

## **Disrupted Family Relations**

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### **Abstract**

By adopting a comparative approach, the chapter focuses on the disrupted family relations in Edward Albee's three plays *The Zoo Story* (1958), *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* ( 1961 – 1962 ) and *The American Dream* ( 1960 ), and Ionesco's two plays *The Chairs* ( 1952 ) and *Rhinoceros* ( 1961 ).

The chapter tackles family relations in the light of the social milieu that leads to distorted relationships. In Albee's plays although they have a family, they live in separate shells, while in Ionesco's plays the family tries to pass the time with absurd games and alcohol. Thus, the psychological reasons that lead to disrupted moral and family values are exposed, yet provide the impetus for a more honest and courageous encounter with the conditions of existence .

## العلاقات الأسرية المفككة

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### ملخص

يركز هذا الفصل على العلاقات الأسرية المفككة في ثلاث مسرحيات لإدوارد ألبى ، وهي : حكاية حديقة الحيوان ( 1958 ) ، ومن يخاف من ذئب فرجينيا ، ( 1961 – 1962 ) والحلم الأمريكي ( 1960 ) ؛ ومسرحيتين لأيونسكو ، وهما : الكراسي ( 1952 ) ، والخرتيت ( 1961 ) ، وذلك استناداً إلى مدخل البيئة الاجتماعية التي تؤدي إلى علاقات مفككة. فعلى الرغم من أن الشخص لذيها أسرة – في مسرحيات ألبى – إلا أنها تعيش في قويعات منعزلة ، بينما تحاول الأسرة – في مسرحيات أيونسكو – قضاء الوقت في ألعاب عبثية وتعاطي الكحوليات. ولذلك فقد تم في هذا الفصل الكشف عن الأسباب النفسية التي تؤدي إلى أخلاقيات وقيم أسرية ممزقة ، ومع ذلك فإنها تقدم زخماً لمواجهة أكثر أمانة وشجاعة لكي نونة الوجود.

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“It is.... the marrow ..... what you gotta get at ” (WAVW213).

George’s words in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* can be the starting point in delving into such a social topic of the family, an important theme in absurd drama. In order to understand the small unit of the family, it is essential to analyze the larger picture of the society. This society formulates the individual, who later becomes an individual in the basic unit, which is family.

It is therefore, important as William Barrett says that “we have to characterize the age to the marrow in order to understand the society” (9). We would then be able to understand the struggle between community, society, man and his social and moral values that constitute his behaviour. Miller believes that:

All plays we call great let alone those we call serious, are ultimately involved with some aspect of a single problem. It is this: How may a man make of the outside world at home? How and in what ways must he struggle, what must he strive to change and overcome within himself and outside himself if he is to find the safety, the surrounding of love, the ease of soul, the sense of identity and honor which, evidently, all men have connected in their memories with the idea of family ? (Miller 36-37).

This disruption that occurs in family relations is “a crime that is seen as having roots in a ..... relationship of the individual to society, and to certain indoctrination he embodies, which if dominant, can mean a jungle existence for all of us, no matter how high our buildings soar” (Blumberg 295). This theme is a main concern in the modern world, for it is a struggle which gloats to the surface of society. It is mainly between “family relations” and “social relations” (Blumberg 293).

The main idea of this chapter is to expose the disruption of the American family, through analyzing the social factors that created a gap among the different generations of the families, in the plays. These are generations of passive fathers and husbands, selfish dominating mothers and the maladjustment of parents and children,

representing the broken familial relationships. There are distorted relations of husbands and wives, people and their neighbours, while women are brainwashed and men are emasculated.

The reasons for all this are their inability to cope with their current situation. They feel a great deal of displacement and rootlessness. Their sense of loss which overwhelms the generations of those families is caused because of spiritual starvation for love, trust, loyalty, care, communication and nurturing. Their inability to face their responsibilities as grown-ups and to face their existence, causes their fear for bearing children. They cannot act as parents because of the tension between each other as husband and wife. The failure of youth to live up to the demands expected of them is also portrayed. The family groups are on the brink of breakdown since they are governed by fantasies rather than wisdom and realism. They have woven a cocoon round themselves so they are unable to see clearly or judge their marriage properly due to their superficial judgments, their failure to face their fears, impotence and hollowness.

However, the family is viewed not as an isolated phenomenon, but as a unit significant and essential to society. The family is a social system that is responsive to the cultural and social milieu in which it operates. The wide scope of the analysis of the American society would make clear the society in which family functions, are performed. The social forces influence, determine and dominate adaptive social systems, such as the family. As a result the knowledge of the society allows the analysis of the relationships. The more we know about the behavior in American family and society; we perceive the cross – cultural and human similarities in any society. Thus, one can comprehend the value of emphasizing universal aspects of the family system. Accordingly, to study the family in any society is to study a universal phenomenon.

The American family is an emergent out of the past and bears the marks of its past background and historical experience. This chapter provides partial answers to a number of questions about the family. What happens to the family under totalitarian rule? What happens to the family in a society characterized by rapid change from a rural-agricultural to urban-industrial economic system? Not only the interchanges and transactions between the family and society are dealt

with, but also the internal workings of the family, the individual in the family and the relationships between family members. The crisis situations in marriage reflect the disillusionment of the social systems.

After any war like World War II, all systems of society especially the family is affected. The family operates within a social milieu which helps to bring it into being, to support it, to shape it, and often even to destroy it. The Western family and particularly the American family have become more and more unstable. The family as a sacred union of husband and wife, or parents and children are always affected by surrounding conditions. An important question poses itself: has the family been able to adapt to rapid social change or has it lost most of its important functions? This can be answered when we take a closer look at family functions.

Families are bound together with other social structures into larger groupings which affect their lives like neighborhoods, villages and communities. The family performs a vital part of the functions necessary to individual and group life. It is affected by the nature and the rate of social change in society. The roots of the change, the transformation of the American family, lay in enlightened philosophical, religious, political and economic ideas about the rights of the individual. While democracy had loosened traditional social ties, it had strengthened the natural bonds of affection within the family. At the same time, it contributed to less pleasant circumstances of frustration, conflict, and ultimately, unhappiness.

During the nineteenth century, a momentous transformation had taken place in the functions and expectations of the middle-class family. These families had been shorn of many traditional economic, educational, and welfare functions. Meanwhile, these families were assigned primary responsibilities for fulfilling the emotional and psychological needs of its members. As well as providing economic security and a stable environment for children, family life was now expected to provide romance, sexual fulfillment, companionship, and emotional satisfaction. Ironically, the factors that the optimists pointed to as evidence of improvement also proved to be the sources of the family problems that pessimists criticized. The increased duration of marriage and the new emphasis attached to companionship and

emotional fulfillment may have encouraged divorce as a solution to unhappy marriages. Also, the new expectations about children's needs aroused adolescent problems. These should be viewed as challenges of American families as they adapt to changing demographic circumstances, instead of alarming signs of the family's demise.

The Great Depression left America's families many benefits. This included social security, aid to families with dependent children, federal home mortgage insurance, and insured bank deposits. However, the depression's greatest legacy was a major shift in public philosophy. It revealed the inadequacy of the traditional family means of coping with economic disaster. The increasingly complex and bureaucratic society underscored the fact that families were no longer able to protect themselves without government aid. The government was induced to take active responsibility for alleviating the loss of earnings caused by unemployment, disability sickness, and old age. This growing governmental involvement in the lives and welfare of the nation's families is what made the central legacy of the New Deal in America.

In order to discover why the family has encompassed a breakdown, it is necessary to understand more about the cultural climate of 20<sup>th</sup> century America. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, conditions of the working-class family were not too promising. Death rates were high, infant mortality, orphan hood, and early widowhood affected a high proportion of families, disrupting a high percent of American families.

This decade dealing with World War II, therefore witnessed a dramatic reaction to the psychological and societal stresses of wartime. Many Americans, who postponed marriage or family during the wars, finally had an opportunity to fulfill their dreams. They married at younger ages and had more children than the generations before them. Responding to the postwar housing shortage, millions of families moved to new single-family homes in the suburbs. There was a sharp reversal of the wartime influx of women into the labor force. They decided against acquiring a higher education and instead concentrated on rearing their children and staying home.

This leads us to the major question of what has happened to the family during the 1950's and 60's. The family has no doubt survived

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during emigration from Europe, Africa and Asia. It has also survived Puritan colonialism, the American Revolution, slavery, the Civil War, industrialization, urbanization, the great depression of the 1930's and numerous wars. Its survival has not been without modification in form and function, but the important point is that the family has survived at all.

Dramatic social changes taking place in sexual values undermined women and young people's patterns of early marriage, large families, and stable divorce rates that characterized the postwar era. All these factors, also affected educational institutions and the way children responded. It also affected a great number of Americans who felt that parenthood had become an increasingly frightening prospect, one that requires specialized skills and outside help.

Happiness became a goal of family living. This happiness is a blend of material well – being, success, social status, good physical and mental health, with family life as essential to its attainment. Adaptation of the American family to its environmental milieu is simplified by the abundance of material resources available. The majority of American families live in relative comfort; the income of one-fifth of all families falls below the poverty line, however.

By the 1960's there was increasing disagreement between the generations. There is therefore a clear link between the breakdown of the family and the major problems plaguing the society. The root cause of these familial failures is the failed intimate relationships of love in marriage and in the family. The breakdown of stable communities flows directly from this failure. Married women in the early twentieth century were discouraged from leaving abusive husbands because the prevailing belief was that a wife's place was in the home. Racism and prejudice also played a part in social policy.

Addressing the root causes of familial failure requires an understanding of the crucial elements of supportive family and community life. First, in importance and influence is the basic marriage commitment. Its importance is evident in the catastrophic impact of its absence. Second, is the love between parents and children, a love expressed primarily in supervision, the inadequate

parenting is clear. Third, the backbone of strong neighborhoods is friendship and cooperation between families.

Financial distress, reduced work hours and unemployment rates are reasons that disrupt family life. That was the reason why some women maintain that if they spent time finding husbands who are good providers, they would live a happier family life. For, unemployment and the person's inability to provide for his family, is bound to negatively affect the family's dynamics. It also decreases the feeling that the family is a loving refuge. As a result of this, the parents postpone parenthood and a feeling of fear prevails for bearing children. Many parents also experience stress while balancing the demands of work and family responsibilities. As a result, the most intensive motive was longing for a better life. After the war there was the spread of spiritual emptiness in the outwardly prosperous and affluent societies of Western Europe and the United States.

