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EDWARD ALBEE'S RECEPTION IN GEORGIA

Abstract

The aim of the article is to explore the reception of Edward Albee's drama in the country of Georgia. On the one hand, the proposed work is mainly an attempt to analyze critical reviews related to Albee's work, whilst, on the other hand, the paper introduces an overview of a number of staged versions of Albee's *The Zoo Story* performed in Georgian theatres in an analytical approach and their critical reception. It has to be noted that Edward Albee in Georgia is mostly perceived as a representative of the Absurd Theatre. According to Hungarian critic, Martin Esslin, being the first to use the term "The Theatre of Absurd", Albee "americanized" the global concept of life's absurdity accentuated in existentialist philosophy and then echoed in the Theatre of Absurd through ironizing the American Dream and criticizing steady social-economic structures and normalized gender identities within the society. Albee managed to adopt essential and eternal human problems of alienation, loneliness and despair to an American reality. It is clear that the analytical perspectives and approaches declared in the articles written in Georgian significantly influence critical highlights and evaluation as well as aspectual focuses and interpretations demonstrated in the performed versions of the *Zoo Story* on the Georgian stage.

Key Words

The American Dream, Absurd, Americanization

Introduction

The research paper intends to examine the reception of Edward Albee's (American dramatist) drama in Georgia. Through the analysis of critical and analytical papers studying Albee's work and looking into stage interpretations of the *Zoo Story*, the review article aims at dealing with Albee's drama in a global context- the analysis developed in the article associates Albee's plays with the issues accentuated in the Drama of Absurd in general (alienation, loneliness, loss of life's essence and belief in transcendental truth, dominance of illogicality and absurdity of existence, etc.). At the

same time, the paper introduces Albee's work as an individual venture of conceptualizing the concept of absurd for the specific US context of the "American Dream", i.e. focusing on the failure of the optimism associated with material well-being and materialized values of American society deprived of beliefs and ideals.

Methodology

In terms of research methodology the following article is a systematic review article. It summarizes and analyzes content from the research articles published earlier on Edward Albee's drama in the Georgian language as well as the theatre productions of *The Zoo Story* on Georgian stage. The review itself is based on a comparative analysis looking at the similarities and differences developed both in the article findings and stage interpretations. Therefore, the work reviews the articles examining Edward Albee's particular plays as well as the works looking at the association of Albee with the Theatre of Absurd, as well as the interrelations between The Theatre of the Absurd in the USA and the Theatre of the Absurd in Europe.

Another research method applied in the given work is a structured interview. The predetermined and designed set of questions were sent to a number of Georgian directors who staged Albee's play *The Zoo Story* at different Georgian theatres. The use of this qualitative research technique enabled me to compare Edward Albee's reception in individual directors' interpretations. At the same time, it helped me analyze how these interpretations are linked with the typical Georgian context as well as the global panorama of analyzing Albee's drama.

1. Articles

1.1. Review of the Articles

The articles on Albee's work written in Georgian tend to demonstrate the approach considering Edwards Albee as inseparable part of the Absurd Drama, therefore, on the whole, the articles accentuate that the dominant contextual discourse in Albee's plays is human conflict with the outer world conditioning the impossibility of finding the self, thus highlighting unavailability of disharmony and absolute alienation. Accordingly, the articles mostly focus on the topics being

essentially problematized in Absurdist philosophy and the Absurd Drama- loneliness, alienation, despair, disappointment, deprivation of self-confidence, loss of values, etc. It is clear that, the authors of the articles develop reasoning that Albee's work is understood as representation of existentialist issues outlined in the Absurd Drama, thus being influenced by the European Absurd dramatists like Beckett, Ionesco, etc. As a result, they mostly develop generalized analysis with a view focusing on life's absurdity conditioning loneliness, despair and alienation. However, the articles do not show an attempt to examine Albee's plays through an insight into the context what made the American dramatist a complete individual in his style and expression. Albee himself denied being associated with the classic Absurd Drama of Beckett, etc. As a dramatist he is said to manipulate Chekhovian elements and methods of Antonin Artaud's theatre of cruelty in his plays, but, from my point of view, he stands out as a fully independent playwright with his distinctively strong voice in his representation of inner human world being in conflict with cultural, social, historical pressures, guidelines and discourses not in a sense and way of Beckettian failure, but vice versa. Albee brings about the social, psychological, cultural, sexual, gender-related contexts and conflicts in which a human-being has to tackle with spiritual, psychological, physical and mental dilemmas. Albee's protagonists escape from reality through self-deception as there is no chance of change, but still they are woken up by an intrusion of a certain turning point in their lives- e.g. it is an unexpected visit of somebody (i.e. Jerry meets Peter sitting on his own in a central park of New York), etc. Albee as well displays the dying of the social-economic values through the irony on the American Dream, thus highlighting that economic and financial growth does not deliver happiness in a world where values undergo critical breakdown. At the same time, it is to be noted that the articles do not throw a focus on the issues such as marriage, family life, gender roles, being significant constituent of Albee's drama in terms of contextual framework. Through these topics Albee achieves a comprehensive exposure of human breakdown in many terms- psychological, spiritual, sexual, cultural, political, etc. Nevertheless, the articles written in Georgian show a critical attempt to approach Albee's drama as a part of the Theatre of Absurd from which the American dramatist absorbs the context of human isolation, alienation and human failure and transforms and adapts these issues to a specifically different American reality.

