

Theses of PhD Dissertation

**TRANSGRESSING THE LIMIT:
RITUAL REENACTED IN SELECTED PLAYS
BY EDWARD ALBEE AND SAM SHEPARD**

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1. Topic and Aims of the Dissertation

The theatre has always been the space of representing, embodying, and demonstrating concepts and issues related to the creation and transformation of identity, argues Erika Fischer-Lichte in her innovative history of drama as history of identity. Like multiple other forms of “cultural performance” (Singer xii)—for example, rituals, ceremonies, or rites of passage—theatre is particularly concerned with the formation and change of identity, while the self-reflexivity of drama illustrates how the genre examines its own structure in the light of changes in the concept of identity. According to Fischer-Lichte, there has always existed a dialectic relationship between the theatre and the cultural and social reality of the outside world: theatre or drama has never been satisfied with merely mirroring or depicting this external world, but has always also functioned as a forum of questioning and critical analysis, a sphere of liminal experimentation “offering or even initiating alternative identities” (*History* 5) within the given culture.

American culture has been constructed on the continuous questioning of subjectivity, on the ongoing process of construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of a specific American identity—individual and collective—that would reshape the entire world. The “new nation” and its creative artists have constantly been confronted with the problem of coming up with a stable image of the American—as an individual and as a community—that has constantly been destabilized by historic shifts and changes in the very concept of identity, as well as with the issue of finding or developing the adequate forms, genres, language that could express such an ongoing process of formation and transformation.

American theatre found its voice and place among the discourses of different “cultural performances” fashioning and propagating American identity/identities at the beginning of the twentieth century with Eugene O’Neill, later followed by such canonical playwrights as Arthur Miller or Tennessee Williams. Starting from the sixties, it has experienced a proliferation of dramatic voices and forms all involved in the dramatization of an American identity that by then was recognized and declared fractured, manifold, unstable, in a continuous process of transformation. European theatrical experiments such as Samuel Beckett’s theatre of the absurd, Antonin Artaud’s theatre of cruelty, Jean Genet’s ritualistic plays, Harold Pinter’s focus on the possibilities/impossibility of communication, had a deep impact upon the American theatrical output with such authors emerging as David Mamet or Arthur Kopit and experimental theatre groups springing up throughout the country (for

instance, the ritual-oriented Bread and Puppet Theatre, Joseph Chaikin's Open Theatre, Judith Malina and Julian Beck's Living Theatre).

Within such a carnivalesque abundance and polyphony, two dramatic voices arose—both embodying a radical new perspective and relentless innovative spirit that concerns the forms and structures of staging identity—that for the last fifty years have been shaping the American theatre: Edward Albee and Sam Shepard. In the “multivocal” context of the second half of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first, Albee's and Shepard's oeuvres emerge as outstanding not merely due to the fact that both encompass a period of half a century, but also because they have succeeded in transforming and renewing their genre over and over again without ever abandoning their quest for staging American identity as a process rather than a static entity, and their critical analysis, re-contextualization, and parody of contemporary social, cultural, and philosophical-theoretical trends. Their personal style, innovative spirit, their relentless search for new ways of dramatizing their hallmark themes add to the American theatrical discourse structures that merge elements of traditional tragedy, comedy, melodrama, domestic naturalist drama with elements of Beckettian and Pinterian absurd, ritual, contemporary performance art, Yeatsian lyricism, popular culture, journalism, and black comedy.

In accordance with their high status among contemporary American authors, there exists a considerable body of scholarship both in English and other languages devoted to Albee's and Shepard's plays. This scholarship, however, tends to focus on their thematic richness, their techniques, their relevance in presenting contemporary American society. At the same time, the latest Albee and Shepard works have not yet been treated at length by literary critics due to their recent appearance and entrance into mainstream American drama.

