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## EDWARD ALBEE AND VIRGINIA WOOLF

SOPHISTICATED DROLLERY in a tense and sombre situation lends a special kind of piquancy to Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, and even those who have no particular liking for the absurdities of the contemporary stage are usually amused when they hear the words of the play's title sung to the tune of "Who's afraid of the big bad wolf?". At the end of the play, it becomes evident, however, that the parody is more than amusing, that the core of the drollery holds something that is central to the idea of the play. "The distorted little nursery rhyme . . . attains profundity in the end", says Elmer Hankiss in *The New Hungarian Quarterly* (V, xv, p. 174). That the question "Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf?" (Who's afraid of the big bad wolf? Who's afraid?) is full of meaning becomes clear to any thoughtful critic, but, so far, it appears to have been considered only in a vague, symbolic context. It does not seem to have been pointed out as yet that the name of Virginia Woolf has a very specific significance with regard to Albee's plot. Consciously or subconsciously, Albee was inspired by Virginia Woolf's writings, especially by one of her short stories, "Lappin and Lapinova", which was first published in *Harper's Bazaar* in 1938 and reprinted in Virginia Woolf's posthumous collection, *A Haunted House and Other Stories*, and in Witherspoon's *College Survey of English Literature*. It is probable that the inclusion of her name in the title of the play constitutes Albee's tribute to one who has inspired him, that it is an open acknowledgment of the debt that he owes to a writer who has helped to refine his sensibility.

Virginia Woolf's story concerns a young couple, Ernest and Rosalind Thorburn, who pretend, in a playful way, to be a pair of rabbits. Lappin and Lapinova are the pet names they have invented for each other. Ernest is Lappin, the King Rabbit "that makes laws for all the other rabbits". To delight his young wife, Ernest twitches his nose like a rabbit, and when they sit on the shore of the Swiss lake where they spend their honeymoon, she offers him the lettuce that was provided with their hard-boiled eggs for lunch, and he stretches forward and nibbles it and takes it out of her hand. Rosalind is

Queen Lapinova who ranges through a mysterious, desolate world, "mostly by moonlight". She is saved from being "trapped" only as long as she sees the familiar reassuring twitch of her husband's nose. At first, Ernest and Rosalind are happy in their make-believe world, but Rosalind comes to depend on it with ever greater intensity. Only while the private world of their own making endures does she feel secure. Subtly, dream and reality mingle and become blurred in her emotions: the rabbits inhabit a realm this side of a stream; on the other side, menacing, lies the "dark wood" where Lapinova cannot go. Beyond the confines of the dream which Rosalind and Ernest have dreamed together, first as a tender jest and later with strange compulsion, there too lies a "dark wood", sombre, hopeless, a place where a hostile destiny will overtake them, where creatures wander "turning, twisting, in and out, round and round, hunting and being hunted". After a while, Ernest Thorburn tires of this fantasy world. As he settles down to a sober routine of living, his wife's references to their dream existence begin to annoy him; and, finally, he announces that "Poor Lapinova" was caught in a trap and killed. He hopes to put an end to a childish game. In effect, however, he destroys the relationship with his wife. To Rosalind it is as if, in some way, the rabbit's fate would involve her own essential being.

Thus ends Virginia Woolf's story. The parallel between its theme and the theme of Albee's play is obvious. In the play too, a husband and wife have built together a dream-world of their own: they have invented a son whom they discuss as if he truly existed, and when, at a moment of spite, George, the husband, announces the son's death, their relationship undergoes convulsive upheavals. Ernest Thorburn kills the dream when he announces the death of the rabbit, and, as a result, his marriage is ended. Albee's George also kills the dream when he speaks of his son's death, and, as a result, his old world lies shattered. But the end of the play is a great deal more complex than the end of the story. The reason for this lies in the differing intentions of the two authors and in the fact that Albee's play deals with more than one level of human experience. In her story, Virginia Woolf was concerned primarily, and perhaps exclusively, with a psychological situation—as John Osborne was when he wrote *Look Back in Anger*, another play on which Virginia Woolf's "Lappin and Lapinova" may have had a fructifying influence. Here too we have a hero whose relationship with his wife can survive only as long as reality is shut out—as long as they can imagine themselves to be faery-tale animals, a bear and a squirrel who live in an imaginary cave where they have lots of nuts. Both, Woolf and Osborne, tell us of people who cannot function, cannot find

