



Binary Oppositions in Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

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Abstract

*Aim: This paper delineates how Edward Albee allegorized layers of meaning in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* through Binary Oppositions. The binary opposition is the means by which the units of language have value or meaning. Each unit is defined in reciprocal determination with another term, as in binary code. The play received a Tony Award, a Drama Critics Circle Award and a Pulitzer Prize nomination. It startled mainstream audiences out of their comfortable notions of the American Dream and brought challenging theatre back to Broadway.*

Methodology: *Binary opposition evolved in Saussurean structuralist theory, not as contradictory relation but as a structural, complementary one. Saussure demonstrated that a sign's meaning is derived from its context (syntagmatic dimension) and the group (paradigm) to which it belongs. An example of this is that one cannot conceive of 'good' if one does not understand 'evil'.*

This paper analyzes the text by applying methodologies of Poststructuralism and deconstruction in drama, using absurdism, Louis Althusser's concept of ideology. The plot and the characters are further explored and decoded using critical technique of Binary Opposition. This paper employs technique of discourse analysis by examining how Albee specifically works each character and plot exhibiting the language in action through relationships, dialogues, psychic expressions, symbols, action and inaction.

Outcome: *The paper is able to highlight themes of alienation, concept of American family, using Binary Opposition. The concepts like American Dream, Absurdity Alienation is delineated in detail by exemplifying the characters of the text. It is discussed how 'Absurdity' of postmodern plays is a rehearsal of deconstruction wave which is a part of post-structuralism during 1960s. Albee's understanding of human existence includes this central gist of deconstruction.*

Conclusion and suggestion: The critical discourse of Albee's play gives deeper insights into Absurdity, American Family, Alienation and individualism, American Dream, that can further be applied to various other dramatic texts using poststructuralism and binary opposition. The various critical issues of the paper can be applied to cultural studies to understand ever-evolving cultures including social structures, community and familial trends across the globe.

Keywords: Edward Albee, Absurdist American drama, Binary Oppositions, postmodern American play, structuralism.

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“Edward Albee, the leading American Playwright of his generation, has been confounding, challenging and stimulating theater audiences for almost half a century.” - *The New York Times*

The term postmodernism, by itself, has been overloaded with meanings. Terry Eagleton described Deconstruction in postmodern terms that it “is the name given to the critical operation by which binary opposition can be partly undermined, or by which they can be shown partly to undermine each other in the process of textual meaning” (132). Hence, as a language suffuses meaning, “Deconstruction tries to show how binary oppositions, in order to hold themselves in place, are sometimes betrayed into inverting or collapsing themselves . . . Derrida’s own typical habit of reading is to seize on some apparently peripheral fragment in the work . . . and work it tenaciously through to the point where it threatens to dismantle the oppositions which govern the text as a whole” (133). In post-modern and poststructuralist terms, Binary Opposition is seen as one of the influential characteristics of Western and Western-derived thought and that typically, one of the two opposites assumes a role of dominance over the other. The categorization of binary oppositions is "often value-laden and ethnocentric", with an illusory order and superficial meaning. Furthermore, Pieter Fourie discovers that binary oppositions have a deeper or second level of binaries that

help to reinforce meaning, for example: Hero and Villain involve secondary binaries: good/bad, handsome/ugly, liked/disliked, and so on.

For better understanding of such a concept, Julian Wolfreys defines binary oppositions in the following way: Any pair of terms which appear diametrically opposed; therefore: good/evil, day/night, man/woman, and center/margin. In literary theoretical discourse, neither term in a binary opposition or pair is considered absolute. (13) The thinking of Binary Opposition derives from the times of Aristotle, who in his book, *Poetics*, elaborated the formula called, “Pythagorean table of opposites”- table divided symmetrically. From one side appear “the positive terms *Limit, Odd, One, Right, Male, Resting, Straight, Light, Good*, and on the other side appear the negative terms, *Unlimited, Even, Plurality, Left, Female, Moving, Curved, Darkness, Bad, Oblong*” (Bertens 4). Following Bertens on this point, these opposites are arbitrary, because in order to understand a term from an Aristotelian positive perspective, there is a necessity to know the opposite, that is to say, its negative extreme. He utilizes the example of light and darkness indicating that, “Arguably, light needs darkness. If there were no darkness, we would not have light either because we would not be able to recognize it for what it is...both terms exist because of *différence*” (130).