My dissertation analyzes eight plays, four each by Albee and Shepard written between 1995-2007 (Albee's *The Play about the Baby* 1998, *The Goat, or Who Is Sylvia* 2002, *Occupant* 2002, and *Peter and Jerry* 2004; Shepard's *Buried Child* Revised edition 1995, *The Late Henry Moss* 2000, *The God of Hell* 2004, and *Kicking a Dead Horse* 2007), works that are virtually unknown to the public of Eastern Europe. In this sense, I hope to familiarize the Hungarian (and Romanian) theatre-lovers with Albee's and Shepard's recent theatrical output and prompt further studies and critical essays. At the same time, I believe that a parallel discussion of their works will offer a more comprehensive image of the duality inherent in American identity and mentality, of the two distinct aspects and spheres of American culture: the urban/rural divide. Their indebtedness to both European and American dramatic traditions, their preoccupation with renewing the genre by drawing inspiration from contemporary

theatrical experiments as well as theory and other forms of “cultural performances” lend their works well to a reading that wishes to focus on how traditional forms expressing cultural exchange and identity transformation, namely elements of ritual and rites of passage, are reinvigorated in postmodern drama. My interpretation focuses on themes such as family relations, the subject and the community, sexuality, life and death and the transition between the two, and on the ways the plays reconstruct the archetypal three-fold pattern of rituals (first outlined by Arnold van Gennep in his seminal *Rites of Passage*, and later developed and detailed further by Victor Turner) both as on- and off-stage processes that incorporate the audience in the rites they re-enact.

I hypothesize and demonstrate that the archetypal three-fold ritual structure resurfaces within these dramatic universes in a “mutilated” form with the final, reintegration phase eliminated from the body of the plays and transposed onto the liminoid interaction between performance and audience. In my interpretation the focus falls on the middle, liminal phase of the implied rituals unfolding on stage. The plays present their characters at “moments of rupture” (Maffesoli 133) in their lives that necessarily evoke and call for enactments of rituals and rites of passage to induce transformation. These, however, fail because the characters have already been trapped in such betwixt and between states on account of some past transgression of the normative rules, thus they are situated in a secluded space, on the margins of society, alienated from communal co-existence. I also argue that these characters are unable to surpass their liminal condition also due to the fact that structural entities such as social groups, value systems, coherent, unified, and stable communities, even the nuclear family unit are subverted and overthrown within these dramatic universes.

I do not intend to identify theatre with ritual, nor do I attempt to demonstrate a fusion of these two forms of “cultural performance”; by identifying these fictionalized rituals in the plays I do not wish to prove that rituals do still exist in postmodern communities and nor that individual rites of passage would fulfill the same functions as they did in earlier times or in other, non-industrial cultures. I adopt these ritual structural models in order to highlight a transformation in the dramatic structure of the plays: traditional denouement (that shows correlations with what Turner defines as the post-liminal or reintegration phase of rituals) has been eliminated, leaving the structure open-ended and its characters trapped in their in-between states, outside the normative system, deprived of the illusion of a stable identity or of authentic, non-artificial subjectivity. I argue that Albee and Shepard thus scrutinize and re-interpret the myths of unified social structures such as the nation, rural or urban communities, the family, units imagined as fixed and unalterable in the American public consciousness. I

suggest that, by perceiving the audience as “witness” to the symbolic structure on stage, the two playwrights transform their spectators into indispensable participants of the liminoid ritual process. For rites only become legitimate and valid if they are witnessed and acknowledged. The audience willingly enters the liminoid space and situation of the theatre that might have a transformative effect on their existence, for—unlike the rituals enacted on stage—the theatrical experience may end in a reintegration: the “aggregation” of a transformed audience into a state of awareness different from their pre-liminoid status.

