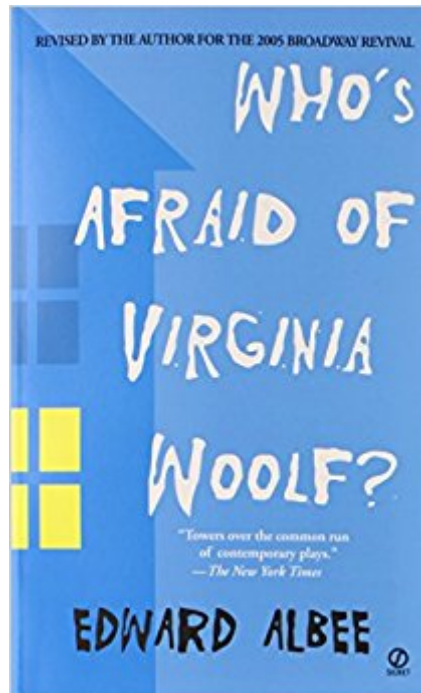




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Who's Afraid Of Virginia Woolf?



Synopsis

NOTE: This ISBN has been Revised by the Author for The 2005 Broadway Revival. “Twelve times a week,” answered Uta Hagen, when asked how often she’d like to play Martha in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Like her, audiences and critics alike could not get enough of Edward Albee’s masterful play. A dark comedy, it portrays husband and wife George and Martha in a searing night of dangerous fun and games. By the evening’s end, a stunning, almost unbearable revelation provides a climax that has shocked audiences for years. With the play’s razor-sharp dialogue and the stripping away of social pretense, *Newsweek* rightly foresaw *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* as “a brilliantly original work of art • an excoriating theatrical experience, surging with shocks of recognition and dramatic fire [that] will be igniting Broadway for some time to come.”

Book Information

Mass Market Paperback: 272 pages

Publisher: Berkley (March 1983)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0451158717

ISBN-13: 978-0451158710

Product Dimensions: 4.2 x 0.7 x 6.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 2.9 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars 106 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #12,493 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #4 in Books > Arts &

Photography > Performing Arts > Theater > Playwriting #4 in Books > Reference > Writing,

Research & Publishing Guides > Writing > Play & Scriptwriting #11 in Books > Literature &

Fiction > History & Criticism > Genres & Styles > Drama

Customer Reviews

“Albee can be placed high among the important dramatists of the contemporary world theatre.” • *New York Post* “An irreplaceable experience | A crucial event in the birth of contemporary American theatre.” • *Village Voice*

Edward Albee, the American dramatist, was born in 1928. He has written and directed some of the best plays in contemporary American theatre and three of his plays: *A Delicate Balance*, *Seascape* and *Three Tall Women* have received Pulitzer Prizes. His most famous play, *Who’s Afraid of*

Virginia Woolf? won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for Best Play. His other plays include The Zoo Story, The Death of Bessie Smith, The Sandbox, The American Dream, Tiny Alice, All Over, Listening, The Lady from Dubuque, The Man Who Had Three Arms, Finding the Sun, Fragments, Marriage Play and The Lorca Play.

When it first premiered in New York in 1962, Edward Albee's darkly comedic play, Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf, was so controversial it was actually considered to be theater of the absurd. Now, many years later, the play stands as a milestone achievement of realistic drama, often being quoted as one of the greatest plays ever written. With a reputation as one of the staples of American Drama, Edward Albee's revered play has been subject to endless analysis, all of which investigate just what makes the play so timeless. With an intricate plotline, four fully realized characters, and well executed themes of truth and illusion, Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf is a masterpiece of ultra-realism depicting one of literature's most vicious marriages. The first facet Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf utilizes to its advantage is a creative and original plot. Depicting two married couples using each other for their own personal gain may not seem entirely original, but once one looks at the time of publication, it becomes apparent just how unique this play's actions are. But, in order to discover just how finely tuned the plot is, one must first deconstruct each act. In Act One, ironically titled Fun and Games, the two couples meet and chat after a late-night party. From the very first line of dialogue, it's made abundantly clear that the first couple, George and Martha, are inebriated. Their drunkenness and general disdain for each other are the surface motives for their "fun and games" that follow. Once the second couple, Honey and Nick, enter, the malicious games can truly begin. Mirroring the first act is Act Two, symbolically titled Walpurgisnacht. With Honey in the bathroom, sick from drinking too much brandy, George and Nick get to know one another, giving George more fuel for his "games" to come. At this point in the play, it's clear that George and Martha are using Honey and Nick to agitate and damage one another. However, what's not made clear is Nick's desire to use Martha for his advantages in his career. This fact is revealed later in Act Two, when George and Nick have a particularly awkward heart to heart. By the time Act Three, titled The Exorcism, begins, Honey and Nick are nearly at their limit, with Nick having made his move on Martha. Once again mirroring the plot structure of the first act, Act Three finds Martha and George in the midst of a verbal and psychological war to permanently damage the other person. What really ups the stakes is when

