



**Ministry of Higher Education  
Scientific Research &  
University of Babylon  
College of Education for Human Sciences**

## **Edward Albee's Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolf: A Thematic Study**

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English language

**BY**

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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

((أَمَّنْ هُوَ قَانِتٌ آنَاءَ اللَّيْلِ سَاجِدًا وَقَائِمًا يَحْذَرُ الْآخِرَةَ وَيَرْجُو رَحْمَةَ رَبِّهِ قُلْ هَلْ يَسْتَوِي الَّذِينَ يَعْلَمُونَ وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ إِنَّمَا يَتَذَكَّرُ أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ))

صدق الله العلي العظيم

(الزمر/٩)

In the Name Of Allah, Most Gracious ,Most Merciful

Is one who is devoutly obedient during periods of the night,prostrating and ))  
standing,fearing the Hereafter and hoping for the mercy of his lord , say , “ Are  
those who know equal to those who do not know ?” Only they will remember  
((.people of understanding

(Al-Zumar/9)

## DEDICATION

Lady of the women of the worlds Fatima Al-Zahra, peace be upon her, and her grandson, Sahib Al-Zaman (May God hasten his honorable reappearance) and my family

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

Special thanks to my doctor in this research Asst. prof Dr. Maamoon Sami dedication to this humble business, to all my family, special my sister and finally I thank myself to face everything and accept everything that happens in my life.

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## **Abstract**

present study Is concerned with the Exposés of moral values of the American family in the modern society that means materialism cover all society. The play aims to show the deceptive appearances and moral. we have noticed that in disintegration between George and Martha. where present study deals with following subjects that: information about the writer's life and how he is influenced by the theater of the absurd, and outline the American dream and how the characters accept illusion as an escape from real life. The study concludes that in ending of the play, George assures Martha that it is for the best that their son died. where He puts his hand on Martha's shoulder and sings 'Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf.' Martha replies that she is afraid, indicating that she is afraid of living without games and illusions

## Introduction

The current study deals with the following aspects in details: Edward Albee's life since her childhood till her death ,The second part deals with the details of Edward style, Intellectual trends,The third part deals with the Edward's influence and reasons writing of play.

### Author biography:

Playwright, born March 12, 1928, Washington, D.C.

Edward Albee arrives on the American theatrical scene in the late 1950s with a series of plays that detail the decade's agonies and disappointments . He has been universally hailed as the successor to Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, and Eugene O'Neill. throughout his career, Albee has showed an interest in a wide rang of theatrical forms and subjects

His works: He's written 31 plays (1958-2009). The Zoo Story (1958). The Sandbox (1959). Who's Afraid of Virginia Woof? (1962). Breakfast at Tiffany's (1966). Seascape (1974). Three Tall Women (1991). The Goat or Who is Sylvia (2002). Me Myself and I (2007), At Home at the Zoo (2009). His awards include two Tony Awards for Best Play ( Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf 1963 The Goat, or Who is Sylvia 2002).(Three Pulitzer Prizes for Drama • A Delicate Balance 1967 • Seascape 1975 • Three Tall Women 1994) still effects theatre today

Edward Albee is often consideres one of America's greatest modern playwrights; even as a teenager, he is being a productive writer. In 1945, his poem "Eighteen" has published in the Texas literary magazine.Edward has moved to New York City's artsy Greenwich Village at the age of twenty. He has supported himself by writing music programming . In 1953, Albee meets playwright Thornton Wilder. Later, he has credited Wilder with inspiring him to become a playwright. he has died in September 16. 2016 in Montauk N.Y. <https://www.gradesaver.com/author/edward-albee> . accessed on 7th. Dec  
<https://www.kennedy-center.org/artists/a/aa-an/edward-albee/> . accessed on 23th. Feb  
<https://www.slideserve.com/truong/edward-albee> . accessed on 3th. Feb

## Edward style

Edward Albee has a multiple writing styles , ranging from naturalist to absurdist . Albee creates psychological and ironic dramas in which the characters are realistic but behave in strange, ludicrous ways. writing style has influenced by the theatre of the absurd movements, and naturalist, which is a European drama and theatre movement that has developed in the late 1800s and early 1900s. It emphasizes on realistic, completely human (rather than legendary or supernatural) characters whose motivations and actions are guided by human nature and circumstance.

