

Death Game and the Survival of Self in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

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Abstract

Throughout decades Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Has been considered for its vivid depiction of two modern individuals' game which dissolves not even others but themselves. Drawing on the theoretical framework of Laing, this game can be viewed and analyzed as the two individuals' battle for survival. The existential world depicted by Laing is a lonesome inner world of an individual who's self is divided in the face of a threatening outside world. The torturing anxieties through which he sees and defines the world skin him, bit by bit, with every breath he takes and the opposing forces from within enlarges the vacuum which is his deathbed. These conflicting needs are the driving forces which define George and Martha's relationship. They both are victims of tormenting and existentially threatening situations which have taught them to preserve their true selves within by disarming and attacking the other. That which seems to be yearn for power is essentially their struggle to protect themselves, or in other words, their true selves. Having a precariously differentiated sense of identity, both fear any contact with the real world while being aware of their inevitable need for this realness to survive. In this Article, first the existential theories of R. D. Laing will be thoroughly explained and the second effort will be to shed new light on Albee's two characters, Martha and George, while digging into the deepest recesses of their being; the most invisible depths which fuel all their seemingly perspicuous actions.

Keywords: Edward Albee; R. D. Laing; Divided Selves; Anxiety; Existential being.

1. Introduction

In *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* one can witness marriage in the years after the two world wars. Albee believes that "drama is a mirror held up' to show how people behave and do not behave" (Luere: 51). This play as "a pre-eminent classic of marital feud" (Klopsch: 4) is intertwined with violence, and this violence, which is evoked by the deterioration of meaning and communication between the characters, shows that the play "takes a 'terrifying look' at modern life and its 'savage humor' spares no icon of the American middle class" (Kelly: 372). The accusation of the American Dream has also been considered as a prevalent point in this play "stating that the American Dream is based on a falsity of values" (Rudzki-Weise: 2).

However, in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* The presence of the concept of phantasy is undeniable. It shows individuals who, in their last breaths, clutch every image of life to feel alive. The violence and "the characters' inability to communicate except through abrasiveness", which have been considered by some critics as the elements which give the play its absurdist spirit (Adams: 7), may point to some psychological patterns which trigger the existential issues for the characters, as McElfresh (1974: 18) considers it a mistake "to read the play and the characters entirely as a metaphor for perishing American culture". The violence, which may appear as the "somasochistic drive" in the characters (Kroll: 314), speaks for the power struggle which functions as the underlying motivation for the characters to move the play forward.

2. R. D. Laing

Laing (1960: 17) in his book, *The Divided Self*, views schizoid individuals in the context of an existential perspective. He defines them as having a split in their experience in two ways: "in the

first place, there is a rent in his relation with his world and, in the second, there is a disruption of his relation with himself". This individual is the wandering figure who cannot see himself belong to the world and, consequently, resorts to his "aloneness and isolation" (Laing 1960: 17). According to Laing (1960: 41), man has two different forms of experience regarding his existence in the world. The person who has a real and continuous sense of his self and identity and who is ready to face the troubles of life is an 'ontologically secure' individual whose identity and autonomy is never questioned. However, this security may not be attained, as Laing explains:

The individual in the ordinary circumstances of living may feel more unreal than real; in a literal sense, more dead than alive; precariously differentiated from the rest of the world, so that his identity and autonomy are always in question. He may lack the experience of his own temporal continuity. He may not possess an over-riding sense of personal consistency or cohesiveness. (1960: 42)

This person is the 'ontologically insecure' individual whose entire attempts and struggles is to preserve his identity and keep himself safe from 'losing his self' (Laing 1960: 43). This individual has an exclusive world of his own which cannot be shared with other people. The outer world becomes a threat to his identity and is, for him, the cause of his three forms of anxiety. This first anxiety is, as Laing calls it, the fear of 'engulfment' which:

[...] is felt as a risk in being understood (thus grasped, comprehended), in being loved, or even simply in being seen. To be hated may be feared for other reasons, but to be hated as such is often less disturbing than to be destroyed, as it is felt, through being engulfed by love. (1960: 44)

