The Names of the Games and the Games of the Names: The Onomasticon of Edward Albee's Plays

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From his own name (given to him in 1928 when [at the age of two weeks] he was adopted by Frances and Reed Albee: Edward Franklin Albee III) to the demanding buiness of naming characters in plays, Edward Albee has always had some onomastic concerns, but onomasticians have neglected him.[1] At this point in time Albee cannot recall why his first play, a three-act farce set aboard an ocean liner and written at the age of twelve, was called *Aliqueen* and the names of its characters are lost,[2] but we can profitably examine the rest of his work from the point of view of name study.

His juvenile play called *Schism* (1946) need not delay us long; then we can move on to the railing, sometimes malicious, satires of his "pudding days" (as he called them) which established him as a significant new voice in the Off-Broadway theatre, his first Broadway success (*Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*), and his subsequent, eventful career. We can evaluate the extent to which onomastic skill is concomitant with what one insightful critic has termed a "theatrical style which belongs only to him, with his disconcerting mixture of minute observation, precise details, and wild invention; with his fusion of reality and day dream; with his combi-

[1]In several thousand items in Elizabeth Rajec's bibliography *The Study of Names in Literature* (1978) and the second volume (1982), there is but one brief article listed: E. G. Bierhaus, "Strangers in a Room: *A Delicate Balance* Revisited," *Modern Drama*, 17 (1974), 199–206. Albee bibliography to 1967 is in Margaret W. Rule, "An Edward Albee Bibliography," *Twentieth Century Literature*, 14 (April 1968), 35–44; and Charles Lee Green, *Edward Albee: An Annotated Bibliography 1968–1977* (AMS Press, 1980), and Michael D. Reed and James L. Evans, "Edward Albee: An Updated Checklist of Scholarship, 1977–1980" (*Edward Albee: Planned Wilderness: Interview, Essay, and Bibliography*, Pan American University, 1980, 121–129), plus such reference books as *American Dramatic Criticism* (Helen H. Palmer *et al.*, eds., Hamden, Conn., 1967), *A Guide to Critical Reviews* (James M. Salem, Scarecrow Press, 1966), *Dramatic Criticism Index* (Paul F. Breed and Florence M. Sniderman, eds., Wayne State Univesity Library, 1972), etc.

[2]Edward Albee, "Preface," *The American Dream and The Zoo Story* (1963), p. 7.

nation of life and game, existence and theater."[3] Does his onomasticon exhibit all these virtues? I think it does.

Our examination is all the more necessary because despite his willingness to give more or less frank interviews, to friends such as William Flanagan (*The Paris Review*, 10, No. 39 [Fall 1966], 93–121) and others,[4] he has not been as forthcoming about this aspect of his art as some other writers have been about theirs. But his work lies open for examination.

When he was at Choate, Albee published little essays on Richard Strauss and Chaucer, about a dozen poems, half a dozen short stories, none of any real merit, and (in *Choate Literary Magazine* for May 1946) a melodrama he wrote at the age of eighteen, *Schism*. The protagonist is Michael Joyce, his name well-suited to an Irish boy disillusioned with the Roman Catholic Church; *Joyce* surely owes something to the author of *Portrait of the Artist* and is more credible if less symbolic than *Daedalus*, while *Michael* might just suggest the combativeness of St. Michael the Archangel (Michael defends Alice "in the battle," as the prayer after Mass puts it). We note that the young girl whom Michael encourages in her split from both family and Church tradition is, like a character in a more famous Albee play written much later, a tiny Alice. Her surname is Monohan, but nothing should be made of *mono* = "one" or "single," for although *Monahan* or *Monaghan* would have been more expectable, *Monohan* neither sounds nor functions remarkably in this little drama crammed with stereotypes and stilted dialogue. The title, *Schism*, however, refers to more than one split and therefore has that conflict and richness which many have found in the double meanings of Albee's later titles.[5]

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[3]Gilbert Debusscher, *Edward Albee: Tradition & Renewal* (1969), p. 84.

[4]William Flanagan, "Interview with Edward Albee," *The Paris Review*, 10, No. 39 (Fall 1966), 93–121; also: "Albee," *New Yorker*, 25 March 1961, 30–2; "Albee Revisited," *New Yorker*, 19 December 1964, 31–32; "Edward Albee," *Playwrights Speak* (Walter Wager, ed., 1967), 25–67; "Edward Albee," *American Theater Today* (Alan S. Downer, ed., 1967), 111–123; John E. Booth, "Albee and [Alan] Schneider Observe: 'Something Stirring!'," *Theater Arts*, March 1961, 22–24; Digby R. Diehl, "Edward Albee Interviewed," *Transatlantic Review*, No. 13 (Summer 1963), 57–72; Antonella Siniscalo, "On His Plays: An Interview with Edward Albee," *Dismisura* (Altari, Italy) 39, 50, 93–97; Michael Smith, "Edward Albee," *Plays and Players*, March 1964, 12–14; R. D. Stewart, "John Gielgud and Edward Albee Talk About the Theater," *Atlantic*, April 1965, 61–68; and "Who Isn't Afraid of Edward Albee?," *Show*, February 1963, 83 and 112–114. Albee has himself written for *New York Times Magazine*, 25 February 1962; *Playbill*, May 1965; *Saturday Review*, 4 June 1966 and 24 January 1970; etc.

[5]"The real dissonance" is not between Alice and her family or the Church and modern ideas but "between the human need for understanding and hope,a nd a stystem which demands either spiritual submission or moral irresponsibility." C. W. E. Bigsby, *Albee* (1969), p. 7. This is a useful survey of Albee's work but does not go deeply into onomastic matters, anymore than do the studies by Richard E. Amacher, Michael E. Rutenberg, and Ruby Cohn (all 1969), Anne Paolucci (1972), Foster Hirsch or Anita Maria Stenz (both 1978), etc.

After some years of writing poetry, which sharpened his sense of language, Albee sat down at his kitchen table in a small Village apartment (238 West Fourth street, New York) and wrote *The Zoo Story* (1958), first produced in Berlin (28 September 1959) and then at The Provincetown Playhouse in Greenwich Village (14 January 1960) on a double bill with Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*.

The Zoo Story is set in Central Park and deals with some central concerns of two characters, Peter and Jerry (*Tom* and *Jerry* would have altered the tone for the worse). In keeping with the casual way in which they meet, and the realistic and even Absurdist traditions in which the play is written, we do not learn the names of Peter's wife and children and pets or of Jerry's landlady, his neighbors, or the dog which is the subject of the *tour de force* aria, "The Story of Jerry and the Dog." Convention limits even Jerry's prying to "What's your name? Your first name?," though later he uses Peter's forename very familiarly as he becomes, one might say, too familiar ("I'm crazy, you bastard"), ending with "Dear Peter" when he succeeds in getting Peter to kill him with a knife. Peter takes the advice of this extraordinary character he knows only as Jerry and flees further involvement ("Hurry away, Peter" and "Hurry . . . Peter" and "Very good, Peter"). The repetition of Peter's name has a dramatic punch in the context of this odd intimacy as conveying nuances, as does Jerry's referring to his parents as "good old Mom" and "good old Pop" and Peter reading overtones into "the Village" as an address.

My colleague Peter Spielberg tried to make a case for a connection between *The Zoo Story* and Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (demolished by F. Anthony Macklin in a subsequent issue of *College English*)[6] but it can be argued that Coleridge's figures of the Ancient Mariner and the Wedding Guest forced to listen to his story derive from their namelessness quite a different character than the figures in *The Zoo Story*, whose first names, at least, we know and who therefore are more personally seen, individuated as well as symbolic.

The other names, of New York places, make the setting of *The Zoo Story* more powerful. *Central Park* holds some menace, *Fifth Avenue* suggests wealth, the *West Side* poverty. *The Zoo* has multiple meanings in the title and the action: for instance, Jerry refers to Peter's home, family, and "*your own* little zoo," and it is implied that we are all captive animals in some sort of zoo, or strange enough to be in a zoo.

These hints can easily be picked up, in English or in German, by any

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[6]Peter Spielberg, "The Albatross in Albee's Zoo," *College English*, 27, No. 4 (April 1966), 562–565; Anthony Macklin, "The Flagrant Albatross," *College English*, 28, No. 1 (October 1966), 58–59. Spielberg attempted a response later.

viewer of the play, nor are references to Beaudelaire and J. P. Marquand or a mocking of an internationally-circulated magazine ("Do you think I could sell that story to the *Reader's Digest* and make a couple of hundred bucks for *The Most Unforgettable Character I've Ever Met*?") likely to be missed. The very accessibility of these allusions and the shadowy existence of other, supposedly contemporary and real associates and relatives of the characters we see on the park bench, isolated from the rest of the great city all around, as well as unnamed people from the past who still exert profound influence on the present ("the superintendent's son," for one), create a fascinating tension in the play. As in real life, we hear a good deal about people we never see (the "colored queen" in the West Side rooming house is one). We can visualize this person and yet, as with so many others with strange stories to tell if we but knew how to read what radio used to call the "eight million stories" of the Big City, we do not even know his name.