He focuses less on the linguistic rhythm and more on character depth. His plays revolve around how people don't notice each other and try to find human connection. For example, Peter's character in "zoo story" is highly lonely, since He stays within his little box, and His works has distinguished themselves in a humorous manner by dealing with dark aspects of marriage, religion, Child rearing and American society in general.

<https://www.studysmarter.co.uk/explanations/english-literature/american-drama/edward-albee> .accessed on 7th. Dec

<https://almadapaper.net/print.php?cat=166829> . accessed on 5th. Feb

## Edward's influence

Edward Albee is influenced by the great American dramatists who have come before him, such as Eugene O'Neill, Thornton Wilder, Tennessee Williams, and Arthur Miller, as well as the generation that is followed, including Sam Shepard and Mamet. Where he when is asked about his influences, he cites Sophocles and Noël Coward for their unique blend of tragic vision and clear intelligence. However, his favorite writer is Samuel Beckett, who exemplifies the combination of rigid form and unsparing content.

<https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-et-cm-edward-albee-appreciation-20160917-snap-story.html> . accessed on 10th. Feb



## Intellectual trends

He aspires to be more than a playwright. to be a comprehensive theatre, he shares some plays with other writers, In some ways, he enjoys the idea of making music, writing opera scripts, being a conscious translator of American theater as an institution, and even being a general critic of professional drama. He has founded the playwrights unit because he dislikes the atmosphere in which the playwrights work, thought his job to help them. at 15 years old, he stops writing the poetry he has started . he decides to try his luck with the novel; he has written a novel that, he claims, is funny, but he adores it very much.

At the age of 19, he is writing another 200-page novel that isn't as good as its predecessors. Albee maintains his resolve to be a writer, despite the fact that he has failed to establish a link with society, where he has demonstrated rebellion from a young age, particularly after his father dismisses the idea of becoming a writer. He left home at the age of twenty, became friends with a number of writers and painters, including William Ing, Bland, and William Flanagan, and worked in some menial jobs before studying arts and literature. Because he isn't a strong novelist or poet, he has touched on a subject that seems a little better: the experience of playwriting, therefore he has studied theatre at the University of Houston, and he has worked as a professor there.

<http://cls.matrix.msu.edu/lecture/?personID=5B-236-8> . accessed on 14th. Feb

<https://www.aljazeera.net/midan/art/theater/2017> . accessed on 10th. Feb

## reasons writing of play

The writer Edward Albee considers the play as a response to a specific moment in US history, where in 1962, the play has premiered. another cause, Albee's play has photographed brilliantly American life, so it has focused about of the local setting especially, and on America middle-class. so the names of the two characters, George and Martha, take us back to found United States and its first Presidents'; this further it supports the idea that the play should read as being 'about of America', as well as the lives of individual middle-class Americans. one of the reasons for writing, this play considers as a classic example of absurdist writing which pursues the modern condition, as well as it acts a symbolic story for America at a certain stage in its history, especially in the early sixties. through the fictional son isn't existent in the play, the writer has been wanting to analyse that son as a signs of the country's worries about of its future. also

he has wanted clarification the turbulent situation of both spouses have never possessed children , their imaginary son is the heart and soul of their conflicted relationship.

among the most important reasons:the original title for Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf was 'Exorcism', which he ends up using as the title for the final act of the play. The eventual title has come from a one of bars which albee has frequented, where customers leave some graffiti,or on a large mirror. He has seen somebody that has criticaed on 'who's afraid of the big bad wolf' from animated films 'Little Red Riding Hood' so he has substituted it 'who's afraid of Virginia Woolf', a reference to the modernist writer, and he has made a mental note of the phrase, thinking that phrase would make a good topic for a play.