In the 1950's and 60's there were highly unrealistic images of the family which were presented in television shows such as "*Leave it to the Beaver*". Through Myths, they believed life would be happier. The most entertaining television programs were comedies, family drama, and Westerns. In 1950s, the Westerns were on top of T.V shows .Hollywood sold its stories about the West to an eager American Public. The Western provided infinite variety of situations and plots, with conflicts often growing out of several archetypal situations: ranches vs. farmers, and outlaws vs. civilization. Movie-going especially Hollywood movies were also a big part of the life of the Americans.

The decade following World War II is often described as one of the most prosperous economic times in American history. With victory and money, Americans in the 1950s could optimistically pursue the American dream. This dream is a mindset of many Americans during this time. This was a time when people built, worked and multiplied to fulfill the dream. The dream according to many Americans meant having a happy and stable family and for men to acquire stable jobs, but when the family did not prosper then they were forced to pretend. Thus, Americans were taught how to be consumerists and how to follow the latest productions of the civilized world.

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Moreover, crime is a notable disadvantage that was created with this fast shift that transferred America from an agricultural to an industrial society. The total number of reported crimes doubled between 1967 and 1979. Families headed by women were especially in need. About the relationship between the crime rate and social codes detected in the United States, Esmond Wright gives his statistics in the following paragraph:

Crime rates have always been relatively high in the United States which may have much to do with social values that stress individual achievement, wealth, and fame, without much regard to means or social cost.. US rates for homicide and violent crime are four to ten times higher than those of Western European countries (561).

As a result the future of the family was a serious cause for concern; families were shrinking in number due to the drastic decrease in live births. Due to divorce, psychological problems that children suffered from were increasing.

Another family dysfunction was the rise of suburbia which influenced the life of the farm negatively. The family bonds were torn apart. The social codes that were restricting the family members were diminishing slowly with the distance that separated many of those who preferred to dwell the suburbs. The link between farmlands and the family life was that the farm is seen as the only authentic place where family life has a chance to thrive.

Socially speaking, David DeRose comments on this deterioration in the American family that started in the 1950s. He also reveals the disappointment resulting from the false myths created by Hollywood media. He says:

The 1950s were a time when the institution of the family began to dissolve; when sons turned to ineffectual and absent fathers for strength and love, and found none; when basically good kids got killed in car crashes; when the society of parents no longer sustained its offspring; and when the myths of Hollywood's America were found sadly wanting by its youth. This was the advent of the postmodern

era in America, when media-generated myths grew to such proportions and with such speed that they lost all connection to the reality from which they once sprang. They became hollow simulacra infiltrating all aspects of America's cultural identity, but no longer capable of sustaining its inhabitants (3).

Another family dysfunction was the form that middle class families took during the 1950s. The early marriages and increased numbers of children; sharply differentiated gender roles. These roles represented the triumph of one possible model over another during the Depression and war years. For a brief period, economic crisis and war had enabled some Americans to envision a "new type of family based on shared breadwinning and equality of the sexes," but such a vision was short lived. As federal policies discouraged married women from seeking breadwinning roles. The wage differentials made it virtually impossible for women to be self-supporting. Public opinion also condemned women seen as usurping male roles. Youngsters therefore grew up viewing changes in traditional gender roles as unfortunate by-products of times of crisis, not changes for better. When youth embarked on marriage they sought well-defined roles. In a world where little seemed certain or secure, Americans turned to familiar models of family life as a protection against potential chaos.

Although America has been able to attain material success and prosperity, it was unable to maintain a solid moral character, family stability, safe communities and a happy society. This contradiction is manifest in individual lives. Youth are instilled with a strong desire for material success and prosperity, yet they fail to learn the values that are necessary to build good character, strong families and a harmonious society.

These signs of family strain in America have shared common traits, with family trends in France. The role of art and artists appeared in postmodern America as a result of all the previously mentioned political, economical and social circumstances. Family in 20<sup>th</sup> century French literature did not undergo an isolated development, but reveals the influence of writers from all around the world. Playwrights were concerned with expressing a sense of wonder, of incomprehension,

and at times of despair at the lack of cohesion and meaning that they find in the world.

Albee and Ionesco were not an exception. They did not accept unthinkingly the moral, political and familial status quo. The plays classed under the label of the Theatre of the Absurd express a sense of shock at the absence and loss of any clear and well defined systems of beliefs or values. Fundamentally, the absurd was in radical conflict with basic American myths having to do with integral self and the inevitability of progress. The functions of marriage, family life and of society as a whole are exposed in the works of Albee and Ionesco.

Albee's fundamental theme is the collapse of communality, broken relationships and artificial values. Ionesco, on the other hand portrays the modern man trapped endlessly, engaged in shallow relationships and escaping from a world he does not understand.

Albee dissects the American dream and attacks many of the values that traditionally compromise that dream; marriage, children, success, wealth and education. He claims each of these values to be empty, resulting in loveless and sterile marriages, failed careers, ill-gotten wealth, squandered education and a powerless status of family. Albee tries to pluck the masks from life, death, sex, love, marriage and money-greed which rule some of the marriages instead of unconditional love. He reveals the American dream with its seemingly nuclear family whose polished exterior conceals cruelty, dishonesty and hatred.

As the Theatre of the Absurd appeals to our sense of humanity, Albee focuses on the twisted human relationships, which can evolve within the society as the result of materialism and parasitism, and on the deceptive nature of ambition. He believes that a playwright must try to alter his society by focusing on rights and responsibilities of family and friends.

On the other hand, Ionesco believed that state and politics are empty institutions. He was a believer in human rights. His plays conveyed what he viewed as man's struggle to survive in a society that put barriers between human beings. He believes that women are treated cruelly by men. The image of suffering and depressed women who feel guilt is always present in his works.

Viewing the family in Albee and Ionesco's plays depends on a sociological perspective, to analyze the family within the context first, its involvement with society and second, its involvement in the lives of individuals. The individual's futility of action, irresponsibility, loss of values and morals, failure, abusive marriages, sexual unfaithfulness, communication breakdown and broken relationships, lead to the disruption of family relationships. As family is a basic social unit consisting of parents and their children, it is one of the most important factors for an individual's whole-being. The personality, character, and a person's achievement rely on the structure of the family he lives in. The problems of disrupted family relations have become a symptom of social sickness in the United States and in European countries in the mid-twentieth century.

These problems of disrupted family relations are depicted clearly in the plays. The main cause of this breakdown is mainly embodied in the loss of values. Materialism is another cause for having artificial values which shatters human relationships and ruins marriages. Opportunism that was built into the institution of marriage was a strong reason as well. A highlight of the parallel between physical death or suicide and living a dead-like life is depicted.

In Albee's plays, the focus is on the crooked human relationships which evolve within society and result in racial discrimination, infidelity and quarrels. He also sees the institution of the family as his principle area of inquiry, since it is here where human relationships are most complex (Stenz 129). Moreover, in Ionesco's plays, he demonstrates the consequences of such a society in which institutions become more important than their individual members.

Albee himself when asked why he showed so much hatred and disappointment in the family, he says:

The nature of drama is conflict and people not getting along terribly well... Most plays are about people in conflict... And most plays are about people who know each other and most people know each other in some kind of relationship ... people feel strongly about this issue of family relationship (De la Fuente 16).

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Thus, this depicts how the life of many people and families remains unfulfilled. A lot of people long for love and contentment, yet what they experience in their lives are indifference and bareness of their marriages or of their familial relationships. They experience rejection, fear, sense of wasted opportunities, and a sense of aloneness.

Ionesco on the other hand rejected absurdity and searched for a deeper alternative; namely the mystery of each individual's dilemma and his struggle against despair and death in his relationships. He believed that:

The dehumanization of the characters did not translate a belief that human beings are mechanized automata: on the contrary, the mechanization of these characters functions to denounce the depersonalization of humankind that [is seen] as perhaps the principle evil of contemporary society (Lane 16).

The images that left its marks on the lives of people at that time were the loss of values. It was a main reason for disrupted relations as exposed in the plays.

Albee believes that the modern American society experiences this great loss in values. He portrays the "moral and spiritual exhaustion" in the society (Paolucci, Tension 5). This exhaustion results from the society's ignorance of the past values. He shows that the present values in the society, if there are any left, are "incoherent and inhuman" (McCarthy 8). Among the values that the dramatist analyzes in *The Zoo Story* are trust, loyalty and love. Peter does not trust Jerry, who is a stranger. When Jerry asks Peter about his job and the money he earns, Peter thinks that Jerry is possibly a thief.

Peter: Well, I make around two hundred thousand a year, but I don't carry more than forty dollars at any one time .. in case you're a .. holdup man ..... Ha, ha, ha (TZS 20).

Peter supposes that Jerry asks all kinds of irrelevant questions such as "Where do you live?" (20) in order to find his house and steal him. According to him, some harm may come from a mysterious stranger like Jerry. That is why he thinks that he should not tell much about his life to this strange man.

Loyalty is another important value for Albee; yet it is absent in the society that Jerry lives in. Jerry reveals the disloyalty of his mother as follows:

Jerry: Good old Mom walked out on good old Pop when I was ten and half years old; she embarked on an adulterous turn of our southern states... a journey of a year's duration... and her most constant companion.. among many others... was a Mr. Barleycorn (TZS23).

His mother returns home only when her dead body is brought back. This adultery affects Jerry as a child. His father being drunk, Jerry explains stepped in front of a bus and dies (TZS23). He experiences alienation mostly for these reasons. As he does not have a family, he becomes an outcast. Besides, Jerry does not know what love is any more. He confides to Peter that he does not see any girl for a second time, and that he loves girls only "for about an hour" (23-24). Loss of love makes his life more unbearable. He does not have anyone around him to relate to, this makes him feel like a stranger.

Albee also handles love, respect and hospitality as lost values in *The American Dream*. Both Mommy and Daddy are pleased to have another boy, Young Man, who is going to take the place of the boy they killed. They show no regret, no pain for the one they caused to die, that boy is already forgotten. Young Man is the character through whom Albee depicts loss of love. He says:

Young Man: I have been unable to love (TAD 139).

Albee underscores the fact that if one cannot love another person truly, he will not be a complete being. Love is the emotion that starts relationships.

Respect is another lost value in this play. Grandma does not respect Mommy and Mommy is not respectful to her, though she is her mother. Besides, they mistreat each other at the presence of Mrs. Barker who is an outsider. When Mommy tries to keep Grandma quiet, Grandma calls her "Nuts", and Mommy apologizes to Mrs. Barker saying that "she's [Grandma] rural" (118). In their house, such attacks go on, and they never stop. They do not treat each other in a civilized manner; it is as if they aim to break each other's heart.