This part of my essay attempts to provide a stage by stage analysis of the four articles written on Albee in Georgian. I will try to analyze basic approaches and critical views they tend to develop.

1.2. Analysis of Albee's Creative Aesthetics

Manana Antadze, a well-known and internationally recognized Georgian literary scholar and translator, was the first one laying the groundworks for the future contemplations in Albee's creative activity. In her article "Existential Intuition" published in the volume "Modern Western Drama" the author analyzes Albee's creative aesthetics. The work emphasizes that Albee's artistic method "joins empirical level with a metaphorical one that contradicts the first." The author as well notes that "American dramatist combines two incompatible poles of illusion and reality. Open end of Albee's plays suggest multiple alternatives making plays more real and close to human context." The author notes that the spontaneous energy that moves Albee's work is "existential intuition" being found in Zen-Buddism as "each of his play culminates in ritual magic."¹ I reckon that this very first article on Albee in the Georgian language suggests an interesting linkage between a reality-illusion combination and an open end characterized for most of Albee's plays. This technique leaves a free space for the audience to analyze, reconsider and draw conclusions based on individual experiences and interpretations. The following article as well outlines the interrelation between existential human dilemmas echoed in the Absurd Drama and protagonists' loss of perception of reality and illusion in Albee's plays. This contextual and formal technique is used by Albee to represent protagonists' attempt to escape from reality. This, in a way, is a certain form of alienation from the self and the world. In my opinion, the article by Manana Antadze is a significant contribution to the analysis of Albee's one of the most essential theatrical traits- confusion and mixture of reality and illusion which as well throws light on Albee's views on life as relationships-relationship to others and to one's own self as well.

1.3. Analysis of The Zoo Story

Another article with a focus on the essential conflict of the Absurd Drama was written by a 2nd year student of the theatre studies (Shota Rustaveli Theatre and Cinema State University of Georgia) **Nikola Kpaliani** under the title "Unprecedented Story". The paper was published in the newspaper Duruji (2013, 4). Here as well the author analyses Albee's "The Zoo Story" through the

¹ Edward Albee: Existentialist Intuition (collected essays "Modern Western Drama", 1989, ISBN 5-511—00317-4, Tbilisi University Press, 1989

retrospect of the Absurd Drama. The article states that the play shares the basic principles of the Theatre of Absurd. The author highlights that Jerry is the person with the role of decoding the essential conflict of the Absurd Drama- the conflict between the self and the universe, whilst Peter serves as his assistant to accomplish this role: “Jerry is the main player, that is why, his role is more important – it is him, through whom the conflict reaches its climax. As for Peter, he can be considered the player’s assistant and, however, Jerry helps him overcome life’s absurdity, though Peter himself plunges into more absurd.”² I am to say that this article definitely offers the reading of the text of the Zoo Story as an existential allegory - one (Peter) has to seek for the essence of life in this absurd world full of misunderstandings, illogicalities and dilemmas. According to this viewpoint, it can be concluded that the author considers Albee’s *The Zoo Story* to be constructed with the principles of the Absurd Drama. Jerry himself manages to give life a certain meaning through choosing death. Though his death seems to be accidental, this is a way of highlighting the significance of choice and meaning in Peter’s life which he himself is deprived of. This makes the play absolutely different from the contexts of the Absurd Drama in Europe as protagonists in Samuel Beckett’s plays, for instance, are deprived of any opportunity of getting a chance of change or finding a certain meaning in life- they live in a world of illogicality either in the condition of waiting (*Waiting for Godot*) or postponing the unavoidable end (*Krapp’s Last Tape*, *Endgame*, etc.). Regarding the characters depicted in Albee’s plays, they constantly experience a kind of encounter (e.g. Peter & Jerry) or epiphany serving to wake them up from their passive condition to face a new reality and realize challenges and crisis in their own lives.