happiness, beyond the framework of their dream. Here Albee appears to be more optimistic. At the end of Woolf's story, when Queen Lapinova died, something that was vital perished in Rosalind Thorburn. At the end of Albee's play we do not have the same sense of tragedy; we do not feel that disaster has overtaken George and Martha (at least, not as far as the primary, the realistic, psychological level of the play is concerned). On the contrary, when the dream is banished, there is the feeling that a new astringent climate can revitalize their future. They will face reality together. When George steps up to Martha with an unaccustomed tenderness and softly sings his

Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf  
 Virginia Woolf  
 Virginia Woolf, . . .

it is as if he were asking who is afraid of those who believe that human beings cannot survive their dreams? And the question seems to be rhetorical, seems to imply an optimistic answer. When George speaks of the future, he insists "It will be better"; and maybe he is right: their relationship has been purified; they can begin anew. But, of course, they can not be certain. One can never be sure. Martha confesses that she is afraid of Virginia Woolf. Perhaps she is afraid that Virginia Woolf could have been right after all when, in her own way, she was saying: tread softly, be careful when you handle people's dreams; for their dreams are fragile things, and you don't know whether the heart will not break when you break the spell of their illusions.

Albee's compassionate insight is impressive even when his words are not given a specific interpretation. No audience can fail to respond when they see George and Martha after hours of nightmarish warfare move close together, when they hear George's question, "Who's afraid . . .?" and hear Martha's answer, "I . . . am . . . George . . . I . . . am . . ." There is something elemental in this—something that is basic to the human condition, something that can dispense with the good offices of an interpreter. Nevertheless, a number of specific interpretations are possible, and they should not be ignored, especially as the play is not merely a psychological study but offers a rich hunting ground for the critic who is looking for symbolic meanings. Since Albee has written a play violently antipathetic to the "American dream" it is natural that allegorical elements in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* should be linked with related problems. If Martha and George represent America, then the

symbolic interpretation of the play does not present any difficulties. In their dreams they consider themselves the happy parents of a son, just as, in the collective dream, wide sections of American society pretend that they have achieved an almost ideal style of life, that theirs is a land where every man is free to pursue happiness. When George kills the imaginary son and Martha murmurs that she is afraid he represents the voice of honesty waking a somnambulant people, and in her answer we hear the bewilderment, the anguish of the individual who is being evicted from a fool's paradise and feels helpless in the thought of what is to come. The symbolism in Albee's play is generally understood to be concerned with social criticism specifically related to problems of the United States. But wider interpretations have been attempted. Ingmar Bergman (whose Stockholm production of the play is briefly discussed by Ivan Nagel, *Neue Rundschau*, LXXIV, 1963, p. 65) appears to see the play in terms of Christian symbolism. Daniel McDonald, writing in *Renascence*, also makes a case for a Christian interpretation. He points to biblical allegory in a number of scenes but rejects criticism that attempts a full analysis of the play in terms of symbolic meanings. "The danger in reading Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is in becoming too involved in symbolism", he writes ("Truth and Illusion in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*" *Renascence*, XVII, p. 63). He feels that the human situation, as stated, is important enough, that the portrayal of struggles and failures will suffice and that the critic who concentrates on allegory and symbolism will lose sight of the realistic picture.

It is precisely at this point that we may become conscious of a kinship between Edward Albee and Virginia Woolf. In Albee's work, a primary level of realistic action and a secondary level of symbolic meaning assume equal importance. To ignore one of them would be to impoverish a play in which a part of its fascination lies in the blending of the two. Plays which offer a primary plot and, at the same time, invite the audience to exercise their imagination and to look beyond it are, of course, no new invention. But in the traditional theatre, we are expected to give most of our attention to the primary level of the play, and if we find some hidden symbolism in it, this is a bonus which the author may or may not have intended for us. The important thing, traditionally, has been the story that unfolds before us on the stage. The plot can stand on its own; it is complete, has its own justification even if no further meanings are attached to it. The modern Theatre of the Absurd, on the other hand, shows us the opposite approach. Here, the primary level, the incidents, the action, all this is almost meaningless, and the play can be understood only if one penetrates the symbolism which the author has con-