The two characters we see, their full names unknown to each other, find their full identities still unrevealed to each other as *The Zoo Story* comes to its swift, shocking, and not altogether unexpected, violent end. It is the effect of two strangers with only first names and a first (and last) acquaintance in a central meeting place in the middle of a vast and anonymous city that seems to me to be the point names make in this play, that and not some far-fetched idea that Jerry's life and fate are jerrybuilt or that the "complacent businessman . . . a vegetable incapable of experiencing any kind of real feeling"[7] is really Peter, the rock on which Jerry dashes himself (to play the onomastic game of word origins) or even (stressing how names function in a literary work's plot) that Peter does deny Jerry (whose name begins with *J*) three times. Impaled on the phallic weapon he gives Peter (who then could have easily have been called Dick), Jerry the "h-o-m-o-s-e-x-u-a-l" — the love which has to spell its name — tempts some critics to read more into the play, perhaps, than is warranted. If they insist upon doing that, I suggest they consider *jerrybuilt* and this "permanent transient," if not *jerry* as chamberpot: a potential Jeroboam, that "mighty man of valor" in I *Kings* 12, who is reduced to the *-y* ending of a little boy's name and to taking a lot of "shit" from society. But this is to elaborate too much!

The names in *The Zoo Story* are as spare as the set and like it serve economically both realistic and allegorical purposes. "We have to know the effect of our actions," one of the characters says; that is one of the messages of the story about the humans at the zoo, the human zoo. I

[7]Thomas E. Porter, *Myth and Modern American Drama* (1969), p. 246.

suggest that critics might well have understood some of the Absurdist points made in this electrifying play had they grasped better the effect of the *names* that Albee chose and manipulated with great skill. It records an attempt, as a black writer of that period might have said, for a man to be called by his rightful name, to have his humanity and identity (along with his name) known by another person, to contrive to get past the bourgeois *Mr. This* or *Mr. That* to an intimacy (a first-name basis). Jerry forces someone to know his name (or the first part of it), tells his story in this "zoo" of a world, dies his elected death and thereby gets out of his cage, and thrusts upon the surviving employee of some unnamed publishing firm the essence of the Book of Life, the "name of the game."

Like *The Zoo Story*, *The Death of Bessie Smith* (first presented in West Berlin on 21 April 1960 and in New York at the York Playhouse on 1 March 1961) is a didactic work. *Bessie Smith* involves spiritual death (of a symbolic figure simply called The Nurse, and maybe the destruction of the spirit of a black orderly pressured to conform to white stereotype) and physical death (of an equally symbolic but historical figure, the unseen jazz great Bessie Smith). There are also messages about "the larger issue of human commitment,"[8] some conveyed by onomastic devices.

The very name of Mercy Hospital is black humor. Bernie and Jack, both black, are not important in white society but they have names and individuality. The whites and the black and white employees of the hospital system have less individuality and humanity: they are The Father, The Nurse, Second Nurse, The Orderly, The Intern. They have functions. *The Democratic Club* and the *North* and *New York* are names which have (as the Hon. Gwendolyn Fairfax in *The Importance of Being Earnest* would say) "vibrations," for they stand for larger realities. Miss Bessie Smith's rejection by the white System and her consequent death are likewise more than what Shakespeare would call a "private woe," as was the fact that Joseph and Mary found "no room in the inn" and thereby could have learned much of the nature of the world into which the infant Savior was to be born, of the need for Him, of His fate. The System that turns Bessie Smith away from a Southern hospital had a problem which President Roosevelt (or even "his wife, Lady Eleanor") could not come as *dei ex machina* (or even "My Day" *ex machina*) to solve. The world in which men are called not by their names but "boy" or "nigger" and in which blacks such as Bessie Smith, who have "made a name for them-

[8]Paul Witherington, "Language and Movement in Albee's *The Death of Bessie Smith*," *Twentieth Century Literature*, 13 (July 1967), 84–88. "Language" here (as in Thomas P. Adler's and other studies with this word in their title) does not mean full examination of naming.

selves," are nobodies, is full of "white hospitals." The play may be based on a real event but the characters are as stereotypical as Fam (Famous American Playwright) and Yam (Young American Playwright), kidded by those funny names, in Albee's brief but amusing "imaginary interview."[9]

Albee wrote of *Bessie Smith* that "while the incident itself was brawling at me, and while the characters I had elected to carry the tale were wrestling it from me, I discovered I was, in fact, writing about something at the same time slightly removed from and more pertinent to what I had imagined."[10] I contend onomastic devices assist that, distancing and enhancing the importance of "things as they are" and converting historical fact into what Jerry in *Zoo Story* would call mytho*logy*. In the end it is not just the "niggers" in "The South" but all Americans whom Albee conceives as crying: "I am tired of the truth . . . and I am tired of lying about the truth . . . I am tired of my skin . . . I WANT OUT!"

The universality, which the character names helped to create, helped to endear Albee to German audiences as well as American. His first play to be premièred in the United States was actually designed for a foreign début (the arty Festival of Two Worlds at Spoletto, Italy) but *The Sandbox* (first seen at the Jazz Gallery in New York on 15 April 1960) was extracted from *The American Dream*, presenting some of its characters "in a situation different than, but related to the predicament in the longer play," as Albee explained in its "Preface." It is one of the finest short plays of the modern theatre and may be his best as well as his favorite work. (*The American Dream* project for Spoletto never materialized.)

Dedicated to his grandmother Crotta (1876–1959), *The Sandbox* presents archetypal American cartoons of Mommy, Daddy, Grandma, and a Musician ("no particular age, but young would be nice") and The Young Man, the American Dream as The Angel of Death, with "an endearing smile" and a Californian aspect. (When I directed this play for the Mommies and Daddies at a University of Rochester Parents' Weekend festival as the Sixties dawned, that smile earned show-stopping applause from some extremely uncomfortable parents.) The sandbox suggests both the play of youth and innocence and the grave of age and reality. Mommy

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[9]*Fam and Yam*, a title which makes one expect a knockabout comedy duo of vaudeville, was first presented 27 August 1960 at The White Barn Theatre, Westport, Connecticut. Name-dropping and a reference to the avant-garde *Evergreen Review* spark this brief piece which ends with: "One of the Modiglianis frowns . . . the Braque peels . . . the Kline tilts . . . and the Motherwell crashes to the floor." Eponyms set the tone, deflate pomposity, excuse the piece's lightness.

[10]Albee on the first page of the New American Library paperback edition of *The Sandbox* and *The Death of Bessie Smith* (*Two Plays by Edward Albee*, with *Fam and Yam*, 1963).

and Daddy's labels are reminiscent of the *redende Namen* of the Expressionist Period and mock the vacuity of people who are prepared to dispose of the feisty Grandma much as the aged end up in another play we used then to discomfort Rochester, Samuel Beckett's *End Game* (with the old in garbage cans).[11]

Moreover, Mommy and Daddy are typical and their names underline that as well as the fact that they become, in effect, the parents of a Grandma in her second childhood (despite her wit and "bright eyes"), ironically stressing family relationships for people who are devoid of any shred of family feeling other than what Society demands be exhibited for appearance's sake.

In the longer play attacking American Society and its deceptions, delusions, and "dream," Mommy and Daddy appear again. Writes Bigsby:

> As in *The Sandbox*, the mother and father are known only as Mommy and Daddy, names which, though sanctioned by the commercial sentimentality of Madison Avenue, clearly imply an element of immaturity while remaining inappropriate to play in which there is no place for the compassion and love which one would normally associate with parents.[12]

I must add that a married couple calling each other Mommy and Daddy gives evidence of America's professed dedication to "everything for the children" (from whose point of view alone the names are appropriate) and some indication that Mommy is the domineering Mom excoriated by Philip Wylie while Daddy is the *sugar daddy* (more politely "good provider") "the little woman" married not for love but for money,

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[11]Albee's drama is essentially about confrontation: here Grandma and her children are generations (and values) in conflict. International criticism often fixes on the confrontation most simply stated in a title such as *Fam and Yam*. See such diverse criticism as Liviu Cotrău, "*Edward Albee şi drama confruntării*," *Steaua*, 28, No. 1 (1977), 50; Martin Brunhorst, "*Albees Frühwerk im Kontext des absurden Theaters: Etappen des Deutungsgeschichte*," *Literatur in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* (Kiel), 12 (1980), 304–318; Rachel Blau Duplessis, "In the Bosom of the Family: Contradiction and Resolution in Edward Albee," *Minnesota Review*, 8 (1977), 133–145; John Fletcher, "A Psychology based on Antagonism: Ionesco, Pinter, Albee, and Others," 175–195 in *The Two Faces of Ionesco* (Rosette C. Lamont and Melvin J. Friedman, eds., 1978); Robert L. Mayberry, "A Theatre of Discord: Some Plays of Beckett, Albee and Pinter," *Kansas Quarterly*, 12, No. 4 (1980), 7–16; etc. Mayberry's article is derived from his dissertation (*DAI*, 40, 5440A). Other recent dissertations on Albee are by Joan Roberta Fedor ("The Importance of the Female in the Plays of Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter, and Edward Albee," *DAI*, 38, 1378A), S. Westerman ("*Die Krise der Familie bei Edward Albee*," *DAI*, 38, 4617C), Carol Ann Burns ("Seeing Double: Analogies in the Plays of Edward Albee." *DAI*, 39, 2268A–2269A), and Robert Gordon Ware ("Edward Albee's Early Plays: A Dramaturgical Study," *DAI*, 41, 1843A).