The ontologically insecure individual finds the only way for the preservation of his identity in isolation. Ontologically secure individuals have the capacity for feeling related to each other while perceiving themselves as separate beings. This sense of relatedness is the lacking capacity in an ontologically insecure individual. He is oscillating from 'complete loss of being by absorption into the other person (engulfment), and complete aloneness (isolation)' (Laing 1960: 44). The second anxiety experienced by this individual is the fear of 'implosion'. According to Laing (1960: 45-46), the ontologically insecure individual has a sense of emptiness inside and feels the need for this emptiness to be filled. However, losing this emptiness is itself losing his identity which is most dreaded. The outside world enters into this inner vacuum and deprives him of his identity. The third anxiety Laing sees which terrifies the ontologically insecure individual is the fear of 'petrification'. This individual perceives himself as being under the constant threat of being petrified or depersonalized by others. He dreads to be considered as 'it' and be bereft of his human characteristics. The origin of this fear is the implications of being depersonalized by others. When this insecure individual is petrified, the person who has petrified him is seen as having the freedom of power and action while he, having been depersonalized, is bereft of any power:

if one experiences the other as a free agent, one is open to the possibility of experiencing oneself as an object of his experience and thereby of feeling one's own subjectivity drained away. One is threatened with the possibility of becoming no more than a thing in the world of the other, without any life for oneself, without any being for oneself. (Laing 1960: 47)

Every communication and encounter with the outer world is seen by the individual to carry the threat of losing himself into the self of another person: 'Any other is then a threat to his "self" (his capacity to act autonomously) not by reason of anything he or she may do or not do specifically, but by reason of his or her very existence' (Laing 1960: 47). When such an individual encounters a real situation, he makes attempts to petrify the other person in order to 'forestall the danger' and

take the power in his own hands to preserve his inner vacuum from being conquered by that person (Laing 1960: 48).

However, this individual finds himself in the opposing inner wishes toward the world and others. He perceives that the existence of himself is linked to the existence of others and by negating their ontological status, his own ontological status becomes threatened as the result of which his desire to preserve himself in relation to others follows his negating behavior. At the end, the threat which is on the individual's identity as the consequence of his act of negating other's identity is exacerbated as the outcome of which this negating should be more desperately maintained and emphasized (Laing 1960: 52).

The anxieties mentioned above are the causes of a split in an ontologically insecure individual's sense of himself. In contrast to him, the ontologically secure person finds himself and starts to know himself from the moment his body feels alive. He lives in his body and feels the pleasures and pains his body provides him with. However, the insecure individual sees himself as detached from his body:

The body is felt more as one object among other objects in the world than as the core of the individual's own being. Instead of being the core of his true self, the body is felt as the core of a false self, which a detached, disembodied, 'inner', 'true' self looks on at with tenderness, amusement, or hatred as the case may be. (Laing 1960: 69)

The true self, which is the unembodied self of the individual, does not engage in the matters related to the false self, which is body. Laing (1960: 69) believes that this true self can be 'hyper-conscious' and can create 'its own imagos'. The relationship of an individual's true self with his false self (mind and body) becomes like an inter-personal relationship. The false self is related to the real world and so can be treated the way the individual treats others. This inner inter-personal relationship is an attempt by the individual to avoid real world interactions (Laing 1960: 74). However, this true self, being isolated and separated from reality 'is unable to be enriched by outer experiences, and so the whole inner world comes to be more and more impoverished' (Laing 1960: 75). Consequently, feelings of emptiness prevail in the inner world of the individual. The outer world, which has always been despised for being considered as 'petty and commonplace', now, becomes the source of life, and the individual yearns to 'get inside life again, and get life inside himself' (Laing 1960: 75). This yearning is followed by the paradox of losing the true self and, hence, once more, preserving the true self from invasion from the outside world. Therefore, the whole existence of an ontologically insecure individual is comprised of these two opposing forces of yearning and withdrawing and the ultimate external manifestations of these inner conflicts, both with himself, which is between his true self and false self, and with the outer world.

3. The insecure selves of Martha and George

As the play opens the reader is exposed to the two tangled voices which try to absorb the reader into the deepest layers of their relationship:

MARTHA: Jesus ...

GEORGE: ... Shhhhhhhh ...

MARTHA: ... H. Christ ...

GEORGE: for god's sake, Martha, it's two o'clock in the ...

MARTHA: Oh, George!

GEORGE: Well, I'm sorry, but ...