I further widen and refine the interpretative field by reading Turnerian liminality together with post-structuralist theories of the subject (among others, by Lacan, Belsey, Kiss, Foucault, Caruth and Felman, Baudrillard, Hutcheon). In interpreting the sacrificial rituals that surface within the drama of the characters’ liminal trials I have recourse to René Girard’s concepts of mimetic desire and the scapegoating effect. Therefore, my dissertation also functions as a testing ground of an interdisciplinary interpretative tool that may fruitfully be employed in different fields of research.

2. Applied Methods

I hypothesize that Albee’s and Shepard’s works present dramatic characters and situations that can be interpreted within the conceptual framework of liminality and the liminoid, as developed in the theoretical writings of anthropologist Victor Turner, and adopted by several scholars of ritual criticism, theoreticians and practitioners of both anthropology and theatre.¹ I use concepts such as social drama, liminality, the liminoid, as well as Turner’s denominations for the types, phases, elements, and participants of a ritual (for example, rites of separation; pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal phase; communication of the sacra; dominant symbols and metaphors; neophytes, initiands, ritual elders) that I consider helpful in my analysis.

I wish to point out that while Turner did publish most extensively on social issues and phenomena that he observed while working among the Ndembu of Zambia, and later

¹ The adaptations of Turner’s theories most pertinent for my dissertation are those by Richard Schechner with whom Turner had a long and fruitful collaboration that resulted in several international conferences on the interfaces and parallel structures of ritual and theatre; and by Erika Fischer-Lichte whose *History of European Drama and Theatre* (2002), as well as her *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual* (2005) and *The Transformative Power of Performance* (2008) interpret the theatrical space as a quintessentially liminal one within which identity and identity transformation is staged “opening a liminal field for the spectator which allows him to play with different identities and encourages him to make a change” (*History* 4). In her *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual* she argues: “Although it [liminality] arose and was developed in the context of ritual theory, there is no reason why it should not be applied to theatre even if theatre is not identified with ritual” (254). Other studies on literature read with Turner’s anthropological terminology and concepts have been published in *Victor Turner and the Construction of Cultural Criticism. Between Literature and Anthropology* edited by Kathleen M. Ashley (1990).

researching complex post-industrial societies, in the latter part of his life, in the 1970s and early 1980s he turned towards an anthropological analysis of cultural manifestations of these complex communities, most pre-eminently the theatre. He also developed the concept of the liminoid based on his observations regarding complex societies' manifestations in leisure activities, while in his *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (1982) he specified: "the essays in this book chart my personal voyage of discovery from traditional anthropological studies of ritual performance to a lively interest in modern theatre, particularly experimental theatre" (7).

In his "processual analysis" Turner argues that rituals share with other cultural manifestations—such as theatre—a deeply symbolic character, and convey in their workings a sense of identity and of community. He describes rites as symbolic action that involve "prescribed formal behavior"—calling to mind theatrical conventions—that initiate and perform the passage of an individual from one state to another, from one identity to another, a transformation that is effected by the maneuvering of symbolic gestures, words, stories, and objects. Ritual subjects going through the middle, liminal phase are described as different, outside the social structure, even dangerous or contagious, "dead" or "invisible" from the point of view of the given social order. They are reduced to uniformity and passivity towards their instructors so that they can be "ground down to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to cope with their new station in life" (*Forest* 98). Liminality is perceived as a betwixt and between state, performed in a secluded and isolated space, outside the ordinary flow of time.

Albee's and Shepard's characters may be interpreted as such "ritual participants"—either as "neophytes" (for instance, Vince in *Buried Child*, Boy and Girl in *The Play about the Baby*, the Moss brothers in *The Late Henry Moss*, Frank in *The God of Hell*) or as "ritual elders" (for example, Man and Woman in *The Play about the Baby*, Ann and Jerry in *Peter and Jerry*, Welsh in *The God of Hell*)—who experience a loss of their former subject positions and are subjected to ritual trials within which they are offered the opportunity to test different identities that would provide them a space within the structure they long to belong to.

