

Title:

An exploration of the household as the site of tragedy in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* and *Uncle Vanya*.

Research Question:

How does Edward Albee, in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and Anton Chekhov, in *Uncle Vanya* use the household to create a sense of the tragic?

Subject: English A – Category 2

Word Count: 3999

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	2
Body.....	3
Conclusion.....	16
Bibliography.....	17

Anton Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* and Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* both use the household as the site of tragedy. *Uncle Vanya*, published in Russian in 1898, and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, published in English in 1962, both portray similar family conflicts, but their difference in time period, and of course, setting; one in Russia, portraying a bleak realism set on an estate in the remote countryside, and one in New England, USA, a modern drama set in the centre of a university campus, therefore mean their respective interpretations are in fact very different. By definition in Aristotelian terms:

Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is admirable, complete and possess magnitude; in language made pleasurable, each of its species separated in different parts; performed by actors, not through narration; effecting through pity and fear the purification of such emotions.¹

Although both *Uncle Vanya* and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* do both follow the conventions of Aristotelian tragedy, they place emphasis on different components of tragedy, and most importantly their interpretations of "mimesis"², described as "imitations' of character and emotion"³ vary. The likeness of everyday actions from *Uncle Vanya* to *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* differ, primarily through their individual uses of the household and how it affects the behaviours and actions of their chosen characters.

¹ Aristotle. (1997). *Poetics* (Penguin Classics). Penguin UK. Page 10

² Aristotle. (1997). *Poetics* (Penguin Classics). Penguin UK. Page XIII (Introduction)

³ Aristotle. (1997). *Poetics* (Penguin Classics). Penguin UK. Page XIII (Introduction)

A play's execution of mimesis, expressed through melody and rhythm, is arguably the most important component in judging the quality of a tragedy. If we cannot relate to the situation of the characters, it is hard for us to feel pity and fear in response, which make up an audience's primary base for judging how effective a play is in creating tragic effect. The more relatable a character is in terms of morality, the better the mimesis, and therefore the more effective a tragedy. In terms of imitation, the thing which "distinguish[es] tragedy and comedy from each other...(is that)...the latter aims to imitate people worse than our contemporaries, the former better"⁴, so a good execution of mimesis and tragedy through the behaviour of the characters within the household allows one to judge whether or not the tragedy is effective.

The difference in mimesis in *Uncle Vanya* and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is the main reason for my choice of comparison. In *Uncle Vanya*, Chekhov, who "inherited and worked in the main tradition of nineteenth-century realism"⁵, focuses on an accurate representation of a depressed character, and sets up the household in order to create an environment which reflects this. The tragedy of the character is embodied by the site of the home, making it a true realistic extension of the 'tragic sense of life'⁶ created through speech and action. In *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, the interpretation of mimesis is different as it is built on the illusion of reality through which the characters live, destabilising Albee's interpretation of mimesis. The characters in the play hide behind a façade of trivialities in order to avoid a confrontation with the reality of the modern and technologically advancing period in

⁴ Aristotle. (1997). *Poetics* (Penguin Classics). Penguin UK. Page 5

⁵ Williams, R. (2004). *Modern Tragedy*. Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press. Page 139

⁶ Williams, R. (2004). *Modern Tragedy*. Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press. Page 1

which they live. This is not a problem for Chekhov in *Uncle Vanya*, due to his choice of remote setting, and the lack of progression of Russian society at his time of writing.

Whilst the domestic setting of the household does provide a likely environment for the imitation of everyday actions to unfold, there are other components to judge the effectiveness of the household as the site of tragedy.

Tragedy, through a series of mimesis refers directly to the representation of everyday life through plot, defined as “a connected series of events”⁷ and spectacle, defined as “everything that is visible on stage”⁸. Completeness, something which is “whole...which has a beginning, a middle and an end” helps to preserve the idea of the unity of the household, making the play’s tragic sense comprehensible. “Language made pleasurable” according to Aristotle is “explained as speech with rhythm and melody”. Tragedy evokes pity and fear culminating in “katharsis”⁹, the “purification”¹⁰ of these emotions accompanied by a sense of relief.