MARTHA: What a cluck! What a cluck you are. (Albee: 3)

The dialogue above is a depiction of the power and the control Martha assumes for herself. This power is accompanied by harshness and her disregard and inattention toward George. Martha's behavior towards George defines him as submissive and obedient. In words such as 'I said, make me some drink', 'you didn't do anything' or "you never do anything" (Albee: 6-7), one can clearly see Martha's assertion of power over her husband. However, as the play moves forward one is exposed to the latent layers of Martha's self:

GEORGE: Good Lord, Martha ... do you know what time it ... who's coming over?

MARTHA: What's-their-name.

GEORGE: who?

MARTHA: WHAT'S-THEIR-NAME!

GEORGE: Who what's-their-name?

MARTHA: I don't know what their name is, George ... [...] he's in the math department, or something ... [...]

GEORGE: [...] but why in God's name are they coming over here now?

MARTHA: Because Daddy said we should be nice to them, that's why. [...] Because Daddy said we should be nice to them! (Albee: 10)

Underneath this dialogue one can see a dim shadow of a very strong figure whose ever-presence flashes in Martha's rigidity and control of the situation with a simple sentence such as 'Well, it's *done!*' (Albee: 11). When speaking about her father, the most frequent words chosen by her are "admire" and "worship" (Albee, 25), signifying the collusive bound which has captured her from within shapes her into a figure most desirable to her father. Since the death of her mother in her early ages, Martha has been surrounded by the presence of her father. The powerlessness she shows at making decisions for her life can be seen in the annulment of her first marriage and her 'revirginization': 'But Daddy and Miss Muff got together and put an end to that ... real quick ... annulled. [...] Ha! Anyway, so I was revirginized, finished at Miss Muff's' (Albee: 78). The story ends with her happiness for being her father's caretaker: '... and I came back here and sort of sat around for a while. I was hostess for Daddy and I took care of him ... and it was ... nice. It was very nice' (Albee: 78). However, this happiness is under question. This happiness works in the framework of the collusion she has with her father.

As Laing (1961: 60) says 'in a collusive bound, two or more individuals cooperate in order to fulfill their identity for themselves by creating an identity for the other which is compatible with what they want to be'. This collusive bound answers two of the most fundamental needs of the individuals: the need for confirmation and attention. When the persons involved play their complementary roles the confirmation needed by each will be answered. However, as Laing (1961: 99) believes, since the basis for these confirmations is pretense one cannot consider them as real confirmations but pseudo-confirmations. In a situation where an individual finds himself torn between his individuality and his need for gaining other's confirmation, he may inevitably take role in the collusion. Being a member of this collusion demands a split in the individual in a way that the role he plays to gain confirmation becomes his false self while his true self is kept safe within. Here, the agent of the contacts with the outside world is his false self.

Viewed through these lens, Martha's relation with her father reflects an intense collusive bound which controls her existence. She feels safe when she is in the presence of her father, since after the death of her mother, this father figure was a shelter for her. Therefore, as this shelter becomes inflexibly austere, Martha finds herself bound to the conflict of whether to escape the bond

or to succumb to the demands of her father by creating a false self. This false self is compatible with the identity that her father demands her to have in order for himself to have his desired identity. In this collusion, Martha succeeds in gaining her father's confirmation which is seen in the word 'rapport' that she insists she experiences in her relationship with her father: 'We had a real ...rapport going ... a real rapport' (Albee: 78). Since the confirmations received through a collusive relationship address a false self, they cannot make the individual feel the sincerity he needs in those acts to feel alive. These pseudo-confirmations are what make Martha insist on the realness of this relationship, the realness of this 'rapport'. The repetition of the words 'a real rapport' implies Martha's need to make herself believe that the relationship between her false self and her father is real, while her pauses between the repetitions speak for her effort to absorb the pretense completely.