cealed in it. Edward Albee has written more than one such play. We may think, for instance, of *The Sandbox* or *The American Dream*. But in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* he stands midway between the traditional theatre and the Theatre of the Absurd. In the early decades of this century, a number of writers, following in the wake of Henry James, created realistic prose fiction which concealed carefully designed symbolist meaning. One of the foremost among them was Virginia Woolf. It appears that Edward Albee applies to the stage that combination of realism and deliberate symbolism which such writers as James, Galsworthy, Conrad, Joyce, and Woolf brought to their novels and stories. We have in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* a plot which in no way forces us to look beyond what we see on the stage; yet there can be no doubt that Albee meant us to look further and that the play is a philosophical statement carefully expressed in the language of symbolism.

Virginia Woolf, like Albee, was capable of creating the purely absurd, the grotesque fantasy which is explainable only on a remote level. We find this trait in her allegorical extravaganza, *Orlando*. But in her best work she attempted to give us a true picture of ordinary human existence and at the same time to reach out toward the metaphysical, the cosmic which could be intimated only in terms of correlatives, of symbols. Her finest book is, probably, *To the Lighthouse*, and here we see how perfectly she could fuse the two levels. The life of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, of their family and guests, is observed with the impressionist's instinct for truth. We are made to inhale the atmosphere of the decaying summer residence where the mat was fading and the wallpaper flapping and the children forgot to shut the doors and brought in their shells and reeds and stones and seaweed from the beach without wiping their feet. We are made to dine with them, to walk with them; and if we so desire we may consider only this: we may accept the story merely as a portrait of humanity, a sketch of people who hope and are disappointed, who live as best they can, who feel, experience, do their part and flounder along and sink out of sight—some, like Mrs. Ramsay, without ever reaching the goal they have longed for. *To the Lighthouse* would be a good book even if it offered nothing but this intense portrayal of atmosphere and feeling. It could exist on the realistic level alone. But the book has, of course, another, quite different dimension; and it is in this context that certain parallels may be discerned between Woolf's novel and Albee's play.

We may, if we so desire, consider the characters in *To the Lighthouse* to be abstractions and the plot an allegory. Virginia Woolf has left so many

clues that such an approach to her book becomes irresistible. Mrs. Ramsay may be looked upon as a personification of the imagination, her husband as a personification of reason. Scattered throughout the book we find innumerable passages which seem to corroborate this interpretation. Mrs. Ramsay walks as if she were expecting someone around the corner: anticipation is the hallmark of the lively, imaginative mind. She wants hospitals on the island and cleaner dairies: it is the imaginative mind which dreams of social reform. When she sees Lily Briscoe strolling along with William Bankes, she immediately concludes that they would marry. She decides that childhood is the happiest time; in other words, she is given to romantic make-believe. Mr. Carmichael, who becomes a successful poet during World War I and thus may be considered to belong to the school of uncompromising realism which then flourished, mistrusts romantic fantasy. He also mistrusts Mrs. Ramsay. But Lily Briscoe, the unsuccessful painter who is so much in need of inspiration, tries desperately and in vain to make her relationship with Mrs. Ramsay meaningful. Indeed, she clings to her bodily, putting her head on Mrs. Ramsay's knee as if, allegorically, the artist were imploring a capricious Muse to lend her aid. Mrs. Ramsay walks away. Lily's paintings are worthless. Lily knows they will be "hung in the servants' bedrooms"; they will be "rolled up and stuffed under a sofa". At last, Lily asks herself why she should go on painting, and it is Mrs. Ramsay's personality that shows her why. The imaginative principle which denies itself to the artist at work may yet bring him consolation in the form of inspired thought: Mrs. Ramsay was "like a work of art" (in other words like imagination become concrete); she "was making of the moment something permanent"; she said "Life stands still here". And Lily, experiencing a sudden revelation, realizes that in trying to create works of art she too was arresting the moment, that through her "this eternal passing and flowing . . . was struck into stability"; and the success of her pictures as such did not seem to matter any more. The act of painting itself created, in some metaphysical sense, a permanent value. Mrs. Ramsay's presence offers the intellect strange, surprising, exciting insights; she can console; she can give hope. Paul, the young lover, "felt her eyes on him all day". No one took him seriously, but she "had made him think he could do anything". The imagination, to Virginia Woolf, can be an infinitely beneficial influence, but it can also deceive. It can persuade, for instance, that ugliness and danger do not exist. It can cast over them a layer of fantasy that will allow the hunted mind to rest awhile. Thus we see Mrs. Ramsay in the bedroom calming a frightened child by winding her beautiful shawl around the jagged skull of a