Albee mocks the hospitality, the way it is in the society. The scenes that the characters exhibit hospitality are highly absurd and comic. At first, the hosts try to make Mrs. Barker feel at home asking her: "Would you like a cigarette, and a drink, and would you like to cross your legs?" (TAD113). She seems to feel so comfortable in their home that she even removes her dress (114). After a while, this artificial hospitality fades away. When Mrs. Barker wants some water Mommy replies: "if you'll be so good as to come into the kitchen, I'll be more than happy to show you where the water is, and where the glass is, and then you can put two and two together, if you're clever enough" (130-131). Mrs. Barker acknowledges that this is the way a visitor should be treated, and helps herself. Their lives are full of artificiality, this indifference and disregard for the visitor reveals the hollowness of their values.

Similarly Ionesco examines loss of values which is evident in the way people use social status as props to disguise the hollowness of their lives. This is clearly portrayed through the old woman's words in *The Chairs* "the intellectuals and the proprietors will take the place of papas and mammas" (Ch 122). This depicts clearly the loss of values in the society. The Old Man is overjoyed when the Emperor finally arrives to recognize and support him. The Old Man and Woman could not be more honored and push their way through the invisible crowd to greet their most exalted guest. The Old Man says:

Your Majesty!...ladies, gentlemen, don't keep him. His Majesty standing.. Your Majesty, I'm truly the only one who cares for you, for your health, I'm the most faithful of all your subjects (Ch148).

The Emperor and Colonel appear as authority figures, standing for the Old Man's absent father. Here parental authority is replaced by political authority. This political authority has become more important in modern society. Instead of complaining to parental figures, the Old Man complains to the Emperor of his disappointments and the indignities that he had to endure, seeking his direction and care. The Old Man says:

... I want to see.. move aside I want ... the celestial gaze,  
the noble face, the crown, the radiance of His Majesty ...  
Sire, deign to turn your illustrious face in my direction,  
toward your humble servant (149).

The Old Man feels support in his life only from people in high social status. This authority to him is what gives him comfort in such a society which has given up its true traditions of love and support from family. These true values have been replaced by false values. As the Old Man says:

I've suffered much in my life ... I might have been  
something, if I could have been sure of the support of Your  
Majesty ...  
I have no other support ... If you hadn't come, everything  
would have been too late... you are, sire, my last recourse  
(150).

The shift from family support to authority support exposes the disruptive changes that happened to values, family and as a result to society.

Again loss of values is shown in *Rhinoceros*. In Ionesco's play, it is the whole society that has swerved from true 'humanity'. He uses the extreme metaphor of a community choosing to become animals and to betray their human identity. We witness an entire community willing to degrade itself. Rhinocerotitis is not only a disease that attacks the community: but the community agrees to succumb to it.

The triviality and the shallowness of the individuals which leads to their transformation, is pictured as the play opens with petty arguments of such a society. For example, Jean quarrels with Berenger over his lifestyle and tells him "what a mess you're in!"(Rh6). Some of the individuals are absurd and others seem to be rational, yet they all transform. This is due to many reasons, some are selfish, others are conformists, few are logicians, yet they all need the transformation for different reasons.

In many ways, Jean appears to be a rational character. He seems harmless-it is precisely this that makes him such a dangerous character. It is shocking that Ionesco chooses to use him as Berenger's best friend and as the most complete physical transformation on stage.

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Berenger's loyalty and respect for him provide his metamorphosis with such significance. Berenger realizes that this need for metamorphosis becomes a societal epidemic. Ionesco reflects this epidemic vividly at this point. Berenger feels shock, fear, and depression as he watches his close friend submit to the beasts. It is with the same respect that man is meant to view the Western philosophy crumbling. Jean's position of authority over him and his Cartesian ideal allows both these themes to shatter, as Berenger realizes Jean is succumbing to the herd. Jean's transformation represents the beginning of the downward spiral Berenger must witness, but he also sets up the major stab at Western philosophy that Ionesco has imbedded into his play.

As Jean transforms, the loss of values and the relationships between friends is exposed. Jean tells Berenger that "[he's] getting on [his] nerves" and to "mind (his) own business" (Rh63). When Berenger suspects Jean's transformation and wants to take him to a doctor. Berenger replies and says:

Berenger: Don't get angry with me. You know very well I'm your friend.

Jean: There's no such thing as friendship. I don't believe in your friendship.

Berenger: That's a very hurtful thing to say.

Jean: There's nothing for you to get hurt about (Rh65).

The questions to be posed here is what value do human relationships have? When friendship no longer has meaning then love and care can no longer exist. This is what Ionesco tried to portray through his characters that they are victims of their inhuman society. This is expressed further in the dialogue that goes on between Berenger and Jean when they find out that Mr Boeuf had changed into a rhinoceros. Jean shows that it is easy to give up the moral standards and laws of life, whereas Berenger believes that if moral standards are dropped, the law of the jungle would prevail and there would be no hope for human civilization. The dialogue goes as follows:

Jean: ... After all, rhinoceros are living creatures the same as us; they've got as much right to life as we have!

Berenger: As long as they don't destroy ours in the process. You must admit the difference in mentality

Jean: Are you under the impression that our way of life is superior?

Berenger :...we have our own moral standards which I consider incompatible with the standards of these animals.

Jean: Moral standards! I'm sick of moral standards! We need to go beyond moral standards!

Berenger: What would you put in their place?

Jean: ...Nature!

Jean: Nature has its own laws. Morality's against Nature.

Berenger: Are you suggesting we replace our moral laws by the law of the jungle?

Jean: It would suit me, suit me fine.

Berenger: ... You must admit that we have a philosophy that animals don't share, and an irreplaceable set of values, which it's taken centuries of human civilization to build up..

Jean: when we've demolished all that, we'll be better off! (Rh 67- 68).

Jean here epitomizes the Nietzschean conception of the "super-man" who is above morality. He believes in the strength of his will and rationalist intellect. His arrogance and disdain for the common man is what causes the prejudice and disruption of relations. Jean's disdain towards Berenger's attitude towards life foreshadows his metamorphosis into a savage, vicious rhinoceros. He symbolizes the Nietzschean "will to power" of the fascist rhino. Their use of strength

and will to circumvent morality and return to a primal state of nature is obvious. Yet, Jean is full of hypocrisies and contradictions. He believes self-improvement should stem from cultural rules, and not from exploration of his humanity. That is why when Jean transforms into a rhino he is willing to trample the weak and anyone who gets in his way. This portrays the social sickness that prevails. It then leads to disrupted relationships that allow an individual to drop his moral values gradually and follow others without feeling its atrocity. They are willing to destroy civilization without hesitation.

Ionesco attacks all ideologies and systems that obscure what is truly important which the human condition is. Politics, he believes “serves to divide individuals rather than allowing them to contemplate together what really unites them-the problem of existence” (Lane 115). In *Notes and Counter Notes*, Ionesco states that:

In an organized society, which is an organization of functions, man is merely reduced to his function, which alienates him from the rest (78).

Another social folly that disrupts most relationships as discussed before is materialism together with consumerism. In the dream of progress, the society gives up its traditions. On the other hand, it adds to the illusions in one's life. It is generally accepted that the more a person consumes, the happier he will be, and this thus results in disrupted relations. The qualities such as kindness, pity and charity are adopted for pragmatical reasons. As an outcome the relationships become superficial and shattered against these artificialities in the society.

Sartre and most existentialists believe that human relationships are distorted and distorting ( Macquarrie 89). Industrialism is one of the reasons for this breakdown. According to Kolin “Albee targets the depraved power of money to set moral standards in America” (qtd. in Bottoms 28). He satirizes the greedy American society through his materialistic characters.

Ionesco also “called upon society to refocus its attention on metaphysical and spiritual matters” (Lane 108) instead of petty interests as bourgeois materialism, political routines and divisions.

The obsession of owning things underlines the triviality and absurdity of people in collecting objects. This is shown in *The Chairs* when the Old Woman carries an astonishing number of chairs for the guests. The chairs signify how:

Human characters are over whelmed and eventually expelled by their sheer mass and density yet it is this very proliferation that signifies futility and absence(Lane52).

Ionesco believes that serious damage to humanity is caused when man surrounds himself with material possessions instead of surrounding himself with family relations, love and warmth of people. In the case of the chairs in the play Ionesco:

Evokes the visual image of man oppressed by an expanding mass of material things and thereby dramatizes the absence of the significant aspects of human life (Whitehurst 82).

The futility of action acknowledged by Albee and Ionesco in the plays is another important cause for distorted relations. Although they favor man of action, the existentialist philosophy asserts that, "Action... entails a motive. A human action therefore arises from a thought about the world, a desire to change some feature in the agent's situation", and "only the awareness of a state of affairs as something to be changed can motivate an action" (Warnock 118-119). However, most of Albee's characters lack the desire to change their lives for good. Even if some are courageous and try to shape their lives, their attempts are mostly doomed to failure. Few of Ionesco's characters attempt to change their lives while the rest lack the desire to do so.

The reason for the reluctance of their characters to act, is that human life is finite, that death is the ultimate end which renders every action of the individual meaningless and insignificant. Whatever they do, they cannot change the fact that they will die one day. Also, it is impossible to establish an order, in such an illogical universe, for the individual by himself. Thus, all of their actions, if they can be called so, will remain petty movements which will not prevent their static situations.

Although Ionesco dramatizes those who are free to choose what they want to be or to do, they are haunted with the futility of action. This stance is contradictory with the existentialist philosophy which takes the human being as an active subject. Heidegger and Sartre regard the future as a cause to act (qtd. in Warnock 119). Heidegger's potentiality-for-Being and Sartre's being-for-itself emphasize action for the becoming of the human reality. Sartre believes that "to act is to modify the shape of the world; it is to arrange means in view of an end", and he adds that "an action is on principle international" (559). It is actually a reciprocal issue for the philosopher; one is to act in order to acknowledge his freedom, and freedom leads the conscious being to action. For the existentialists, only death will cease the process of man's becoming, and even that does not come at the time or in the way one desires. There are always various choices for a man to make. For Ionesco's individuals, any action will be meaningless. They lack the desire to act because they deny expectations in life. His characters are aware that any activity will be buried in the void of existence, but some try to believe that if they act, they might give life some meaning.

Most of them do not believe that they can change their lives by action. Berenger in *Rhinoceros* and the Old Man in *The Chairs* try to convince themselves that they can change the futility of life and reject being idols. In an attempt to give life some meaning, Ionesco here contradicts Esslin's words that "the more things change, the more they are the same" (18-19).

In *The Chairs* the change is futile only when the Old Man attempts to justify his life and relationships with whining explanations. He tries hard to deliver a message to humanity, but when he hires the orator, the futility of the enterprise is made clear by the fact that this orator is mute. Only then the futility of the action and the absurdity of their life are made clear.

Berenger's attempts to act and to save humanity also reveals Ionesco's glimpse of hope that man can take action to change his life. He contradicts all the others who attempt to fail in acting and choosing the correct action. They try to give themselves the impression that they are giving some meaning to their lives.