Martha's sense of temporal awareness is lost due to the fact that she is still trying to be her Daddy's little girl. She cannot leave this collusion because her lack of a sense of stable identity prevents her from perceiving the meaning of the present. The two factors which define time is evolvment and change, both of which cannot be found in an ontologically insecure individual. The false self needs to remain unchanged for the true self to remain safe within. However, she marries George. The following words shows that her intention for this marriage may be for something more than only gaining confirmation from her father:

[...]. When you've made something you want to pass it on, to somebody. So, I was sort of on the lookout, for ... prospects with the new men. An heir-apparent. (Laughs) it wasn't Daddy's idea that I had to necessarily marry the guy. I mean, I wasn't the albatross ... you didn't have to take me to get the prize, or anything like that. It was something I had in the back of my mind. (Albee: 79)

As it is observable in the text above, her intention to get married is not explicitly demanded by her father; yet, the latent need to gain her father's confirmation can be considered as her intention. However, marriage means breaking from the previous bound and moving to a new one. Therefore, there needs to be another more powerful force obliging her to undergo this horrific change as an insecure individual and that is her need to break free from the collusive bound which does not let her true self breathe. To analyze this situation one needs to pay attention to Martha's behavior toward Nick. First, she tries to attract his attention towards herself and uses him to attack George:

MARTHA: Hey, you must be quite a boy, getting your masters when you were ... what? ...twelve? You hear that, George?

GEORGE: That's very ... impressive.

MARTHA: [...] George is bogged down in the History Department, that's what George is. A bog A fen [...].swamp. ha, ha, ha HA! A SWAMP! Hey, swamp! Hey swampy! [...][addressing Nick] hey you played football, hunh?

NICK: Oh! Oh, yes ...I was a ...quarterback ... but I was much more ... adept ... at boxing, really.

MARTHA: Boxing! You hear that, George? (Albee: 51)

George's view of himself is not compatible with Martha's view of him. The bound that has created her false self cannot let Martha escape the definitions it has given her to view the world. Nick fits the qualities defined in the collusion that has fed her as 'he fulfills the desire created by Martha's false self to sustain her false identity by depicting the identity Martha needs in the other to be what she wants to be'. While George lacks these qualities and does not fit, Nick has the potential

which can give Martha's false self a chance. However, after the intercourse, the tables are turned. The pattern that up to this point has been leading the audience to an expected result changes, drastically:

MARTHA: You're certainly a flop in some departments.

NICK: I beg your pardon ...?

MARTHA: Go answer the door.

NICK: What did you say?

MARTHA: I said, go answer the door, what are you, deaf?

NICK: you ...want me...to go answer the door?

MARTHA: That's right, lunk-head; answer the door. There must be something you can do well; [...] Now, now, now; just do what you're told; show old Martha there's something you *can* do, Hunh? Atta boy.
(Albee: 153-154)

In this dialogue one can clearly see Nick as another George. He is now carrying the names and the definitions George has been carrying in his relationship with Martha. Thus, the complexity of Martha's behavior demands a much deeper analysis of the layers working in her inner world. At this point, one may turn one's head from Martha's false self as the force behind her pursue of other men to other possibilities. As an existential being, she sees "the horror of [her] existence" (Koreneva: 49). George and Martha "even try to destroy the vacuum but feel they are drawn in more and more deeply. [...] So they are dragged on and on by the merry-go-round of the 'Walpurgisnacht into the abyss of non-being'" (Koreneva: 49).

As an ontologically insecure individual, Martha's intention for marriage is torn between her true self and her false self. Her false self seeks her father's confirmation while her true self seeks its freedom and realness. As the true self is kept safe within, its eventual death is inevitable and the individual is aware of this process. Thus, seeking life and aliveness, the true self wishes to gain existence through contact with the real world, yet this wish cannot be fulfilled considering the fact that the outside world is a threat to the true self. So the 'vicious circle', as Laing calls it, keeps Martha in a constant struggle torn by her conflicting needs. Keeping her true self within, she marries George and enters a new bound which demands change, change which is most dreaded by her as an insecure individual. She tries to open her true self and let it live. However, her precarious sense of self does not let her feel safe in her relatedness to others. The fear of engulfment works deep within Martha and urges her to defend herself against George. The act of sexual intercourse triggers this fear in Martha; thus, her defensive actions begin.

In her defensive behavior toward George, there can be seen the forcing of another fear which is the fear of petrification. The insecure individual, always lives with the fear of an outside invasion as a result of which his being would turn into non-being. As Laing (1960: 47) points out, the actual behavior of the other person may not be the threat, but the threat is 'his or her very existence'. Therefore, the mere existence of the other is considered as a threat to the existence of the self. The defensive action which follows this anxiety is formed by the individual's attempt to 'depersonalize' the other in order to take away his or her existence.