boar which someone had fixed to the wall, softening its outlines, pretending it wasn't there. She is a source of happiness to all who love her. "In the midst of chaos there was shape" because of her presence.

It is Mrs. Ramsay who promises her little son, James, a trip to the lighthouse, and it is her confidence which excites in him "an extraordinary joy". She encourages him to hope, to trust, to expect that the impossible journey may come true. It is imagination that kindles in mankind a zest, a confidence, a strength to hope that "if it's fine tomorrow", the "lighthouse" may be within reach. If conditions are right, the point of truth will be attained, the conditions of light, of happiness; the good life will be lived one day, maybe soon, maybe within one's own lifetime. Without imagination, mankind would be without direction, without a goal, without a guiding light to beckon it to progress. Mrs. Ramsay channels little James's thoughts; she gives them purpose and direction.

Mr. Ramsay represents reason, the mind that is concerned strictly with the factual, with reality. He views the world with the eyes of a logician, a mathematician, a scientist. He has no illusions. In his profession, he knows his achievements are modest. There are barriers beyond which he cannot move: one must be content to reach some point of vantage. It is he who tells little James that there will be no landing at the lighthouse tomorrow. The weather won't be fine. The expedition will not take place. In Mr. Ramsay's view, it would be foolish to raise the child's hopes when the prospect, according to all reasonable calculations, is so unpromising. Reason tells mankind that its talents are negligible and its resources limited, that conditions are not favourable now and won't be too bright tomorrow, that it won't do any good to expect the impossible: the good life, the conditions of light and comfort cannot be achieved. With his "hard, rectangular philosophy", Mr. Ramsay is likened to an empty kitchen table. Significantly, Mrs. Ramsay is likened to a flowering fruit tree. Without the flowering tree, without the beautiful tree of promise, the kitchen table will remain useless. Mr. Ramsay, we are told, largely depends on his wife. He constantly needs her sympathy. Reason alone, the ability to understand and evaluate facts, is not enough. To function meaningfully, reason needs the impetus of the imagination. Mrs. Ramsay promised to take her son to the lighthouse; she nurtured his desire; but in the end it is Mr. Ramsay who gets him there. Imagination can only promise; it is reason which must devise the means of fulfilment.

Throughout Virginia Woolf's book, the interdependence of reason and imagination is emphasized, and in the last section we get a glimpse of a world

where the balance is disturbed, where imagination is dead. The mellowing influence of Mrs. Ramsay is vanished. In the old, decaying summer house the cleaning women find the jagged boar skull exposed on the wall. Some rock in the far away mountains has crashed to the abyss and has made the old house tremble. The shawl which Mrs. Ramsay had so gently placed over the object of revulsion and fear is loosened and the thing is exposed to view. Those who now enter the room have to face the facts. The period is that which followed World War I. The holocaust has loosened the old comforting beliefs which the imagination had devised.

Lily, the artist, mourns Mrs. Ramsay's death with "the pain of want" and with "bitter anger". Without Mrs. Ramsay's presence she can't work. She feels like "a miserable machine, an inefficient machine". Without imagination, human beings are incapable of art, of self-expression. They are also incapable of establishing a graceful relationship with others: Lily Briscoe, whose soul reaches out toward her fellow beings, has nothing more interesting to say to a man than "Ah, but what beautiful boots you wear!"