Both Albee’s *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, a play cultivated by illusion, deception, and the protagonists’ distorted picture of reality, and Chekov’s naturalistic drama, *Uncle Vanya*, both allow for the relationships within the family to suffer. What at first appears as usual family or marital trivialities, caused by the sharing of the household, when explored further in both texts, have deep and dark roots. This only

⁷ Aristotle. (1997). *Poetics* (Penguin Classics). Penguin UK. Page XXIII (Introduction)

⁸ Aristotle. (1997). *Poetics* (Penguin Classics). Penguin UK. Page XIX (Introduction)

⁹ Aristotle. (1997). *Poetics* (Penguin Classics). Penguin UK. XXXIX (Introduction)

¹⁰ Aristotle. (1997). *Poetics* (Penguin Classics). Penguin UK. Page XXI (Introduction)

becomes apparent to an audience through close examination of mimesis, and the other components of tragedy which Aristotle refers to in "*Poetics*".

Uncle Vanya is a provincial play set in the Russian countryside, where the characters of the Serebryakov/ Voynitsky family are resident on a private estate, creating room for them to honestly express their confused emotions of distaste at their purposeless lives, whilst entangling themselves in perplexing love affairs, which never seem to work out, particularly in the case of Uncle Vanya and Sonya – the only two characters physically tied to the household, in terms of economic constraints, and also emotionally¹¹. The microcosmic setting of the isolated estate allows for an environment which permits the expression of emotion freely, exposing the disorder within the Serebryakov/ Voynitsky family structure.

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? is a modern drama set in New England, USA, where George and Martha live in a house on the campus of a small college. The invitation of a new couple into their home forges the sense of a close-knit community. From the moment the guests, Nick and Honey, who represent the good of society arrive, George and Martha are thrown into a chaotic evening of so called 'games'. As these 'games' are played, the different strings of the illusion that George and Martha are living start to unravel, creating the environment of a household ridden with lies.

Vanya's gloomy perspective on life is encouraged by his depressive ties with Astrov, which have been stimulated by the structure of the household, and

¹¹ The estate was bought as a dowry for Vanya Voynitsky's sister, and Sonya's mother.

Chekhov's structuring of the rooms, resulting in Astrov sharing with Vanya when he comes to visit. The placing of the two men in the same room in the household helps to create a sense of entrapment. Their negative thoughts are confined to that room, where they thrive and feed off of each other, encouraging their misery.

Furthermore, the sense of being stuck in a perpetual despondency by the physical constraints of the household intensifies the depressing atmosphere, making the negative thoughts of Astrov and Vanya contagious. The other characters therefore struggle to find peace and happiness in the remote setting. Vanya's discussions seem to often take negative turns; during conversation with Mrs Voynitsky, and Sonya, he exclaims "It's a perfect day...",¹² which initially seems to have positive connotations, but is then overruled by the pessimistic "...for a man to hang himself". Vanya has an ambition to subvert positivity, and desires to overshadow his own false happiness, even by overthrowing his own speech. The dystopian atmosphere he creates in the microcosm of the household is something also experienced in *Ivanov*¹³, where in his struggle, Ivanov also seems to have a negative effect on those around him, and "breaks others in his own fall".¹⁴

In addition to this, the resulting unhappiness which Vanya and Astrov catalyse in each other, and therefore the contagion effect on the other characters is amplified by the isolated nature of the household. The lack of characters from outside the family allows for unhappiness to perpetuate throughout the house, infecting others through their engagements with Vanya, poisoning potential for positivity in the more

¹² Chekhov, A. (2008). *Five Plays – Uncle Vanya*. New York. Page 126, Act One, Line 5

¹³ Written by Chekhov, A. (1887)