Martha attacks George since she dreads being robbed of her existence by him. There are times in the play that George shows indifference toward Martha. Language, as a mortal weapon, 'forces Martha and Georges to indulge in one-upmanship. They talk for victory and are as conscious of their routines as their guest is made' (Oberge: 141). The act of indifference, in itself, is a sign of being petrified by the other. Martha's true self needs the engulfment, yet her fear of being robbed of her existence by becoming George exacerbated by George's indifference forces her to use petrifying weapons against her enemy. Her petrifying weapon is sleeping with another man, the man who has been himself the weapon to petrify George. This is, as well, further forced by her need

to be engulfed as well as escaping any bound which could chain her to George. However, the fear of engulfment cannot be ignored and triumphs over her need for realness. Thus, after the intercourse she attacks Nick the same way she attacks George. Therefore, by taking a look at the process and the similarities between the two experiences one can draw this conclusion: 'George has experienced what Nick experienced: being trapped in the vicious circle of Martha's yearning for engulfment and the fear of being engulfed by the other'.

The collusion that Martha strives to preserve and lay upon his shoulders is the threat from which George struggles to escape. Through his relationship with Martha, George is forced to lose his own view of himself and live in the framework of the collusion which has been feeding Martha. Thus, this collusion becomes the force which has the power to rob him of his identity. Like Martha, George also shows signs of fear of engulfment when he avoids sexual contact with Martha.

MARTHA: [...], you can light my cigarette, if you're of a mind to.

GEORGE (Considers, then moves off): No ... there are limits. I mean, man can put up with only so much without he descends a rung or two on the old evolutionary ladder [...] I will not light your cigarette. And that, as they say, is that. (Albee: 51)

The act of lighting the cigarette has an important meaning since as one can see in the process of the play, lighting the cigarette is the initial step to be engulfed by Martha and then to be bombarded by her need to defend her true self through petrification of others. The limit mentioned by George points to Martha's defensive actions as an example of which is these following words: 'I swear ... if you existed I'd divorced you ...' (Albee: 16). George, himself, is living with the dread of being in contact with the others and he shows it first in his fear of the presence of other's identities. Being 'precariously differentiated from the rest of the world' (Laing 1960: 43) is what George dreads most when facing the other:

GEORGE: [Addressing Nick] You're the one! You're the one's going to make all that trouble ... making everybody the same, rearranging the chromozones, or whatever it is. [...] But! Everybody will tend to be rather the same....Alike. Everybody ... and I'm sure I'm not wrong here ... will tend to look like this young man here. [...]. There will be a certain ... loss of liberty, I imagine, as a result of this experiment ... but diversity will no longer be the goal. Cultures and races will eventually vanish ... the ants will take over the world. (Albee: 65-67).

George's fear of being one with the other originates in his lack of any sense of boundaries between his own identity and that of the other. Nick as the biologist has the scientific power to win over his identity. Furthermore, he is the man who Martha uses as a weapon to attack George. Thus, Nick becomes a serious threat to George: 'I know something about history. I know when I'm being threatened' (Albee, 68). Faced with this threat, George shows petrifying behavior towards Nick in order to rob him of his existence and this can be seen in his joshing behavior which manipulates Nick and takes away his control and power as an active agent.

GEORGE: [...]. (Not too friendly) What made you decide to be a teacher?

NICK: oh ... well, the same things that ... uh ... motivated you I imagine.

GEORGE: what were they?

NICK: pardon?

GEORGE: I said what were they? What were the things that motivated me?

NICK: well ... I'm sure I don't know.

GEORGE: you just finished saying that the things that motivated you were the same things that motivated me.

NICK: I said I imagined they were.