He has written the play because it contains biting dialogue by highlighting the dysfunctional relationship between two people who seemingly have only one purpose...the psychological destruction of each other.He has Written "this play " reference to the English novelist Virginia Woolf. her work has used as a symbol throughout the play.Where the play is a complex and intense play that challenges the audience to face uncomfortable truths about human relationships and societal norms.He has written this play because, it deals topics of class and racism. Instance george is professor of history in a small New England college,where his wife is daughter of the president of the college

<https://interestingliterature.com/2021/08/edward-albee-whos-afraid-of-virginia-woolf-summary-analysis/>

.accessed on 24th. Feb

<https://youtu.be/AeioIHhern4?si=tBQYbl2aYBe7NpK3> . accessed on 14th. Feb

## **who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf**

Themes like Imperfect marriage, Academic, Reality and Illusion, Critique of societal expectations, Ambition, Success, and Failure, Sterility, Competition, Games vs War, American Dream, the christian allegory, History versus Biology, Love and hate

one of the important themes in "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf" where portrays marriage as a source of strife, disagreements, and disillusionment, emphasizing the concept of imperfection. George and Martha, although being named after the first presidential pair of the United States, are a paradigm of dysfunction, undercutting the concept of the happy couple. They invite Nick and Honey to their home to act as an audience for their mutual contempt and arguing. Though Nick and Honey are originally shown as rational and functional, particularly when compared to their contemporaries, their marriage is quickly found to be similarly dysfunctional

The drama chronicles the collapse of the two marriages, as the individuals' public appearances are sullied by drunken admissions of their private thoughts and histories. that the play has premiered in the early sixties, it can be read as a reaction to the fifties, when unrealistic images and advertisements of the 'perfect American family' and home life abounded.

<https://www.litcharts.com/lit/who-s-afraid-of-virginia-woolf/themes/imperfect-marriage> . accessed on 8th.

Mar

The idea of academia impacts and taints the play's narrative at several times. It causes specific power dynamics tensions, and jealousies among the characters—Martha is attracted to Nick and George is threatened by him because of his academic achievements; Martha's father holds the key to George's future success or failure, and thus defines the terms of their marriage; George and Nick's academic disciplines work their modes of conversation and their argument about genetic biology

The academic atmosphere also provides special relevance to the genders of the characters—the individuals have employed by the institution and whose successes are analyzed, George, Nick, and Martha's father, are all men. The women in the play, Martha and Honey, are only affiliated with the college through their familial relations. Honey plays an exaggerated version of the university wife, in her timidity and respect to her husband. The play examines the difficulty separation in the academy, between professional

and personal life, and public and private life. It also explores the limitations of academic intelligence and professional ambition in creating a happy life

<https://www.litcharts.com/lit/who-s-afraid-of-virginia-woolf/theme> . accessed on 9th. Mar

The third theme refers to those who are terrified of living life without false illusions.( J.MANN,2003.). Albee's interest in the issue of reality versus illusion is evident in several of his plays. In analyzing *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*,

he refers to Nietzsche's understanding of the Apollonian/Dionysian dichotomy of ancient Greek drama, as recounted in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Albee says, "There was a time when people believed in deities. And then revolutions came – industrial, French, Freudian, Marxist. God and absolutes vanished. Individuals find this very difficult and uncomfortable. All they have left is fantasy or the examination of the self." According to Lawrence Kingsley, Albee's characters create illusions to help them evade feelings of their own inadequacy – as "George and Martha have evaded the ugliness of their marriage by taking refuge in illusion." The play demonstrates "how his characters must rid themselves of falsehood and return to the world in which they must live (J.MANN,2003.).

The distinction between truth and illusion is at times deliberately unclear. The reality of the child, George's "murder" of his parents, and Honey's "pregnancy" may all be illusions, but they appear true to the characters. Illusions may be banished in the play, but no truth or seeming reality is provided in their place. "All truth," George claims, "becomes relative." Edward Albee's theme of illusion vs. reality implies that individuals prefer to hide behind illusions and pretenses rather than face the harsh truths of their lives. However, all illusions must finally come to an end, and individuals are forced to face reality head on.