¹⁴ Williams, R. (2004). *Modern Tragedy*. Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press. Page 142

optimistic characters. The conversations that Vanya has with other members of the household, for example in his first monologue, express his feeling that, “life here is so dreary and stupid”¹⁵ extending the misery of his life to humanity’s existence. The tragic sense of life being experienced by all the family is something that is caused by the household and its claustrophobic quality. In relation to Aristotle’s theory of mimesis, it would make sense for actions which take place in the household to be probable, and the privacy that accompanies it provides a safe space for honest expression away from societal judgment. This demonstrates the probability of sadness spreading easily through this environment, as ‘tragic effect is enhanced when people inflict harm on those “closely connected with them”’¹⁶.

In comparison, the conflict between George and Martha’s emotions, which are revealed in the site of the household affects their guests. The disorder which is embodied by their home and the harm it allows them to inflict on each other is portrayed through graphic language, in particular, the childish use of name-calling – “swampy”¹⁷, and also the vulgar “Well, you make me sick”¹⁸. Nick and Honey, representing what is morally right in society, juxtapose the catastrophic behaviour of George and Martha. The name “Honey”, a sweet golden liquid made by bees has connotations of good, reflecting her innocence. In one instance, Nick tries to protect Honey from the behaviour of George and Martha, pleading “I wish you wouldn’t talk that way in front of my wife”¹⁹, trying to prevent the corruption that the characters in *Uncle Vanya* have already submitted to. Nick and Honey’s lack of familiarity to

¹⁵ Chekhov, A. (2008). *Five Plays – Uncle Vanya*. New York. Page 119, Act One, Line 20

¹⁶ Aristotle. (1997). *Poetics* (Penguin Classics). Penguin UK. Page XXXIII (Introduction)

¹⁷ Albee, E. (2001). *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Random House. Page 26, Act One, Line 19

¹⁸ Albee, E. (2001). *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Random House. Page 63, Act Two, Line 12

¹⁹ Albee, E. (2001). *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Random House. Page 24, Act One, Lines 18-19

George and Martha also creates an environment of false intimacy. The openness of George and Martha in the presence of Nick and Honey shows how comfortable they are in the household, further evoking pathos when the truth is revealed. The presence of guests should create a more light-hearted atmosphere, rather than just having the family present, like in *Uncle Vanya*, where the characters are already too familiar with suffering. Here, we could say that Chekhov's execution of the household as a site of tragedy is more integral to the tragedy than Albee's.

The stark contrast of the morally good Nick and Honey to the corrupted George and Martha is shown through their responses to each other. Polite remarks like, "Oh wasn't that funny? That was so funny."²⁰, show Honey's innocence prevents her from seeing the darker reality at work. As the evening unfolds, the toxicity of George and Martha's marital turmoil becomes unendurable, causing physical sickness and necessitating the sanctuary of the bathroom. The bathroom provides her with a place to wash, symbolising her need for purification. The physicality of the poisoning of her morality by George and Martha, again, in a similar way to in *Uncle Vanya* is intensified by the household setting, which not only acts as a physical restraint but lacks societal boundaries, further blurring moral expectations.

Whilst you could argue that a tragic sense of life is not created by the household itself, but that the transparency the household provides affords a raw view of the tragedy. In *Uncle Vanya*, the household presents a life which is far too real in its decline. Vanya's angst is reflected in the disordered nature of his routine and the basic parameters of life which he relies on the household to provide. His

²⁰ Albee, E. (2001). *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Random House. Page 12, Act One, Line 15

consumption of food, drink, and sleep patterns are out of sync; “everything’s been turned upside down. I sleep at all the wrong times, eat all sorts of fancy things for lunch and dinner, drink wine”.²¹ Vanya’s abnormal routine reflects his emotional disorder. The unity of the household perpetuates his emotional stasis; stuck in the same insipid environment with no purpose. The isolation of Vanya in the household not only allows the audience to see thoughts unfiltered, in their purest form, but offers insight into the way that others within his environment perceive and interact with him.