GEORGE: oh. (Off-hand) did you? [...]. (Albee: 31)

As Laing explains, the ordinary circumstances of living becomes a threat to the ontologically insecure individual. In this case, George finds himself in a battlefield the triumph in which is crucial to his survival. Winning over a conversation is not a matter of sheer argument but a matter of the individual's existence. George's need to gain the control of the conversation and to 'josh' Nick is his way of preserving his own existence against him. The fact that George is preoccupied with history also points to another dimension of his being which is his lack of temporal awareness. The unrealness of the present forces him to remain in the past. The 'numbness' he feels in his 'brain cells' (Albee: 155) speaks for his inability to perceive the realness of the present moment. He views past as a refuge for himself:

GEORGE: It's very simple.... When people can't abide things as they are, when they can't abide the present, they do one of two things ... either they ... either they turn to a contemplation of the past, as I have done, or they set about to ... alter the future. (Albee: 178)

As Laing (1961: 31) clarifies the point 'in this twilight realm time is evaded. Time must stand still. The person lives "in" the past, or "in" the future. The present is never realized.' George's circumstances of living does not allow him to feel safe in the present. His need to be viewed by the other's the way he desires to be is not met by Martha and the collusion with which she tortures him. Therefore, George takes refuge in the past and becomes the history, the historical past which is safe and unalterable. However, this marriage is not the only force pushing him towards the past. His sudden recollection of his childhood memories brings forth some hints for discovering the other factor:

[...] a bunch of us used to go into New York on the first day of vacations, before we fanned out to our homes, and in the evening this bunch of us used to go to this gin mill owned by the gangster father of one of us- [...]. And one time, in the bunch of us, there was this boy who was fifteen, and he had killed his mother with a shot gun some years before-accidentally, completely accidentally, without even an unconscious motivation, I have no doubt, no doubt at all-and this one evening this boy went with us, and we ordered our drinks, and when it came his turn he said, I'll have bergin...give me some bergin, please...bergin and water. Well, we all laughed ... he was blond and he had the face of a cherub, and we all laughed, and his cheeks went red and the color rose in his neck, and the assistant crook who had taken our order told people at the next table what the boy had said, and then they laughed, and then more people were told and the laughter grew, and more people and more laughter, and no one was laughing more than us, and none of us more than the boy who had shot his mother. (Albee: 94-95)

As revealed in the text, the main focus of these recollections is the boy who ordered 'bergin'; yet, George begins by focusing on himself as a sixteen year-old boy belonging to the 'bunch of us'.

The togetherness of this ‘bunch of us’ as opposed to the singleness of the fifteen-year-old boy catches one’s attention considering the point that every time George wants to talk about himself he uses ‘bunch of us’. His first mentioning the boy is accompanied by his immediate revealing of the guilt that was torturing the boy. In George’s recollections, the boy has killed his own mother with a shotgun. However, the important point to notice is George’s immediate attempt to defend the boy’s innocence and insistence on the event as an accident, even though it is the first time that the boy has joined the ‘bunch of us’ (Albee: 94-95). As unexpectedly as it seems, later on, as Martha talks to Nick and Honey about the novel George has written the secret is revealed that the fifteen-year-old boy is George himself. The degree of unexpectedness decreases if one pays attention to the way George recollects his memory. Although the focus of the story is the boy, George begins by focusing on himself in the “bunch of us” group and he continues his emphasis on his oneness with that bunch of us to a point where there won’t be any suspicion regarding George being the fifteen-year-old boy. The relation he has with the boy is revealed in his attempts to make Nick believe in the boy’s innocence; yet, as mentioned earlier, this is a one-time event and therefore his certainty regarding the boy’s innocence is not justifiable.

An ontologically insecure individual also suffers from self-consciousness which makes him become aware of himself ‘as an object of someone else’s observation’ (Laing 1960: 106). This awareness sometimes makes the individual believe that he is the main focus of the others around him and they are ‘unfavorably critical of him’ (Laing 1960: 108). George in his memories has the ability to step out of his body and become one with the others and watch himself critically. As a self-conscious individual George can be said to be captured in his own critical eyes. The critical and the humiliating laughs which are heard and continued for a long time can be considered as the interpretation of the self-consciousness of George’s unembodied self which perceives and defines the surroundings and the others as if their main focus is George’s bodily behavior. These laughter’s are the whips torturing him from inside and punishing him for his bad bodily behavior. Later on, in an accident in which he is the driver, he hits a tree which leads to the death of his father.