In *The Forest of Symbols* (99-108) Turner differentiates among the components of liminal processes the "communication of the sacra" that involves the exhibition of sacred objects (relics, masks, instruments, "what is shown")—such symbolic objects within the analyzed dramatic works being Shelley's fur coat in *Buried Child*, or Ross's letter in *The Goat, or Who Is Sylvia?*—as well as actions ("what is done")—like the symbolic burials of Dodge in *Buried Child* and the continuous role reversals of Man and Woman in *The Play about the Baby*—and

instructions (“what is said”) delivered by the ritual elders—a role masterfully and ironically played by *The Play about the Baby’s* Man and Woman, something that Ann and Jerry aspire to be in *Peter and Jerry*, or a role of which Man is quickly dispossessed by the grand diva Louise Nevelson in Albee’s *Occupant*. The second component consists of the ludic deconstruction and recombination of familiar cultural configurations, the exaggeration or distortion of characteristics of familiar objects, deviant or grotesque representations of states and identities, and strange appropriations of roles (as Esteban or Conchalla do in *The Late Henry Moss*, Man and Woman in *The Play about the Baby*, or Welsh in Shepard’s *The God of Hell*). These force the ritual subjects to think about their society, they provoke them to reflect on the basic values of their social, cultural, and cosmological order, urging self-reflection and transformation of identity. The third component is defined by Turner as the simplification of the relations of the social structure characterized by the authority of the ritual instructors and the submission and passivity of the initiands—dramatically represented in the chosen plays through the relationships among family members, representatives of power and subjects of the very same power, or between individuals and the entire surrounding world.

Turning towards phenomena in complex societies, Turner introduced the term “liminoid” to describe the “quasi-liminal character of cultural performances” (DeFlem 14) such as theatre, music, art exhibitions, and leisure activities like sports events. The liminoid differs from the liminal as it does not necessarily take place as a result of a crisis within the social structure or according to a biological or calendrical pattern as rites of passage do (“Liminal to Liminoid” 84-86). It arises due to the differentiation made by complex industrial and post-industrial societies between “work” and “play,” as a characteristic state of “play,” outside economic, social, or political structures.² The liminoid, however, just like liminality, though self-imposed, creates opportunity for reflection on the structures and values of the social order and, therefore, it may result in revolutionary ideas and may challenge the existent structure. Turner argues that the liminoid is individualized and it originates from the efforts of one individual or a particular group, a feature that Fischer-Lichte identifies as the “process of self-organization” in the constitution of temporary communities within the theatre’s liminal space (*Theatre* 255).

Discussing the similarities and differences between liminal and liminoid states in *From Ritual to Theatre* (20-60), Turner identifies the former as an obligatory process to be

² See, for example, the difference Peter (*Peter and Jerry*) makes between his reading for work and his reading in the park as typical instances of “work” versus “play.”

undergone by members of a community at different stages of life and social status, characterized by a combination of work and play, with emphasis on the “human seriousness of play” (as the subtitle of the book suggests) and the transformation of identity as well as the conceptualization and acceptance of its elusive and processual nature. Such processes are dramatized in Vince’s homecoming in *Buried Child*, the Moss brothers’ attempted separation from their dead father in *The Late Henry Moss*, Frank’s initiation ritual in *The God of Hell*, and Hobart Struther’s attempted ritual of separation from an empty and meaningless life in *Kicking a Dead Horse*; while in the Albee plays: Boy and Girl’s initiation into parenthood and into loss in *The Play about the Baby*, Martin’s love rituals and the Gray family structure’s collapse in *The Goat, or Who Is Sylvia?*, Jerry’s ritual of taming the dog and “taming” Peter in *Peter and Jerry*, and the protagonist’s ritualistic re-telling of her life’s events in an attempt to order them into a meaningful narrative of a fate destined for greatness in *Occupant*. The liminoid, on the other hand, represents a state that one enters voluntarily, and is perceived as leisure rather than work—just like Peter’s long reads in the park, on “his” bench on sunny Sunday afternoons. None the less, the liminoid does share with liminality the potential for renewal of its participants and a reaffirmation or a re-evaluation and challenging of the value-systems and structural orders outside its sphere—phenomena that both Albee and Shepard hope their plays will generate and urge in their audiences.