Although the theme of the futility of action is contradictory to American Drama, which urges the human being to be an active agent in the twentieth century, yet Albee follows Ionesco's footsteps in his plays to some extent. His characters do not have any hopes for the future, which is why they reject being active agents. Referring to his relationship with the dog, Jerry in *The Zoo Story* states: "I had tried to love, and I had tried to kill, and both had been unsuccessful by themselves" (TZS 30). Like Berenger in *Rhinoceros* who fails in his attempt to help Daisy not to transform into a rhino, Jerry fails in his attempt to befriend people, or even a dog in order to end his alienation. The failures teach him that all his future efforts will be in vain, too. He explains this idea when he says:

Jerry: I have learned that neither kindness nor cruelty by themselves, independent of each other, creates any effect beyond themselves: and I have learned that the two combined, together at the same time are the teaching emotion. And what is gained is loss (31).

Albee's characters opt for passivity, just as Ionesco's do. Jerry perceives that his last attempt to stick to his absurd life has failed as Peter cries out loud that he does not understand anything about the story of the dog or any other thing Jerry explained (TZS 32). This makes Jerry choose an eternal inaction, which is death. He says: "So, be it!" (39). He must be fed up with being an outcast, who is entrapped on every side, who cannot communicate with anyone. His last action brings him a constant passivity.

In *The American Dream*, the replacement of the dismembered boy by the Young Man make Mommy and Daddy happy; they are in the same situation as they were before. Grandma sums up the absurdity of their situation as follows:

Grandma: I don't think we'd better go any further. No definitely not. So, let's have 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 (TAD 148).

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For her, the lives of the couple will repeat itself. She knows that nothing will erase the absurdity in their lives, thus, she believes in the futility of action. George in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* avoids making decisions for the family except at the end when he decides to take action in killing the imaginary son.

Albee's individuals are devoid of any willingness to modify or better their lives. They think that they cannot do anything that will save them from suffering. So, they choose a passive state or withdrawal from life. However, Albee wants to conclude that even when one is not an active subject in life, he is still responsible for this attitude, and that is why they cannot find any relief.

Futility of action is also portrayed clearly in Ionesco's plays *Rhinoceros* and *The Chairs*. He portrays his characters as victims of their society. He believed that the world is dominated by severe forces and brutal behaviours based on illogical reasons. That is why they suffer from futility of action as well. This leads to their failure of reaching the intended goals and mirrors the broken relationships between individuals.

In *Rhinoceros*, Ionesco portrays Berenger as a man trapped in an office oppressed by his job engaged in shallow relationships and escaping with alcohol from a world he does not comprehend. Whatever he does, he feels, is futile. Not only does Berenger feel this, but also all the rest of his friends who escape from reality for different reasons and transform into rhinos share this feeling.

The bourgeois individual cannot listen and relate to others, he is wrapped with a hard cover that protects his narrow and selfish view of the universe. Ionesco describes him by saying:

The petit bourgeois... is just a man.. who no longer thinks for himself but repeats the truths that others have imposed upon him.(Notes and CounterNotes 66).

Jean's insult to Berenger in *Rhinoceros* "there are certain things which enter the minds of even people without one" (Rh 15), expresses how millions are swayed to collective thought without thinking. A universal mentality that compromises the individual mind is what Ionesco wants to picture. These minds evade responsibility and choice

and allow external ideas to enter without an internal check. Man thus, becomes paralyzed and cannot think and as a result cannot act.

Ionesco attempts to pin the blame of disrupted relationships less on man's tendency to evil than his tendency not to think for himself. This is expressed when Dudard and Berenger debate the issue of evil and the normal and abnormal distinction:

Berenger: We must attack the evil at the roots.

Dudard: The evil. That's just a phrase! Who knows what is evil and what is good? It's just a question of personal preference (Rh12).

And later:

Berenger: And you consider all this natural?

Dudard: What could be more natural than a rhinoceros?

Berenger: Yes, but for a man to turn into a rhinoceros is abnormal beyond question.

Dudard: You seem very sure of yourself. Who can say where the normal stops and the abnormal begins? Can you personally define these conceptions of normality and abnormality? Nobody has solved this problem yet..

Berenger: The problem may not be resolved philosophically-but in practice it's simple. They may prove there's no such thing as movement..and then you start walking (Rh13).

Dudard's intellectual maneuvering is an anticipation of some of the philosophical points of postmodernism. He believes that they are mere matters of perspective or personal preferences: there are no absolutes in deciding what evil or abnormal practice is. In the absence of any absolute values, the most appealing ontology is that of raw energy and power. Berenger senses the dubious aspects of Dudard's claims, but is unable to offer any counter-example. All he says is that his intuition tells him that in actual practice, he most certainly knows the idiocy of a misguided philosophy when he sees it. Indeed as Berenger is presented as the 'common man' who is philosophically unsophisticated yet, he certainly senses the abnormal.

The moral relativism and power-based rhinoceros movement is therefore philosophical nonsense because the idealized, "happy," and carefree world they postulate is, in Ionesco's eyes, a lie. The

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complexities of individualized human existence cannot be caught by such illusions. Berenger knows this and he clings in an inconsistent manner to his own individuality. At the end of the play, he is slightly tempted by rhinocerism and says “Oh, how I wish I was like them... their song is charming-a bit raucous perhaps, but it does have charm! I wish I could do it”(Rh15). But finally, he decides not to give in.

Berenger did not conform to this temptation to escape one’s disrupted relations and solitude by identifying with and joining groups ignorantly. Berenger holds out against the crowd, he is the only one courageous enough to refuse to return back to primeval virtues that return to instinctual, natural life. One can deduce that Berenger’s inability to transform might be humanist integrity, although he is left only with enmity and hostility.

His futility of action is portrayed when he does not know how to convince his friends to return back to humanity, nor does he have any idea how to start teaching them to be different. Berenger hangs his own picture and that of other humans on the wall beside the rhinoceros. He then believes, it is the humans who seem ugly because they lack the collective beauty of the organized herd. He says:

I'm not good – looking .....  
They're the good – looking ones .....  
I haven't got any horns .....  
A smooth brow looks so ugly  
I need one or two horns to give my sagging  
face a lift (Rh 106 – 107).

- This expresses Berenger’s guilty anguish for not joining the rest, and regretting his isolation. He feebly protests at what he cannot stop, here lies the futility of action to regain his friends, his relations and his life. As rhinocerization is dangerous and humanly invalid, brotherhood is being evasive when men like Berenger must stand alone.

Ross Chambers in his article “Detached Committal” says that:

The antagonism of the social and the individual, and the irony that the individual values themselves cannot be

asserted without becoming social, and as such, a danger to the individuals (26).

The human beings who become rhinos are condemned for twisting the logic of their ideology beyond all values. Logic itself is not the answer as far as Ionesco is concerned. Its laws are designed rather than realized. Other values of courage love and liberation should be realized.

Again this futility of action that leads the characters to suffer from failure which affects their relationships causing a fracture within their families is also clear in *The Chairs*. The Old Man and Woman try hard to convey the core of their experience in life to others. This is the frustration and disappointment they feel for not being able to connect to others. The futility of action is shown when the Old Man is irresponsible, afraid and unable to deliver his message, himself. He struggles to convey it, but in vain; his message becomes blurred. The Old Man echoes his disrupted relations with others due to his passivity when he says:

Old Man: It is my pity that has defeated me....But they never pitied me. I gave them a pin prick..and ..they've crushed my bones ...

Old Man: ...no one has ever shown me due consideration..However, I,I alone could have saved humanity, who is so sick...had I had the opportunity to communicate my message, I do not despair of saving it, there is still time, I have a plan... alas, I express myself with difficulty.. (Ch 101).

Here the Old Man is helpless to attain his freedom from his predicament opposite to Berenger in *Rhinoceros*. Catherine Hughes substantiates this idea of self-will in action:

With Berenger, he (Ionesco) knows that man is superior to the rhinoceros: he is deprived of some part of his essential humanity..(and) his dignity as man. (would be lost) in bowing to the contemporary ethic of conformity (124– 125).

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Albee as well as Ionesco therefore asserts that distortion and unhappiness is caused by these dominant society forces like loss of values, materialism and futility of action.

When Albee produces angry attacks on the mainstream American family, it becomes a commentary on all human relationships (Paolucci 32). Albee also shows the family unit as dysfunctional. His “main area of inquiry is failures in human relationships in whatever form they occur” (Stenz 3). He strips bare the impossibility of communication between parents and children and depicts family quarrels and conflicts between generations. Emasculation is also exposed, parents are merciless towards their children and vice versa children who have become adults are merciless towards their parents. Albee also pictures the uneven distribution of powers between mother and father. He also exposes the issue of abandoned children and failed marital fidelity.

Similarly, Ionesco pictures the vicious circle of human existence in general and that of married couples in particular. He also exposes the guilt and disappointment of failed relationships. The human defects exemplified by Ionesco are lack of communication, alienation from society and mediocrity. He pictures married couples as feeling hopeless, they live a depressive state which is caused by failure of family relations. However, in the plays, Ionesco somehow pictures the presence of companionship and family relationships in an optimistic way, for they sometimes lighten the despair of Ionesco’s world.

This contradicts Albee who handles familial relationships and friendship with severe satirical tirades that reveal how people cannot cope with each other “Albee claims that friendship and family conflicts (do not) rest upon a secure moral base” (McCarthy 81). Jerry’s description of his neighbors in *The Zoo Story* reflects that he could not build any relationship in the rooming house. He does not know some of his neighbors, and he has never seen some of them (TZS 22). He refers to one of his neighbors as follows: “Oh, wait! I do know that there's a lady living on the third floor, in the front. I know because she cries all the time. Whenever I go out or come back in, whenever I pass her door I always hear her crying, muffled, but .. very determined ” (TZS25).

He has never tried to visit or console her. He does not know why she cries all the time. There must be some problem in her life; but Jerry does not bother himself to find it out.

Jerry cannot build strong relations with people; he finds it difficult to come out as a homosexual. He tries to be with the opposite sex only for a short time (24). Possibly, he cannot even make love to them. So, he chooses to be friends with the dog of his landlady instead of one of his neighbors or any other person. He calls the animal “my doggy friend” (29). He tells Peter that he could not manage to communicate even with the dog. Conventionally, a dog is man’s best friend; but in a world of broken relationships, even that becomes impossible.

Peter, who appears to have an ordinary life compared to Jerry’s life, probably does not have a sexual relationship with his wife anymore. When Jerry tries to explore this situation, Peter gets angry:

Jerry: And you're not going to have any more kids, are you?

Peter:..No. no more... Why did you say that? How would you know about that?

Jerry: ... Is it your wife?

Peter (Furious): That’s none of your business!... Well, you're right. We’ll have no more children.