The boy’s innocence and his lack of any possible intention behind the death of his parents can be analyzed through George’s further attempts to kill Martha and his son. In one scene, Martha begins to attack George’s identity by telling Nick and Honey about the time she punched him in boxing. Her act of punching George is a defensive reaction towards him. As mentioned earlier, the power of her collusion urges her to defend herself against George as an outsider. Boxing is considered by her father as a defensive action: ‘Daddy got the idea all the men should learn how to box...self –defense’ (Albee: 57). Thus, she uses this self-defense technique to defend her existence against George:

So, while this was going on... I don’t know why I did it... I got into a pair of gloves myself ... you know, I didn’t lace’em up, or anything ... and I snuck up behind George, just kidding, and I yelled “Hey George!” and at the same time I let go sort of a roundhouse right ... just kidding, you know? (Albee: 56)

This act of self-defense is constantly referred to by Martha as an accident. However, the willfulness of it is undeniable regarding the forces working inside her and pushing her towards defending her true self within. George’s attempt to kill Martha with a shotgun is his defensive reaction towards her petrifying attacks on him. While she insists on the accidental nature of the event, George enters and points the gun ‘at the back of Martha’s head’ (Albee: 57). Therefore, the impossibility of Martha’s accidental reaction, coinciding with George’s actual attempt to kill her with a shotgun, can be considered as an implication of the possibility of the existence of will behind the death of his mother. George’s way of killing his imaginary son also echoes the way he kills his own father:

GEORGE: The following summer, on a country road, with his learner's permit in his pocket and his father on the front seat to his right, he swerved the car, to avoid a porcupine, and drove straight into a large tree. (Albee: 96)

GEORGE: Martha ... (Long pause) ... our son is ... dead. He was ... killed ... late in the afternoon.... (A tiny chuckle) on a country road, with his learner's permit in his pocket, he swerved, to avoid a porcupine, and drove straight into a....

MRTHA: You ... can't... do... that!

GEORGE: ...large tree. (Albee: 231)

The intensive and undeniable similarity between these two events creates the possibility of viewing the death of his father as a willful action. When speaking about the death of his son he uses the word 'kill': 'I can kill him, Martha, if I want to' (Albee: 231). Thus, the willfulness of his act of killing his son can be a hint to the willfulness behind the accident that leads to his father's death. He kills his son as a defensive reaction towards Martha's petrifying act of having intercourse with Nick. Based on this evidence which shows George using the shotgun and the accident as defensive way to protect his own existence, one may conclude that the same pressures were at in his relationship with his parents during his childhood. George's concern is believed by some critics to be '[...] the concern with [his] acquired identity and the desire to face [his] evolved self by relying on the catalytic intervention of another person' (Falk: 416). However, based on Laing's perspective, George needs to protect his identity in the face of the identity of the other. Having a precarious sense of identity he might have been captured in the hands of threatening parents whose existence led him to protect his existence by killing them.

The imaginary son which was created by them satisfies one part of their identities as a mother and a father. The danger of this fantasy lies in its essence as it pertains to 'the creation of life, of which they are not capable' (Lewis: 36). This imaginary son is needed since when they 'look inward all they find is self-contempt' (Kingsley: 71). However, this son becomes a weapon with which one tortures the other. For Martha, she tries to pull her son toward her collusion with her father and make him hers and not a threat while George uses him as a defensive tool to protect his true self against Martha's attacks. At the end George releases the final shot and kills Martha defenseless.

4. Conclusion

Laing's definition of an ontologically insecure individual is a person who lives with the pain of having a precarious sense of self. This individual suffers from his inability to have a real contact with the real world. The split of selves which defines him forces him remain on a defensive state in order to protect his true self within in isolation. The anxieties of engulfment, implosion and petrification linger in him while affecting all his behavior towards the other. However, the vicious circle, as Laing calls it, is the ironic conflict of this individual which makes him yearn what he dreads and kill what he yearns and therefore feel emptier every time he kills the other. The collusion which plays the key role in creating this split in the individual works as the prison from which the individual both yearns to escape and towards which he finds himself running.

Martha, being brought up in the controlling collusion of her relationship with her father, finds herself empty of any means to face the outer world. Therefore, she carries her false self to her marriage and tries to preserve it in order to protect her true self within in isolation in face of George, the enemy. George, himself, suffering from a precarious sense of self, cannot perceive himself living in a safe world. Thus, each contact with the real world becomes a threat to his identity and existence. Both in their interactions with each other intend to kill the other using petrifying weapons, such as indifference and having sexual intimacy with others. This relationship is defined based on

two individuals' need for the survival of their existence in the face of a threatening violent outside world. Each tries to preserve their true self safe within.

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