In order to widen the interpretative field, I read liminality in the light of different subject theories that I consider fruitful for the development of a more complex understanding of the dramatic texts and also of the very concept of liminality. In the different chapters of my dissertation I turn to different contemporary theories, and I demonstrate how their concepts may be applied to widen a reading embedded in such a ritualistic frame.

I show how Turnerian patterns may successfully be read together with the Lacanian concepts of the Imagery, the mirror stage, and the phallic symbolic system. Liminality thus is revealed as a new mirror stage within which, through the utilization of dominant symbols and the process of communicating the sacred knowledge and demonstrating different identity models, the initiands face the instability and constructed nature of any one subject position they may occupy and any normative order they may belong to. It turns into a sphere of uncertainty, where the Imagery, the taboo, the grotesque, the unnamable erupts into the patriarchal order of the characters’ narratives and destabilizes any rule and/or role. It is revealed as a state indescribable with and through terms and concepts of the phallic symbolic system; therefore, theatrical representation, dramatization proves to be the most adequate

method of illustrating the process of language, dominant symbols becoming corporeal within these staged rites of passage.

Belsey's concepts with reference to the "processual nature of subjectivity" lend themselves well to a reading within the framework of liminality where, by definition, subjects are forced to realize that identity defies fixation. Also the "special ritual vocabulary" that Turner identifies as the specific register and discourse of rites parallels Kiss's argument according to which identity models are transmitted within linguistic clichés. Language, however, as the repository and transmitter of meaning, is itself flexible and elusive; thus, within the analyzed dramatic universes different narrative forms and strategies, generic elements, and conventions are juxtaposed in order to demonstrate the fallibility of communication strategies.

While focusing on the methods and techniques Albee and Shepard utilize to create what the anthropological literature defines as the "communication of the sacra" through showing, telling, and symbolic action, I also highlight the disproportional, monstrous, mysterious, and sacrificial aspects of this "communication" process that, Turner argues, lies "at the heart of the liminal matter" (*Forest* 95). When analyzing the sacrificial elements present in the dramatized implied rituals and the function of these within the constructed system of symbolic action and language, I use René Girard's concepts and definitions of mimetic desire and the scapegoating effect in order to demonstrate how liminal subjects act in conformity with such inherently human drives and resort to such archetypal victimization for the hoped transcendence of their threshold state.

Trauma represents a constituent element of social existence handled within ritual; therefore, concepts of contemporary trauma theory widen the interpretative field. The plays present characters whose past traumas—of war, of violence, of brutality—haunt and define their entire existence. Their "rituals of separation" from their pasts and their traumas that disrupt their present and result in "uncontrolled repetitive . . . intrusive phenomena" (Caruth 11) read as attempts to "assimilate into full cognition" (Felman 5), to understand, and to surpass the traumatic experiences they had to go through and inflicted upon others.

Liminality also appears as a sphere marked by overt and manifest simulation, inviting a Baudrillardian reading. The processes of identity construction and deconstruction, of doubling and grotesque combinations of the constituent elements of a culture and of subjectivity, the endless repetition of routines and their subversive, critical analysis that according to Turner characterizes liminal processes, constitute a complex system of simulation, the theatrical space thus manifesting itself as the sphere of the Baudrillardian "hyperreal." Here simulation

does not have to be denied or disguised but can be accepted as such. Thus the audience may acquire an understanding of how simulation functions, and may be sensitized to its status within it.