[12]*Albee*, p. 31.

security. Daddy is more father figure than lover or husband, a daddy to his wife more than to any offspring.

Grandma appears again the *The American Dream* (first seen at the York Playhouse, New York, on 24 January 1961), as wise as ever, with Mrs. Barker (whose name conjures up many things, from circus huckster to loudmouthed harridan), a woman who arrives to remind everyone that she once obtained a child for Mommy and Daddy to adopt. Thus *Mommy* and *Daddy* are ironic again, for the couple are not real parents at all. When the nameless tot failed to give "satisfaction," the heartless "parents" mutilated it. Clearly the child was doomed, never returnable to anything called the Bye-Bye Adoption Service, whose name suggests the mechanistic obtaining of children, placing them, and forgetting about them. If the "service" really cared about a child, it would have investigated and discovered that this Mommy and Daddy had no qualifications as parents and could never give the child love; they could never be a real father and mother at all.[13]

The American "dream" calls for a happy family centered around a paragon of a child. Without a son, Mommy and Daddy are parents of no one. So on the scene comes a nameless Young Man, expected like Tennessee Williams' Gentleman Caller. But Williams' ideal had a name, we discover in *The Glass Menagerie,* albeit one (Jim O'Connor) that suggested he might be a drunk (prejudice against the Irish) like Tom's wayward father (a telephone man who fell in love with long distance and fled a nagging wife). This Young Man has only a body and a face, a role to play, no real identity in the Absurd drama of modern American life, with all its false values (whether held by a Chance Wayne or a Willy Loman with no chance at all). *The American Dream* refers to both the "pipe dreams" of O'Neill and the "life lies" of Ibsen, two of the many dramatists to whom critics have found Albee indebted;[14] the Young Man embodies these ideals, carries the germ of the sick substitution of the artificial for the real, stands for "complacency, cruelty, emasculation and

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[13]No one has related this tale of adoption to Albee's own life and the "satisfaction" or lack of it he gave to the new "parents" who made him a "III."

[14]Marion A. Taylor (*Papers on English Language and Literature,* 1 [Winter 1965], 59–71) compares *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*? with Strindberg's *Dance of Death;* D. C. Coleman compares it with Shaw's *Heartbreak House* (*Drama* Survey, 5 [Winter 1966–1967], 223–236); Randolph Goodman sees Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* in it (*Columbia University Forum,* 10 [Spring 1967], 18–22); Charles R. Lyons sees the same "irrational universe" in Brecht's *Im Dickicht* and Albee's *The Zoo Story* (*Drama Survey,* 4 [Summer 1965], 121–138); and Terry Otten compares Albee's pretend child to Ibsen's *Little Eyolf* (*Comparative Drama,* 2 [Summer 1968], 83–93) and Albee to Coward (*Studies in the Humanities,* Indiana University [Pennsylvania], 6 No. 1 [1977], 31–36).

vacuity," according to Albee. He needs no individual name; he is legion; he is John Rechy's *youngman* on the make, blithely walking into what Whitney Balliett in the *New Yorker* called the "comic nightmare" of Albee's slick, sardonic, Absurdist "comedy." Like the Ionesco-like conversations which commence the play, the Young Man is empty, banal and baleful, as horrifying as the nameless "van man" who is the bogeyman with whom Grandma is threatened.

"Aren't you something," says Grandma to the Young Man in her old-fashioned language. Exactly. Something, not someone. "The American Dream! The American Dream! Damn it!" He does not even adopt a name as Grandma did a *nom de boulangère* — "I called myself Uncle Harry," Grandma explains, telling how she won the baking contest and hinting that chauvinist judges might just have given "Uncle Harry" the prize because it was interesting to think a man might win a contest obviously designed for housewives — and he is not "Day-Old Cake" but simply a fresh and very frightening Young Man, one whom Mrs. Barker might well take to be the "van man" come to cart away Grandma, one who will certainly do to supply Mommy and Daddy with the perfect prefabricated son. "Call him whatever you like. He's yours. Call him what you called the other one." He is a present (like Cowboy in *The Boys in the Band*, a hustler, a sinister Huck Finn), actually the twin of that nameless "other one," interchangeable.

Will this new Young Man work out like "the other one" and will " all the trouble . . ."? But, no. As Grandma says to bring down the curtain on this bitter romp:

> I mean, for better or worse, this is a comedy, and I don't think we'd better go any further. No, definitely not. So, let's leave things as they are right now . . . while everybody's happy . . . while everybody's got what he wants . . . or everybody's got what he thinks he wants. Good night, dears.

And even in that "dears" the shrewd octogenarian (folksy *Grandma*, not forbidding *Grandmother* but grand) is telling us something, don't you think? Throughout the play the names themselves, as it were, directly address the audience, breaking through the Fourth Wall as Albee was to do in some later work, distancing us as the names of Everyman, Death, and Good Deeds do in the old Morality Play.

All these were Off or Off-Off Broadway plays, though when Michael Smith came to present *The Best of Off-Off Broadway* (1969) his anthology offered then rather recent efforts (Sam Shepard's *Forensic and The Navigators* and Roland Tavel's *Gorilla Queen*, both 1967, for instance) and ignored Albee's works of the late Fifties and Sixties. Other anthologies of

Off-Off Broadway (such as *Eight Plays from Off-Off Broadway* edited by Nick Orzel and Michael Smith in 1966 and *More Plays from Off-Off Broadway* edited by Michael Smith in 1972) omit Albee; they present Frank O'Hara, Lanford Wilson, Sam Shepard, Jean-Claude van Itallie, Megan Terry, Tom Eyen, Adrienne Kennedy, and others, but obviously regard Albee not as "Off-Off" but "Off." (These clumsy terms, infortunately, seem to have been inerradicably established by the *Village Voice*.) As the Sixties began Albee was "Off-Broadway's outstanding playwright," his associates in that Little League being Jack Gelber, Arthur Kopit, Murray Schisgal, and such. Then Schisgal (with *The Typist* and *The Tiger*) and Albee moved uptown. Later even some of the Off-Off dramatists were to make and grace Broadway, Lanford Wilson (who began at the first of the New York "fringe" theatres, Caffé Cino) among them, and as I write Wilson and Tom Eyen and other Off-Off playwrights of the past are enjoying Broadway hits: it has been a long haul from *Dames at Sea*-type musicals produced by Joe Cino to *Dreamgirls* produced by Michael Bennett (who established himself with a musical about the theatre's "gypsies," *A Chorus Line*), financially if not artistically. But one of the most remarkable things about Albee's undoubted talent is that as early as the first years of the Sixties he made the great leap from the fringe to The Great White Way and established himself as a Broadway playwright, and with serious drama, not glitzy musicals. Others, such as Wilson, took a longer time to reach what New York considers The Big Time. Now Sam Shepard has written 40 plays and, partly because of the cinema, is probably better known by the average American than Albee is. Eyen has come into the big money after years of shows whose whole production budget was less than the cost of one costume in *Dreamgirls*. Increasingly, fiscal considerations have encouraged Broadway producers to bring uptown shows already successful in smaller productions — they have sometimes suffered artistically by the fancier packaging — and Off- and Off-Off Broadway have become feeders for the upscale big-risk market. Albee, however, made the leap to Broadway not with a fringe show that was moved but with a Broadway one, bigger, different, representing a break with his previous career, the blockbuster *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* It made him a Broadway playwright instantly and, in the film version directed by Mike Nichols, a "name" for the millions in America who have never been in a legitimate theatre in their lives.

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, as Kenneth Tynan wrote in 1963, was the right thing in the right place at the right time. It was "a marathon dissection of that familiar corpse, the married life of middle-class intellectuals," appealing at once to snobs who like Big plays and anti-intellectu-

als; it shows the wife humiliating the husband, standard fare of the TV situation comedies, familiar to Broadway audiences; it had a touch of Ibsen (the "false son" Tynan calls justly and frankly "a strained and implausible gimmick") and a Two Cultures debate in which the "neurotic historian" loses to the "heartless biologist"; it had roaring comedy and murderous malice, "brilliant poetic invective and cadenzas of spite"; indeed it was a serious play "too funny by half" (as only Tynan had the wit or courage to assert).[15] It had a superb cast. It was a hit.

