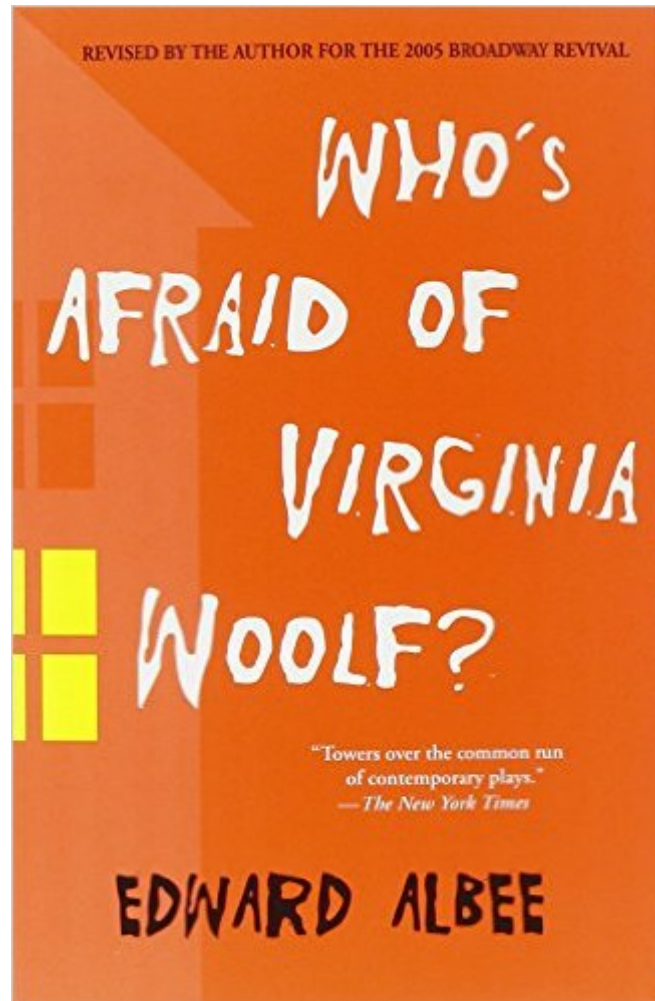


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Who's Afraid Of Virginia Woolf?: Revised By The Author



Synopsis

â œTwelve times a week,â • answered Uta Hagen when asked how often sheâ™d like to play Martha in Whoâ™s Afraid of Virginia Woolf? In the same way, audiences and critics alike could not get enough of Edward Albeeâ™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 eveningâ™s end, a stunning, almost unbearable revelation provides a climax that has shocked audiences for years. With the playâ™s razor-sharp dialogue and the stripping away of social pretense, Newsweek rightly foresaw Whoâ™s Afraid of Virginia Woolf? as â œa brilliantly original work of artâ™an excoriating theatrical experience, surging with shocks of recognition and dramatic fire [that] will be igniting Broadway for some time to come.â •

Book Information

Paperback: 272 pages

Publisher: NAL; Reprint edition (August 1, 2006)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0451218590

ISBN-13: 978-0451218599

Product Dimensions: 5.3 x 0.6 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 starsÂ Â See all reviewsÂ (96 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #8,435 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #6 inÂ Books > Textbooks >

Humanities > Literature > American Literature #26 inÂ Books > Literature & Fiction > Dramas &

Plays > Regional & Cultural > United States #135 inÂ Books > Textbooks > Reference

Customer Reviews

A play in three acts, a very simple setting, and only four characters who live in a small, university town in America: a middle-aged couple, Martha and George. And a "young and innocent" couple, Nick and Honey. They all meet in a room, in Martha and George's house, very late one night, for a nightcap. And then...all hell breaks lose. The play tears apart both marriages: the middle aged couple, who seem to hate each other and in the end turn out to be much more devoted to each other as it would seem. The young, seemingly perfect couple, who turn out to have lots of problems of their own. In three heart-breaking scenes, using dialogue that cuts like a knife, Edward Albee has written a masterpiece. He manages to give a clear-cut, honest picture of the reality of marriage, the reality of love, and the fears that go hand in hand with love and intimacy. At some point, in act three,