Michel Foucault's "The Subject and Power" sheds new light upon liminality, the social implications of withdrawal and separation, as well as the strategies employed by the structure/power to manipulate subjects into the passive acceptance of their predicament. I argue that liminality cannot be described within the terminology and context of power relations as devised by Foucault. Within such periods ritual subjects are forced to face grotesque simulacra of known and accepted subject positions and of the whole symbolic order. Normative power relations existent within the given culture are suspended as neophytes are necessarily reduced to uniform passivity and deprived of their will and/or ability to act individually and autonomously. Their in-between state also deprives them of the possibility of designing control- and resistance strategies towards the power structuring their existence. The plays analyzed here thus foreground and parody the workings of power while also highlighting the fact that within normative power structures the subject has not only the freedom but also the responsibility to function as a control mechanism toward and within the structure, that without such control necessarily turns into totalitarianism.

The liminal process of the "communication of the sacra" and ritual's two-fold function of reinforcing and/or analyzing and subverting normative structures and value systems is also echoed in contemporary storytelling and Linda Hutcheon's concepts on parody. Rituals of separation occasion the scrutiny and re-evaluation of earlier subject positions and of the social order within which these subject positions are available, while storytelling and parody create the necessary critical distance that allows subjects to confront and examine themselves "reflected in the eyes of another" (Fischer-Lichte, *History* 1). They are revealed as means of both "enshrining" and questioning the past (Hutcheon 126) in Albee's and Shepard's metatheatrical plays that turn towards the genre and establish a hermeneutic space within which audiences/readers are invited to abandon preconceptions, reshape expectations, decode allusions and references.

3. Results

Through the analysis of Albee's and Shepard's chosen plays I have demonstrated how Turnerian concepts of ritual broadened by contemporary subject theory may serve as an efficient tool in decoding theatrical texts, and I also suggest further paths of theoretical

research (such as the analysis of how liminal situations bring about a multiplication of doubling and a proliferation of the motif of the Doppelgänger; an investigation of parody within rituals), while inviting a reinterpretation of the Albee and Shepard canons.

Within the interpretative process I have also transgressed the limits imposed by such theoretical frames as the Girardian concept of the single victim of mimetic rivalry, demonstrating how within these dramatic universes the role of the scapegoat may be dispersed upon several characters/subjects of the ritual process. They all experience the loss of illusions with reference to identity as a naturally/sacredly/culturally given fixed and stable entity, and recognize the fact that all human structures (including identity) are constructs, thus fallible, exposed to subversion and transformation.

I have also concluded that in Albee's and Shepard's plays the archetypal ritual structure resurfaces in a "mutilated" form, with the third, reintegration stage being moved out of the body of the play and transposed onto the plane of audience—performance interaction. My interpretations of the dramatic texts justify my hypothesis that these elliptical structures arise due to the fact that the presented dramatic characters are always situated at the margins, removed from society or any community they might be re-entering, these concepts being themselves undermined and their coherence and stability overthrown. Through their theatrical-liminal experimentations, the two playwrights devise dramatic structures that stage identity and model communal processes with the elimination of closure, that in a reading within the framework of Turnerian terminology equals reintegration, thus transforming the dramatic structure in order to adapt it to the contemporary sense of identity as a fluid, fractured, processual item rather than a fixed and coherent entity, as well as of a community in constant transformation. Therefore, necessarily their plays remain open-ended and invite multiple interpretations. They create literary universes that respond to their context, sketching radical images of the different aspects of American culture. They continuously posit into the foreground of their preoccupations the problem most pertinent to "cultural performances"—a dramatization of individual and communal identity and the attainable subject positions within the social, historical, and cultural normative system that their works critically present, doing this in a style and manner that does not stabilize this discourse but amplifies and expands it through fresh perspectives.