But it is my contention that *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* by the very fact that it was hilarious (if you can laugh at the sight of heart's blood) made critics secretly uneasy: isn't tragedy supposed to be more serious than comedy? Is not pomposity to be preferred even over pretention, pathos over perceptiveness? Would not a war-between-the-sexes play be better if lighter (Thurber) or heavier (Strindberg)? Would not a more poetic symbolism enhance the familiar subject of impotence, so dear to Broadway at that period in the work of Tennessee Williams (*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, Sweet Bird of Youth)* or lesser writers (*Toys in the Attic, Middle of the Night*)? Would not welcoming to Broadway a playwright with experience in the fringe theatre be too much like an admission that there, in the cultural boondocks and in inexpensive productions attended by *eggheads* and *hippies* (two powerfully derogatory terms of that time), there was more vitality and genius than was commonly, expensively mounted on Broadway for the cloak-and-suit crowd, the hicks looking for a big-city aesthetic fix, the Jersey Girls and the Scarsdale Ladies?

I contend that the uneasy and hostile critics for a long time fought against full acceptance of Albee's talent, just as the Pulitzer Prize people refused him that "honor in decline." Not all the critics, of course. There is never unaminity in a business in which, if you have nothing else to say, you can always attract attention by championing a heterodox view or saying something obvious, from the unpopular to the unspeakable. Two of the members of the Pulitzer jury resigned in protest. Albee received his share of praise or, better, a share of praise; but Albee also faced for many years a battery of journalistic and academic critics who were less outraged by his negative approach than his positive success, who did not mind his malice as much as they were prompted by his humor to mock his achievement, and in his clever manipulation of language (especially puns, cli-

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[15]Kenneth Tynan, *Tynan Right and Left* (1968), 135–136. He also speaks of "Albee's well-known joust for mixed doubles, *Wer hat Angst vor Virginia Woolf?*" at Munich's Kammerspiel (p. 153). Note what *Angst* does to the German title.

chés, and allusions) they found the very weapons to put him down in what they put down about him.

The onomastic approach has never been used in quite this way before, but here goes: One can trace the critical reaction to Albee in the very names of the articles in periodicals, and a very instructive thing that is. Of course he fell prey to the academics and there were the usual pomposities gracing pieces intended to impress promotions' committees quite as much as to inform the world of scholarship. A dozen examples will be more than enough: Daniel Macdonald hit on "Truth and Illusion" (*Renascence* 17, Winter 1964) and that was echoed by Ruth Meyer (*Educational Theatre Journal*, as it was then called, for 20 March 1968); Charles R. Lyons compared "Two Projections of the Isolation of the Human Soul" (*Drama Survey* 4, Summer 1965); Melvin L. Plotinsky tackled "The Transformation of Understanding" (*Drama Survey* 4, Winter 1965—"The Metamorphosis of the Metaphysical" was perhaps a bit too much); John W. Markson topped that with "Negative Oedipal Enigma" (*American Imago* 23, Spring 1968); Henry Knepler retreated to a simpler "Conflict of Tradition" (*Modern Drama* 10, December 1967); Randolph Goodman, then my colleague at Brooklyn College CUNY, borrowed a cliché from pop psychology of the period for "Playwatching with a Third Eye" (*Columbia University Forum* 10, Spring 1967—it was amazing that Dr. Berne's *Games People Play* did not figure more than once in Albee criticism); C.W.E. Bigsby saw *A Delicate Balance* as "The Strategy of Madness" (*Contemporary Literature* 9, Spring 1968); Herbert M. Simpson wrote of "Limited Affirmation in a Conflict between Theatre and Drama" (*Forum* 6, Fall/Winter 1968); Robert M. Post concentrated on "Cognitive Dissonance" (*Quarterly Journal of Speech* 55, February 1969); Rachel Blau Duplessis dealt in "Contradiction and Resolution" (*Minnesota Review* 8, 1977); and (to rush on to modern times) Mary Castiglie Anderson discussed Albee as "Staging the Unconscious" (*Renascence* 33, 1980) while Robert Lawrence Mayberry spoke of a "Theatre of Discord" (*Kansas Quarterly* 12, No. 4, 1980); etc.

Whitney Balliett offered "Three Cheers for Edward Albee" (*New Yorker* 36, 4 February 1961) and there were many deserved compliments to follow, but a surprising antagonism to a distinctive new talent in the American theatre is to be documented in the titles of periodical essays. A striking number of critics got smart at Albee's expense. Here are some examples of the cheap shots taken at the title of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolf?*: "Who's Afraid of Big Bad Broadway?" (Henry Hewes, *Saturday Review* 45, 27 October 1962), "Edward Albee: Who's Afraid of What?" (C. Hughes, *Critic* 21, March 1963), "Are You Afraid of Edward Albee?" (J. Cappelleti, *Drama*

Critique 6, September 1963), "Are You Afraid of Edward Albee?" (J. Cappelleti, *Drama Critique* 6, September 1963), 'Who's Afraid of Edward Albee?" and "Why So Afraid?" (Richard Schechner and Alan Schneider, both in *Tulane Drama Review* 7, November 1963), "Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolf, Hunh?" (Ray Irwin, *Atlantic* 213, April 1964), "Who's Afraid of Edward Albee?" (Elemér Hankiss, *New Hungarian Quarterly* 5, No. 15, 1964), and "Who's Afraid of the Culture Elite?" (Diana Trilling, *Esquire* 60, 22 February 1964). My colleague Foster Hirsch even called his 1978 book-length study *Who's Afraid of Edward Albee*? Apparently one must be very careful about the title one gives a play, for there is always some Dorothy Parker ready to make an easy swipe at (say) *Halfway to Hell* ("underestimates the distance") if not a Goodman Ace prepared to demolish *I Am A Camera* with "No Leica." It would be nice if this were left to the writers of pop play notices and not indulged in by serious critics (and the Widow Trilling). You can see by "The Widow Trilling" rather than "Mrs. Trilling" what sticks and stones can be hurled by name-calling *via* manipulated designations.

Other attacks on Albee documentable from the titles indulge in devices dramatists themselves use to enliven the titles of plays: plays on words, references to literature (especially popular literature, songs, movies, etc.), mangled quotations and jokes, versions of other and perhaps more famous titles, and so on. Tom F. Driver contributed "Albee Damned" (*Reporter* 30, 30 January 1964), playing with the playwright's name rather cleverly, and Richard Hayes referred to the theatre chain owned by Albee's adoptive father when he wrote "At the Albee" (*Commonweal* 74, 25 August 1961). Robert Brustein in *New Republic*'s irreverent way damned Albee's début on a double bill with Beckett as "Krapp and a Little Claptrap" (22 February 1960) — a judgment which now must cause him acute embarrassment — and wrote other bits about "Fragments from a Cultural Explosion" (27 March 1961) and "The Playwright as Impersonator" (23 January 1966). Running down the alphabet of critics running down Albee's various offerings we may note: Alex Matheson Cain, "Eating People is Wrong" (a line from a comic song about "The Reluctant Cannibal" by Flanders & Swann heading Cain's piece in *The Tablet* 219, 20 February 1965); Jerry Cotter, "Sleazy Semantics" (*Sign* 43, November 1963); Roger Gellert, "Sex-War Spectacular: *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*" (*New Statesman* 67, 14 February 1964); Richard Gilman, "Here We Go Round the Albee Bush" (*Commonweal* 77, 9 November 1962, of course from the children's song); Robert Hatch, "Arise Ye Playgoers of the World" (*Horizon* 3, July 1961, echoing "Arise Ye Prisoners of Starvation," the Communist anthem); Henry Hewes, "Through the Looking Glass, Darkly" (*Saturday Review* 48, 16 January 1965, cutely

making an odd couple of Alice in Wonderland and St. Paul in *Corinthians*), "The *Tiny Alice* Caper" (*Saturday Review* 48, 30 January 1965, suggesting something of a *ripoff*, to use a term of the time), and "Dismemberment of the Wedding" (*Saturday Review* 46, 16 November 1963, attacking Albee's treatment of Carson McCullers by the perversion of the title of her famous *Member of the Wedding*); John McCarten in the *New Yorker* typically headed reviews "A Long Day's Journey into Daze" (20 October 1962, playing with an O'Neill title) and "Mystical Manipulations" (9 January 1965); *Newsweek* wrote of "Chinese Boxes" (11 January 1965) and "The Murk of Albee" (24 January 1966), having earlier called Albee "Odd Man in On Broadway" (4 February 1963, *Odd Man Out* as a film having made the old phrase current); Tom Prideaux offered " 'Coward, Flop, Pig,' " which looks as if it might have ungallantly described a stout British actress in Sir Noël's *The Girl Who Came to Dinner* but really was "Marital Sweet Talk on Broadway" (*Life* 53, 14 December 1962); Leonard Wallace Robinson dismissed a well-balanced cast as "A Bunch of Drunks" (*Jubilee* 10, February 1963); Gordon Rogoff offered to put his finger on "The Trouble with Alice" (*Reporter* 32, 28 January 1965 — remember Alfred Hitchcock's *The Trouble with Harry*?); Philip Roth alluded to Oscar Wilde on the stand for sodomy with "The Play That Dare Not Speak Its Name" (*New York Review of Books* 4, 25 February 1965); Wilfrid Sheed recommended "Back to the Zoo" (*Commonweal* 82, 9 July 1965); Jerry Tallmer harked back to jazz for "Hold that Tiger" (*Evergreen Review* 18, May/June 1961, a headline better suited to a review of Murray Schisgal, I think); J. C. Trewin on Shaftesbury Avenue recorded Britain's shock at "Nights with a Ripsaw" (*Illustrated London News* 244, 22 February 1964); and W. H. von Dreele in *National Review* made cute references to Sellars & Yateman ("The 20th Century and All That," 15 January 1963) and to Ibsen's *The Master Builder* perhaps in "A Master Carpenter" (14 January 1964). I hesitate to (as it were) cross the Ruby Cohn, but her "Albee's *Box* and Ours" looks unfortunate to all feminists cognizant with American slang, Hewes afraid of things after Virginia Woolf in *Saturday Review* led to unfortunate items such as "Woman Overboard" and "Death Prattle," and someone ought to point out that it is *Tiny Alice*, and not some affair between Mickey Mouse and Brooke Shields, that was intended to spring to mind upon seeing W. E. Willeford's "The Mouse in the Model."