In a world without imagination, there can be no empathy and consequently no compassion. When Mr. Ramsay and his children travel to the lighthouse, the boatman's boy takes a fish and cuts "a square out of its side" for bait and throws the mutilated body ("it was still alive") back into the sea, and no one does anything about it. Had Mrs. Ramsay been present, one feels, she might have prevented it; she would at least have protested. The world without imagination is a world where horror remains unchecked. It is a blighted world. But, at the same time, Virginia Woolf seems to say: dreaming alone is not enough. You need imagination, certainly, but ultimately you need reason to get things done.

When he was a child, holding his mother's hand, James craved the journey to the lighthouse. He had to grow up before his father could take him there. Yet, when the opportunity finally comes and the weather is fine and the boat is waiting, James is reluctant to go; he has to be coerced by his father. Mankind, like little James, has its dreams of the House of Light, and it has to grow up, mature, before it can hope to turn the dream into reality. But when it comes to the point, even when conditions are favourable, humanity has to be coaxed and coerced before it will act constructively. It would not progress if it were not for the compelling authority of reason.

James gets to the lighthouse in the end. It does not look exactly as it had appeared to him in the distance when he had dreamed of it in the company of his mother, but he does reach it, and he is glad of it. Virginia Woolf thus

ends her book on an intensely optimistic note, and a comparison between her and Albee, whom many consider an arch-pessimist, may seem inapt. An analysis of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* will show, however, that there is a strong intellectual kinship between the two authors. The symbolism in Albee's play is concerned with much the same issues as the symbolism in Virginia Woolf's novel.

In *To the Lighthouse*, young James represents mankind at large. In Albee's drama, mankind is symbolized in Martha. Here, Albee makes interpretation easy enough, for Martha declares with much emphasis that she is "The Earth Mother". She represents the species in its entirety. What this species longs for and does not produce is the good life, the life of enlightenment and happiness. What Martha wanted, but did not produce, was a child. The son of her dreams, "the beautiful, beautiful boy" whose eyes were green and whose hair became fleece in the sun, who loved the sun and grew up to be "beautiful; wise; perfect", that son is to Albee what the lighthouse was to Virginia Woolf: he is the state of perfection, of fulfilment. Mankind knows this condition only in its dreams. Martha raised her son only in fantasy. The impetus, in both cases, must come necessarily from the imagination. Humanity's dream was begotten by poets, prophets, and philosophers; and it was perpetuated by artists and chroniclers. The father of Martha's imaginary son is George, the history professor, the author of a novel, the man who insists that once, when he was sailing past Majorca, "the moon went down, thought about it for a little . . . considered it . . . and then, POP, came up again. Just like that." George, like Mrs. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*, represents the fructifying imagination. But while Mrs. Ramsay encouraged in her son the longing for a far away yet clearly defined ideal, George tends to confuse Martha's image of the ideal, to raise doubts concerning its nature. He blights the ideal that he has fathered. When Martha speaks about the green eyes of the son, George prompts her: they were blue, green, brown. When Martha tells of the child's restless sleep, George chimes in: the son had nightmares. Martha rhapsodises about her son's beauty and goodness. George insists that the boy was ashamed of his mother, that he "fought her every inch of the way". George and Martha produced an ideal, but their happiness did not last. They began to quarrel about it, and they continue to quarrel and to torment each other because of it. There is considerable consistency in this allegory. Basically, all human beings want the good life, but what this ideal life is to be like, what its features and character are to be, these are issues which divide mankind as the imagination changes from generation to generation, from place to place,

from one type of person to another. While Mrs. Ramsay represented the idea of imagination, the principle in its essential, pure form, George, the unsuccessful history professor, the would-be author who has written only one atrocious book, represents imagination that functions but feebly, a degenerate, bitter, destructive imagination. Mrs. Ramsay looked toward the lighthouse that was built on rock. Hers were the clear, well-defined values of the past. She personifies the imagination of the traditionalist. George has begotten something which, originally, corresponded to the old, accepted ideals, but he insists on changing it. "The state of perfection . . . couldn't last", says Martha. "Not with George . . . not with George around." He represents the weak, skeptical imagination of a confused age. Finally, when he announces that the son has died, when he eliminates the dream, he abdicates the one role he was fit to play in his relationship with Martha. On the allegorical level, we see in him the collective imagination of the species which loses the strength to create something of beauty and, at last, loses the will to create.