Aristotle’s dictum states poetry is concerned not with what has happened, but with “the kind of thing that would happen, i.e. what is possible in accordance with probability or necessity”²². Vanya’s actions, and their tragic appearance are altered by the site of the household. Whilst the household contributes to the naturalistic rooting Chekhov strives to demonstrate, this is contradicted by Vanya’s intrinsic connection to the household - as the inevitability of his downfall. Rational humans are aware that houses are bought and sold as circumstances change. However, the selling of the house as the cause of Vanya’s deep distress illustrates his heightened emotional connection to the household. The sarcastic “My ears must be deceiving me”²³, “You’re going to sell the estate. Wonderful. A very bright idea”²⁴ shows he fears the removal of the unity the household could bring. Vanya’s reaction when Serebryakov makes the selfish decision to sell the estate for his benefit shows the flawed family dynamic and the disregard of Vanya having “slaved away for ten years

²¹ Chekhov, A. (2008). *Five Plays – Uncle Vanya*. New York. Page 120, Act One, Lines 30-32

²² Aristotle. (1997) *Poetics* (Penguin Classics). Penguin UK. Page 16

²³ Chekhov, A. (2008). *Five Plays – Uncle Vanya*. New York. Page 153, Act Three, Line 4

²⁴ Chekhov, A. (2008). *Five Plays – Uncle Vanya*. New York. Page 153, Act Three, Lines 11-12

and paid off the whole mortgage”²⁵. This pivotal moment is one of recognition (“anagnorisis”²⁶) for Vanya – “a change from ignorance to knowledge”²⁷, where his “eyes have been opened”²⁸, and “everything’s perfectly clear”²⁹. This change is particularly important, being amplified by the setting of the household and its result (leaving him worse off) has been induced by Serebryakov, someone associated to Vanya by close relationship. Aristotle observes that as an audience, when judging the effectiveness of tragedy, we are concerned most with those recognitions that involve those with “close relationship and enmity”³⁰. Vanya’s change to bad fortune causes him to express his views to Serebryakov abruptly. He explains that not only him, but the entire family, using the pronoun ‘we’³¹, have endured years of hardship purely to please him. The use of listing; “we talked of you and your writings”³², “we were proud of you and worshipped the very sound of your name”³³, “we wasted our nights reading books and journals that I now utterly despise”³⁴ adds emphasis to the imitation of a tragic sense of life, not only in Vanya’s world, but in the ‘world’ of the family, embodied by the household. The creation of perpetual misery and therefore the sense of the tragic is directly connected to the home. This ultimately foreshadows Vanya’s loss of control; his shot at Serebryakov.

Astrov’s depiction of the environment surrounding the household, through the drawing and description of the map he has painted to Helen, shows the slow

²⁵ Chekhov, A. (2008). *Five Plays – Uncle Vanya*. New York. Page 154, Act Three, Lines 11-12

²⁶ Aristotle. (1997). *Poetics* (Penguin Classics). Penguin UK. Page XXX (Introduction)

²⁷ Aristotle. (1997). *Poetics* (Penguin Classics). Penguin UK. Page XXX (Introduction)

²⁸ Chekhov, A. (2008). *Five Plays – Uncle Vanya*. New York. Page 155, Act Three, Line 8

²⁹ Chekhov, A. (2008). *Five Plays – Uncle Vanya*. New York. Page 155, Act Three, Lines 8-9

³⁰ Aristotle. (1997). *Poetics* (Penguin Classics). Penguin UK. Page XXX (Introduction)

³¹ Chekhov, A. (2008). *Five Plays – Uncle Vanya*. New York. Page 154, Act Three, Line 37

³² Chekhov, A. (2008). *Five Plays – Uncle Vanya*. New York. Page 154, Act Three, Line 37