One is tempted to repeat Woody Allen's joke about the names of the somewhat argumentative journals (*Dissent* and *Commentary* merge and a new periodical is born: *Dysentery*) and leave it at that, but I want to argue that all this bibliography here is something more than "merely corroborative detail added to give artistic verisimilitude to an otherwise bald and unconvincing narrative," as Pooh-Bah would say. I don't think it has ever

been remarked before that the public image of a creative writer can be manipulated by punning and disrespectful titles to articles, some of which I have noted above. In fact, not all of these articles were disapproving and not all critics agreed with my colleague Glenn Loney (*Theatre Arts*, November 1962) that the Theatre of the Absurd itself was "only a Fad." There were many nice things said about Albee (some more grudgingly than others). But for a public that scans only the headlines, the impression was inescapable: Albee, who himself loved to play with language (and often did so, subtly and effectively), was a fair target for critics who wanted to make smart remarks to catch attention. This disrespectful attitude, especially in a country which took *J.B.* and other plays it would be too painful to name with deadly seriousness, did something to give Albee the reputation for being an unserious playwright. It may surprise some to learn that Anita Maria Stenz' study of him in Mouton's Studies in American Literature Series No. 32 (1978) lists not only many periodicals but also 50 books on modern drama in which his work is given serious attention. As late as 1980, reviewing *The Lady from Dubuque*, Jane Schlueter was asking, "Is it 'All Over' for Edward Albee?"

I feel pretty sure that the achievement is not over, less sure that "the best is yet to come" (if only because that seems to be the general fate of American writers: as Scott Fitzgerald remarked, there are no second acts in American lives), and absolutely sure that, whatever happens, the snide comments will continue. I do hope Albee can be persuaded to give us his long-promised play, *The Substitute Speaker*. For many reasons, not the least of which is the comparative failure of all his adaptations of the works of others, I sincerely hope the play will appear with some other title: that one would be just asking for trouble.

We have heard what the critics did with the mere title of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and it is past time now to return to the onomastic analysis of his plays and to consider the name of that play and the names of its handful of characters.

The title *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* may be a little long for a marquée but it suffered no awkward truncation (*Marat/Sade, Colored Girls*); the only other thing the public might have called it was *Virginia Woolf*, and that would have been a trifle confusing. The title is arresting, memorable, and conveys suggestions of childhood taunting, games, and literary concerns, all relevant to the play. Moreover — and this is always good on Broadway — in it is something old-fashioned and comfortingly familiar which is given an original twist. It sets a tone for the play in a way that titles such as *Barefoot in the Park* or *Butterflies are Free* attempt to do. Naming the acts ("Fun and Games," "*Walpurgisnacht*," and "The

Exorcism'') was unnecessary and pretentious, though it may have impressed a few critics who read the text. None of these, not even ''Fun and Games,'' would really have done for the play as a whole.

First seen at the Billy Rose Theatre, New York, on 13 October 1962, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, which ''rivals anything in twentieth-century drama'' acording to *Neue Rundschau* and is ''an unsatisfactory play, a play of half-heartedly developed ideas, a play that does not live up to its promises'' according to *Modern Drama*[16] — talk of prophets unappreciated in their own country! — has, as everyone knows, four characters: George, Martha, Nick, and Honey. Anyone sensitive to American fashions in names, even without examining the play, could say at the outset that George is older and less clever than Nick, that Honey is younger and less forceful than Martha. Any American will think of George and Martha Washington, ''Old Nick'' (the Devil), and the significance of nicknames (or nicknames bestowed as given names) such as *Honey*. The pretend child in the play may raise not only the ghost of Ibsen but set one to comparing the dull historian George with George Tesman in *Hedda Gabler*.[17] *Martha* is not as ''pushy'' a name as *Matilda* (even more old-fashioned) or *Barbara* or *Audrey* and, though an unusual name for a woman supposedly born about 1910, credible for the daughter of an upperclass family with traditions. For Honey to be ''rather plain'' (putting it mildly, considering Sandy Dennis played her as damply repulsive in the film) is a surprise but her passivity is expectable: who but a very passive person would submit to *Honey*? *Tony* would have done as well as *Nick* for her ''blond, well put-together, good looking husband,'' but *Nick* has

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[16]Ivan Nagel, ''*Requiem für die Seele: Über Albee's WER HAT ANGST VOR VIRGINIA WOOLF?*,'' *Neue Rundschau*, 74, No. 4 (1963), 646–651; Richard J. Dozier, ''Adultery and Disappointment in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*,'' *Modern Drama*, 11 (February 1969) 432–436. Dozier's article suffers from the ''half-heartedly developed ideas'' of which he accuses Albee's play.

[17]George has been the subject — Martha seems beyond them — of a number of critical commentaries, expecially: Stephen H. Gale, ''Breakers of Illusion: George in Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and Richard in Harold Pinter's *The Lover*, '' *Vision* 1, No. 1 (1979), 70–77; Paul Sawyer, ''Some Observations on the Character of George in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*,'' *CEA Critic* 42, No. 4 (1980), 15–19. He figures too little in Howard L. Quackenbush's otherwise fine articles on the influence of the play on Spanish American Absurdist theatre in *Texto Critico*, 10 (1978), 136–150, and (in English) in *Revisto Interamericano*, 9 (1979), 57–71. The extent to which points scored in literary onomastics are lost or misshapen (or even enhanced by accident) in dramatic translations remains unstudied, but the modern drama (from the title of Ibsen's *Ghosts*, which might better be *Vampires* or *Révenants*, through the names in Chekhov's comedies such as *The Cherry Orchard* which get a laugh in Russian but never in English, right up to what Spaniards might make of *Blanche Du Bois* or even how the name loses its subtlety in French productions) offers vast opportunities for critics. Names may be the most untranslatable of all the vast family joke that each language's literature really is.

connotations of devilishness (as I said) and *nicking* with a knife, viciousness, not in *Tony* or other names associated in the public mind with good looking young men (*Richard*, *Dave*, etc.). For George, *Dudley*, *Harvey*, *Harold*, *Howard*, *Elmer*, would have been loading the dice too obviously.

I am aware that statements such as this one may be deemed "too subjective" and "unscientific" by a few scholars, though I believe the statistics of studies such as *First Names First* and *The Name Games* comments on name fashions and romances can be called in evidence. I profess an expert knowledge of the nature of names in society and in fiction, and I argue that it is neither unscientific to express opinions based on data nor defensible to ignore them as debatable when names play a significant part in life and literature. Onomasticians will simply have to defend their responsibility — and other linguistic scientists (and critics) will have to learn more about the psychology of names and the art of criticism. *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* would be as good a place as any to begin, and the drama's appeal to mass audiences, rather than the "fit audience but few" of more exclusive literary *genres,* is especially attractive to beginners.

The use of names in the play (Martha calls her father Daddy, deals in movie name nostalgia, derides her husband as Georgie-Porgie, and is — when it comes to calling names — a "phrasemaker" *par excellence*, all of which we discover in the first minute or two of the action) is superb and worth an article of its own sometime. Think about it, not omitting to consider the effect of the use of names and of substitutes for given names ("the little lady," for instance). For "New Carthage" read "Ithaca." It is far above Cayuga's waters, and not in some foolish fiction that what we have here is four disguised homosexuals *dishing* each other (a canard which Albee has specifically denied), that you can look, should you feel moved, for the people behind the names in this academic Armaggedon. Yes, Virginia, college people really are like that.

