

Great Writers of the English Language

Dramatists

GREAT WRITERS OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

DRAMATISTS

EDITOR
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GREAT WRITERS OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

DRAMATISTS

Great Writers of the English Language

Poets

Novelists and Prose Writers

Dramatists

EDITOR'S NOTE

The selection of writers included in this book is based on the recommendations of the advisers listed on page ix.

The entry for each writer consists of a biography, a complete list of his published books, a selected list of published bibliographies and critical studies on the writer, and a signed critical essay on his work.

In the biographies, details of education, military service, and marriage(s) are generally given before the usual chronological summary of the life of the writer; awards and honours are given last.

The Publications section is meant to include all book publications, though as a rule broadsheets, single sermons and lectures, minor pamphlets, exhibition catalogues, etc. are omitted. Under the heading Collections, we have listed the most recent collections of the complete works and those of individual genres (verse, plays, novels, stories, and letters); only those collections which have some editorial authority and were issued after the writer's death are listed; on-going editions are indicated by a dash after the date of publication; often a general selection from the writer's works or a selection from the works in the individual genres listed above is included.

Titles are given in modern spelling, though the essayists were allowed to use original spelling for titles and quotations; often the titles are "short." The date given is that of the first book publication, which often followed the first periodical or anthology publication by some time; we have listed the actual year of publication, often different from that given on the title-page. No attempt has been made to indicate which works were published anonymously or pseudonymously, or which works of fiction were published in more than one volume. We have listed plays which were produced but not published, but only since 1700; librettos and musical plays are listed along with the other plays; no attempt has been made to list lost or unverified plays. Reprints of books (including facsimile editions) and revivals of plays are not listed unless a revision or change of title is involved. The most recent edited version of individual works is included if it supersedes the collected edition cited.

In the essays, short references to critical remarks refer to items cited in the Publications section or in the Reading List. Introductions, memoirs, editorial matter, etc. in works cited in the Publications section are not repeated in the Reading List.

We would like to thank the advisers and contributors for their patience and help.

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John Webster
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Patrick White
William Whitehead
John Whiting
Oscar Wilde
Thornton Wilder
Emlyn Williams
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William Butler Yeats

ALBEE, Edward (Franklin, III). American. Born in Washington, D.C., 12 March 1928. Educated at Lawrenceville School; Valley Forge Military Academy, Pennsylvania; Choate School, Connecticut, graduated 1946; Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut, 1946–47. Served in the United States Army. Worked as a radio writer, WNYC, office boy, Warwick and Legler, record salesman, Bloomingdale's, book salesman, G. Schirmer, counterman, Manhattan Towers Hotel, messenger, Western Union, 1955–58, all in New York. Producer, with Richard Barr and Clinton Wilder, New Playwrights Unit Workshop, later Albarwild Theatre Arts, and Albar Productions, New York; also a stage director. Founder, William Flanagan Center for Creative Persons, Montauk, Long Island, New York, 1971. United States Cultural Exchange Visitor to Russia. Recipient: Berlin Festival Award, 1959, 1961; Vernon Rice Award, 1960; Obie Award, 1960; Argentine Critics Award, 1961; Lola D'Annunzio Award, 1961; New York Drama Critics Circle Award, 1964; Outer Circle Award, 1964; Antoinette Perry Award, 1964; Margo Jones Award, 1965; Pulitzer Prize, 1967, 1975. Litt.D.: Trinity College, 1974. Member, National Institute of Arts and Letters, 1966. Lives in Montauk, New York.

PUBLICATIONS

Plays

- The Zoo Story* (produced 1959). In *The Zoo Story, The Death of Bessie Smith, The Sandbox*, 1960.
- The Sandbox* (produced 1960). In *The Zoo Story, The Death of Bessie Smith, The Sandbox*, 1960.
- The Death of Bessie Smith* (produced 1960). In *The Zoo Story, The Death of Bessie Smith, The Sandbox*, 1960.
- The Zoo Story, The Death of Bessie Smith, The Sandbox: Three Plays*. 1960; as *The Zoo Story and Other Plays*, 1962.
- Fam and Yam* (produced 1960). 1961.
- The American Dream* (produced 1961). 1961.
- Bartleby*, with James Hinton, Jr., music by William Flanagan, from the story by Melville (produced 1961).
- Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (produced 1962). 1962.
- The Ballad of the Sad Café*, from the story by Carson McCullers (produced 1963). 1963.
- Tiny Alice* (produced 1964). 1965.
- Malcolm*, from the novel by James Purdy (produced 1966). 1966.
- A Delicate Balance* (produced 1966). 1966.
- Breakfast at Tiffany's*, music by Bob Merrill, from the story by Truman Capote (produced 1966).
- Everything in the Garden*, from the play by Giles Cooper (produced 1967). 1968.
- Box and Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-Tung: Two Inter-Related Plays* (as *Box-Mao-Box*, produced 1968; as *Box and Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-Tung*, produced 1968). 1969.
- All Over* (produced 1971). 1971.
- Seascape* (produced 1975). 1975.
- Listening* (broadcast 1976; produced 1977). In *Two Plays*, 1977.
- Counting the Ways* (produced 1976). In *Two Plays*, 1977.
- Two Plays*. 1977.
- The Lady from Dubuque*. 1978.