During my analysis of the plays there also arose a further aspect of the detected and described liminal and liminoid processes: in their functioning and effects they show similarities with parody as conceptualized by such theoreticians as Hutcheon or Puiu. For parody, as Puiu argues, has its eyes always focused on the "receiver" (16). It involves two

superimposed and juxtaposed planes: the field of expectations set up in the audience by the recognized “text” that is parodied; while, on the second plane, these expectations are violated, criticized, and subverted, an effect that Hutcheon identifies as “counter-expectations” (32). This shattering of expectations distances the viewer from the object of his/her gaze, it destroys the illusion of identification, and stimulates thought, critical reflection, it opens up the text(s) to further, alternative interpretations.

Doubling of effects also characterizes parody: it does not only create critical distance and re-evaluative attitude toward the contemplated object, but it also scrutinizes the audience itself, our own modes of interaction, the way our preconceptions and prior knowledge delimit our expectations and set up an interpretative field based on our concepts about the genre, author, myths, motifs, themes, etc. that parody undermines. It does not only question the object of our gaze, but the gaze itself as well. In Albee’s and Shepard’s plays “ghosts” of the past and of the present—illusions, myths, doctrines, theses, theatrical and literary heritage—are brought onto the stage and in their ludic interplay audiences are invited to abandon preconceptions and prejudices, and observe, dissect, analyze, and re-evaluate not only the play/text unfolding in front of their eyes but, distancing themselves from themselves, also the gaze that stares at its own uncanny Doppelgänger on stage. Parody thus effects a “catharsis of the surprise” (Puiu 17) not only arising from the recognition of references and the observation of deviations, but the surprise of catching oneself in the process of interpretation. It induces a level of awareness and self-awareness that is characteristic of liminal states. Both parody—an inherent feature of Albee’s and Shepard’s works—and liminal/liminoid states provoke participants/audiences to contemplate, observe, try out, and test constituents of their culture as well as their own attitude towards these elements and configurations.

These observations have led me to conclude that the “mutilated” implied ritual structures resulting in the open-endedness of the plays arise also on account of the hermeneutic circle set up within this liminal sphere by parody. The plays ludically deconstruct themes, motifs, structures, value systems, identity, they scrutinize audience expectations, while they also continuously undermine their own effects keeping the audience in a state of liminoid experimentation and constant re-evaluation of what they see and how they see it. Parody demands and urges the constant reinterpretation of the contemplated aesthetic object as well as the continuous scrutiny and readjustment of the observing and interpreting “gaze,” resisting closure and perpetuating the liminal/liminoid experience.

My dissertation shows how Albee’s and Shepard’s dramatizations of ritual passage and liminal trials challenge pre-existent concepts on subjectivity, moral and cultural values, and

power structures. They defy and transcend the limits of both ritual and dramatic tradition. As Albee emphasized, “I want to influence people, and if possible, do some damage” (12 May 2008). His and Shepard’s plays subvert the status quo and urge their audiences to confront the world outside the limits of the theatre with a consciousness altered by the inner liminoid experience. In my reading of their recent plays, these two playwrights appear as keen observers of the human condition, as harsh social critics, and re-invigorators of dramatic forms. Their works, imbued with irony, humor, parody, create a carnivalesque and playful ambiance foregrounding the regenerative and renewing powers of the liminoid rather than the reinforcing character of the liminal.

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4. Publications Linked to the Topic of the Dissertation

Studies in Scholarly Journals

- “Transgressing the Limits of Interpretation in Edward Albee’s *The Goat, or Who is Sylvia?*” *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* 15.1 (Spring 2010): 135-153.
- “Effacing Myths and Mystification of Power: *The God of Hell*.” *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae—Philologica* 1.1 (2009): 60-77.
- “Dramatic Representation of a Culture of Violence in Sam Shepard’s *The Late Henry Moss*.” *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae. Philologica* 2.1 (2010). Under publication.

Reviews in Scholarly Journals

“Johan Callens’s Dis/Figuring Sam Shepard.” *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* 14.2 (Spring, 2008): 420-23.

“David Wiles’s A Short History of Western Performance Space.” *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* (2005): 246-47.

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