

Paper #2 Assignment

Due Thursday March 28, a 5-page, wordprocessed paper on one of the topics below. (You may write more than five pages if you need to; write at least **5 full** pages.) The works on which you may write this paper are *Box* and *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-Tung* (unless you wrote on them for paper #1), *Seascape*, *Listening*, *Counting The Ways*, *The Lady from Dubuque*, *The Man Who Had Three Arms*, or *Finding the Sun*.

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. If you want to write about an issue other than those provided below, e-mail me **well beforehand**; we will collaborate on writing a topic question similar in form to those below. Many of the topics below would be appropriate for the research paper as well as this assignment. Finally, 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 works with each point or category. (You may convert single-work topics to c/c topics or vice versa; just let me know if you want to do that).

TOPICS

1. Analyze one of the plays eligible for this paper as exhibiting characteristics of **POSTMODERNISM**, in terms of philosophical concepts and/or aesthetic form. You must apply some formal definition of postmodernism (or, if you can find it, of postmodern drama), whether it be our "pomo" text by Powell (*Postmodernism for Beginners*) or some of the groundbreaking studies in postmodernism (e.g., by Baudrillard, Jameson, Lyotard). Be careful not to confuse or conflate postmodernism with theatre of the absurd.

2. **A.** Through close reading of the text, support the interpretation of any of the eligible plays as a **BIBLICAL ALLEGORY**. 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 Judaeo-Christian underpinning work in harmony with a more literal reading of what Albee's play is about?

2.**B.** Write an interpretation of *Seascape* as an **ALLEGORY** or perhaps some other non-realistic literary form or genre, such as the fairy tale. (You could even try to apply Bruno Bettelheim's *Uses of Enchantment* or Vladimir Propp's analysis of fairy tale plot elements.) Why does Albee choose to make Leslie and Sarah lizards?

3. "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 & 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?

4. 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 literature or theatre 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 existential in implying that people can learn, can change, can grow if they consciously choose to?

5. 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*. (You could 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 nihilistic 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.

6. A. Argue that one of the works we've read is a TRAGEDY and expresses a tragic vision. Apply at least one of the following theories of tragedy: the **Aristotelian** definition (tragic hero, reversal of fortune, *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), *anagnorisis* (recognition), catharsis of compassion (sympathy or empathy) 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; **Kierkegaard's** comparison of ancient versus modern tragedy; **Nietzsche's** symbiotic relationship between the Apollonian and Dionysian; **Miller's** "Tragedy and the Common Man." Be sure that one paragraph in the body of your essay shows that the work does manifest a tragic vision of life, or the universe, or the human condition. (See SOCS for brief summaries of these theories but you should read excerpts of the theories found in books on reserve under my name in the library: Barrett Clark *European Theories of the Drama*, Robert Corrigan *Tragedy: Vision and Form*.)

6. B. Since the beginning of theatre in western civilization 2500 years ago, we have come to expect that a tragedy will have a major character who is the "**TRAGIC HERO**." In Greek tragedy there is often more than one character who might be considered the tragic hero. Write an essay in which you argue that one character in an Albee play is the tragic hero (or tragic visionary or figure). You may consider such issues as the degree of suffering, fall from a great height, *hamartia* (the so-called "tragic flaw" compared to an otherwise great character—the best the human race has to offer—but which may be read as a mistake, error in judgment, or sin), deserving of punishment (suffering), sympathetic, *anagnorisis* (recognition or epiphany), etc. Does s/he represent the human race in some manner? Is s/he doomed by fate/god(s)/curse/anything, or is his/her fall the result of free will? Is s/he faced with a damned-if-s/he-does/doesn't choice? Do we pity him/her? Be sure that you do apply at least one of theory of tragedy to help support your case for the character as a tragic figure

6. C. If you're willing and able to write a longer paper, C/C one Albee play with a Shakespearean tragedy (*H.O.L.M.* or *R&J*) or one of the Greek tragedies with which I am familiar (Aeschylus' *Oresteia* (*Agamemnon*), Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, *Antigone*, Euripides' *Medea*, *The Bacchae*, *Trojan Women*), who are undisputed writers of tragedy, applying the same criteria as in topic #1. Apply at least one of the theories of tragedy to the play. Your rhetorical stance in writing this paper would be, for example, if *Antigone* is universally accepted as a tragedy, and theory X applies well to *Antigone*, and if *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is similar to *Antigone*, and theory X also applies well to it, then *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* can be seen as a successful attempt to write a modern tragedy in the great tradition of tragedy beginning with the Greeks. So this is not C/C for C/C's sake; it's C/C in order to argue that this modern work should be regarded as a successful attempt to write a tragedy in the great tradition of tragedy established by the Greeks and Shakespeare.

7. C/C the FAMILIES in two of the 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)? Does Albee portray the family as inherently tragic or as doomed by certain historical movements or metaphysical forces or psychological influences? Is there any implicit suggestion of what a family should be?

8. Analyze in one or C/C in two plays the view of **HISTORY OR TIME**. Is the view of history or time evolutionary (or progressive), cyclical (or static), or entropic (or destructive)? What determines the direction of history? Are historical movements and events inevitable or is history open-ended? Is progress a myth, an illusion? Are these larger actions of importance to individuals? Is there a macrocosm--microcosm relationship? Or you could adapt this to fit a character: Does his or her story manifest **PROGRESS** in some way? That is, is she or he making progress in some way? Or remaining the same, static, unchangeable? Or regressing, declining, dying (spiritually or emotionally if not physically)?

9. 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?

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 above 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?

11. C/C masculine **AND** feminine **gender roles** in **ONE** of the plays we've read, **OR C/C the feminine OR masculine gender roles** in **TWO** of the plays we've read. 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 work(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 either work sympathetic to the plight of women in patriarchal society? Is there a feminine way of doing things versus a masculine way of doing things? Are there examples of each gender in the work(s) that are the epitome of what is wrong with gender roles, or what gender roles should be?

12. 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.

13. 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.)

14. Analyze the choice of **dramaturgy** (the play as a narrative work) and **theatrical style** (how the play is meant to be staged) in one **OR** C/C two of the plays for this paper. What is the purpose of Albee's choice of dramaturgy and theatrical style? How does he make his points apparent to the audience? Consider stage directions, speeches, character dimension (i.e., 3-D, 1-D), plot construction, set design, lighting, sound, and any other indications of the dramaturgical and theatrical style Albee employs. If you can accurately use such terms as expressionism or symbolism, do so. If you choose this topic, be sure you formulate a thesis about his choice of style and structure in relation to his thematic purpose.

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

PAPER FORMAT

Papers should be typed **double-spaced** on a wordprocessor. Use only one side of 8 1/2" x 11" paper. **Set all 4 margins to no more than 1¼ (1.25)" and font to 12 pt; use Times New Roman font.** On separate single-spaced lines, put your name, LIT 499-07, date, Dr. Konkle, and topic question # in the upper left-hand corner of the first page. Center your title above the first line (no title page). (By the way, you italicize play titles.) Number subsequent pages in the upper right-hand corner. (If you don't know how to have the wordprocessor paginate the document, then at least number the pages by hand.) Cite the page numbers of quotations parenthetically in the text of your paper. If you quote only from the course text, don't bother with a Works Cited page. Be sure to **proofread a hard copy** of your paper after having the wordprocessor 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.