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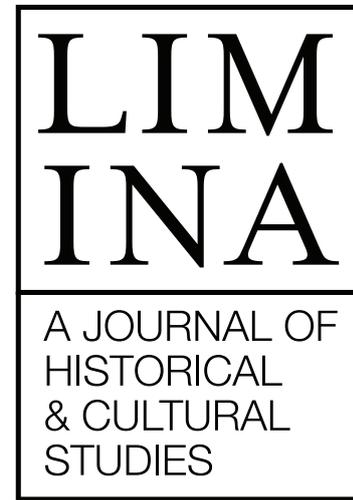
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### **Cover Image**

*In Dreames*. Digital image by Brook Guidry

Crespy, David A. and Konkle, Lincoln (eds.), *Edward Albee as Theatrical and Dramatic Innovator, New Perspectives in Edward Albee Studies 3*, Leiden & Boston, Brill, 2019; hardback, pp x, 254; R.R.P. €97.00; ISBN: 9789004394704.

In presenting this collection of essays, the editors David Crespy and Lincoln Konkle state:

Early in Albee's career, [the] breaks from reality [in Albee's plays] were explained as part of the Theatre of the Absurd movement ... [But] his plays do not merely transfer the absurdist playwrights' subject and style into American settings. Albee brings the real and the unreal into close proximity, making them even more disturbing than some absurdist plays' frank artificiality. (3)

The relationship between Edward Albee and Absurdism was the focus of the first volume in the New Perspectives in Edward Albee Studies series, with its aim to open new fields of inquiry in Albee studies. In this third volume, there appears to be a consensus among the contributors that the works of Edward Albee resist simple categorisation as absurdist theatre. Albee's myriad innovations in drama and stagecraft take centre stage instead as the contributors draw on notable biographies of the playwright, the playwright's own published reflections on his work, other scholarly works, and interviews in this collection that features nine well-researched essays and a previously unpublished interview.

In their introduction, the editors underscore how the variation in Albee's style might result in his plays being thought of as not 'of a piece' (1). Yet, what is striking about this collection is the common threads and thematic concerns that are woven through each chapter. Key plays are studied in different lights by each contributor, engaging the reader in making complex connections in Albee's body of work. Indeed, as Albee himself said in a 2007 interview with Carol Rocamora for *The Guardian*, 'I suspect that every play I write is part of one large play'. Albee's 'essence as a dramatist' (7) is effectively conveyed by the end of the collection. *Edward Albee as Theatrical and Dramatic Innovator* is enriched by the contributors' gamut of expertise in American theatre education, research and praxis, including insights from American cultural and theatre scholars based in Seville, Western Australia, and Paris.

David Crespy deftly shows how Albee's theatrical design was influenced by his vast knowledge of classical music, his appreciation and accumulation of art works, and the relationships that he built with other artists. I found this chapter particularly moving as Crespy affords the reader clear glimpses of Albee as a deeply involved, perhaps controlling, designer and playwright, and a generous patron of the arts through the voices of the playwright's contemporaries. The previously unpublished transcription of an interview included as the final entry in this collection, in which the reader hears the cadences and thoughts of the playwright himself, fittingly pairs with this first essay.

A common theme explored by the other contributors to this collection is Albee's interest in re-presenting the secular. For example, the staging of the dying process, not death itself, is analysed in Milbre Burch's study of three plays. Burch usefully coins the term 'theatrical thanatology' (45) to refer to this dramatisation and the innovative ample space Albee makes for the dying protagonist's consciousness—and their grief—work to be heard and seen by the audience, even as it is silenced or ignored on stage. In this essay, the reader is offered insight into the influence of Elizabeth Kübler-Ross' five stages of grief on the playwright. Parisa Shams similarly examines how Albee

confronts his audience in 'Goat'. Informed by Judith Butler's ethics of vulnerability and violence and Emmanuel Levinas' theory of the face, Shams' deeply theoretical analysis moves beyond the extant critical focus on the staging of the bestiality taboo to closely examine Albee's tragic problematisation of the bonds of kinship.

These bonds that are destabilised and denaturalised in Albee's plays are a theme returned to again in Ashley Raven's and David Marcia's essays. Both Raven and Marcia show how Albee's use of vaudevillian comedy in 'Counting the Ways' and 'Marriage Play' respectively produce what could be described as a Brechtian *verfremdungseffekt* that engendered the participation of Albee's audiences. This effect is perhaps explicated most clearly by Valentine Vasak in her essay on the disturbing stage designs of 'Box' and 'Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-Tung', which are distinct departures from the (de)familiar scenes of Albee's other plays.

Although it is placed in the middle of the collection, Nathan Hedman's essay is useful for understanding Albee's calling on his audiences to witness scenes they might not otherwise have cause to reflect upon, using techniques dealt with by the other contributors in this collection. Hedman begins with a helpful scaffold of the three relevant features of Charles Taylor's 'immanent frame' that he applies to Albee's drama: 'disenchantment, disembeddedness, and bufferedness' (105). He argues that rather than setting his characters up for Aristotelian *anagnorisis*, Albee launches them into what Hedman dubs 'Albee's secular epiphanies' (104). There are several detailed sections in Hedman's essay, which sometimes might appear to detract from his central premise. But overall, Hedman elucidates the innovativeness of Albee's deployment of religion to stage transcendence in the modern—secular, isolating—context shared by the witnessing audience.

Crucially, Ramón Espejo Romero and Julia Listengarten finally remind the reader of the expansiveness of what may be understood as the modern and the secular as they explore the transformative influence of Albee's innovations in the different contexts of fascist Spain and the Soviet Union respectively. Romero's and Listengarten's essays are fascinating and important, both making evident that further research into the effect that Albee's innovative work has had and continues to have on other realities is needed. I think Albee would approve.

Charmaine Herfkens-Fernandez

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