



Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?

Edward Albee

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“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.”

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? Details

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From Reader Review Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? for online ebook

Maxwell says

Holy smokes, this was hard to put down. It's riveting, a little vile, and dramatic to say the least. I'm so excited to talk about it in class this week. I'll probably come back and review it more properly then. Needless to say, this was excellent.

Ahmad Sharabiani says

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? = Wer hat Angst vor Virginia Woolf?, Edward Albee

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? is a play by Edward Albee first staged in 1962. It examines the breakdown of the marriage of a middle-aged couple, Martha and George. Late one evening, after a university faculty party, they receive an unwitting younger couple, Nick and Honey, as guests, and draw them into their bitter and frustrated relationship. The play is in three acts, normally taking a little less than three hours to perform, with two 10-minute intermissions. The title is a pun on the song "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?" from Walt Disney's Three Little Pigs (1933), substituting the name of the celebrated English author Virginia Woolf. Martha and George repeatedly sing this version of the song throughout the play.

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Kat Kennedy says

This play is so fucked. I don't know whether it's genius or madness. Probably both.

Michael says

I have to invent a new word after this play: sadvicious. As in, sad and vicious, ineluctably intertwined, till death do them part. There's also the wicked humor of the play, for which I don't have a new word, a heartbreaking hilarity that keeps pace with the emotional maelstrom. This is an absolutely brilliant work.

easily able to supply the visual punctuation marks for the few moments that lose something in translation to audio-only format: George's sudden brandishing of a (fake) gun, or his violent flinging of snapdragons at his wife as their boxing bout moves into the final rounds.

Albee's writing itself provides all you really need for the play's visceral intensity to hit home: highly literate, stippled with corrosive wit and bristling with combativeness, it doesn't really require much in the way of staging to work its wounding magic. All that's needed are four great actors, and the four who starred in the debut production give performances that, even some 50 years later, still feel fresh, fierce and definitive.

No one will ever outshine Hagen's Martha. There's something particularly satisfying about hearing the performance. You can appreciate the mighty range of Hagen's vocal resources — and her unerring ability to wring every ounce of emotional truth from a line.

Am I gushing? Yes. But rarely has an audio recording of a play moved and affected me like **Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf**.

Hadrian says

[The final twist seems vaguely implausible at first glance, but then I've had people lie to me about more implausible things than having a child. (hide spoiler)]

Beatrix says

I think I'm still processing, but WOW!

"We all peel labels, sweetie; and when you get through the skin, all three layers, through the muscle, slosh aside the organs [...] and get down to bone...you know what you do then? [...] When you get down to bone, you haven't got all the way, yet. There's something inside the bone...the marrow...and that's what you gotta get at."

Rebecca McNutt says

I don't often read plays but I absolutely loved *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* for its cinematic, almost comedic style, its colourful characters and its timelessness. Definitely a classic that everyone should read.

Laura says

This is, in my opinion, the best play ever written in the 20th century. There's also a great story about how this was the first drama rejected by the Pulitzer Prize committee for "obscenity" (you may have a hard time

finding the obscenity in it, though, since it's from 1962). It's basically about two married couples who hang out in the wee hours of the morning following a party on a college campus in New England, but the interesting part is the way one couple tries to screw with the other's minds for their own personal enjoyment. There's waaay more to it than that, but I'll save it for my students. Lots of symbolism, historical references and absurdist influences (and a surprise ending). By the way, like many plays, it's not the greatest "read"; to really do it justice, you have to see it performed. I recommend the 1966 film version directed by Mike Nichols, starring Liz Taylor and Richard Burton.

Maybe this shouldn't be on GoodReads. I wish there was a site called GoodPlays or something.

El says

This falls under that category labelled AWKWARD SOCIAL GATHERING.

You ever been to a party where the host and hostess get totally hammered and spend the rest of the evening humiliating each other? If you haven't, I don't believe you, number one, and number two, you're a lucky bastard. It's awkward and uncomfortable and lemme tell you, it's not much better if you're the drunken host and hostess either. No one's having a good time, no matter how much liquor is consumed, keep that in mind.

The theater around the corner from us was showing this movie recently and I went to see it on the big screen because it's been a really long time since I've seen it and I wondered how I felt about it as an adult. I realized I remembered very little of it to begin with, and I certainly didn't find it nearly as uncomfortable the first time I watched it as I did this time. Oy.

In any case, watching it again made me realize I never read the actual play all the way through, though occasionally we'd be assigned monologues from it in my theater classes, or I'd have to sit through people performing scenes from it from time to time. But I never actually gave Albee's play the attention it deserved. (Certainly if you've seen the movie, you know the play, though they both deserve attention.)

This is truly one messed up little play, and Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton played their characters extremely well. *Too* well, one might suggest. *Volatile* was what they were known for, so they filled their roles beautifully.