A relationship between opposing ideas: reality and illusion, game and war, history and biology, love and hate, public and private image in marriage, presence of alienation and absence of communication, explain Albee’s purpose of presenting the absurd nature of human existence. Since the absurdity of plays is a rehearsal of deconstruction wave which is a part of post-structuralism during 1960s, his understanding of human existence includes the central gist of deconstruction.

In relation to literature, in general, and drama, in particular, Binary Oppositions have a wide range of specific characteristics. As Saddik states: “Characteristics of postmodern literature and drama include a focus on the

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instability of meaning and the inadequacy of language to completely and accurately represent truth, along with an irony and playfulness in the treatment of linguistic constructs.” (6) Theatre, in general, is less reliant on words than is fiction. It mostly focuses on the images and representations. This is where Binary Oppositions hold importance. The theatre of images, according to Murphy “carries postmodern self-reflexivity to one logical extreme: it re-presents nothing but itself and demands only that we submit ourselves to its seductive spectacularity” (194). So in post-modern times, with self-reflexivity and meta-discursive approach, American drama displays and deconstructs the processes of its own signification.

In 1962, the doubts about Albee's reputation in the New York theater were dispelled by the great Broadway success of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*- a profanity-laced quartet that comments on the corruption of American values and the nature of illusion. It was a succès de scandale, achieved the status of a modern classic. The play received a Tony Award, a Drama Critics Circle Award and a Pulitzer Prize nomination. It startled mainstream audiences out of their comfortable notions of the American Dream and brought challenging theater back to Broadway. Albee then continued to pursue an ever deeper understanding of the individual's relationship to the modern world. He received Pulitzer Prize for *A Delicate Balance* 1966, *Seascape* 1975, and *Three Tall Women* 1994. In 2005, Edward Albee was presented with a Special Tony Award for Lifetime Achievement, recognizing him as America's greatest living playwright.

Through Binary Oppositions in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Albee created his characters to be “the face and the reverse” in order to represent an ironically strong binary opposition in the American society. As Albee himself admits in the preface to *The American Dream* he writes “an examination of the American Scene, an attack on the substitution of artificial values for real values in our society” (Albee 53-54).

As for the irony, he asks and answers: “Is the play offensive? I certainly hope so.” (55) His strong binary opposition, the method of clashing and the value judgments is on part of both the couples who clash in various ways.

Edward Albee explores the perversion of the American Dream as this ideal has brought strain upon the individual to find one’s role in society. The immigrants from all over the world fled to the shores of America, with a hope to survive in the new land and fulfill their dreams. They believed in economic opportunity, religious freedom, and equal justice, good living America promises to offer. Such motivation in the individuals has caused desires to warp to the point where financial success and status become ultimate ends. Hence, the search for a healthy and optimal way of living in the contemporary world has become difficult as the value of each individual is lost in materialistically orientated society. The philosophical movement of Existentialism, through art, expresses feelings of man in such a society, that of loneliness, fear of future, loss of past certainties, man’s finitude or wasted life. The Theater of Absurd also reflects the view that human life is meaningless and futile. It shows that when a man lives in absurd condition there is failure of communication, inevitable futility of man’s efforts, and alienation with unbearable realities leading to crutch of illusions. As Albee belongs to a trend that is concerned with the existential and perennial, it is not the here and now. His plays are prominent representative of this theatre in America. He examines the influence of such a society on its basic unit- family, and psychologically on the individual. Albee exposes such a society which puts outer forms of living resolutely above inner ones. The three-act play begins at the town New Carthage, where George and Martha live in the New England college campus. Carthage is the name of the ancient classical city, the site of the great love story of Dido and Aeneas; ultimately destroyed because it was a city of "unholy loves," as referred by St. Augustine. Here, New Carthage is the site of the destruction of the American dream. But the word "New" in New Carthage is a

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suggestion of hope and a second chance is what Albee ultimately proves. The play comprises three acts. The first act is entitled 'Fun and Games'. The second act is 'Wapurgisnacht' while the third carries the symbolic and typically expressionistic heading that of 'Exorcism'.