One more significant insight of the author is drawn into Jerry’s monologue- the author of the article states that Jerry’s monologue highlights the necessity of mutual understanding, overcoming isolation and the failure of the attempt to achieve harmony in human relationships.³ This is another contextual similarity the *Zoo Story* shares with the Theatre of Absurd- it demonstrates failure of communication- an unresolved challenge for the alienated humans portrayed in the Absurd Drama.

Besides the two articles mentioned above I have to speak about my two papers- the first one endeavors to convey depiction of the concept of alienation in XX century American Drama and the

² Nikola Kopaliani, “Unprecedented Story”, Shota Rustaveli Theatre and Cinema State University Newspaper “Duruji”, April 26, 2013, p. 1

³ Nikola Kopaliani, “Unprecedented Story”, Shota Rustaveli Theatre and Cinema State University Newspaper “Duruji”, April 26, 2013, p. 3

second one is mainly a venture to outline basic differences and interrelations between the Theatre of The Absurd in Europe and the Theatre of the Absurd in the USA.

1.4. Analysis of Albee's Plays in the Context of the Absurd Drama in Europe and Absurd Drama in the USA (Universalities, Interrelations, Differences)

My first article on American Drama was published in the conference book of V International Conference on American Studies organized in October 2010 by Akaki Tsereteli American Studies Center together with John Dos Passos Association of Georgia. The paper "Alienation in XX Century American Drama" underlines the prerequisites of formation of the Absurd Drama in Europe. It states that the Absurd Drama in Europe was conditioned by that despair humankind had to face after I and II World wars, thus considering alienation to be a central contextual unit of the European Absurd Drama.⁴ In the article I single out three American plays (Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, Christopher Durang's *Sister Mary Explains It All for You*) to be the most powerful representation of alienation and human incapability of communicating thoughts and feelings. The most significant and noteworthy remark regarding Albee's most popular play *Who's is Afraid of Virginia Woolf* is that Martha and George, a couple represented in the play, are both seen as "alienated from the microcosm of the university where they work, as well as from the entire world." I note that the couple's imaginary son "demonstrates the fear of oneself" which can be perceived as ultimate alienation from the self and the universe.⁵ As the article focuses on understanding alienation as one of the most acute issues in the Absurd Drama, it analyses George and Martha's relationship as a representation of alienation in a global sense. Alienation is revealed through miscommunication between the husband and wife as well as their intellectual and psychological attachment to illusion exposed in their imaginary child being part of their marriage life. At the same time, the play contains a number of fake things: Honey's fake pregnancy, the fake boxing match, the fake nursery rhymes, the fake shotgun. The article suggests an interpretation that this inseparability of illusion and reality is conditioned by alienation from reality which is unbearable and illogical for the

⁴ Inga Zhghenti, "Problem of Alienation in XX Century American Drama", Conference Proceedings of the V International Scientific Conference on American Studies, ISSN 1512-09-53, October, 2010

⁵ Inga Zhghenti, "Problem of Alienation in XX Century American Drama", Conference Proceedings of the V International Scientific Conference on American Studies, ISSN 1512-09-53, October, 2010, p. 152,153

protagonists. This approach once again indicates that Albee's dramatic works in Georgian articles are analyzed in a context of the Absurd Drama and its fundamental postulates among which alienation, being one of the most predominant troubles of humankind, tends to be prioritized in analysis.

My another article “The Major Differences and Interrelations between the Theatre of the Absurd in Europe and the Theatre of the Absurd in the USA” was published in a conference book of 12th International Conference on American Studies. (The conference was held on December 2, 2019 at International Black Sea University (Tbilisi, Georgia). The paper seeks an explanation of what universalities the Absurd Drama in Europe and the Absurd Drama in the USA have in common and what characteristics distinguish the one from the other. At the same time, the paper “looks at the manner absurd has been incorporated into a particular/specific American vision on the example of Edward Albee's three plays *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, *The Zoo Story* and *The American Dream*. The first part of the work “Backgrounds and Interpretation of Absurd in the European and American Absurd Drama” highlights that the notion of absurd in the American Absurd drama has different meaning from the way it is incorporated in the European Absurd Drama. I accentuate that the absurd in European Absurd Drama is related to the loss of meaning and acknowledging ultimate illogicality of existence. The realization of this tragic condition drives a man towards a total alienation, i.e. he is cut of his transcendental roots of belief, devoid of any purpose in life. This is what the concept of absurd means in the Absurd Drama in Europe. Regarding the Absurd Drama in the USA, I highlight that as loss of meaning and sense in life was mostly determined by post-war despair in Europe, there was no preconditioning loss of meaning in the USA. In the paper we as well read that according to Bigsby “modern American literature is a catalogue of attempts to understand and conceptualize absurd in an American way.” Bigsby defines that to American writers interpretation of absurd is dissimilar to what it means to European authors: “Absurd can only be acknowledged if it is susceptible of transcendence, it sets a context within which American optimism is a kind of “recurring irony”. (<https://journals.ku.edu/amerstud/article/download/2185/2144>).”⁶ Besides Bigsby's viewpoint, I also mention Peter Brook who determines the basic difference between the Absurd Theatre and the Traditional (Conventional) Theatre: “In naturalist plays dialogues are composed in a way that