[https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Who%27s\\_Afraid\\_of\\_Virginia\\_Woolf%3F](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Who%27s_Afraid_of_Virginia_Woolf%3F) . accessed on 9th. Mar

Where realism, the play has been viewed as realistic psychology. But credible motivation drives psychological drama, and Albee's motivation is designedly flimsy: Why does George stay up to entertain Martha's guests? Why for that matter, does she invite them? And why do Honey and Nick allow themselves to be "gotten"? (COHIST ,1969.)

play opposes the idea of a perfect American family and societal expectations as it "attacks the false optimism and myopic confidence of modern society". Albee takes a heavy-handed approach to displaying this contrast, making examples of every character and their expectations of the people around them. Societal norms of the 1950s consisted of a nuclear family, two parents and two (or more) children. This conception is picturesque in the idea that the father is the breadwinner, the mother a housewife, and the children well-behaved. *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* smashes these conventions and shows realistic families that are far from perfect and possibly ruined. The families of Honey and Martha were dominated by their fathers, with no sign of a mother figure in their lives. George and Martha's chance at a perfect family is ruined by infertility and George's failure to become a prominent figure at the university.

[https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Who%27s\\_Afraid\\_of\\_Virginia\\_Woolf%3F](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Who%27s_Afraid_of_Virginia_Woolf%3F) . accessed on 8th. Mar

Another theme George's lack of achievement is a main source of stress in his marriage to Martha, who, like her father, has expected him to achieve more than he has. anticipated he occupy the college's presidency once Martha's father retired, but Martha claims that her father no longer considers George qualified for the role. She mocks his scholarly work, the novel he has wrote, and his general weakness. George is put into relief by the young Nick, who is praised as ambitious, successful, and bound to achieve great things. Martha seems more upset with George's lack of success than even he is, which might be read as a projection of her own frustration with her own inability to have an accomplished professional life —a consequence of the sexism of the time, and perhaps an indication of her own shortcomings as well. That all of the characters' emphasis on ambition and relative success has only led them to the seemingly unhappy situations on display in the play suggests that success as they understand it may not be a good value or barometer to dictate one's life around <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/who-s-afraid-of-virginia-woolf/themes> . accessed on 8th. Mar

Martha and George act childishly throughout the play, provoking and tormenting their guests. They engage in common romantically juvenile gestures, such as calling each other "baby" and speaking in childlike voices. George and Martha also sometimes treat Nick and Honey like toddlers. this conduct can be interpreted in light of the couple's experiences with infertility and "imaginary children": George and Martha create a son who does not exist, Honey has "a hysterical pregnancy." end of the play, Honey screams that she wants a child. The two married couples are distressed by the absence of their children., and the necessary absence of them, is a subject of distress for the two married couples. Having children is something

that completes the image of the American family, but Albee suggests that the characters have deeper issues .and desires that they wish to quell by having a child

<https://www.litcharts.com/lit/who-s-afraid-of-virginia-woolf/themes> . accessed on 8th. Mar

Throughout Who Is Afraid of Virginia Woolf? Edward Albee portrays competitive nature as something that frequently outweighs a person's desire to be kind or sensible. The competitive aspect is evident in the games has played throughout the night, as well as the relationship power dynamics. George and Nick are competitive in the sense that they always try to outwit one another, and they are both academics at the same university. Nick compete with George for Martha's affection, but George pretends not to notice. George and Martha are constantly competing to see who can disgrace each other the most. She has subtle sense of competition with Honey, who is still young and able to have children. She has used Nick to prove and ensure her value. Conversations regarding human genetic engineering also bring up the concept of competition. Edward Albee suggests that competition can bring out the pridefulness in people as they try to .mask their fears with the idea of winning or being right

<https://www.litcharts.com/lit/who-s-afraid-of-virginia-woolf/themes> . accessed on 8th. Mar

George's classification of these games, as games emotionally destructive activities. these games assumpt which George is the role of ring master reveals that all the events of the evening are section of a power conflict between him and Martha, in which one of them intends to appear as victor. Martha and George's verbal joks is also characteristic of their continue game-playing. Years of marriage have shifted insults into accurate routine. By description these activities of games, Albee does not suggest that they are silly, Trivia or meaningless. Rather, he likens game-playing to war and demonstrates the degree to which George and Martha are committed to destroying each other. George and Martha in fact declare "all out war" over the .course of the play until the characters try to destroy each other and themselves

<https://www.gradesaver.com/whos-afraid-of-virginia-woolf/study-guide/themes> . accessed on 12th. Mar