The first Binary Opposed relation is between Reality and Illusion. Albee makes his academic hosts, a dysfunctional couple, George, history teacher and Martha, invite a status-climbing new biology teacher Nick and his simpering wife Honey over to their house for a late night bout of "mind games." George is defined by his physicality and his "status" which causes troubles for him. According to Martha, "George is bogged down in the History Department." Martha lives in a fantasy world. She has a fixation on a son that does not exist, a father that doesn't love her, and a husband whose unconditional love she rejects. They spend an evening in a celebration of the twenty first birthday of the hosts' fantasy son. At the end of a long evening of drinking, nagging and abusing, it is discovered that "twenty one year old son" is an illusion and that they are actually childless, just like their guests. The initial games of the party gradually give way to the long-suppressed feelings of pain and disillusionment to both the couples who are totally different in disposition, social status and even sexual prowess. In the end George and Martha expose their imaginary son, a simple lie, a self-deception. One of the biggest illusions in this play is hinted at from early in act I, when George begs Martha "Well, don't you let that get bandied about (the kid)" (Albee 21). The veiled arguments about the kid foreshadow the revelation that "the kid" is not real until the third act. George and Martha's battle about kid and their later talk of his parentage makes clear that this is a shared creation of illusion. George's underlying fear is that sharing their illusion with outsiders would expose their lie and destroy the comfort it brings. This illusion reveals a deep intimacy between these now bitterly disappointed characters. They spent years together, with fantasies of parenthood, dreams that never came true for

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either of them. Then, in later years of their marriage, they turn their illusionary son against one another with despise and disgust. Ultimately, George takes it upon himself to “kill” that illusion when Martha brings it too far into reality.

George : Martha ... [Long pause]...our son is ...dead.[silence]. He was ... killed... late in the afternoon... [Silence] With his learner’s permit in his pocket, he swerved, to avoid a porcupine, and drove straight into a ...

George: ...Our son is DEAD! Can you get that into your head?
(135)

This reality is unbearable to Martha. But finally she has to accept it though she is afraid of it. The concluding lines of the play reveal the truth. As Edward Albee has said that the song, “Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?” means “Who is afraid to live without illusion?”

George: Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf...?

Martha : I ... am... George ... I ... am... (140)

Martha is afraid of the illusion of their son that sustains George and her tempestuous marriage. George is the only one who can kill their “son.” Martha could, but is quite unwilling. Nick cannot because he doesn’t know what is going on even though he has been included (without his knowledge) into the game. Without being aware of it, Honey has bought into the fantasy completely and will not reveal Jim’s death to Martha. This chaotic event ends the game and moves George and Martha closer together- a first step in a long road to recovery.

Nick and Honey's lives are based on illusion. Nick, a biology instructor who looks to the future, seems most optimistic and vivacious of the four. But he married for money, not love. However, it is this very optimism and overconfidence that props his illusions and alienates him from reality. Though he looks strong and forceful, is impotent. “To you, everybody's a flop. Your husband's a flop, I'm a flop.” Honey created illusion of pregnancy to marry Nick

and has been deceiving him by using birth control to prevent pregnancy. Now her increased drunkenness increases her susceptibility to illusions woven by others. She takes at face value what she hears, eager, for example, to hear Martha's story of how she came to marry George. The surface "truth" of the characters is that they mask their real selves are not what they seem.

As an Absurdist, Albee believed that a life of illusion was wrong because it created a false content for life, just as George and Martha's empty marriage revolves around an imaginary son. In Albee's view, reality lacks any deeper meaning, and George and Martha must come to face that by abandoning their illusions. He explores the illusion of an American dream that masks a core of destruction and failure. Writing during the Cold War, Albee was responding to a public that was just beginning to question the patriotic assumptions of the 1950's. His George and Martha 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. Nick's name is a direct reference to Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev, and his threat to George and Martha's marriage references the Cold War turmoil of America.