⁶ Inga Zhghenti, “The Major Differences and Interrelations between the Theatre of the Absurd in Europe and the Theatre of the Absurd in the USA”, Conference Book of 12th International Scientific Conference on American Studies, 2019

naturalism of speech is preserved and the message fully conveyed. And the playwright of Absurd Drama creates an absolutely new dictionary through illogicality of language and strange behavior of characters.⁷ At the same time, the article clearly defines the distinctions between the theoretical and contextual frames of the Theatre of the Absurd in the USA and the theatre of the Absurd in Europe, supporting the suggested opinions of stating a number of prominent literary critics' viewpoints. Hungarian critic Martin Esslin explains that in American drama the feeling of absurdity is connected with the failure of the belief in the so-called American Dream. As Edward Albee's work "attacks the very foundations of American optimism", Martin Esslin assigns him to the category of the Theatre of the Absurd. In the paper I as well mentions that, according to Esslin, Albee clearly takes up the style and subject matter of the Theatre of the Absurd and translates it into a genuine American idiom. One more noteworthy information given in the work is C.E.Bigsby's distinction drawn between the vision of Samuel Beckett or Eugeni Ionesco and Edward Albee- Bigby reckons that Albee's "The American Dream" is an expressionistic satire revealing the inadequacies of contemporary American Society.⁸ Bigsby's evaluation of Albee's theatrical aesthetics indicates that the representation of absurd in Albee's drama is woven into the dramatist's intention of interrelating cultural, political, social agenda into the characters' lifestyles, relationships and attitudes. Accordingly, it can be concluded that in Albee's work the central issues of the Absurd Drama (whether it is absurd, alienation, etc.) are correlated with socio-political accents (the American Dream, the US history, etc.)- e.g. even George and Martha's suggested surname "may well be Washington" indicates a sociopolitical and historical concern (George is a member the college's history department) and destruction of past values. Their childlessness signifies the failure and the end of the cultural reality they belong to.

Another important chapter of the article is "Conceptualization and Americanization of Absurd in Edward Albee's Drama." In this part I analyze the so called "americanization" of absurd related to deconstruction of the material values associated with the American Dream. I state that in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* Albee reveals "the failure and inappropriateness of the American Dream

⁷ Zhghenti Inga, "The Major Differences and Interrelations between the Theatre of the Absurd in Europe and the Theatre of the Absurd in the USA", Conference Book of 12th International Scientific Conference on American Studies, 2019

⁸ Zhghenti Inga, "The Major Differences and Interrelations between the Theatre of the Absurd in Europe and the Theatre of the Absurd in the USA", Conference Book of 12th International Scientific Conference on American Studies, 2019

through the unhappy marriage of George and Martha. It is noted that the American dramatist exposes the destruction of values and principles associated with the American Dream. Albee discloses that “within the scheme of the American Dream marriage is approached as a kind of economic deal rather than a relationship based on true love, respect and mutual understanding.”⁹ This analysis suggests that *Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf* refers to dysfunctional marriage through which basic problems within the society and dilemmas of values are exposed.

The work as well looks at understanding the concept of alienation- I reckon that by Martha and George’s imaginary son, being an important constituent of the plot and contents of the play, the dramatist depicts extreme form of alienation and emptiness in which characters are deprived of any sense of reality. They neither accept nor have the capacity to change their lives, therefore, both George and Martha choose to live in illusion, thus finding a kind of shelter in it. Finally, as George considers Martha to be lost between truth and illusion, he kills their imaginary son through the fact of revealing their secret to the guests- he states that their son has died in a car accident. With the very decision Albee “demonstrates tragic and dramatic forms of alienation exposed in the characters’ attempts to escape from reality”.¹⁰ This very point of the play again echoes issues of alienation and absurdity of existence being fundamental in the Absurd Drama in general.