³³ Chekhov, A. (2008). *Five Plays – Uncle Vanya*. New York. Page 154-5, Act Three, Lines 37-1

³⁴ Chekhov, A. (2008). *Five Plays – Uncle Vanya*. New York. Page 155, Act Three, Lines 2-3

progression of change within the area, contributing to the low sense of purpose that plagues Vanya's life. The focus on the site of the play also helps to contribute to the unity of place, and it also directly reflects the family. The land is in "gradual and unmistakable decline"³⁵, "because people have found the struggle for existence too much for them"³⁶. This emphasis on unity of place, and the effect it has on mimesis plays a similar role to pathetic fallacy.

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? interprets mimesis differently to *Uncle Vanya*. It focuses more on a reversed portrayal of reality – it portrays the illusion that Martha and George vicariously live through. This is clever, as it is an accurate reflection of everyday life, just not the everyday life of George and Martha. The portrayal of a confusing, and purposely flawed execution of illusion by George and Martha, through the use of "Fun and Games", which is connectedly the name of Act One, leaves some interpretation of what good mimesis looks like in this play. The lack of focus on realism makes it hard for us to compare *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* in the same way as *Uncle Vanya*. The different games which serve to expose the illusion George and Martha are living are communicated through broken and disjointed conversations represent a lack of harmony and rhythm that the relationship of George and Martha tends to enjoy. In the opening scene, whilst the two characters are alone, the play's disorder is immediately set in a conversation about a play, led by Martha, where George seems to be detached. Martha tries to engage her husband in dialogue, but George is not listening, so responds to her prompts with the wrong play, to which Martha confusedly replies "What...what is?"³⁷. Despite the

³⁵ Chekhov, A. (2008). *Five Plays – Uncle Vanya*. New York. Page 148, Act Three, Line 21

³⁶ Chekhov, A. (2008). *Five Plays – Uncle Vanya*. New York. Page 148, Act Three, Lines 31-32

³⁷ Albee, E. (2001). *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Random House. Page 2, Act One, Line 18

intention of casual conversation, the frequent ellipses and question marks, and Martha's response of "Don't you know anything?"³⁸ portrays a disconnect in their conversation and marriage, reflecting a further disconnect to life itself.

The use of the household in setting, and its compliance to Aristotle's idea of the 'unity of place', which helps to form a good tragedy, in some ways helps to create a mask for the underlying causes of the characters dissatisfaction in their lives. In *Uncle Vanya*, the sporadic use of Telegin as a positive voice, and his attempts to make the best out of their situation, focusing on the physicality of the household, shows his attempts to distract from the underlying depressive mood with a façade of happiness. He admires the beauty of a "stroll in the shade of the garden"³⁹ which causes him to "experience bliss beyond compare"⁴⁰. The focus on the visually pleasing aspects of the household poses a distraction from the underlying problems which Telegin and the family are facing. The remark that "we all live in peace and harmony"⁴¹, which has so far proved extremely difficult, serves to try and shield the audience from the obvious disorder that lies not only in the physical estate but in the roots of the family who lives there. The use of the household is not only significant in its material state, but its probable intrinsic tying together of the family, and its unification of relationships in the face of difference, none of which seem to have bloomed from the household in *Uncle Vanya*. Here, tragedy is used to manipulate a place normally where families spend times of love and make positive memories, by subverting this through the suffering which the characters face.

³⁸ Albee, E. (2001). *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Random House. Page 2, Act One, Line 20

³⁹ Chekhov, A. (2008). *Five Plays – Uncle Vanya*. New York. Page 121, Act One, Lines 33-34

⁴⁰ Chekhov, A. (2008). *Five Plays – Uncle Vanya*. New York. Page 121, Act One, Lines 34-35

⁴¹ Chekhov, A. (2008). *Five Plays – Uncle Vanya*. New York. Page 122, Act One, Line 1

This is replicated very similarly by the life of illusion that Martha and George lead. The fantasy through which George and Martha live is shown through the use of the story telling. They are often told, mainly by George, in the third person, helping to create another perspective that Nick and Honey can view, but not connect with. This further distorts the atmosphere within the household, and disconnects the two couples through a lack of personal language.