I don't think anybody is like the people in *Tiny Alice* (also premièring at the Billy Rose — 29 December 1964 — after the failure of *The Ballad of the Sad Café* in 1963) and I wish I could skip it. There ought to be a moratorium against adding to the criticism, mostly ridiculous, which has already accumulated. The criticism stands accusing the play itself of having prompted reactions that tend to put the whole critical fraternity in disgrace. The blathering (to employ Shaw's categories) has been "neurotic, erotic, pinerotic [make that pinterotic now], and tommyrotic." The play has been seen (through the verbiage) to deal with (in alphabetical order): affirmation (limited), alienation (pervasive), *Angst* (undefined), agony (existential), appearances (and symbols), blindness (and revela-

tion), conflict (theatrical — actively presented — and Oedipal — passively resolved), dissonance (cognitive, *for the use of*), erotic themes (and homoerotic themes), fear (also pity), Freud and Jung man's fancy (archetypal mythologism), love, life (also death, etc.), mice (women) and men, negation (and communion), passion (and The Passion), reality (*vide* illusion), religion (*vide* God, also Alice), science, sentimentalism, sensationalism, sex, truth, and *all that jazz*. Mary Elizabeth Campbell has hailed *Tiny Alice's* "luxuriant multiplicity" and Bernard F. Dukore has called it "muddled, evasive, confused." Bigsby has gone out on a twig and announced the play is "experimental", Richard Alan Davison that it is "theatrical," and so on. But the critics made little sense of it (or few sensible remarks about it, considering the volume of criticism published) and Albee wisely resisted an explanatory preface to Athenaeum's edition (restoring cuts, 1965); presumably whatever he had to say was in the play itself and whatever silly comments that might be added (and a few helpful ones) were already in the criticism. Albee wrote:

> It has been the expressed hope of many that I would write a preface to the published text of *Tiny Alice*, clarifying obscure points in the play — explaining my intention, in other words. I have decided against creating such a guide because I find — after reading the play over — that I share the view of even more people: that the play is quite clear. I will confess, though, that *Tiny Alice* is less opaque in reading than it would be in any single viewing.

A play that yields more to the reader than the alert playgoer (even one who sees it but once) is certainly open to comment, but I shall confine my remarks to the names of the characters. It is clear, I think, that *Alice in Wonderland* and the experiences of "Tiny Alice" there offer a clue to at least some of the mysteries. A problem may have arisen in that Carroll's book is better known to academicians than slang: black American slang that produces *Miss Ann* and *Mr. Charlie* and *gay* American slang's use of *Alice* and *camp* expressions such as *Miss Thing*.[18] (I am astounded that desperate critics did not venture as far as A. A. Milne for Alice in connection with Christopher Robin. (They might have discoursed on,

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[18]"Bruce Rodgers," *The Queen's Vernacular* (1972), p. 20: "*alice 1.* common euphemism for the uniformed law, see * *Lily Law*" — "Rodgers" does not seem to realize that a policeman in uniform is *Miss Alice* (here the *Miss* is derogatory) because of the song "Alice Blue Gown" — "*2.kwn* S[an] F[rancisco], late 60's) LSD-25; acid 'Alice dropped by here [*dropping acid* – taking LSD] last tuesday.' " In the play, consider Alice in terms of law and mood alteration, "mind expansion." "*3.* acid head [addict] *4.* (*kwn* SF, '71 *fr Alice in Wonderland*) a liar, storyteller 'Alice, Alice, full of malice!' " See how it helps to know the language when dealing with a *gay* playright or one whose characters may be homosexual now and then?

say, the Roman Catholic Church as *bearer of Christ* and *rob[b]in'*, for *Tiny Alice* has much to say about religion and money.) Well, "now we are six" (five characters and that blasted model — "that someone would do it"). What to make of the lack of individual names for the Lawyer, the Cardinal, the Butler? Archetypes? The Morality Play tradition in this return to what Samuel Terrien calls "the theatre of communion,"[19] an onomastic device missed by Thomas B. Markus in his discussion of "a new theatrical device by which we are intellectually removed from . . . the specific problem of the protagonist," a device of drama to go beyond the particular to universal issues?[20] *Miss Alice* not only invokes the "wonderland" but is also a title of respect such as would be used among persons who regarded the surname as unnecessary (if indeed it is known). *Brother Julian* is such a name as a postulant would assume on joining a religious community. Why *Julian*? Etymology is no help ("soft-haired") and the Julian family of ancient Rome (or the Julian calendar) seem irrelevant. Perhaps we are meant to think of Flavius Claudius Julianus, usually called Julian the Apostate. If so, to what purpose? "We simplify our life as we grow older," as Julian would say. Drop the game. If there is name play in this oddly named play it is resistant to certainty, perhaps as clumsy as the adjective in "Santayanian finesse." The amateur may be tempted by the not altogether impossible; the professional critic should concern himself with the probable, a word that demands proof, though even in courts of law, circumstantial evidence is admitted, and some circumstantial evidence is compelling — "as when one finds a trout in the milk." We must simply be sure that our judgments are not fishy.

Play your games with the more accessible names in *A Delicate Balance* (first seen at the Martin Beck Theater, New York, 12 September 1966) while, with limited space here, I concentrate on lesser known, later plays where the onomastic devices are paradigmatic.[21]

Box-Mao-Box opened at the Studio Arena in Buffalo, New York, 6 March 1966 and reached the Billy Rose Theater, New York, on 30

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[19]Samuel Terrien, "Albee's Alice," *Christianity and Crisis*, 25 (28 June 1965), 140–143. Even more misconception arose from critics who were not Christian (or unfamiliar with Christianity) writing about *Tiny Alice* than can be attributed to those who were not homosexual (or did not wish to admit they were) discussing the play. This is one good article from the Christian perspective. Perhaps we now call "Christian names" just "forenames," but some names are *Christian names*.

[20]Thomas B. Markus, "*Tiny Alice* and Tragic Catharsis," *Educational Theatre Journal*, 17, No. 3 (October 1965), 225–233.

[21]The Germans seem to have grasped this play better than most American critics. See, for example, Matthew Winston's article on it in *Das amerikanische Drama der Gegenwart* (Herber Grabes, ed.), Kronberg: Athenäum, 1976. The names in *A Delicate Balance* (of ard between what, we are to ask) are: *Agnes, Tobias, Claire, Julia, Edna* and *Harry*. Agnes is "a handsome woman in

September of that year. Its arresting title is explained by the fact that "two inter-related plays" (*Box* and *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung*) are followed by a "reprise" of *Box*. In *Box* the stage is dominated by a lighted cube, while we hear a "voice over," as it were. Actually, there is little to be gained by staging this play: radio would emphasize the voice, television the box, but, like Albee's *Listening* (an appropriate title for the little drama presented on BBC radio 28 March 1976) *Box* was staged. Like Pinter's *Landscape* and *Silence*, also staged, it ought to have been restricted to radio; it is unnecessary to put it on stage. The voice in *Box* has no name, of course, but in *Mao* we have the name of a familiar historical character (author of the celebrated little red book of aphorisms or "quotations") and three persons identified only as Long Winded Woman, Old Woman, and Minister, the very names one might have for them were one to overhear them talking on the deck of a cruise ship (back to *Aliqueen* at last?).

When *Listening* was staged it appeared (3 February 1977, presented by the Hartford Company at Hartford, Connecticut) with *Counting the Ways*, the very title of which starts one thinking about love and Elizabeth Barrett Browning's accountancy . . . . Neither play has as yet been subjected to criticism to any extent and neither has had any appreciable effect on Albee's reputation. Most people have never heard of them. They await, and I dare to suggest will reward, study.

The one-acters that Albee first thought of as "Life" and "Death" in time became *Seascape* (26 January 1975 at the Schubert) and *All Over* (27 March 1971 at the Martin Beck). *Seascape* may put you in mind of *Landscape* and also of escaping from the sea, while *All Over* manages to pun on both finality and universality.[22] The names in *Seascape* may offer some challenge. ("All right. Begin.") They are: *Nancy*, *Charlie*, *Leslie*, and *Sarah*. Such "common" names communicated little (it seems) to audience and critics, and it is perhaps here that the onomastic critic might

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her late fifties" so the name is not wrong as far as period is concerned, but the suggestion of "lamb" ("I shall . . . keep this family in shape") is awkward — unless we think of the Blood of the Lamb, *Agnus Dei*. *Tobias*, "her husband, a few years older," has never been a common American name. It should send you scurrying off to consult your Bible. Claire is Agnes' sister, "several years younger"; are you clear about what *Claire* means? Agnes' and Tobias' daughter is named Julia; she's "thirty-six and angular" and her name is strong, even severe, a little intellectual but not wholly reliable. . . . Edna and Harry are the *square* suburban couple next door and their names fit their ages and station. If they are "very much like Agnes and Tobias," how do the various names distinguish the characters? Read the play again, sensitive to names, name-calling, and so on.