The growth of Games and War in the relationship between George and Martha is measured by how effectively each learns to play the "game" by the rules. The title of the first act is "Fun and Games", in itself is deceptive, for their games of Humiliate the Host, Get the Guests, and Hump the Hostess involve the characters' deepest emotions. In the game 'Humiliate the Host' George himself is the victim as Martha and Nick humiliate him. He is so much hurt that he decides to take revenge upon his rivals. So, he suggests another game named 'Hump the Hostess'. It means that the male guest may seduce the female host. It is amusing that he tries to humiliate his own wife, Martha. He does so because he is annoyed by her efforts to flirt with young Nick. In the next game 'Get the Guests'. George and Martha humiliate the guests, particularly Nick. The humiliation causes much

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comedy for the audience. Next Georges' comment about Martha's father is also humorous as he calls him a large white mouse with red eyes. George points out, "This is a civilized game", whereas Martha is constantly changes the rules of their "games." Martha says George is the one "who keeps learning the games we play as quickly as I [Martha] can change the rules . . ." This is most clearly seen from the beginning when Martha breaks the rules and mentions their son to outsiders (Honey). GEORGE: You broke our rule, baby. You mentioned him . . . you mentioned him to someone else. MARTHA: I FORGET! (126)

Because the 'Bringing up Baby' game resulted in failure, the characters come to understand the depth of the deceit. George's characterization of these emotionally destructive activities as games and assumption of the role of ring master reveals that all the events of the evening are part of a power struggle war between him and Martha, in which one of them intends to emerge as victor. Martha and George's verbal banter is characteristic of their ongoing game-playing. Years of marriage have turned insults into a finely honed routine.

The shotgun that turns out to be a toy; the chimes accidentally struck pretending arrival of the telegram as the devices used by the characters to keep from facing the real world: alcohol, sex, and constant verbal assaults on one another as games. The ending of the play is pathetic and the first two acts too contain tragic elements. For e.g. the story of the boy who kills his parents narrated by George is serious and pathetic because later on we learn that the boy is not other but it is he himself who kills his own parents.

By games, Albee does not suggest that they are frivolous or meaningless. Rather, he likens game-playing to war and demonstrates the degree to which George and Martha are committed to destroy each other in "all out war". In this war, Martha sees the best part of her life as being over with so she fixates on those "memories" that she has. Martha starts off with a Bette Davis quote, the source of which she cannot remember and the source of her first conflict with George. Her

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memories of actual events -her first marriage to the mower man, her courtship of George, his failure as the chairperson of the History department, etc.), are used as weapons to humiliate George. Her memories of imaginary events (bringing up their 'son,' Jim) are used to connect emotionally with other people Nick and Honey as well as further denigrate George. If anything, calling these emotional clashes a game serves to make the possibility of emotional destruction more random and uncertain.

The duality of biology of science and history of humanities is highlighted in an absurd situation by George and Nick respectively. Each party is convinced about the usefulness and validity of its specialization. As Pound propounds, "The artistic (humanities) and the scientific hang together. Any conception which does not see them in their interrelation, belittles both." (Pound 223) While history is indispensable in the past Old American Dream, biology defines what being "other-directed" means with reference to future. George assaults the scientific field and its snobbish pretensions. The representative of science, George's lack of success in the History Department and inability to rise to power as successor to the president of the college contrasts with Nick's plans and seeming ability to move ahead first taking over the Biology Department, then the college. Nick, who appears cool, is impotent, when Martha puts him to test. George's tone in dealing with the representative of science is ironic and sarcastically framed:

George: ...Martha, this young man is working on a system whereby chromosomes can be altered, well not all by himself—he probably has one or two co-conspirators—the genetic made-up of a sperm cell changed ... for hair and eye color, stature, potency... I imagine...hairiness, features, health... and mind. Most important...Mind. All imbalances will be corrected, sifted out...propensity for diseases will be gone, Longevity assured, we

will have a race of men... test-tube-bred-incubator born...superb and sublime. (45)