Martha talks about her husband- and it's probably one of the best pieces of literature I've read:"...George who is out somewhere there in the dark...George who is good to me, and whom I revile; who understands me, and whom I push off; who can make me laugh, and I choke it back in my throat; who can hold me, at night, so that it's warm, and whom I will bite so there's blood; who keeps learning the games we play as quickly as I can change the rules; who can make me happy and I do not wish to be happy, and yes I do wish to be happy, George and Martha: sad, sad, sad."What more can I say? just read the play, and if you get the chance, watch it performed in the theatre, too.

Looking past the rough language and the slew of verbal insults, one can see a sheer literary masterpiece. It wonderfully shows the struggle of George and Martha trying to come to terms with the reality they have created for themselves. When George discloses the secret of their son's nonexistence, he is forcing he and his wife to forfeit their mind games and live as functional human beings. By the way, in rebuttal, the title is absolutely perfect. Anyone with literary knowledge knows that Virginia Woolf was a realist who tried to present life as it truly is. Martha, at the end, is afraid of Woolf, or the symbol of life without pretenses.

Brilliantly vitriolic, witty, and sassy, this is one of the most engrossing and readable dramas you are likely to come across. At its most basic level, this play is so simple - just four characters, one room, and all the action taking place in the space of a few hours. But in terms of substance this is a powerfully rich and complex work of genius. The writing cuts like a sharp knife, the characters are exquisitely developed and original, and their chemistry is charged with an undeniable energy. The characters are at odds with each other throughout the play, and yet it is difficult to take sides with only one of them. They are all both likeable and dislikeable at the same time. George is a mean-spirited passive-aggressive with a huge chip on his shoulder, but it's impossible not to root for him as he joyfully attacks his wife, Martha, for her fondness of the bottle and various other sins. Nick's demeanor is just a tad holier-than-thou, but it is easily forgivable given the outrageous treatment he is forced to endure throughout the evening. Honey, his wife, is a ditz and a lush, but loveable in the same way as an Irish Setter. Any one of the four could easily carry the show, and together they create a powerful tension that keeps the play moving at a brisk pace. It is easy to see why Albee's writing has earned him a Pulitzer Prize. What is surprising is that it was another, lesser-known play and not this one that he won it for.

This is the stuff real drama is made: the human soul. And we see four torn, ravaged souls caught in a maelstrom of bitter emotions caused by frustration, unrequited love, anger and guilt feelings. Martha can't understand George's despair, that his apathy is generated by his ultimate failure to find a source of hope and meaning in his life; George can't understand the frustration of Martha, her own feeling of failure being incapable to connect with him, to save him from his passive/aggressive depression; nor can Nick and Honey comprehend them, and indeed themselves. The sadistic rituals of games are like pagan sacrifices, made by the characters to the god of modern angst to know the truth on themselves. As the sad truth is revealed, they emerge maybe purified, surely wiser. This drama is like an interpretation of Eliot's *Wasteland*. The spirit, especially in the final scenes, is very similar.

I was shocked to see that the new revision omits the end of Act II, "Walpurgisnacht". George and Honey have a key confrontation. George says "How do you make your secret little murders stud-boy doesn't know about, huh? Pills? PILLS? You got a secret supply of pills? Or what? Apple-jelly? WILL POWER?" Several pages are omitted; perhaps Albee wanted to decrease the run-time of the play. I have no idea. The shortening and the omission of key speeches are not worth the addition of the "F" word. Honey and Nick become a less complex and nuanced couple; her participation in secrets and her ambivalence about child-birth and motherhood are, essentially, removed from the text. It's an unkind cut.

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