[22]The only striking criticism of *All Over*, is C. W. E. Bigsby's "To the Brink of the Grave: Edward Albee's *All Over*" in *Edward Albee: Twentieth Century Views* (Maynard Mack, ed., 1975, 168–174).

balance Coleridge's assertion that a work of art must have in it the reason why it is "thus and not otherwise" with the simple fact that a writer must call his characters *something*. Still, if the names are to be "just names," not significant but incidental, they still must fit and prevent misinterpretation. Art means control of significance(s). In obscurantist modern writers, the temptation to read into the work is strong; with craftsmen as careful as Albee, it is wise to expect intentions fulfilled. The "greatest sin in living" as an artist is "doing it badly . . . stupidly," as if you could not command nuances. If Clive Barnes of the *New York Times* was right about *Seascape* that it is "leaner, sparer, simpler" than Albee's earlier work, to what extent is this true about the onomastic devices in this affirmation of life?[23]

In his lesser known but probably better play *All Over* — Ronald Hayman found it "a more honest piece of writing" than *Tiny Alice* and a "more original" one than *A Delicate Balance* — the naming tricks still remain to be examined in detail. Especially important will be to compare them with the onomastics of sly Old Possum, for Julius Novick was unusually perceptive when he noted that *All Over* "sounded uncannily like a newly-unearthed play by T. S. Eliot." Actually *All Over* repeats the Eliot touches in *A Delicate Balance* without the Enid Bagnold overlay. Which poses still another onomastic question which I may raise here in lieu of analyzing this set of character names for you: to what extent has Albee in his plays (seen by various critics as echoing Steele and O'Neill, Shaw and Strindberg, Ibsen and Ionesco, Beckett and Bagnold, Eliot and Brecht, Williams and several others) copied onomastic devices from playwrights old and and new and (as he gave his own peculiar twist to Absurdist drama and every *-ism* from Realism to Expressionism) how has he adapted what he adopted? In *All Over* are we to match his naming techniques with those of Pinter and Maeterlinck,[24] to mention two dramatists often cited in connection with this play?

I shall not here discuss the onomastics of Albee's adaptations (*The Balad of the Sad Café*, *Malcolm* from James Purdy's novel, *Everything in the Garden* from Giles Cooper's play, *Lolita* from Nabokov's master-

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[23]Julius Novick, *Village Voice* for 3 February 1975, p. 84, found *Seascape* "unfinished." Clive Barnes concluded magisterially (*New York Times*, 23 January 1975, 20) that it "is about life." Kitty Harns Smither saw Albee as a "starthrower" in *Seascape* in the Panamerican University (Edinburg, Texas) Albee anthology, 99–100. Thomas P. Adler saw "humanity at a second threshold" in the play (*Renascence*, 31 [1979], 107–114). Lucinda P. Grabbard called it a "modern fairy tale" (*Modern Drama*, 21, [1978], 207–317). Does it employ the distancing onomastics of "once upon a time"? Hayman's *Edward Albee* was 1973.

[24]James Neil Harris, "Edward Albee and Maurice Maeterlinck: *All Over* as Symbolism," *Theatre Review*, 3 (1978), 200–208.

piece). These are ventriloquism which has hurt his reputation badly. Ruby Cohn recalls the disembodied voice of *Box* and "arts which have gone down to craft" (she "longs for the clumsy upward groping toward art")[25] but even the craft in these works has been rejected or resented. It does not concern us here except insofar as the names in the Albee versions might differ from those in the originals, and that is not Albee's custom. Much as I should like to tackle the names in *Malcolm* (premièred at the Schubert Theatre, New York, 11 January 1966), if I discoursed on *Malcolm*, *Cox*, *Laureen*, *Kermit*, *Girard Girard*, and *Madame Girard*, *Eloise*, *Brace* and *Jerome Brace*, *Gus*, *Jocko*, *Melba*, *Miles*, *Madame Rosita*, and *Heliodoro* (to ignore the contribution to Malcolm's world of *A Man*, *A Young Man*, *A Washroom Attendant*, *A Doctor*, and *Various People*) I should be launching on still another of my favorite writers, James Purdy. So, to *The Lady from Dubuque* and the end of my allotted space here.

The Lady from Dubuque, a too-neglected play first seen at the Morosco Theatre, New York, 31 January 1980, takes its title from a remark of Harold Ross, who said that he did not edit the *New Yorker* (1925–1951) for boorish Middle America or, as he put it, "the old lady from Dubuque."[26] The play title works even today, for James Thurber's *The Years with Ross* (1959) has kept the memory of Ross green longer than that of most curmudgeonly editors. The characters in the play are astonished that one of them as elegant as Elizabeth should be from Iowa ("farm country"); she could, in their opinion, no more be "the old lady from Dubuque" than she could be from *Joisy* (Amerindian for "plastic"). *Dubuque* is a toponym loaded with significance, like *Podunk*, and it suggests not merely Middle America (that could be Peoria, as in "Will it play in Peoria?") but cultural wasteland. Where Elizabeth is from ("And they wonder who I am") is crucial to the drama, which ends with "I thought he knew." The title is part of the fun and games of this Albee allegory.

Other game players, besides the "stylish, elegant, handsome" Elizabeth (whose name is stately enough, and contains the name of God: *El*, not near enough in *Alice* elsewhere), speak to the audience directly as well — and have names which "speak to the audience" too. ("Perfect packag-

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[25]Ruby Cohn, *Dialogue in American Drama* (1971), 168–169. This book and all others are inadequate on how names function in dialogue, which deserves further study. Psychologists and other "communications" experts need to educate literary critics more about naming as significant human behavior. *Homo nominans* is unique.

[26] Even on 16 May 1960, when *Time* reported on this, the *New Yorker* had 97 subscribers in Dubuque, "including several old ladies." There may be more now.

ing.'') The characters begin by playing ''Who Am I?'' and that question is paramount. Toward the end Elizabeth informs us that everything else is ''semantics.'' The names help to keep the players straight, help us to fathom their characters and even the relationships between the characters (as when Edgar or Carol calls Lucinda ''Lu''), and hint at the play's mysteries.

But the names of the characters do not telegraph information as do the names in earlier tradition (such as *Everyman* or *Endymion*, *Vice* or *Volpone*, *Sir Tunbelly Clumsy* or *Sir Fopling Flutter*, *Lydia Languish* or *Mrs. Malaprop*, or even Zero in *The Adding Machine* and Loman in *Death of a Salesman*); however, even *Dick* and *Jane* and other common names can score points in this game. Once a writer, especially one with a reputation for hidden meanings, uses even an ''ordinary'' name people will start looking for something extraordinary about it in the context, so (as I said) the writer has to close the doors to avenues he does not wish explored at the same time that he invitingly opens, or at least leaves significantly ajar, those to his true intentions.

Critics, if not the general public, can be annoying to some authors. Take Harold Pinter, for example. Reportedly disturbed by what some critics with more ingenuity than insight were reading into the character names in *The Caretaker*, *The Birthday Party*, etc., Pinter for *No Man's Land* named his principals after famous cricketers. (As a Jew, Pinter has taken an interest in the National Game in order to become more of an insider.) But once I noticed that there were cricketers' names in *No Man's Land*, I began thinking of how the three men stuck in Hampstead, like the three posts of a wicket, were being defended against the ''demon bowler'' outsider (played by Gielgud as a take-off on W. H. Auden), how Pinter's recurrent themes of territoriality and menace were here translated into a defense of the wicket (wicked?). Maybe he never thought of that; perhaps he ought to have done so. *''C'est une idée,''* as Louis Jouvet says in the film *Un Sosie, ''une idee idiote, mais une idée.''* To what extent is an author responsible for critics having *idées idiotes,* and what can or should writers do to prevent misreading?

However, here we are considering Albee, not Pinter, much as Pinter has affected our dramatist, among others. Albee's names for the characters in *The Lady from Dubuque* now engage us: *Elizabeth*, *Sam*, *Jo*, *Fred*, *Lucinda*, *Edgar*, *Carol*, and *Oscar*. None of these names is extraordinary, but just as the public ''knows'' (for no explicable reason) that *Michael* and *David* are ''strong'' names, *Anita* and *Wanda* ''sexy'' ones, Adrian to be ''artistic,'' Bertha ''obese,'' and so on, so these names may be

lexically opaque but are not devoid of connotations.[27] *Lucinda*, the most uncommon name here (out of fashion for more than a century), may convey to a few some hint of "light" and has for some a scent of seventeenth-century poetry still clinging to it, which makes it an odd choice indeed for "your average blonde housewife." What are we to read out of (and resist reading into) that? *Sam* is perhaps less apt for a "good-looking, thinnish" person than (say) *Don*, but it will suffice. Jo is described as a "frail, lovely, dark-haired girl" (Albee may be raising some hackles with "girl," for she is a woman in her "early 30's") and *Jo* does help with "frail," recalling one of Louisa May Alcott's "little women." Fred is a "blond ex-athlete going to fat" aged 40; that works well enough for a "plain dirt common" type (like a Joe, but less of a *klutz* than a Harvey) but in a British production would introduce an unwanted suggestion of stupidity, for *Fred* in Britain has associations (just as for them *Clyde* suggests "black" and *Charlie* what we should call a *schnook* — "a proper Charlie" came into British slang after Charlie Chaplin) apparently unintended by Albee. If *Lucinda* is a trifle too *ritzy* for its bearer here, maybe *Fred* is not as good as *Scott* or something similar. Edgar ("balding perhaps") is supposed to be "average," but his name is decidedly unaverage, far too old-fashioned and "weak," though he is referred to in the play as "good old Edgar." *Carol* fits a "ripe" brunette of 30, "not all bimbo." Oscar is (for some unaccountable or must-be-accounted reason, however much we like to see black actors getting jobs) black, an "elegant, thin black man" of about 50. If hints of homosexuality are to be avoided, *Bruce* would be worse but *Oscar* is still too closely associated with Oscar Wilde (whose father, physician to the King of Norway, gave Oscar the name of his royal godfather). An older black man having an unusual name goes well with audience expectation (if not with fact). As with so many other things in drama, the theatrical effect is more important than statistical fact. *Oscar* will do, but the casting will have to be careful.