In the very article I also note that *Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf* also shares certain technical traits with the European Absurd, e.g. with Samuel Beckett’s drama: “In Beckett’s works there is a tendency to demonstrate a decay of characters’ health and physical conditions in the succeeding acts (e.g. in the second act of *Waiting for Godot* Pozzo is blind and Lucky is deaf; Nagg and Nell’s health also becomes worse in the second act of *Endgame* in which Nell dies). Similarly, in *Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf* the three parts of the play represent the gradual depreciating of principles, values and ideals. In the first part characters discuss their interests and convictions with

⁹ Zhghenti Inga, “The Major Differences and Interrelations between the Theatre of the Absurd in Europe and the Theatre of the Absurd in the USA”, Conference Book of 12th International Scientific Conference on American Studies, 2019

¹⁰ Zhghenti Inga, “The Major Differences and Interrelations between the Theatre of the Absurd in Europe and the Theatre of the Absurd in the USA”, Conference Book of 12th International Scientific Conference on American Studies, 2019

enthusiasm, whilst in the second and third ones they start drinking too much, consequently, divulging their secrets and thus depicting demoralization of human values.”¹¹

The work as well looks at Albee’s first play *The Zoo Story* which shares the feelings of emptiness, alienation and lack of communication from existentialist philosophy and the Theatre of the Absurd. Through the encounter of Jerry and Peter in Central Park, New York, the author reveals human inability to achieve mutual understanding and communication. The play shows that modern humans tend to be locked in cages like animals in the zoo and isolated in their own existence.”¹² This critical examination once more approaches Albee’s work as “an American contribution” to the Theatre of the Absurd.

Regarding the conclusion drawn in the article, I explain the difference in understanding absurdity and alienation in the Absurd Drama in Europe and the Absurd Drama in the USA- it is assumed that in the European Absurdist drama alienation and despair are linked to the loss of life’s essence, whilst, Albee, through masterfully exhibiting that minds of the Americans being restless and too much obsessed with the desires of the American Dream, demonstrates absurdity and alienation in the very context of failure and futility of materialistic ambitions associated with the American Dream. ¹³ One more basic assumption made in the article regards the different prerequisites of formation of the Absurd Drama in Europe and the Absurd Drama in the USA, which definitely affected and influenced issues conveyed in them: “as there was no corresponding loss of meaning and essence of life in the USA and due to the concepts of the American Dream being still strong and followed, American idea of absurd attacks the very foundations of the American Dream. Even within the materialistic society being too much obsessed with career, prosperity, economic success and wealth, humans in the modern world in any case, are doomed to suffering, loneliness, miscommunication and alienation. With these features American Absurd

¹¹ Zhghenti Inga, ““The Major Differences and Interrelations between the Theatre of the Absurd in Europe and the Theatre of the Absurd in the USA”, Conference Book of 12th International Scientific Conference on American Studies, 2019

¹² Zhghenti Inga, ““The Major Differences and Interrelations between the Theatre of the Absurd in Europe and the Theatre of the Absurd in the USA”, Conference Book of 12th International Scientific Conference on American Studies, 2019

¹³ Zhghenti Inga, ““The Major Differences and Interrelations between the Theatre of the Absurd in Europe and the Theatre of the Absurd in the USA”, Conference Book of 12th International Scientific Conference on American Studies, 2019

echoes conceptual highlights of the general understanding of absurd and absurdity of existence from the European absurd.”¹⁴

As a conclusion, it can be said that the articles written by Georgian literary critics on Albee’s drama represent the American dramatist’s techniques and ideas as being incorporated from the absurdist plays of the European dramatists such as Beckett, Ionesco, Genet, etc. but, at the same time, the works outline Albee’s plays as explicitly American with its independent and distinctive representation of human problems woven into their social statuses, relationships, behaviors and socially normalized discourses. In my opinion, one of the most essential feature distinguishing Albee from European absurdist playwrights is that his drama is not as pessimistic as Beckett’s drama, for example: in most of his plays, through exposing dysfunctionality of families, society, destruction of values, alienation and indifference, Albee calls for action for social equality, harmony and change.

2. Theatre Interpretations of Albee’s Plays

2.1. The Zoo Story Productions

The Zoo Story was Albee’s first produced play being proclaimed by Christopher Bigsby as “the most impressive debut by any American dramatist.”¹⁵ Like many other leading dramatists, Albee’s The Zoo Story premiered outside the USA in a workshop production in German at the Schiller Theatre in West Germany in 1959 as a part of double bill with Samuel Beckett’s Krapp’s Last Tape. Six months later The Zoo Story, again paired with Beckett’s play, came to the off-Broadway Provincetown Playhouse. The play was repeatedly revived in different double bills at various New York Theatres in the next years.