Jerry (Softly): That is the way the cookie crumbles.

Peter (Forgiving):Yes, I guess so (TZS 18).

- Sunday is the day when the families generally gather and do some activities together. Peter could have chosen to be with his family or to come to the park with his children; yet he chooses to be alone. He is estranged from his wife and from his children.

The relationships among the characters in *The American Dream* are shattered, too. The parent-child relationship between Grandma and Mommy reflects how they disregard each other’s well-being. For instance, Grandma reminds Daddy that she warned him before marrying Mommy and told him “stay away from her type” (TAD 107). She does not think of the effect of what she says, or that she

deliberately tries to shatter her own daughter's marriage. Mommy does not care for Grandma's well-being, either. She always threatens her with the nursing home (120). She wants to break off with Grandma and abandon her to face loneliness.

The husband-wife relationship is also disrupted. Mommy and Daddy experience a breakdown in their sexual relationship. Daddy is possibly a sterile man as he has had an operation. He says that he is sick and adds that he does not want to sleep with her any more (TAD108). Mommy is pleased that she does not have an argumentative husband (123). Arguing with someone can be a way of communicating; but Mommy and Daddy have no such communication. Daddy does whatever Mommy orders him to do. When Mommy wants him to break Grandma's television, he says: "If I must ... I must" (123) and does so. His passivity under the domination of his wife shows that he does not care whether his relationship with Grandma will be broken or not. Mommy reveals the war between her and her husband by emasculating him. As Micheal Rutenberg says:

She is the boss in the American household,  
to the detriment of her weak-willed  
husband and consequently confused  
children (42).

The empty games, emasculation and bitter arguments are a substitute for genuine contact and highlight the urgent need for love between family members. In *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Albee introduces two married couples, where the younger couple is onlookers to a vicious spectacle of a domestic battle which the older couple presents to them.

Martha and George engage in a wild battle of sexes. John Gassner calls the play the "most harrowing sex duel on the stage since Strindberg's *The Dance of Death*" (77). Martha is anti-feminine in her relationship with her husband George. She is a "rogue" and described by her husband as a "monster yowling" (WAVW19), and also as insane. She screams and shouts continuously, she out drinks the men and she often describes how she is the backbone of the family not her husband. George on the other hand allows himself to be emasculated.

He huddles in the corner and takes whatever Martha dishes out. He has an illusion that this is their relationship throughout their entire marriage (Albee 67). The only way George restores his masculinity is in the end when he reveals Martha's inability to fulfill her important role as a woman. Martha declares that she also feels unhappy in her marriage.

This reveals the disruption of family roles, where the mother is the one in charge and the husband is unable to make decisions, while the man in this era should be seen as the breadwinner and successful, he should constantly be striving for perfection in all aspects of life. Not as Luciana Gabbard points out that these characters “.. are images of family discord, focusing on the ‘bad’ mother and an initially passive father ” (23).

Peter similarly in *The Zoo Story* is also weak and passive for he “embodies Albee’s lacerating satire of the emasculated and complacent conformist” (Hammouda 31). Though Peter’s wife is not included, her absence is made up for, by the power she exercises over her husband’s life, as Paolucci says that “the shadow of the Domineering Woman is there” (39). Peter tells Jerry that he wanted a son, but his wife would not have anymore children (TZS 161), other than the two daughters. He also did not want cats, but his wife and daughters brought home not only cats but also parakeets. Peter is shown as tolerant with his wife, as he does not dare object and does not have the courage to let the cats get at the parakeets (TZS 162) and get rid of something that is a nuisance to him.

The picture of the domineering wife in Albee’s plays is contrasted with the wife in Ionesco’s *The Chairs*. The Old Woman although feeling “bored” (Ch 114) like Martha in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf ?* who feels marital “discontent ” (WAVW 16), the Old Woman is a comforting presence to the Old Man. She plays the role of his mother; she rocks him on her knees, while he sobs about his orphan hood. She soothes him and tells him “I am your wife I’m the one who is your mamma now” (Ch118). She pulls him back from the window when he leans too far. She praises him for his stories in contrast to Martha in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf ?* and Mommy in *The American Dream* who are always quarreling and bullying their husbands. The Old Woman calls her husband “darling” (Ch 113).

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In *The Chairs*, Ionesco pictures “the female character [which] is the protagonist’s wife, a maternal figure who may be a nurturing, supportive “good mother” (Lane 18). Daisy also in *Rhinoceros* is “the lovely young ingénue, object of the protagonist’s desire” (Lane 18). Berenger is deeply in love with Daisy and tells her “I love you as much as it's possible for a man to love a woman”. She tells him “I feel a bit ashamed of what you call love” (Rh 103).

This view of the relations between the sexes, Sartre analyzes it in *Being and Nothingness*. He says:

To analyze in detail the implications for the love-relationship of such a concept of human interaction ...it develops that there is really no such thing as the sort of romantic love as portrayed in *Romeo and Juliet*. What really prevails is a more or less overt struggle of the egos in which each one of the pair attempts to make the other an object by “seducing” the other to accept him or her as a totally satisfying love-object...But all efforts are doomed to fail, because we cannot ever literally appropriate the freedom of another, and every effort on my part to make the loved one accept me as object (which he cannot actually do) will be automatically frustrated by a counter effort on the part of the others (Sartre 494-495).

This clarifies how the disrupted relationships can occur. Albee similarly says that his plays especially *The American Dream* is intended to offend. Its offense lies in its portrayal of the tyrant of the home. This emphasizes Colin Wilson’s belief that “Nineteenth-century man felt as if he has been thrown out of the Garden of Eden; he was in the world on his own ” ( Wilson 19 ). For if the wife who becomes a mother is full of faults then automatically the whole family is disrupted.

Albee was among the writers who fueled the Americans to see their faults. He explored not only the falsity of the American Dream, but also the American family’s status quo. The American Dream and all it stood for was not found in his plays. They make up the child in order to fill the empty place of Martha’s desire to own a baby. This

desire of owning children is also echoed in Ionesco's *Rhinoceros* when Berenger tells Daisy:

Berenger: Listen, Daisy..We'll have children, and our children will have children ...but together we can regenerate the human race.

Daisy: Regenerate the human race?

Berenger: It happened once before.

Daisy: Ages ago. Adam and Eve .... They had a lot of courage.

Berenger: And we, too can have courage..

Daisy: What's the use?

Daisy: I don't want to have children – it's a bore (Rh 102).

Daisy alternates her devotion to Berenger very quickly, for Daisy seeks a “happy”, guiltless life, which in reality is unattainable and a detachment from humanity. Berenger tells her that “Happiness is such an egotistical thing!” (Rh 99). He believes in regenerating humanity with Daisy just as Adam and Eve did. This can be achieved by bearing children and by developing awareness that life needs commitment not escape. It needs courage in order to face man's fears and predicament. This echoes the Existentialists who believe that man as an individual is responsible for what he does and for who he is. He is also responsible for the way he faces and deals with the world.

Albee also wants to emphasize that from one generation to the next, humanity is caught in a process of deterioration. This deterioration is the outcome of modern life. He asserts that it is a result of disrupted relations and it is not only limited to one generation, but extends to a whole way of life. He is therefore, not only interested in man's individual predicament, but on the contrary, the ills of man in his plays are the ills of a whole civilization.

*The American Dream* introduces us to three generations namely, Grandma, Daddy and Mommy, and finally the ‘Bumble of Joy’ who is to be substituted now by the Young Man. They are easily delineated as the past, the present and the future. As such, the three generations reappear in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* where Martha's father exists alongside with George and Martha on the one hand, and Nick

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and Honey on the other. From one generation to the next, humanity seems to be losing love, compassion and true relationships. The adopted child, who was systematically maimed, is the obvious embodiment of this tendency. One has to bear in mind that the same child will appear later in the insensitive Young Man in *The American Dream* and Nick in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, the man of the future who is solely concerned with the creation of colourless men. To a certain extent then, the individuals' dilemma is that of the whole of humanity:

When Mr. Albee tells us that his Martha and George are wretched beings or when he places alongside them his younger couple, Nick and Honey, in whom the wildness of a preceding generation has been replaced by the wedding of Nick's cold imperviousness with the noxiousness of a Honey, there is little in the writing of our time to refute his implied assumption that, from one generation to the next, humanity is caught in a grievous process of deterioration (Hammouda 37).

Nick and Honey's marriage is based on falsity which will lead to its destruction. Their marriage is not based on true love, loyalty or trust. They are married for other reasons as money or Nick's belief that Honey was pregnant. Yet Honey is panic-stricken with the thought of giving birth to a baby. She echoes Daisy's words in *Rhinoceros* and says:

"I don't want any children I'm Afraid!  
I don't want to be hurt... please"  
(WAVW 176).

Daisy in *Rhinoceros*, doesn't want children in order to avoid being hurt, while Honey in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* does not want children because she believes it is a bore. Both women's view reflects the fear of not being able to take the responsibility for bearing children. Martha like Honey is childless. But the parallel is propped up by contrast. Martha wanted children and hasn't any; Honey doesn't want them and manages to take pills to keep from having them or

rather she doesn't want to go through the pains of childbirth. At the end she confesses pathetically that she fears the physical labor connected with childbirth and reveals a very different kind of impulse. The two stories move toward the same psychological vacuum. The hysterical pregnancy and the fictional son are conceived in different ways, but they are essentially the same kind of birth. Both are the result of impotence, or rather, of a willful assertion which proves abortive. As George lacks leadership potential, he fails to measure up to Martha's ambitions for him as the son-in-law of the college president; Nick fails to measure up to Honey's romantic dream. Both women give birth to an unsubstantial hope. Therefore, the fixation of the couples on children represents distorted relationships in the real world and the life of the characters.

As George married Martha for her money and influence, Nick also married Honey for beneficial reasons of money. Similarly, Mommy in *The American Dream* marries Daddy for his money. She only cared to gain money from him. The marriage thus implied losing its integrity and individuality, the husbands, lost their manhood, the wives, could never fulfill their wishes. Martha's words to George exemplify this disappointment when she tells him "I've tried with you baby .. really I've tried" (WAVW 157). She is also aware of her shortcomings when she says: "I disgust me" (157).

The failure in their marriage is also an outcome of their attempts to find excuses for their failure. George puts the blame on external causes such as Western civilization. He says:

And the West, encumbered by crippling alliances, and  
burdened with a morality  
too rigid to accommodate itself to the swing of events  
must ... eventually... fall  
(WAVW 174).

The fact lies that no matter what excuses Martha and George try to find for themselves, their failure is purely personal. Their marriage proved to be a failure. The dominant quality which disrupts their marriage and relationship is the emotional sterility as well as physical sterility.