It's a hard play to read, there are no winners here. You think Charlie Sheen is crazy? George and Martha could be his parents. It's not an easy movie to watch either, because there you have a visual. You want to hate all of the four characters, yet you feel for all four of the characters at the same time. It's very complicated that way, but overall it makes you never want to attend a social gathering *ever again*.

Probably makes you think twice about hosting one too.

Pooya Kiani says

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Amaranta says

"Chi ha paura di Virginia Woolf"? Nessuno. O forse tutti. Una cantilena di bambini si trasforma in un leit motiv nero colonna sonora di una serata come tante in un salotto come tanti.

Un dramma in tre atti con due coppie sulla scena: Martha e George più grandi e padroni di casa, e Nick e Honey più giovani e ospiti. Una guerra verbale, amara, atroce si consuma in poche ore, parole che segnano violente l'animo, che feriscono come coltelli, che umiliano perché il dolore provoca cattiveria e va gridato. E così Martha e George litigano ancora una volta, si odiano con tutta la forza di cui sono capaci, si maltrattano e coinvolgono in questo spettacolo i loro nuovi amici, che da spettatori diventano loro malgrado attori, rubano le loro debolezze deridendole e scoccando frecce mortali anche per loro per poi scoprire alla fine che un grumo di dolore può avvelenare una vita, due e lasciarla senza più ragione.

Un dramma di grande potenza, che in modo surreale, in una quasi commedia degli orrori scopre la follia dell'animo umano, in un momento. Martha e George si appartengono, nel dolore e nella sofferenza e per questo si uccidono mille volte.

Trevor says

This is, quite simply, one of my all time favourite plays. There is a film version, with Burton and Taylor as the two main characters, and while this isn't a bad version (and it is in glorious black and white) I think that film struggles with words and this is a wordy play. And then there is that bizarre scene when they leave the house which makes no sense at all

I first read this play in high school and had to do a reading of the play in front of the class. Naturally, I was Nick, as the teacher was George. There is a nice fact that Albee is supposed to have said he had no idea of the significance of calling his major characters George and Martha – and definitely did not mean any reference to the first President of the United States and his missus. I find this a little hard to believe – either way, fate has stepped in and this fact remains, intentional or otherwise. I've always thought it adds something interesting to the play.

This might as well be two plays. On the surface there is a couple who look like they are about to tear each other apart. This reads like a 'moments before the divorce' play – and you would be stretched to find a play in which there are deeper feelings of hostility or more savage attacks between a married couple. But this is only on a surface level. The depth of affection and love between George and Martha is really the point of the play – the games they play are quite literally played so as to keep each other sane.

And this is not the only contradiction between our initial impressions and 'reality'. Honey (has there ever been a more perfect name?) comes across at the start of the play as a mousey little moron of a wife, who puffs up with child to get her hands on a husband only to deflate again once the ring is on her finger. To look at her you might think she was completely incapable of sustaining a pregnancy and that this is the point – but actually, her life is spent having to drink brandy (never mix, never worry) to end a constant string of pregnancies.

This, of course, stands in stunning contrast to Martha, who comes across as the earth mother - but in reality is incapable of having children.

George comes across as a pathetic creature at the start of the play, unable to satisfy his wife who considers him so ineffectual that she doesn't even pretend to hide her flirtations with other men – but by the end we realise that he has completely controlled all of the action in the entire play and everything that has happened has happened due to his choices and his decisions. There are possibly few modern plays with a more God like character. More than this, everything that happens, happens due to his great love of Martha – something that seems incomprehensible at the start of the play as they are tearing strips off each other.

I went to see this play a year or so ago and was almost reduced to tears towards the end. The older I get the more I find that the sorts of things that are most likely to make me want to cry are not the sorts of things that might have had that affect on me when I was young. Then I would have been just as likely to have become upset over unrequited love or such - something I find a little dull now. Today I find what is almost too painful to handle is love that is based on a deep acceptance of who we are – if someone can love us for our scars, for ourselves – warts and all - I am almost invariably reduced to tears. At the end of Therapy when the main character kisses the mastectomy scar of what had been his childhood sweetheart I was virtually a blubbing mess. But of course, such love only exists in fiction - and that is, perhaps, its main role.

Fortunately, I'm too much of a boy to be caught crying in theatres – particularly over plays I know quite so well as I know this one (I must have read it a dozen times over the years). All the same, watching Gary McDonald recite the requiem mass at the end of the play as Martha realises that her son is truly dead and must remain so for them to continue to have any access to him at all was as close as I would like to be to tears in a grossly public place.

This is a truly devastating play, a play that shines and shines, a work of sheer power and genius. It is also one of the funniest plays I've ever seen. I don't think it is possible to love this play any more than I do.
