? Can love be logical? Is all fair in love and war? Is love (or sex) worth fighting for? Dying for? Killing for? Are there examples of love in the plays that demonstrate what love should be? If you want (especially for the research paper), you may apply “Queer Theory” or individual studies of gay aesthetics to Albee’s plays.

12. Trace a **MOTIF** through at least two (three for research paper) of the plays we've read thus far. Write an interpretation of the motif based upon its significance in specific contexts and overall in the plays. Some motifs: animal imagery, cages, biblical allusions, classical mythology allusions. (If there is another motif in which you are interested but is not included in this list, e-mail me well before the paper is due and we'll discuss it as an option.)

13. Analyze in one or C/C in two plays the form Albee employs. More specifically, look at the **DRAMATURGY** (structure of the play as a narrative work) and **THEATRICAL STYLE** (how the play is staged). How does Albee structure the two plays? How does he make the point of each scene apparent to the audience? What drives the plot? Consider stage directions, speeches, character dimension (i.e., 3-D, 2-D), plot construction, set, and any other indications of the theatrical style Albee employs. If you choose this topic, be sure you formulate a thesis about Albee' choice of style and structure in relation to his literary purpose.

14. C/C *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* to the **FILM ADAPTATION** of it. Why did the director make the changes that he did? How do those changes affect your experience of the play, your feelings toward the characters? How did the actors in the major roles affect your opinion of the characters they played? Which do you like better, the play or the film? Some other aspects of the film production to consider include set, props, lighting, sound, musical score, costumes, makeup. All your comments with regard to how the film adaptation served or did not serve the play must be supported by specific examples from the film.

15. Support your interpretation of the treatment of **DEATH AND/OR DYING** in one or more of the plays we've read. Is death seen as a biological, social, or metaphysical phenomenon? How is death represented and why did Albee choose that way to represent it? Does death as subject function only on a literal level, or is there also a metaphorical level? If a metaphor, of what? Is there fear of death? Anticipation or acceptance of death? If you are very interested in this topic, especially if for the research paper, you might want to write on it for the second paper using *All Over*, which is ostensibly about a wealthy man dying. (We never see the wealthy man; he is behind a hospital bed screen upstage. We only see and hear his wife, mistress, son, daughter, best friend, doctor, and nurse as they all wait for him to die.)

May the Force be with you.  
(And also with me.)

## PAPER FORMAT

Papers should be typed **double-spaced** on a word processor. Use only one side of 8 1/2" x 11" paper. **Set all 4 margins to no more than 1¼ (1.25); don't justify the right margin. Set font to 12 pt.; use Times New Roman font.** On separate single-spaced lines, put your name, LIT499-04, date, Dr. Konkle, and **topic #** in the upper left-hand corner of the first page. Center your title above the first line (no title page). (By the way, italicize or underline play titles.) Number subsequent pages in the upper right-hand corner. (If you don't know how to have the word processor paginate the document, then at least number the pages by hand.) Be sure to **proofread a hard copy** of your paper after having the word processor check the spelling for you. (Be wary of the grammar check; the suggestions are often wrong.) Try reading your paper aloud; you will hear mistakes you might have missed otherwise. Staple the pages together on the upper left-hand corner.