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This failure is allegorical to America whose passage was from innocence to guilt and madness. It reflects George's story of the boy who killed his parents accidentally and turned mad. Similarly America had begun as a fresh, unspoiled continent, convinced that it was unique in human history in its opportunity to create a perfect society, but by cutting itself off from its European tradition and history, it had killed its "parents". Only by retreating into madness can one escape history.

The fictitious son, they believe consoles their life, but actually he becomes the embodiment of the couple's failure as this imaginary child focuses their failure of marriage. As Martha breaks their agreement of the child, she breaks the thin thread that holds their relation together. George then realizes the dangers threatening their marital relation. He also becomes aware that the bonds of holding their marriage together are inadequate and weak. He therefore decides to take a positive step to try to regenerate their relationship and free himself then fight back for his manliness. George's "brutal insistence on the death of the child," explains Spencer, "represents his refusal to continue living a delusion, his determination to confront 'Virginia Woolf' instead, and finally, his consciously willed rebirth as a man" (28). It will also be a hope for a rebirth in their disrupted relationship.

When all these threads are pulled together one can see that George's marriage and his career are analogues for the American historical experience. America had begun by feeling that it could escape from history, control its destiny and preserve its innocence, but that hope was met with failure. The American dream-the child which was to be given birth upon the new continent-never really materialized; the paradise on earth was not founded. Instead America was increasingly caught up in the same corruptions and failures as the rest of the world. America was therefore the victim of its own idealism unable to escape the realities of history and also unable to play the game of power politics.

Within the contexts of the play there are two possible ways of dealing with this failure. One is to pretend that it never occurred, to create the child out of the imagination and stubbornly to insist, as does Martha, that "everything is fine". The other is to look backward,

recognizing that something has gone wrong but rather than trying to question the validity of the dream itself, try to place the blame on somebody else. Albee sees these two modes of dealing with the failure of the dream as characteristic of American disrupted behavior.

*Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* uses the roles of the four characters to demonstrate the failings of the 1950's and the family unit. The play gives us the chance to see how the family unit has been broken down through these characters. The stereotypes of the 1950's no longer prove adequate in Albee's writing. Each character fails and upholds different ideals at different times. However in the end all seem to be unsuccessful in portraying themselves as the American society truly desire.

Thus the role of the female and male are equally examined. This is essentially the decade of the family unit. The baby-boomer generation is begun in this decade. Two parents, one son, and one daughter family is seen as the ideal. In *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* both couples are shown as childless. In this time of the importance of the family unit this is a very unusual thing for Albee to do. However, this represents the very importance of the children in a family structure. When writing about American society, he knows nothing is more disruptive than the lack of the family unit. Procreation is the basis of this unit and perhaps the focus of Albee's play on the lack of children is explained.

The relationship between Berenger and Daisy in *Rhinoceros* is also based on distorted love, full of guilt. Daisy alternates her devotion to Berenger so quickly, although she knows he is in love with her. He laments Dudard's transformation to Daisy, but she believes in letting him, and people in general, make their own decisions. She tells him that they have no right to interfere in other's lives.

Daisy has assumed control of their relationship. She says that because she loves Berenger, she has a right to interfere in his life only. They fantasize about their lives together. He claims that he will defend her, but Daisy replies, "Oh you never dare to do anything and you say you could defend me" (Rh 100). They are the last humans left as Daisy says, "Not a soul left anywhere" (100). She tells him that no one intends to harm them, but Berenger replies that sometimes harm is

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done by simply not preventing harm. He blames himself and Daisy for contributing to the epidemic, through lack of sympathy. She tells him:

Daisy: You'll spoil everything if you go on having a bad conscience. Everybody has their faults, but you and I have got less than a lot of people.

Berenger: Do you really think so?

Daisy: We're comparatively better than most. We're good, both of us (98).

Daisy convinces Berenger to shrug off the guilt he feels; as she tells him that as "good" (98) people, they have a right to happy lives despite the circumstances around them.

Daisy: Well then we have the right to live. We even owe ourselves a duty to be happy in spite of everything. Guilt is a dangerous symptom. It shows a lack of purity.

Berenger: You're right, it can lead to that.. a lot of them started like that !

Daisy: We must try and not feel guilty any more.

Berenger: How right you are, my wonderful love ... you're all my happiness... We are together, aren't we? No one can separate us. Our love is the only thing that's real. Nobody has the right to stop us from being happy—in fact, nobody could, could they? (Rh98-99).

Berenger agrees and supposes that guilt is what probably turned people into rhinos in the first place. Daisy believes that they must adapt to their new neighbors, but Berenger proposes to regenerate the human race.

Daisy's relationship with Berenger is not built on solid grounds, of sacrifice or deep love as Berenger says: "I can see our opinions are directly opposed. It's better not to discuss the (Rhino) matter" (105). That is why she gives up hope when she says: "After all, perhaps it's we who need saving. Perhaps we're the abnormal ones" (103). Daisy calls themselves the abnormal ones; she finds the power of the rhinos seductive, and human love a "weakness" (103). When Berenger tells her:

Berenger: ...Think of our love!...our love

Daisy replies:

I feel a bit ashamed of what you call love-this morbid feeling, this male weakness. And female, too. It just doesn't compare with the ardour, and the tremendous energy emanating from all these creatures around us (103).

Daisy soon breaks up with Berenger and leaves, he feels guilty for making her leave as he tells her that he will never surrender. Daisy will surely turn into a rhino, but Berenger as the last figure of humanity, will fight the rhinos. Through their relationship of falling in love, quarreling, and parting, Berenger says:

Oh dear! In the space of a few minutes we've gone through twenty five years of married life (104).

This shows the sequence of failure that leads to disrupted relationships. Guilt and love are the dominant emotions in the end. Daisy and Berenger's ideas of these emotions clash in profound ways. The "happy" guiltless life Daisy seeks, detaches itself from humanity. The love she expresses for Berenger, then, is simply a love for another individual, not for all humanity. He is at first manipulated by her into accepting this guiltless life. He later renews his guilt by choosing to absorb the guilt for Daisy's own departure. The idea of Berenger's concern for someone who has just abandoned him in the worst way shows that he holds unconditional love not only for Daisy, but also for humanity. He says: "Let's save the world" (Rh 103).

At first Berenger did not comprehend Daisy's belief that love allows you to act on behalf of someone else. Ionesco here implies that to love one human, is not enough for a life of significance; one must love and be willing to take responsibility for all humanity, and this allows Berenger to interfere on behalf of the world and try to save humanity. This unconditional love is the solution Ionesco poses for distorted relationships. In order to commit one's life to something outside oneself, as the Existentialists were concerned with, one must love all humanity. Berenger eventually, transforms from a disturbed individual into one who wants to regenerate humanity.

Daisy, on the other hand is in constant avoidance of responsibility and her lack of concern for her fellow man reveals her desires for Berenger as selfish, despite the good intentions she often has for him. She frankly expresses her selfishness when she tells Berenger “why bother to save it (the world)?” (Rh 102).

The transformations of the characters reflect different reasons that echo the rationales of various groups. Some of the characters show how the human individual can lose his humanity with loss of morals, conformity and individuality. Relationships are therefore shattered.

Jean makes clear in justifying his decision to join the rhinoceroses is that the “rhinoceros' mentality glorifies nature and dismisses outdated moral standards: Nature has its own laws. Morality's against Nature” (Lane 112). Like the Nazis, these are brutal beasts that glory in their strength and trample the weak.

Botard also is a left-wing activist who sees conspiracies everywhere. Dudard points out that Botard's passionate attitudes are “entirely dictated by hatred of his superiors” (Rh 83). Despite his early opposition to the rhinoceros, he converts in order to “move with the times” (89). Dudard, on the other hand, represents the type of intellectual for whom “to understand is to justify” (83). “My dear Berenger, one must always make an effort to understand. In order to understand a phenomenon and its effects, you need to work back to the initial causes, by honest intellectual effort” (83). Dudard is a tolerant relativist who tells Berenger:

That as mere humans we are not competent to judge what is normal or abnormal (Rh84). Other characters (Daisy and M. Papillon, for example) are ordinary otherwise decent citizens who go along with the rhinoceroses because everyone else is doing it or because they are afraid. Mme Boeuf also leaps onto the back of her rhinoceros husband (Lane113).

Dudard's desire to belong to the “universal family”(Rh 93) of rhinos is more important to him than to have a family or have a domestic life. As he says:

Dudard: ... I feel its my duty to stick by my employers and my friends, through thick and thin.

Berenger: No you're wrong, your duty is to .. oppose them with a firm clear mind.

Dudard: .... I won't abandon them.

Berenger: You're too good-hearted, you're human. [To Daisy:] Don't let him go. He's making a mistake. He's human (93).

Dudard's wanting for a 'universal family' calls attention to the scarcity of family in *Rhinoceros*. None of the major characters seems to have any relatives at all. Dudard also falls a prey to conformity, yet his justification of their friends' transformations remains Humanist until the end when he says: "I'm most sure if morally you have the right to butt in... They're free to do as they like" (84).

Mrs Boeuf is a clear example of Ionesco's women characters who is devoted to her husband. When she announces that her husband has transformed and recognizes one of the rhinoceroses as her husband she says:

Mrs Boeuf: It's my husband. Oh Boeuf, my poor Boeuf, what's happened to you?

Mrs Boeuf: I recognize him!... (Rh50).

Everyone tries to give her practical advice for dealing with the strange metamorphosis, but in the end she is too devoted to her husband to leave him and jumps down to the ground floor where she rides off on his back.

Mrs Boeuf: [coming to] My poor darling, I can't leave him like that, my poor darling. ...[Tenderly] He's calling me.

Mrs Boeuf: [rising suddenly] I can't desert him, I can't desert him now! (52).

As Jean says that "Boeuf never let his wife know what he was up to..." Berenger answers and says: "You're wrong there Jean – it was a very united family" (66).

Though Ionesco does not write his female characters with a lot of empathy, yet Mrs Boeuf is significant. It is she who is the first character ready to transform. She bears the news that a horrifying epidemic has started. Instead of the situation being animals running

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loose through the town, Mrs. Boeuf is the first to make the connection between her missing husband and the rhinoceros. Despite this significance in her character, Mrs. Boeuf is still shown as a weak character because she ultimately submits to her husband; in other words, though she is the first character to make this intellectual connection, she does not use this power. This reflects the view of women. While both female characters join the herd for more emotional than logical reasons, Mrs. Boeuf's main justification is that she feels compelled to support her husband's decision:

Mrs.Boeuf: No! Poor thing! I won't abandon my husband in such a state! (Rh 52).