The appearance of Albee’s the Zoo Story on the Georgian stage should be attributed to the Georgian directors’ attention and interest in the Absurd Drama in general. Like in all the other theatres, Albee’s drama in Georgia was premiered by the launch of the Zoo Story. As in the articles, the stage interpretations also represent Albee’s play as a work exposing and unfolding

¹⁴ Zhghenti Inga, ““The Major Differences and Interrelations between the Theatre of the Absurd in Europe and the Theatre of the Absurd in the USA”, Conference Book of 12th International Scientific Conference on American Studies, 2019

¹⁵ The Cambridge Companion to Edward Albee, edited by Steven Bottoms, Cambridge University Press, 2005

those human challenges being centrally acute in the Absurd Drama, i.e. the conflict between the self and the universe. In spite of the fact that the Georgian directors mostly tend to interpret the Zoo Story as an absurdist play (highlighting absurdity of life, alienation and miscommunication), at the same time, they incorporate a variety of elements such as of traditional drama, naturalist theatre, psychological drama, etc. in order to highlight the central acute issues in Albee's world among which alienation, loneliness, pressures conditioned by socially accepted discourses, conflict between an individual's self and society are predominant.

Before I analyze the theatre interpretations, staging techniques and reviews of the plays, I will give a chronology of Albee's *The Zoo Story* theatre performances in Georgia: It was Levan Svanadze, a director of Chiatura Drama Theatre who staged the *Zoo Story* in 1986. The theatre took the play on tour to Riga, capital of Latvia. In 2003 director Gega Kurtsikidze's version of the same play, which as well was his graduate work, was awarded a grand prix in an international festival "Debut". One more version of this play appeared in 2015 by Beka Kavtaradze in Vaso Abashidze Music and Drama Theatre. In 2018 director Mamuka Tkemaladze also staged the play at the Tumanishvili Theatre. One of the most distinguished interpretation of the play was directed by Saba Aslamazishvili on February 21, 2021 in Meskheti Theatre.

All the theatre interpretations of the *Zoo Story* are similar to the articles discussed above in a way that they accentuate existentialist dilemmas depicted in the Absurd Drama. The performances through their staging techniques, minimalist décor and accents highlight the impossibility of understanding and harmony in relationships, thus the conflict between Peter and Jerry is mostly perceived as demonstration of absurdist alienation and disharmony. Consequently, in this part of my essay I will explore the essential traits of the *Zoo Story* performances in Georgia in terms of characteristics they have in common as well as contextual traits revealing the differences in the messages directors intend to input in their interpretations.

2.2. Director Mamuka Tkemaladze's Interpretation

Mamuka Tkemaladze follows the pattern being adopted in many of *The Zoo Story* versions – his interpretation creates a polar version of a character lost in ambiguity of existence caused by dominant social guidelines he follows. In his version Peter is a prisoner of his own life – he has all the things declared as "normal and acceptable" by society such as family (he is a family man), he is

employed, etc. i.e. he, unlike Jerry, follows a conventionally normative lifestyle. The director uses Peter's encounter with Jerry to reveal Peter's fake harmony - Jerry mocks Peter's bourgeois lifestyle and materialistic ambitions from which Peter himself wants to escape, at least subconsciously - that is why, Peter leaves his house to go to the park which gives Jerry's accusations a certain credence. Mamuka Tkemaladze represents Jerry and Peter as two opposite selves of one and the same person (Samuel Beckett's characters as well are often considered as split parts of one and the same person-e. g Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*). Thus, in Mamuka Tkemaladze's version of the *Zoo Story* Peter meets Jerry – his second true self- a rebel, an outcast from the society, through whom he realizes the tragic absurdity of his own life following the rules dictated by the society. This scheme of interpretation is one of the angles of the Absurd Drama- depiction of a world empty of real meaning in which a human deprived of any logic and sense has to find a logical connection between his own self and his individual role in the universe.

Regarding the décor of the play, it is minimalistic as in most Absurd Drama plays, but one significant addition is a bridge above the stage and audience, towards which Jerry advances but then turns back. According to the director, he wanted to dramatize Jerry's loneliness and alienation from the society (audience considered as society). This is one more accentuated concern in the Absurd Drama- alienation from the own self and from the society in which one is unable to establish his own self-identity. Mamuka Tkemaladze's comment on his version of the *Zoo Story* as well proves that he tried to problematize issues which are essential constituents of the Absurd Drama: "Edward Albee's creative activity focuses on a man existing beyond time and space for whom the only true value is comprehending life's essence. I endeavored to tell a story about Peter who is trying to find his lost self, function and freedom in his monotonous, organized and set-out life. The audience shall notice the problem of alienation of a person from the society, how a person strives to find a kindred spirit which ends up in psychological disorder being fatal in most cases." (**Mamuka Tkemaladze. Interviewed by Inga Zhghenti**). The director's explanation clearly states that the pivotal concern the play aims at illustrating is a person's alienation and struggles for self – determination which are essential dilemmas in the Absurd Drama in general.