George and Martha characters reference patriotic namesakes - George and Martha Washington. Albee uses this symbolic first couple's unhappy marriage as a microcosm for the imperfect state of America. When George and Martha's marriage is revealed to be a sham based on the illusion of an imaginary son, where the audience has paid to Suspect the illusions that similarly support the American dream. Nick and Honey, a

traditional American couple they introduce to be presenting a falsely happy façade. They too secretly exploit each other. Furthermore, Nick's name is a direct sign or reference to Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev, and George and Martha's marriage considered as a threat and references the Cold War turmoil of America

<https://www.gradesaver.com/whos-afraid-of-virginia-woolf/study-guide/themes> .accessed on 12th. Mar

Accurate references to Christianity, especially to Catholic rites, in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*. For instance, Martha refers to her (imaginary) son as a "poor lamb," making him a Christ symbol - for Jesus is also known as the "Lamb of God". George chants some words in play such as the (Kyrie Eleison, Dies Irae, and Requiem) these words from Catholic symbols. The doorbells rings which sound at the end of the second like as to echo the chimes that sound during a Catholic mass. Albee even names the third act of the play "The Exorcism" That name, refers to George's attempt to kill the "son" and thus exorcise illusion from his marriage. The killing of the "lamb" can also be seen as a victimization necessary to rescue George and Martha's marriage. Where George has named the proceedings "an Easter pageant," referencing the day the Lamb of God has sacrificed to save the world and where the scene even establishes early on a Sunday morning

<https://www.gradesaver.com/whos-afraid-of-virginia-woolf/study-guide/themes> .accessed on 12th. Mar

Albee's exchange between Nick and George regarding Biology and History displays two opposing worldviews George's lack of achievement in the History Department and failure to climb to power as the college's president conversely with Nick's goals and seeming ability to move forward — first taking over the Biology Department then the college. Where Albee definitely for us to see Nick's (half-joking) scheme as threatening. George's criticism of Biology's capacity to generate a race of identical test tube infants all like Nick, and Nick's harsh willingness to take whatever means required to move a front of, the lack of morality and scary uniformity in a future decided by science.. What's more, in exposing seemingly virile Nick's impotence, Albee demonstrates the

underlying powerlessness of science and in George's perseverance, the unexpected staying power of history

<https://www.gradesaver.com/whos-afraid-of-virginia-woolf/study-guide/themes> .accessed on 12th. Mar

However, Albee's drama is restricted by its concealment. George's caustic idiom overshadows his feeble humanitarian yearnings. His ideas on history, society, and biology are basic George wishes to safeguard Western civilization against its sex-oriented, success-oriented adversaries ("I will not give up Berlin").

Albee subtly incorporates classical and Christian themes into the drama, reflecting the civilization's classic Christian heritage. Martha's opening expletive is "Jesws," and both men swear Christian oaths. The fictional child is identified with the sun and golden fleece, and the offstage dads of Martha and Honey are viewed as god-like. However, these indications play a minor role in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* The emphasis on human love also limits the role of the divine (COHIST, 1969.)

through George and Martha's marriage, Albee seems to make the uncommon literary confirmation that love and hate are two parts of a any person. so through play we notice from their vitriolic banter, it clearly appears that George and Martha hate each other. In fact, they try to destroy each other. Nonetheless, there are moments of tenderness that contradict this hatred. George even tells Nick not to necessarily believe what he sees. Some of George and Martha's arguments are for show only, others are for the challenge of arguing, while still others are indeed meant to hurt each other. However, Martha's declaration that George is really the only one who can satisfy her and make her happy. this mean there are positive aspects to their marriage. Clearly, as much as they fight they also need each other need help each other, even if just to maintain the illusions that keep them going

<https://www.gradesaver.com/whos-afraid-of-virginia-woolf/study-guide/themes> .accessed on 12th. Mar



## **Conclusion**

We conclude this play shows community problems that help modern readers to understand Edward's crises and his tragedy form. the play seems to be about the illusion but in fact it examines and presents crises of the modern American values and their way of life. Thus, the play discloses the theme of illusion and social American crises through the bond of marriage of the two couples. We conclude also that the play by writer Edward Albee considers as joke, for reference the name of the play, where All the characters in the play refer to the joke which plays on the song title Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf? also we concludes the play's continued focus of the theme of reality versus illusion is a common literary theme throughout the writings of Virginia Woolf. Each character is asked to examine their own illusions and the social illusions they create to determine if they have to courage to live without illusions

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