“As the animal becomes the norm and the human the aberration, the scale of values is reversed” (Lane119). Here the Human domain (the “normal”) is displaced by rhinoceroses (the “abnormal”).As a result the normal moral values are replaced with distorted ones. This reflects the displacement of the human realm by rhinos, the replacement of human conversation with roaring and “disquieting sounds” (Rh 101). By the end, Daisy believes the animals to be “beautiful ... They're like gods” (104).

Ionesco sometimes embraces the humanistic defense of the individual and the defense of individual freedom. Albee also maintains these ideas in *The American Dream*, through Grandma. She is the mainstream American symbol of the humanist tradition that stretches back to the early, idealistic years of the American republic. Grandma is the mouth piece for Albee. Ronald Hayman says that:

There are hints that Albee intends her to be .... an incarnation of the American nineteenth-century liberal values which were still alive earlier in the twentieth [century ] ( 35-36 ).

It is as if Albee wants to say that if man cherishes these values, his relationships would become truthful, idealistic and undistorted. Albee and Ionesco show their views on humanism and traditional values.

Grandma's inner qualities in *The American Dream* link her with the best that has been thought about America. First of all, in the

dehumanized, alienated society of Mommy and Daddy's apartment in which she lives, she alone bears the standard of benevolent humanism for which America has stood. Although, she has learned to insult, to give as well as take from Mommy, she alone has a sense of human dignity, of the worth of the individual upon which American democracy is based. In one of her first speeches Grandma states her philosophy of life:

Well that's all that counts. People being sorry, makes you feel better, gives you a sense of dignity, and that's all that's important ... a sense of dignity. And it doesn't matter if you don't care or not either. You go to have a sense of dignity, even if you don't care cause if you don't have that, civilization's doomed (TAD 64).

To Grandma's keynote statement, Mommy responds accusatorially: "You've been reading my book club selections again!" (65).

Of course! While mommy has been glued to the television, Grandma has probably been reading Heritage Book Club selections by Plato, Moses, Shakespeare, Jefferson and other source of America's enduring values. Grandma's eloquent view of history helps make her the only genuinely human, empathetic character in the play (Paolucci 35).

Grandma also fits within the archetype of "The American Adam" sketched R.W.B Lewis in his seminal book by the same name on American intellectual history. He says:

The American Adam is, of course, the archetype of a new kind of human being, freed from the corrupt institutions of the Old World and facing an unspoiled garden utopia, armed with power derived from youthful vigor and spiritual innocence (150).

Her explicit identification with the American Adam is depicted by Albee in two ways. First, when Grandma examines the Young Man for the first time, she exclaims: "Yup ... yup. You know, if I were about a hundred and fifty years younger I could go for you" (TAD

106). Here literary criticism must become mathematical : The play was written in 1960, which means that Grandma literally has in mind the year 1810, when the United States ( with it's new constitution ) was 21 years old-newly come of age, full of idealism and on the verge of it's incredible expansion. At that time in history, the Young Man would have made a perfect mate for Grandma.

The function and meaning of Grandma in the American Dream is expressed through the juxtaposition of her with her main foil who is the Young man. Soon after she sees him she exclaims: “Yup. Boy, you know what you are, don’t you? You're the American Dream, that’s what you are. All those other people, they don’t know what they're talking about. You .... you are the American Dream ” ( TAD 108 ). This stresses the point that it takes one (American Dream, old style) to know one (American Dream, new style).

Although Grandma empathizes deeply with the Young Man in his painful “fall from grace” and “departure of innocence” (TAD 114) by exclaiming “Oh, my child; my child,” (115), yet, she knows that his arrival requires her own immediate departure. After all, the apartment is too small to hold all four people. Shallow Mommy has definitely rejected Grandma (and her humanistic American Dream) and chosen the Young Man (and his materialistic American Dream). This realization fills Grandma with anger. In her reply to Mommy's query, “Who rang the doorbell?” Grandma responds, “The American Dream! ...Damn it” (TAD 108). Her “Damn it” means Grandma’s great recognition that she has been displaced. In effect, she also means, “Damn it! This is the American Dream that has come to displace me”. Grandma the “real values” is displaced with the Young Man “the artificial values” (Lewis 151).

Ionesco on the other hand, believes that he can't fall back on humanism, for in *Rhinoceros*, the humanists, along with the Church have capitulated. This stance of human nature being inferior causes broken relationships. It can be metamorphosed by a worldview that is beyond morality, humanism and individual personality and rights. Through the play, it is clear that Ionesco finds such a metamorphosis to be absurd and he uses Berenger as a persistent foil to this philosophy. This is seen through the dialogue between Jean, and

Berenger. Berenger talks about mankind which has taken centuries of human civilization to build up sets of values that are irreplaceable, but Jean believes that when these values are demolished, man would be better off. He says:

Jean: Don't talk to me about mankind!  
Berenger: I mean the human individual, humanism. Sentimentalist.  
Jean: Just clichés! You're talking rubbish!  
Berenger: ...You wouldn't like to be a rhinoceros yourself, now would you?  
Jean: ...I'm all for change. I said what's wrong with being a rhinoceros (Rh 68).

In suggesting that morality is a trick, Jean's views are a throwback to Thrasymachus' position in Plato's *Republic*: justice is whatever is in the interest of the stronger party. The only things that are real to Jean are energy and power, and these are beyond good and evil in the sense of traditional bourgeois, democratic-liberal morality. To be a rhinoceros, according to Jean, is to be lifted into a new dimension, a new way of being in the world.

That is the reason why Ionesco makes Berenger aware of this when he says: "I'm the last man left, and I'm staying that way until the end" (Rh107). Ionesco thus rests his case with Berenger's final declaration that he will cling to his own way of life in the face of overwhelming odds which cause disrupted relationships, absurd idealizations of fundamental realities of personal life.

Ionesco in *The Chairs* portrays some distorted family relations "it is a memory play, the memory of a life and a marriage" (Bloom 87), but the couple's relationship contrary to Albee's couples is quite loving. What bothers them most is their human condition of a repetitive existence that grind the couple into deathly routines, cyclical action that get them closer to death as they seek ways to create some excitement in their lives. Just as George and Martha in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* also play games to create some excitement in their lives. But on the contrary to Ionesco, Albee's couple does it with abuse, hatred and humiliation in their relationship. Yet, Ionesco's old couple though being bored with their repetitive existence, the Old Woman is a comforting presence to the Old Man. He, on the other

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hand tells his wife the same story every night for their seventy five married years so that she can forget the repetitive nature of their existence due to their living in complete isolation in a building surrounded by water.

Although, the old couple leans on each other for support, the Old Woman does not forget to remind him that he could have been more in life had he tried harder and had he learned to get along better with people. His words to his wife show how the disrupted relationships have affected his life and his family's life too. He says:

Old Man: I've brought bad luck to my friends, to all those who have helped me..

Old Man: They've always had good reasons for hating me, bad reasons for loving me ...

Old Woman: That's not true, my darling, I love you, I'm your little mother ...

Old Man: All my enemies have been rewarded and my friends have betrayed me ...

Old Man: They've treated me badly... I was never able to revenge myself... I have too much pity. I refused to strike the enemy to the ground, I have always been too good (Ch150-151).

The Old Man here shows his frustrations and tells his wife how circumstances beyond his control turned him into the failure he is. The Old Woman is both a wife and mother to her husband. She calms him down, rocks him in her lap, fondles him, sings him songs and blows his nose when he gets weepy. The Old Woman contrasts Martha in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* who is vicious and enumerates her husband's deficiencies and failures.

The Old Woman again is his solace when he wonders about his mother and whines that he is motherless and an orphan. His wife tells him that his mother is in heaven and comforts him when he cries. She also whispers to him that she is now his mamma. Ionesco here suggests that a person never forgets the loss of parents that he loved and that time does not heal this pain of loss. Ionesco here makes the wife play the mother role, but then the Old Woman turns into a respectful wife. She encourages her husband to tell her stories. She then turns into a child who needs pacifying when she hears the story over and over with enjoyment.

The Old Man also sometimes acts as infantile, belying his ninety-five years. He is confused whether he is a child or an old man. He recounts a story to show this confusion. He tells the story to the Emperor:

Old Man: Your Majesty.. I was forty years old ... before going to bed, I seated myself on my father's knees...my mustaches were longer than his...

Old Man:.. I told them, I love my papa very much. Someone replied: It is midnight; a child shouldn't stay up so late.

Old Man: Nevertheless, I thought to myself, I'm not married. Hence, I'm still a child ... (Ch153).

Ionesco here shows the Old Man's confusion over beginnings and endings. The devastating dependency of the couple is portrayed and Ionesco:

Does not spare any of the grim details that render marriage an association of two helpless, self-indulgent, egocentric individuals, who try to find in each other their own image and the comfort they lost in growing out of childhood. However, his protagonists are in the state of second childhood; they have come full circle (Bloom99).

The Old Man and his wife therefore both try to access a past that is now beyond their reach. "The couple in *The Chairs* is trapped in a repetitive prison with their best days either behind them or completely forgotten" (Lane 54).

The Old Man pities his anguished state and his frustrated involvement with society. He tries to justify his life with explanations. Just as he is at the brink of breakdown, he reaches a brink of fulfillment when the Orator, who will deliver his message, arrives. His aim in life is to convey this message, that he believes will end his life of suffering and give a meaning to his life because he will save humanity as he says:

Had I had the opportunity to communicate my message; I do not despair of saving it, there is still time (152).

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This reflects the existential view that believed man's condition in the universe as absurd unless man commits oneself responsibly to a greater good. Through delivering the message, the Old Man would like to mend disrupted relations and frustrations that are evident in the couple's relationship.

The disrupted relations between parent and child are also portrayed in *The Chairs*. The Old Man has been a neglectful parent and son by abandoning his dying mother and failing his son, who called his parents responsible for his departure. The Old Woman tells the Photo-engraver that she and her husband have had only one son, the Old Man, however, tells Belle that they have never had a son at all. "The fact that the old couple contradict each other on both of these matters does not mean that one is lying and the other is telling the truth; rather the language thematizes the ambivalence and guilt that lie at the heart of their relationship" (Lane 61), which is reflected in their son's final words: "It's you who are responsible" (Ch 135).

The story of their son's departure proves that they are irresponsible and have led an irresponsible life; they were even unable to take care of their only son. The parting of the son has a double meaning; the parents are responsible for his departure and it's also an ironic comment since they are not, in fact, responsible. The Old Man denies they even had a son, but he does own up to his cruel abandonment of his dying mother left her to die alone in the ditch. Though his wife refutes this, he says that his mother called after him and said:

My little child, my beloved son, don't leave me to die all  
alone...Stay with me.  
I don't have much time left. Don't worry, Mamma, I told  
her, I'll be back in a moment... I was in a hurry ... I was  
going to the ball, to dance. But when I returned, she was  
already dead...sons, always, abandon their mothers, and they  
more or less kill their fathers ... Life is like that ... but I, I  
suffer from it ... and the others, they don't... (Ch 135).