2.3. Director Gega Kurtsikidze's Interpretation

Gega Kurtikidze staged Albee's *The Zoo Story* as his graduate work in 2003. This version also incorporates basic characteristics of the Absurd Drama both in terms of décor and contextual elements. Kurtikidze's interpretation of the play puts forward the conflict between an individual, a person and the society one has to live with. The décor is minimalistic (as in most Absurd Drama performances) with two chairs in the middle of the stage and a path continuing into the back wall of the stage creating an impression of being lost and disappeared somewhere in infinity. The director states that "the main point he took into consideration while working on the play was stylistics and aesthetics of the Absurd Drama through which portrayal of the essential conflict between the self and the world, the society, representation of human indifference and total alienation between a human and society becomes more dramatic and tangible." (**Gega Kurtikidze. Interviewed by Inga Zhghenti.**) Considering the contextual accents outlined in the play together with the director's evaluation, I have to state that this interpretation of the *Zoo Story* undoubtedly is a true representation of the Absurd Drama with its specifically dramatic focus on alienation showing unfeasibility of harmony and adequate communication in an absurdist world.

2.4. Director Saba Aslamazishvili's Interpretation

I would like to draw reader's attention to one more interpretation of Albee's *The Zoo Story* on the Georgian Stage. A young director **Saba Aslamazishvili** launched a very captivating version of Albee's work in Meskheta Theatre on February 21, 2020, immediately receiving a critical acclaim from theatre scholars and critics. According to the theatre reviewer Maka Vasadze, "Saba Aslamazishvili's *The Zoo Story* is an Absurd Drama performance with psychological elements in which we see employment of various theatrical movements and directions such as expressionist, naturalist, epic, realistic, documental, interactive together with the techniques of the Absurd Drama under a well-known Shakespearean perception of the world as a stage."¹⁶ Therefore, in this version of the play Jerry and Peter introduce themselves to the audience by themselves as the participants of Albee's play- they themselves explain that they are actors in a play which is named the *Zoo Story*. Together with transporting Shakespearean model of presenting the world as a stage on the theatre stage, the director applies a very interesting technique of interaction with the audience – during the

¹⁶ Vasadze Maka, Modern Georgian interpretation of Albee's first play "The Zoo Story" <https://www.facebook.com/MusicAndDramaTheatre/posts/815749018516742/>

play Peter and Jerry approach the audience a number of times, shake hands with them and talk to people. This principle was as well approved to be used in drama by Edward Albee himself. The issue the director focuses through his theatrical form of expression is violence. The play suggests exploration of how physical, mental, social, cultural or political backgrounds and environments can drive a man's violent psychology to become a murderer. The director gives a clear explanation of his motivation regarding what he wanted to achieve and bring to the audience with his interpretation: "I was looking for a chamber play with the main accent on human psychology and attitude towards the universe and other humans. I wanted to find a play in which characters were driven to act on the basis of their inner complexes and fears. In Edward Albee's drama inner human world is shown in an excessively detailed manner exposing an opportunity to look into life and its essence through a very human way. The essential topic is violence – how physical or mental violence can affect a man's psychology and turn him into a murderer. Regarding the feedback received, consideration of moving a play to different roles was the most significant. A man playing Jerry was named the best actor of the year for this role by Georgian Theatre Committee." (**Saba Aslamazishvili, interviewed by Inga Zhghenti.**) As it is evident, both critical reviews as well as director's intention related to the main messages to be delivered by the play are connected with the concept of the Absurd Drama, but I reckon that outlining the problem of violence makes Saba Aslamazishvili's performance more "Albeean" in a sense that Albee as a dramatist uses the theatre platform to accentuate concerns of the society such as violence, dysfunctional family troubles, gender related topics, etc. Therefore, I think that this very version of the Zoo Story can serve as a transformer of Albee's drama from the rails of the Absurd Drama to a more distinctive Albeean pattern of dramaturgy on the Georgian stage. This means adapting contextual and formal characteristics of the Absurd Drama to create a new reality of stage in which the so called "Americanization" of the Absurd Drama attributed to Albee conveys the irony on the "American Dream" and harsh criticism of those social, cultural, political systems through which essential human problems of the Absurd Drama, i.e. alienation, absurdity, loneliness, despair, failure are depicted not in a Beckettian pessimistic style, but with a strong appeal for change and motivation to change.