Radio Play: *Listening*, 1976.

Bibliography: *Albee at Home and Abroad: A Bibliography, 1958–June 1968* by Richard E. Amacher and Margaret Rule, 1970.

Reading List: *Albee* by Ruby Cohn, 1969; *Albee* by Richard E. Amacher, 1969; *Albee* by C. W. E. Bigsby, 1969, and *Albee: A Collection of Critical Essays* edited by Bigsby, 1975; *Albee* by Ronald Hayman, 1971; *From Tension to Tonic: The Plays of Albee* by Anne Paolucci, 1972; *Albee: The Poet of Loss* by Anita M. Stenz, 1978.

* * *

At age fifty, after two decades of playwriting, Edward Albee remains the most controversial playwright of the United States. Critics are divided as to whether he is a realist or absurdist. Critics and public are divided as to the quality of his writing after *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Actors and directors are divided as to whether he is wise to direct his own plays. Never one to soar above the battle, Albee wittily attacks his attackers. More importantly, he continues to write plays in his own restless search for new dramatic forms.

The Zoo Story, completed in 1958 when he was thirty years old, played in New York City on the same bill as Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*, and Albee was immediately pigeonholed as absurdist. Rather than dramatize a metaphysical impasse, however, Albee creates a protagonist who is a martyr to brotherly love and cultural vigor. In arousing smug Peter to enact a zoo story, Jerry strikes hard at complacent conformity, and Albee strikes hard at conventional theater.

Albee's next few plays in the next few years are more traditionally satiric. *The Death of Bessie Smith* lacerates white racism; *The American Dream* and *The Sandbox* ridicule American materialism and mindlessness. *Fam and Yam*, a slight piece which Albee continues to direct, confronts an old established playwright with a bright young novice.

For all the energetic idiom of *The Zoo Story* and the satiric verve of his other short plays, Albee remained a fringe playwright until his very full evening of theater, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* The play has been misunderstood as a marital problem play, a campus satire, or veiled homosexuality, but, even misunderstood, its verbal pyrotechnics attracted audiences. Slowly, its symbolic import has seeped through an apparently realistic surface. George and Martha, ostensibly an American academic couple but related by name to the father (and mother) of the United States, have based their union on the illusion of a child. On the eve of the child's twenty-first birthday, the fantasy parents return home from a campus party. Drinking heavily, the older couple uses a younger couple for "flagellation." As in O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night* alcohol proves confessional and penitential for all four characters. In the play's third act "Exorcism" George kills their imaginary son. The middle-aged couple, alone at daybreak, has to learn to live with naked reality.

A direct challenge to O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh*, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is a noteworthy contribution to American dramatic preoccupation with illusion, in the lineage of Williams's *Streetcar Named Desire* and Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. In this big four O'Neill and Williams are the romantics, Miller and Albee the realists, and yet *Virginia Woolf* reveals hints of nostalgia for illusion. Moreover, with time, the play's verbal vitriol seems diluted, clarifying the theatricalization of a crisis in Western culture.

All Albee's subsequent plays hinge on this theme, for which he finds new forms. He continues the corruscating dialogue of *Virginia Woolf* into the first scene of *Tiny Alice* but then shifts to slower rhythms of mystery – both murder and metaphysics. As in *Zoo Story* and *Virginia Woolf*, the protagonist of *Tiny Alice* seeks the reality beneath the surface, and the surface glitters theatrically with such devices as a model castle, a Cardinal who keeps caged cardinal-birds, a beautiful woman disguised as an old crone, an operatic staircase, and visual reminders of the Pietà and Crucifixion. Brother Julian claims to be "dedicated to the reality of things, rather than the appearance." Abandoned on his wedding day by his bride Alice and her entourage, literally shot into reality, Julian finally lies in cruciform posture, clinging to illusion as he really dies.