This neglect has been for him a source of guilt. Ionesco here, similar to Albee, reflects the importance of abandonment of child to

parent or parent to child and how it influences family life and disrupts it. Love and care automatically turn to guilt and sometimes regret.

With the arrival of the Emperor and the Orator they reach their greatest triumph. They then decide to commit suicide together. Nancy Lane comments on this dual suicide and explains:

The couple's final farewell emphasizes the spatial component of their relationship; the Old Man regrets that they are separated from each other at this supreme moment by the pitiless crowd. Separated in space, they look to the dimension of time for consolation: "Let us be united in time and in eternity, even if we are not together in space, as we were in adversity let us die at the same moment" (Ch158). (Lane 57 – 58).

This feeling of failure and loss is a main cause for the great rupture in relationships. Guilt as Ionesco puts it, blocks open expression of many desires and causes loss of chances and therefore loss of relations.

In Albee's *The Zoo Story*, Jerry also has learned a lesson about loss. Loss of loved ones, loss of relations, and loss of friendship he was trying desperately to impart his wisdom to Peter. Yet he most certainly learns a lesson of how a disrupted relationship is avoided no matter who this relationship is with. Jerry makes this lesson clear when he says:

I have learned that neither kindness nor cruelty by themselves, independent of each other, creates any effect beyond that the two combined, together, at the same time, are the teaching emotion. And what is gained is loss ... We neither hate nor love because we do not try to reach each other (TZS 43-44).

This sense of Jerry's up rootedness and lack of family ties is shared with The Young Man in *The American Dream*. Although they bought him, yet they felt no familial ties with him. Albee explains, having experienced this in his own childhood. "You go out and you buy a kid and you expect it to become a mirror image of yourself. And if the goods are damaged you are not too happy with them" (Bigsby 6). Mommy and Daddy are afflicted with the illusion that they can apply

a merchandise policy even to living creatures and get a refund any time the purchased human being does not meet their expectations.

In a confessional monologue, the Young Man tells Grandma of a twin “torn apart” from him, so that it seemed his heart was “wrenched from his body,” draining him of feeling. As his twin brother was mutilated physically, the American Dream is mutilated emotionally (Cohn 148). He is simply a pretty face with no substance. Inside his handsome shell there is nothing but a void ( Debusscher 37 ). He actually fits perfectly into his new family, since he claims that he would “do almost anything for money” (TAD 109).

The protagonists are true specimens of contemporary society in which parents can decide if a child is satisfactory or unsatisfactory. The myth of the American Dream was ridiculed by Albee. He strips bare the impossibility of interaction between parents and children and also the interaction between parents themselves. This depicts family quarrels with conflicts between generations.

Albee’s characters do have families, but the relationships between family members are hopelessly emptied. Everyone ends up being alone, since nobody can be sure about feelings towards his or her dearest people. The basic premise of human closeness is not reliable. What should be one’s most fundamental certainty is in reality the most insecure thing. The American Dream is only a generally accepted illusion. When Albee points out the emptiness of the family myth, he reveals the illusory nature of the compactness of a family unit. Where solidarity does not exist, human beings need to find some irrational consolation, for example a religious faith.

In the selected plays, Albee criticizes the emptied relationships within the American family also due to the old being mistreated. The domestic hostilities devoid of any true feeling provide a rich source for his satire. Among the ills of family that he attacks is the cruel treatment of those who are called “senior citizens”. Albee is concerned with the problem of the rejection of the aged as in *The American Dream* in which he exposes the indifference and mercilessness of the closest relatives. Having no perspective in front of them, the old people decide a voluntary death in order to escape a life that is not worth living.

Although Grandma is “much more likable than Mommy or Daddy, (she is) a victim of their callousness and armed with an alertness and an irony which combine to make her seem a lot less fatuous” (Hayman 24). Grandma utters apt observations about growing old and about the attitude of other people. She says:

Most people think that when you get so old, you either freeze to death, or you burn up. But you don't. When you get so old, all that happens is that people talk to you that way ... sense of dignity – that's all that's important. [...] When you get so old, you can't talk to people because people snap at you. When you get so old, people talk to you that way. That's why you become deaf, so you won't be able to hear people talking to you that way...That's why old people die, eventually (TAD 65).

This reflects clearly the ill treatment and distortion in family relations.

Finally under a microscope of distorted relationships within the character's societal position, one believes that Dudard's words in *Rhinoceros* sums up the case “Everybody's in the same boat!” (Rh 91). It also sums up Stenz's conclusion on the reasons for disrupted family relations and marriages when he says:

Men and Women are accomplices in the creation of their unhappiness and dissatisfaction when they fail to fill up the places emptied by necessity and time with understanding and acceptance, as well as with an openness for new experiences and continuous unselfish concern for people around them in different stages of their life (132).

This also sums up Albee's concern with the emptied relationships within a family. How married couples are alienated from each other in their casual lives and sex lives. Parents and children are indifferent towards each other, too. Albee through his plays intended to show the decay “in the honored institutions of the family and the halls of learning” (Gould 282).

Although in Ionesco's plays “the authorial presence and the point of view” of his works are always male, yet they are “involved in

ambivalent relationships with women ... Throughout Ionesco's work, women are closely linked to life and death" (Lane 18). His characters are humanized incarnations of his personal anxieties and obsessions. Some characters lack the initiation into the adult world that needs responsibility as The Old Man in *The Chairs*. Peter also in *The Zoo Story* lacks maturity and development. Both characters are indecisive, the Old Man in delivering his message and Peter when he says: "I'm normally... reticent" (TZS 19) He is therefore the unthinking spokesman for the unexamined attitudes of his social class. These are some of the reasons why relationships fail. The passive acceptance of a child rather than the independence of thought which should characterize an adult who has feelings and responsibility. Peter's paternal inadequacy is expressed when he says "... naturally, every man wants a son" (16). This shows Peter's unquestioning the myths of his society rather than his ability to "produce" sons. This sums up his passivity to two forces which have become parental forces to him. First his wife as a maternal symbol who has a strong influence on him and second is the male defined and controlled social structure which Peter remains obedient to and therefore remains in a "cage" (179).

The role of women is very important in the plays, as they are either a source of anguish to the male character or a source of relief. Either way, the woman is the other half that makes a family complete. She is quite responsible for a broken relationship or a happy one. Critics in Ionesco's theatre are divided as to whether the women "are the source of man's fall from grace" or the "only authentic form of salvation" (Lane 19). Their relationship to the male is usually conflictual.

Women tend to be strongly associated with guilt through filial neglect as in *The Chairs*. In *Rhinoceros*, the woman is a source of the protagonist's desire. In contrast to Albee, Ionesco feels pity for women and pictures them as persons who lighten man's despair and anguish. Ionesco himself says:

I have pitied all women rightly or wrongly  
I have taken my father's guilt upon myself. Being myself  
afraid of making women suffer.... But each time that I have

made a woman suffer ... I have suffered from her suffering (Lane 19).

This was Ionesco's feelings of guilt towards women because of his father's brutality towards his mother.

Albee's focus is on the tension between women and men, the war between the sexes. "Emasculation is the rule of the game.. It is one of Albee's major thematic concerns" (Hammouda 54). In *The Zoo Story* and *The American Dream*, bad and good father and mother figures which constitute the family unit, are portrayed. As Jerry's mother is benign, absent and died of alcoholism, Grandma is literally a woman who embodies truths and values. Yet, Jerry's land lady has unsatisfied lust and guardianship of the building. The reflection of both figures is summed up as follows:

[The] Father figure or the construct of male figures blends a collection of authority, servitude, sexuality, impotence, unconcern – all fluctuating to match the changing emotions of the aggressive – regressive female constructs. The pattern of ambivalence is appropriate to the alternating independence and regression of the child caught in the throes of anxiety over separation and loss. It is also the well-spring of the family discord that recurs in Albee's play (Gabbard 25).

Moreover, "the heart of his technique is an archetypal family unit, in which the defeats, hopes, dilemmas and values of our society (as Albee sees it) are tangibly compressed" (Baxandall 19).

Albee as well as Ionesco dramatizes the broken human relationships in the social groups such as neighbors, family and friends. Their characters do not have any kind of genuine interaction in any one of these groups. They do not care for each other's agonies; they do not bother themselves with the problems of other people. Even the closest relatives suffer from this state.

Albee's couples are isolated in their own worlds, living in separate lives. They are unable to reach out to each other. They suffer from the breakdown in their relationships. The family members have their own separate shells and they prefer remaining in those shells except for George and Martha who try to knock off the hard shell from

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around them, and try to re-establish a relationship. Mommy and Daddy in *The American Dream* have a disrupted marital relationship and therefore through the delineation of the Young Man, Albee stresses the failure of youth which is caused through the failure of parents as Rutenberg says: “he is the living result of the kind of up bringing their baby (his twin brother) would have received had it survived” (74) and stresses not only the sterility of family ties, but also the sterility of the myth called the American Dream. As a result of this:

Albee has illuminated the artificiality of our civilization ...  
Albee (also) carries the effect of mechanization one step  
further resulting in sterilization of the emotions (Gould 281).

Broken relationships therefore, are a direct cause of sterile human contact, devastating family ties and failure to engender virtue in children. The fostering of moral confusion caused by post war America and the substitution of false for real values in the American family had caused the damaging of family relationships. Thus, civilization (Mommy sponsored) enables the weak to rule the strong by artificial means, whereas by right none but the tough (Grandma) deserve to survive.

Albee and Ionesco are disturbed and agonized by the extent of the dislocation of people’s relationships and imprisoning isolation. The views of Ionesco and Albee are so close to each other. Like Ionesco, Albee:

Sees the absurd localized most sharply in convention of social behaviour. For both dramatists, the normal currency of social intercourse – of hospitality, or courtesy, or desultory chat – has lost its meaning ... and this is an index for them of the vacuity of the social life represented (Way 66).

Ionesco reflects the family with anguish as a conforming man under stress. He also unveils aspects of western society like spiritual death of the Old Man and the image of depressed women like the Old Woman in *The Chairs*. Albee's American family also undergoes anxiety and terrible barrenness as it staggers into decay. It symbolizes

contemporary power in America and how affluence is estranging it from its own ideals.

Both dramatists believe that these family failings are the effect of the American and Western culture on their society and therefore on the family and individuals. They reveal through their plays certain ideas and morals in their culture which have weakened the power of conscience in the society and thus in the power of family. These morals are inadequate parenting, individual irresponsibility, minimal commitment, plain selfishness, putting one's own needs above family duties. Thus the social forces influence, determine and dominate social system such as family. As the American family has gone through various changes that affected it so did the western family which also passed through massive transformations.

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