George decides to play one last game, revealing a shocking truth of Martha's life that is nearly too vicious for her to handle. Depicting each "game" as an opportunity to lie or manipulate is the first brick that ultimately builds the towering structure of the play. The next brick lies in the thoroughness of the characters. Only depicting four characters, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* makes use of complex motivations to bring out the full characters of each couple. Firstly, there is George, an associate professor of History at a small university. He is calm and weary at first, but once his wife gets ahold of him, the claws come out. Avoiding particularly dark moments of his past, while at the same time shielding himself from the bitter truth of his marriage causes this character to act as a ticking time-bomb that erupts several times throughout the play. Right beside him is his boisterous wife, Martha. When George describes her as braying in the first scene, the account could be considered an understatement. Being vulgar, manipulative, sensual, and sympathetic all at the same time makes Martha, by far, the most complex character. Her journey of acceptance as the main protagonist is what finalizes her complexity. Finally, there is the second couple, Honey and Nick. The first thing made evident of the two is their similarities to George and Martha. Like George, Nick is an associate professor. Like Martha, Honey is an emotionally repressed homemaker. And, like the two of them, their marriage is failing. However, unlike Martha and George, Honey and Nick are depicted as much more relatable characters in which the audience can identify aspects of themselves. This makes their destruction even more painful. In fact, all four characters' downfalls are what makes the drama of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* so compelling. Other than character drama, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* also utilizes complex themes to really strike a chord with an audience. Firstly, there is the theme of truth versus illusion. In a world where George and Martha are constantly lying and fabricating events, any sign of truth is viewed as a weakness they do not want to associate with. That is, until Honey and Nick enter the picture. Then the game is to reveal both truths and lies to destroy the other party, in hopes of Honey and Nick not noticing the difference. Right behind truth and illusion is the concept of success and failure. One of the biggest reasons for all four characters' downfalls is their failures to achieve what they view as success. This is compounded by the bitterness George and Martha have for another for their failures finalizing the hostile environment in which the play is set. The final theme the play grasps is the concept of war. George and Martha are literally in a war with each other, and this one night the play takes place on is their last battle. Determined to destroy each other for fun, the couple push limits and cross boundaries until one person is proclaimed the victor. The twist is that neither of them can win without sacrificing themselves, as

well. Featuring realistic dialogue abounded by complex characters, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* is a completely transfixing drama that is guaranteed to break even the most stonehearted of readers for its sheer brilliance alone. Depicting one of the most vicious and abusive marriages in literary history, the play automatically hooks its audience with intriguing characters in an almost surreal world we can connect with. The brilliance of the play relies on the fact that nearly every audience member will somehow identify with its characters, thereby inserting themselves into the drama only to be devoured by the fun and games George and Martha continue to play. This, plus one of the most shocking twists in theater history, creates a stirring effective play that has now become one of the most studied, applauded, and renowned plays of modern drama.

Have to say, when I got this I didn't expect much from it. Infact I was not intreged at all by the summaries I had read. But wow! This simply blew me away, I understand why this play is so highly praised now. I would love to see this play in real life now. The writing style and way Albee uses different texts and writing techniques to emphasize his characters really shows how experienced an author he is. This play throws you into the complicated relationship and life of Martha and George and it dives deep into the realities of marriage and the American way of life. This play dares to show the deep thoughts of the American house hold as we watch the nigh unfold. I was simply blown away by this and I read it in one day. I could not stop reading it because you become so invested and interested in the characters. The way Albee sets this story up is just perfect. He pulls us into George and Martha's life right away and quickly sets up a plot that is so thick and shocking. There are parts in this play that are so surreal that they are almost real. It's really a rollercoast ride of a play and I recommend everybody who is interested in human psychology or relationship sciences to check out this play!!

Boiling this play down into a short review is a loser's gamble. Critics have written huge books and only scratched the surface of the myriad of ways this play can be read. They agree, though, that this play is a benchmark in American theatre, the beginning of the raw, angry, psychologically dense plays that would be created by writers like Tony Kushner, Marsha Norman, and David Mamet in the two generations since this vision of Hell first hit the stage. George and Martha, dignitaries of a New England liberal arts college, seem to be the most honest couple ever. No thought enters their heads that doesn't spill from their mouths. But those thoughts are relentlessly destructive. Their mutual abuse is ritualized and intricate. They know how to torture each other, physically, sexually, and

mentally. But, bored of tormenting each other, they invite a new professor and his wife over for late night drinks and casual cruelty. The self-deception these four characters mask behind what looks to be ruthless honesty is appalling. Like a crash on the highway, you can't help staring, even as you are repulsed. Characters who think they've built invincible walls prove to be as vulnerable as babies, if others can find the right weakness. The revelation of secrets and lies, and the fact that George and Martha have done this before, pushes the audience out and past the bounds of compassion. Some reviewers complain that this revised version of the classic takes something away from the original. Albee has plainly shifted his sympathies away from the young couple being tormented and onto the older couple performing the torment. But even this is invigorating, since it strips away the little bit of safety net the audience thought they had and pushes us, defenseless, into the realm of these characters and their profound damage. As a warning, do not try to read this play in a single sitting. If anything, it's even more painful than a performance, since actors provide a little bit of a cushion against the brutality. Reading all three acts in quick succession can be a strain on even the sturdiest reader. But if you measure your reading out carefully, this purging fire of a play shows in big scale most of the changes that have transformed American theatre in living memory. Stunning and terrifying.

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