Results & Discussion

The research is of significant value both for theatre and literary scholars, as well as for international research of Albee's drama as looking at the reception of Albee's work in an area (Georgia) not studied previously.

The article unites the analysis of Albee's drama both in articles and theatre interpretations of Albee's most popular play *The Zoo Story*. It should be noted that the articles written in Georgian mostly explore Albee's work through the retrospect of the Absurd Drama, i.e. they mostly introduce an attempt to analyze the issues acute in the Absurd Drama such as alienation, despair, disappointment, destruction of values, human incapability and loss of the belief in transcendental truth. The articles as well explore the concept of absurd in typical American culture in which Albee's specific "American vision" of absurd and existential crisis was formed. At the same time, they examine universalities both the Absurd Drama in Europe and the Absurd Drama in the USA share, as well as their differences and interrelations. Regarding the theatre interpretations of *The Zoo Story*, though Georgian directors have staged individual versions of the play based on their own vision and used different decors, they all interpret the work within a global context of absurd for a human in existential crisis, thus trying to accentuate and depict the themes of alienation, loneliness, gap between an individual and society, violence and loss of communication.

Conclusions

The presented work is mainly an attempt to provide a picture depicting Edward Albee's reception in Georgia through analytical emphasis and interpretations suggested both in the articles and theatre performances of Albee's *The Zoo Story*. The review article analyzes the previous scholarly works published on Albee in which the reception of Edward Albee's drama is mostly associated with the Theatre of the Absurd. Therefore, the articles and stage performances discussed mostly explore themes of absurdism, meaninglessness of life, disappointment, human failure and total destruction of values- the themes typically accentuated in the Absurd Drama.

It can be clearly seen that a literary respect to Albee's drama is part of those global human challenges and dilemmas accentuated in the Drama of Absurd, i.e. impossibility and irrationality of finding essence in existence, alienation, self-isolation, total dehumanization and deconstruction of values in the modern world. These thematic highlights in the Absurd Drama were conditioned by tragic and catastrophic results of World War II. One of the noteworthy findings of the article is that not only literary and theatre scholars, but also contemporary directors are strongly affected and touched by the issues accentuated in Albee's drama. However, the reception of Albee's drama in Georgia (in theoretical research as well as theatre interpretations) mostly focuses on Albee's plays through the retrospect of the Absurd Drama. This focus is exposed through the analysis of the thematic highlights in Albee's works being typically relevant for the Absurd Drama. The thematic accents such as alienation, boredom, loss of life's essence, disbelief in transcendental, deconstruction of basic human values, meaninglessness, absurdism and ultimate despair are addressed and examined both in the scholarly publications and theatre interpretations of the Zoo Story. Consequently, the issues and problems analyzed in the articles as well as attempted to visualize, interpret and demonstrate on stage versions of the Zoo Story link Albee's work with the basic and universal traits of the Absurd Drama in general. At the same time, it has to be noted that one of my articles "The Differences and Interrelations between the Theatre of the Absurd in Europe and the Theatre of the Absurd in the USA", as well analyzed in the research, is an effort to deal with Albee's Drama as different from the Absurd Drama in Europe. The work summarizes criticism related to the specific American context, not relevant for Europe, according to which Albee's Drama is perceived as "Americanization" of the concept of absurd and an irony on the idea of the "American Dream". This article outlines that the formation of the Absurd Drama in Europe was conditioned by the tragedy of World War II, whilst the context of the war was not that much relevant to the USA. Accordingly, the work develops a new and appropriate analysis of Albee's work within the context of the American Dream. Furthermore, the article also attempts to demonstrate Albee's individualism revealed through weaving the acute issues of the Absurd Drama in a specific existentialist and particularly "American" context through which definite social, political, economic and cultural aspects become predominant in modern American Drama.

Finally, it has to be stated that consideration of accents and emphasis placed both in the articles and performances of the Zoo Story indicate that Albee's plays are manifold, vividly earthy, realistic and acute in Georgian cultural context, thus creating unfailing possibility to be interpreted in various perspectives in future research.

Acknowledgements

I would like to highlight my special gratitude to Dr. Lasha Kharatishvili who supported me with great willingness to get in touch with the theatre directors who had staged Albee's the Zoo Story. I would also love to take the opportunity to thank brilliant Georgian translator Manana Antadze for sharing her research on Albee and all the directors (Mamuka Tkemaladze, Saba Asamazisvili and Gega Kurtsikidze) who took their time and provided detailed answers for the interview questions predetermined for my research paper.

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