The distinction between Nick and George, who represent their own interpretations of reality and illusion, is reflected by their professions. George is a historian, focused on the past, using it to distort the current reality he does not want to face, turning it into an illusion. Nick the biologist, in contrast, is focused on the future, and how he can modernise his own current reality. The play being based in the household of George and Martha, rather than of Nick and Honey, allows George to execute and secure his and Martha's illusion. Although his morality is certainly questionable, the foundations of his beliefs, and his life, rooted in stories of the past, is concrete, while Nick, in his modern ways "shows himself ready to adapt his morality to the demands of expediency"⁴². In comparison, the names George and Martha are the names of the First President and First Lady of the United States, the Washington's. This helps to reiterate George's fascination with the past, ensuring the "validity of their archetypal role"⁴³.

⁴² Bigsby, C. W. *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? Edward Albee's Morality Play*. *Journal of American Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2, Page 262, 1967 JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/27552789. Accessed 30 May 2020.

⁴³ Bigsby, C. W. *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? Edward Albee's Morality Play*. *Journal of American Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2, Page 259, 1967 JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/27552789. Accessed 30 May 2020.

Towards the end of the play, it becomes unmistakable that both George and Martha are aware their lives have blurred the line between reality and illusion. In the Act of “The Exorcism”, essentially an exorcism of the lies Martha and George have been living, they attempt to put an end to sharing their illusion with those who aren’t part of their relationship. This is odd, due to the intimacy the other couple has experienced within the household, and in the case of Martha and Nick, intimacy with another characters themselves. Martha, “pleading”⁴⁴ admits their state of confusion, in the mixing of truth and illusion.

MARTHA [*pleading*]: Truth and illusion, George; you don’t know the difference.

GEORGE: No; but we must carry on as though we did.⁴⁵

The use of the past tense “did”⁴⁶, shows willingness to move on, and the possibility of finally ending the illusion. This foreshadows George’s announcing of the “son...is dead”⁴⁷, which distresses Martha, and she tries to stop George, shouting “YOU...CAN’T...DO...THAT!”⁴⁸. It is interesting that, at this point where Martha knows that her illusion is slipping away from her, the language she uses to express hurt and anger towards George changes tone. Her language is not rude, it is concise and final, using one word sentences such as “No!”⁴⁹ and “Liar!!”⁵⁰. This shift in tone signifies an end to the games, and a deep registration of the loss of her ‘son’. The

⁴⁴ Albee, E. (2001). *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Random House. Page 108, Act Three, Line 20

⁴⁵ Albee, E. (2001). *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Random House. Page 108, Act Three, Lines 20-22

⁴⁶ Albee, E. (2001). *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Random House. Page 108, Act Three, Line 22

⁴⁷ Albee, E. (2001). *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Random House. Page 123, Act Three, Line 23

⁴⁸ Albee, E. (2001). *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Random House. Page 123, Act Three, Line 30

⁴⁹ Albee, E. (2001). *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Random House. Page 119, Act Three, Line 26

⁵⁰ Albee, E. (2001). *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Random House. Page 121, Act Three, Line 5

use of the son as a metaphor for the illusion shows how treasurable the illusion is for both Martha and George in its loss being comparable to the loss of a child. The treatment of the illusion as a family member is made important by the household, as the illusion feels integral to their relationship. The loss of the son during the exorcism of the illusion, and the use of the holy scripture in Latin, shows a progression “from humiliation”⁵¹ in the light-hearted fun and games, to a deeply religious “humility”⁵², where the illusion is sacrificed. The use of the child also creates a more accurate imitation.