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[27]Christopher P. Andersen in *The Name Game*, for instance, says *Sam* indicates "a hard-working fellow," *Frederick* is "pushy" (but *Fred* is not the same, any more than a *Bill* is a *Willie*, or a *Will* or a *Billy* or a *William*). This goes beyond etymologies and histories in George R. Stewart's *American Given Names*, fashion statistics in Leslie A. Dunkling's *First Names First*, but you must wait for the book I am writing now for Washington Square Press. Researches back up assertions: Herbert Harari and John McDavid established that San Diego teachers graded an essay higher if they thought it had been written by a *Michael* or a *David* than by (say) a *Hubert*. In Florida, research shows that people really believe women named Gertrude are "ugly." People with common names are more popular; those with uncommon ones. . . . But enough for now.

Names figure importantly in the dialogue of *The Lady from Dubuque*, which at one point has the characters thinking up pairs of names: *Marx and Engles, Gilbert and Sullivan, Lum and Abner, Abbott and Costello, Sacco and Vanzetti, Romulus and Remus*. The flurry over *Marx and Engels* ("Were they queer?" and "Of course not") makes the inclusion of Lorenz Hart (the Communist duo are called jokingly "the Kaufman and Hart of their day") and another pair, *Rimbaud and Verlaine*, remarkable. And just as a psychiatrist will find clues in "random" words you may list, so we can find characterizing effect in names produced. Carol complains, "I don't *know* any of these people." (Fred gets a laugh with, "Don't worry, Carol; you wouldn't have liked them.") A person who does not know any of these names lets us know something about her. A person who, asked for any pairs at all, comes up with items from pop culture (movies, radio, the stage) is surely different from one who produces *Romulus and Remus*. We cannot help noticing the unusual interest in politics: not only do we have *Sacco and Venzetti* (infamous before most people today were born) but we also get "the Bolsheviks," "the Czar and his boys" (where "men" would have had a different effect), "Lenin in Zurich," "Karl Marx was a Jew," "Stalin," "Hitler," a number of slighting references to Nixon (these must be Democrats), and "Ku-Ku-Klan" [*sic*] perhaps to hint at *cuckoo* = "crazy," or to characterize the person who gets it wrong), along with individuating allusions to places (Peru, Rome, St. Paul de Vence, New Jersey), things (Cuisinart, Foreign Legion, Imperial Japanese Army), and persons (Jasper Johns the painter and "Mr. Blake," the painter and poet, where the "Mr." conveys an attitude). "Warhol shit" characterizes both the speaker in knowledge and attitude toward such "art."

When Fred uses "toots" or Sam is referred to as "Sambo," or Carol says "G'by, rats," character is built, just as it is when a person says "Soviets" and not "Russians." (Elizabeth, to these detesters of Nixon-lovers, warns: "A *real* Nixon will come along one day, if the Russians don't." Richard M. Nixon was one kind of "real Nixon" and here his name is taken in another sense.)

Just as the names of the players in this game reveal some things, so does the fact that they (like Albee himself) like to play with names: "Doomsday. It follows Thursday" and "Samsday, Thurmsday, Doomsday" and "Miss Smartypants" and "floozy-bopper," which Carol rightly says is "pretty good." These characters are language-conscious. "I haven't heard 'swell' in a very long time," says Oscar of a word much older than he is, and he turns to the audience to make them language-conscious too:

"Can you remember when you last heard 'swell'?" Nor has he heard "goose" in a while, "in a coon's age" (itself obsolescent).[28]

When Edward Albee was thirty-nine, Vincent Stewart wrote that he was "unquestionably the most important and exciting young dramatist that America has to offer today; he is the only dramatist of the late 1950's and the 1960's have produced who can really be said to stand along side of Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller."[29] Now as the Eighties begin he remains important and at any moment may "light up the sky" again. Surely for an artist of this historic and artistic magnitude a study of the neglected onomastic component of his art is warranted. The names are right there in plain sight in the plays and at the same time fully imbued with what one critic has identified as "Albee's constant aim . . . to penetrate below the exterior of modern society to the fears which exist below the surface . . . the chief function of the dramatist and the main responsibility of the thinking individual."[30] It is time to consider them too, as conveying what critics so hesitantly call in quotation marks his "message" and as means of penetrating (if I may be permitted one final quotation) what Eugene O'Neill, writing of Albee's spiritual and dramatic forebear Strindberg, called "the banality of surfaces."

As far as this present article is concerned, the *unum necessarium* (when have you heard that?) is to be language-conscious about names in drama, to argue that Albee's many virtues include a notable gift for the manipulation of names, part of that love of language and command of verbal skills that explain his involvement with puns, clichés, repetitions, platitudes, etc. Here I have omitted the plays in which he was (as Bigsby said of *The Ballad of the Sad Café*) "sacrificing his own 'voice' " and attempted to show how the onomastic skill of his authentic voice is one with his "ear for puns, allusion, and repartee" that demonstrates "an inventiveness of the first order, the key to his "compendium of styles" and unique statement.[31]

Literary onomastics as a critical tool offers one way of penetrating a work of art. It may be objected that it is sometimes too subjective an

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[28]*A Delicate Balance* attempts "to invest a modern setting with metaphysical significance," argues Bigsby in "The Strategy of Madness: An Analysis of Edward Albee's *A Delicate Balance*," *Contemporary Literature*, 9 (Spring 1968), 223–235. Do the names chosen help or hinder? Paul Witherington says Albee has "resonance" in his clichés. And his names?

[29]Vincent Stewart in *Survey of Contemporary Literature* (Frank Magill, ed., revised 1977), 1962 (Vol. III).

[30]Arthur K. Oberg, "Edward Albee: His Language and Imagination," *Prairie Schooner*, 40 (Summer 1966), 139–146. Still, where are *names*?

[31]Bigsby, "The Strategy of Madness," again.

approach to warrant the description of "scientific," but surely criticism is an art and, even when we concentrate on linguistic matters, there is more to words than can scientifically be explained. Fully to understand any author's work one needs to be sensitive as well as scientifically rigorous and the critic ought to have to the greatest extent possible regarding both facts and feelings that "snail-horn perceptiveness" which Joseph Severn noticed in Keats. If that leaves his observations open to further comment and if nothing said about art can ever be as precise and as perfected as mathematicians would like, so be it. To discuss the names in a playwright's work, the critic has to consider the artist and his audiences, his talent and his time, the play itself and all relevant aspects of its cultural context — in brief, a lot more than "words, words, words." A playwright such as Albee, who deals in mysteries as well as messages, suggestions as well as statements, cannot be explained by a criticism that aspires to the convictions of exact science. He is, however much it may infuriate the people who yearn for certainty, of the school of obscurantist poet T. S. Eliot, who told the *New York Post* (22 September 1963):

> A play should give you something to think about. When I see a play and understand it the first time, then I know it can't be much good.

Though I can well appreciate the playgoer or reader who thinks that drama, that age-old form of mass communication, ought to communicate to him because he is, after all, one of the masses, as an individual I like subtlety and as one of the tribe of literary critics I dare to try to identify and even to explain it. If in this article on Albee, an admittedly minor dramatist whose work I admire in a major way, I am able to make it mean more to others, or if I can persuade them (for I am a teacher as well) to go back to the plays to re-experience them, whether others agree with every impression I have tried to convey about the effect of the names in his plays or not, I shall consider my work as a critic not wasted.

I believe other literary critics ought to sharpen their critical tools for work on other elusive and "difficult" writers, particularly dramatists (who have to take their audiences into account in a way in which, if not to an extent to which, novelists and poets do not), and not be frightened away by the fact that their conclusions may not be as conclusive, their methods not as narrowly linguistic and rigidly "scientific," as some would like who tend to forget that we are not all scientists, that there are some doctors of philosophy as well as (say) doctors of medicine. I am not one of those doctors who give "orders"; I give my opinions. With critic George Jean Nathan, I say to hell with the ideal of impersonal criticism (the reality of impersonal criticism or scientific literary onomastics is

unattainable anyway), for it is "like an impersonal fist fight or an impersonal marriage, and as successful."

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