As a member of the literati, Albee prefers to give George the upper hand in accentuating the moral lessons of the play and the wrongness of the scientist's attitudes and judgments. For all his apparent emasculation, George "grows in stature, taking on more control, becoming, for a time, quite menacing", (197) as Susan Abboston cogently argues. Albee clearly intends for us to perceive Nick's (half-joking) plan as a threat. George, predicting the future world of the New American Dream, defines Nick's job in a very depreciatory tone of voice. He is certain that as a result of chromosome alteration, scientists like Nick will create "a race of glorious men", the "wave of the future." (Albee 66) that will establish "a civilization of men, smooth, blond, and right at the middleweight limit" (ibid). The price of the birth of this glorious generation is huge. According to George, mankind will have to pay with giving up music and art, liberty and diversity. "Cultures and races will eventually vanish," which George takes as a personal attack because with the turn of the world from the Old to the New American Dream "the surprise, the multiplicity, the sea-changing rhythm of...history, will be eliminated" (67). Reading and knowing history means, however, to know that such utopist expectations will eventually fail. History will always be on the side of the Old Dream to warn it about threats and as George suggests: "Read history." Albee demonstrates the underlying powerlessness of science and in George's perseverance, the unexpected staying power of history. The play attacks American optimism and the privileging of progress and scientific thinking over more humanistic ideas.

Albee questions the American way of life where sentiments and relationships have lost meaning and where life has become one long game of competition where agonistic relationships are built on false accusations and spiteful indictments, lacking in respect and compassion because the world does

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not value these once-important qualities. The play exhibits dialectical of love and hate through the language used by the characters. Albee attempts to draw attention to the modernity which is full of tensions, incompatibilities and divided loyalties. Human emotions and interactions in the contemporary world are superficial, isolated, escaping into playing games and creating fantasies that only reinforce their loneliness and despair. It is in portrayal of George and Martha's marriage, Albee seems to make the not-uncommon literary assertion that love and hate are two parts of a single whole. From their vitriolic banter, it clearly appears that George and Martha hate and pledge to destroy each other. With Martha's unsuccessful adultery attempt, there is some sort of mutual concern, rather distorted love, existing between George and Martha.

Nonetheless, there are moments of tenderness that contradict this hatred. George even tells Nick not to necessarily believe what he sees as George and Martha's arguments are for show for the challenge of arguing, or meant to hurt each other. George said disparagingly of Martha, "She's a housewife. She buys things," but I felt sorry for her as a disenfranchised woman who clearly is not satisfied with what her daily life offers her." George has become habituated to accommodating her fantasies and behavior and is desensitized to her ranting and flirtations. However, Martha's declaration that George is really the only one who can satisfy her suggests that there positive aspects to their marriage. Clearly, as much as they fight, they also need each other, even if just to maintain the illusions that keeps them going. The concluding moments of the play are to George's favor. It is true that George and Martha have a dull and humdrum life. Yet Martha stresses the great amount of love she has for her husband for all his academic incompetence and lack of manliness. It is because only he can tolerate her and is ready to face and force his wife to realize the futility of their existence. As Roudané says, "Love's opposite—indifference—finds no place in their marriage.

Albee's dialogue mixes kindness and cruelty ...their wittily devastating repartee is born out of a profound love for the other." (Roudané 70)

Martha: George, my husband... George, who is out somewhere there in the dark, who is good to me - whom I revile, who can keep learning the games we play as quickly as I can change them. Who can make me happy and I do not wish to be happy. Yes, I do wish to be happy. (102)

Nick, in contrast, is living a loveless life based on indifference, cool and utilitarian spirit. Nick and Honey are more miserable and less humane. As James Martin puts it, "Although science is allegorically represented by the apparently virile young biologist, his sexual vigor is called into doubt", while his marriage to Honey, is simply because of her 'false pregnancy' (Martin 20). Honey, who clearly struggles to play the role of the proper professor's wife, is unfulfilled and blames herself for her unhappiness when her husband is also contributing to their marriage's struggle. Nick cannot help Honey overcome her insecurities about child birth.