In *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* tragic effect reaches its peak when George goes to shoot Martha, then turns out to be using a prop gun. In this scene, during “Fun and Games”, the emotion of fear is extremely high, and this is essentially the most blatant example where we see the technique of imitation and spectacle in use. The toy gun represents the fantasy that George and Martha have created, and the intense and sudden build up to when George “pulls the trigger”⁵³ directly exhibits the illusions power to create domestic tragedy. The use of the gun also creates astonishment, which in Aristotle’s opinion, is extremely important in evoking tragedy. It also follows on from an ordered sequence of events. Aristotle claims events in tragedy are most effective when “these effects occur above all when things come about contrary to expectation but because of one another”⁵⁴. George shooting a gun at Martha, although one could argue it would follow a normal sequence of events,

⁵¹ Bigsby, C. W. E. (1967) *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? Edward Albee's Morality Play*. Journal of American Studies, Vol. 1, No. 2, Page 260, 1967 JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/27552789. Accessed 30 May 2020.

⁵² Bigsby, C. W. E. (1967) *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? Edward Albee's Morality Play*. Journal of American Studies, Vol. 1, No. 2, Page 260, 1967 JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/27552789. Accessed 30 May 2020.

⁵³ Albee, E. (2001). *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Random House. Page 30, Act One, Line 25

⁵⁴ Aristotle. (1997) *Poetics* (Penguin Classics). Penguin UK. Page XXVIII

could be argued to be too extreme. Up until this point in the play, tension has been present but constant, and the site of the household has not yet reached its full potential in holding the characters' anger, where it is warranted more so than in a public setting. The use of a gun, if real, would have been disproportionate compared to the magnitude of past events, therefore the event lacks magnitude, as the events are less than probable. The gun is astonishing to the characters who are unfamiliar with this particular household setting, shown through Honey's "screams"⁵⁵ and how Nick "rises"⁵⁶. However, to the audience, the lack of connection minimises the effect of astonishment as normally 'the illusion of connection increases our sense of astonishment'⁵⁷. This therefore decreases the tragic effect which is further reduced by the use of colour in the "red and yellow Chinese parasol"⁵⁸ which devoids the scene of any serious tragic emotion.

The use of the household as the site of tragedy is presented by Chekhov and Albee in different ways, one being a brutally realistic representation of mimesis, and the other being a mimesis of an illusion which is based upon fantasy, yet both utilise the home to effect similar tragic emotions. It is not only the honesty that the household provides to the characters themselves, but also the openness which allows the audience to view tragic representation in the characters' actions and behaviours which are exaggerated by the household. The household provides a breeding ground for toxicity, which extends not just throughout the site of the household, but in the context of each respective play, to the wider world as well.

⁵⁵ Albee, E. (2001). *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Random House. Page 30, Act One, Line 23

⁵⁶ Albee, E. (2001) *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Random House. Page 30, Act One, Line 23

⁵⁷ Aristotle. (1997) *Poetics* (Penguin Classics). Penguin UK. Page XXIX

⁵⁸ Albee, E. (2001). *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Random House. Page 30, Act One, Lines 27-28

Bibliography

Albee, E. (2001). *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Random House.

Aristotle. (1997). *Poetics* (Penguin Classics). Penguin UK.

Bigsby, C. W. E. (1967). *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? Edward Albee's Morality Play*. *Journal of American Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Oct., 1967), pp. 257–268. Retrieved May 30, 2020, from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/27552789.pdf>

Borny, G. (n.d.). *Interpreting Chekhov*. Failed Experiments - The Early Plays. Page 119 Retrieved May 30, 2020, from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/j.ctt2jbjpn.8.pdf>

Chekhov, A. (2008). *Five Plays – Uncle Vanya*. New York.

Friedland, L. S. (1911). The Dramatic Unities in England. *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (Jan., 1911), Page 73. Retrieved August 31, 2020, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27700071>

Williams, R. (2004). *Modern Tragedy*. Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press.