Edward Albee uses the drama as medium to illustrate and expose the binary opposition of the idea of private and public images in marriage. Inherent in this idea of public and private faces is the theme of phoniness. Albee shows that people make up images of themselves, for their friends and neighbors. Both the couples in this play make up fantasies about their lives together in a somewhat unconscious attempt to ease the pains that they have had to face along the way. Over the course of the play, both kinds of masks are torn off, exposing Martha, George, Nick, and Honey to themselves and to each other. Perhaps, though, this exposure frees them as well. Certainly, their little social niceties pretending not to notice George and Martha's arguments, laughing at things they don't find funny, changing the subject of conversation are meant to preserve an illusion of civility and present the image of a happy couple.

Though George's career started well enough, it soon lost inertia. This caused Martha's resentment of him, his father-in-law's poor treatment of him, and George's not inconsiderable self-loathing. The same loss of inertia can be seen in his relationship with Martha. What started out well has since petered out and is barely hanging on. Martha's situation of being the college president's daughter is continually contrasted with George's poor performance as heir apparent to the school presidency: "There are easier things in the world, if you happen to be teaching at a university, there are easier things than being married to the daughter of the president of that university. There are easier things in this world." (13) Through George, Albee questions the reason for this desire for success, and demonstrates how the desire can destroy one's self-esteem and individuality and relationships due to facade. From the relationship between Martha and George, it seems that women can be more caught up with the idea of success than men. Martha is disappointed in George's professional failure, perhaps more than he is. One of the reasons for this expectation and hope for her husband could be the fact that she wants to live through his experience. Women had careers much less frequently in the 1950s and 60s than they do today, so Martha might have felt limited. In wake of false images, the "senses" dysfunction by frequent consumption of alcohol- a sense deadener. For good public persona, the personal appearance suffers.

There is absence of communication between George and Martha, and presence of alienation in Nick and Honey. Martha once says to George: "I can't even see you...I haven't been able to see you for years" (164). Their solitude is so great that they indulge in drinks, games and even create an imaginary child to escape from reality. However, such means of consolation and escapism seem only to aggravate their isolation and estrange them from interaction and healthy relation. Violence as a form of communication is demonstrated through the tale of George and Martha's boxing match, his fake rifle, and the physical scuffles

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between them. Psychological violence as a form of communication is evidenced by George and Martha's repeated attempts to humiliate each other, and by George's decision to "get the guests." Their attempt at a verbal communication is a failure for what they say contradicts their real intentions. Nevertheless, as Martha abuses George with provoking words, her real intention is not to humiliate him, but to activate him into action so that he could have more "guts" and be more "aggressive". However, George fails to recognize this attempt at real communication and their relationship becomes more strained than ever. George on the other hand has also been trying very hard to achieve real contact with Martha, as he himself admits: "I've been trying for years to clean up the mess I made" (222). But Martha fails to recognize his effort. No real contact is made when the two, so they blame and flagellate at each other while great pain is caused. Communication is not impossible; it is simply avoided by people as a threat to illusion of complacency. In the last scene of "exorcism" they finally achieve some sense of mutual understanding.

Solitude is caused in part by sterility. *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, is considered a play of "collective sterility" (Way 68). Both couples in the play are childless, highlighting the emptiness and sterility of their marriage. Thus the three major absurdist themes are interrelated with each other and integrated in the play: solitude prompts the need for communication and is caused in part by sterility; difficulty in making communication and disguising of sterility fuel the sense of Alienation.

The characters in the absurd theatre feel alienated from the society and are highly affected by it. The characters feel alienated from each other as we see that they always quarrel with each other. Once, Martha starts talking about their son. She doesn't care George's warning and goes on talking about their son so, George becomes angry and grabs her by her throat. George and Martha are alienated at personal level. George is alienated from the college culture and makes

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appearances just for the sake of Martha's reputation as President's daughter. He expresses, "I'm tired...IF your father didn't set up these goddamn Saturday night orgies all the time..." (3) Martha caught in the façade of parties "hasn't changed" for George "in years". Nick and Honey alienated to each other. They lack encouragement and urge to become parents and share responsibilities.

Critics have sought to label Edward Albee within clear-cut and specific categories, but to no avail. He is seen as "an absurdist" (Esslin 313), "subversive" (Biggsby 78), or an expressionist, writing in the manner of Tennessee Williams or Arthur Miller. Albee himself admits that he is closer to the leader of expressionism, August Strindberg, "More Strindberg than Ibsen ... psychological" (52). Younger American playwrights, such as Paula Vogel, credit Albee's daring Mix of Theatricality and Biting dialogue with helping to reinvent the post-war American Theatre in the early 1960s. Albee's American family undergoes anxiety and terrible barrenness as it staggers into decay. A few fugitives detach themselves and seek solutions in aesthetics. They watch the historical dream wither. The core of Albee's viewpoint is that the generations have moved away from practicality to emasculation. A frightened populace has created illusionary values. George's escape into imagination is the sole solution Albee propounds to the national condition. These binary oppositions exemplify the broken family ties, alienation, and inability to communicate, violence, quest for identity and define how they impede the fulfillment of the Dream. Albee uses some characteristics of Theatre of the Absurd present the instances of the Dream of a harmonious family turning to nightmare. It is possible to view Albee's portrayal of modern marriage as decidedly existential.

Martha and Honey might also be contrasted with each other in the way they are or are not capable of accepting the truth. The two women, have problems with fertility. After her affair with the gardener boy, and her possible pregnancy and "annulment," Martha could not have children, so to cover up the empty space

in her life, she imagined one. When the time comes to finish their biggest game, the fantasy of the child, she is hurt very much, but she agrees to the new conditions and reveals her fear. In the specifics of George and Martha's history or relationship, one thinks about the characters' histories, whether or not George is the boy in the story who accidentally killed both his parents, did Nick selfishly married Honey ignoring her pretense of false pregnancy, is never presented decisively as truth or illusion. The subject of their arguments doesn't matter. It's not important if George and Martha argue about ice cubes or Bette Davis movies. What matters is how they conduct their argument, how they interact with each other, how they choose to exist in this situation in which they've found themselves trapped and still continue to live. The solution to George's troubles is change. A change of scenery and/or career would probably get him out of his "bogged" situation—possibly a move to another university, a change of profession, or just a change of departments. However he might want to do it, changing his situation (and/or physical condition) would have a profound effect on him and resolve his current personal "problems." George, Martha, Nick, and Honey are trying to figure out how to realize a "normal" family life, particularly in the context of New Carthage. Each is coming to the goal from different directions. Martha has a "son" that she would like to share with others and a father whose love she wants; George's parents are dead, is unable to have children with Martha, and would like nothing better than to normalize his life with Martha without their "son"; Nick wants children to complete his image but his wife appears to be unable to have them; Honey is terrified of the pain associated with childbirth but is desperate to figure out a way (other than children) to keep Nick from straying away from her.

As Cohn suggests, "George and Martha may rebuild their marriage on the base of Truth" (Cohn 24), which seems to be a sign of a tough but better future. In an interview Albee mentioned that "the exorcism of the nonexistent child

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suggested a new state of emotional honesty” (Rutenberg, 255). This emotional honesty is what lacks Honey and all the New American Dream characters. The fact that they are “other-directed” prevents them from the ability to act and talk honestly, and allows the Old American Dream to do these instead of its new counterpart. Their clash is, therefore, exhausted in the realization that the New American Dream passes by the Old, without attracting the attention of the possibility that they could learn and get something from history, culture, from the “inner-directed.” As binary oppositions make up the plot of *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, the majority of this play consists of one argument after another between the two couples. George and Martha argue over George not being “man enough” or successful enough, Nick and Honey disagree about Nick putting their private affairs out in the open, and George and Martha even argue about how funny certain jokes are who has better sense of humour. Things finally shift from one mood- argumentative to another-settled/relaxed. And this shift only occurs and solidifies itself when the truth about their made up son comes out- cause. Therefore, the controlling idea of the play is that life’s problems can be resolved when people are honest among themselves and others. American playwrights such as Eugene O’Neill, Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, Albee, Sam Shepard, David Mamet, and others are quite concerned with this condition of the American family and therefore the familial strife is recurrent in their work through technique of Binary Oppositions. The dilemma of family is the common denominator in American drama since they reveal characteristics and cultural aspects that are distinctly American, Albee in limited filial setting vividly showed the struggles and passions inherent in such a milieu. Through *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Albee shared the personal vision of the American Dream and its destiny.

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