George, of course, does not see himself as the "shabby failure" which Martha knows he has become. He defends his incapacity to keep the dream alive. "It was . . . time", he says. The time of myth-making is over. The future, he insists, will be better. Their life will be free of deception. Virginia Woolf too was convinced that beautiful deceptions were fit only to serve frightened children. They were temporary consolations at best. Sooner or later, the beautiful veil came undone and revealed the ugly boar's skull it had concealed. But Virginia Woolf, nevertheless, knew that the imagination had manifold roles to play and that, without it, man would inhabit a gray and cruel world. When Martha angrily protests that her son can not be dead, that George can't kill him, we hear mankind protesting the disappearance of its ideals. Martha's rage is the rage of humanity that refuses to believe that it is being deprived of an ingredient that is vital to its well-being.

In *To the Lighthouse*, Mr. Ramsay is the man of reason and action. In *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, the corresponding personification of reason and action is Nick, the biologist, the scientist. Martha has long known that George, the man of the spirit, can only dream (and even that with diminishing efficiency). Thus, for some time, she has searched for tangible reality, chiefly (as we are informed by George) among the undergraduates at her father's college. Disappointment has made her alcoholic and promiscuous. Now, a new opportunity presents itself in the person of Nick, the man of the flesh. Martha turns to him, seduces him, takes him to the kitchen and to the upper regions of the house. He is young and healthy. There is an excellent chance

that he may give her a son, a real son. He tries, but apparently, without success. "Your potential's fine. It's dandy. Absolutely dandy", we hear Martha tell him after they have emerged from the bedroom. "I haven't seen such a dandy potential in a long time. Oh, but baby, you sure are a flop." In Virginia Woolf's novel, Mr. Ramsay, the man of reason, does succeed in making James steer his boat to the lighthouse. In Albee's play, Nick, the man of reason, reality, and action, is as incapable of helping Martha as George, the man of the imagination. What Martha's escapade with Nick does bring about is George's final decision to abandon the imaginary son, to kill him. He will punish her. "I'm going to get you . . . Martha", he murmurs while she is away, upstairs, with Nick. And he does get her, does punish her, by refusing to let their dream continue. Viewed in allegorical terms this means that, in a world which relies on the scientist and technologist for the fulfilment of its dreams, the poet and the prophet grow silent.

Nick is involved also in what one may perhaps call "a sub-plot" which, at some points, parallels the main story. Honey, Nick's wife, his "wifelet", at times represents, as does Martha, humanity as a whole, especially its weaker aspects; at other times she stands for specific segments of society: being Nick's wife, she represents that part of humankind which relies entirely on the realist, the scientist. Significantly, we are told that Honey believed herself pregnant when, in fact, she was not. Albee seems to say that those who believe that the good life, the era of enlightenment, is already in the making and that science and technology are bringing it about are deluding themselves.

Nick's relationship with his wife is not fruitful, and we may guess that perhaps, one of the reasons for this lies in a lack of passion, a lack of love. When Nick exchanges confidences with George, he confesses that he and Honey had known each other from childhood and that there was some kind of sexual experimentation even then; marriage brought them "no surprise, no earth-shaking discoveries". They married because their families expected them to. There is a strong hint that money was an important consideration. It is a marriage of convenience. Albee here touches on a theme which is strongly emphasized in *To the Lighthouse*. Reason alone is not enough. Reason has a perpetual need for the imagination, for the principle that brings about inspiration, zest, enthusiasm.

There is another respect in which Honey's story reminds one of problems touched upon by Virginia Woolf. Little James wanted the journey to the lighthouse very much, but when it comes to the point, when all is ready for him and waiting, he arrives reluctant, lagging, and melancholy. He has

to be coerced to achieve what he wanted to achieve. In the course of Albee's play, we find that Honey very much wants a child. She wants it "on principle", as George so pointedly suggests. But we know also that Honey is afraid of the real thing (just as mankind at large is afraid of the sacrifices that may accompany the coming of an enlightened age).

The symbolism of Virginia Woolf and Edward Albee confronts us with large issues; both writers are concerned with the destiny of the species, with its ultimate goals; both are concerned with elemental forces necessary to its progress; and both seem to suggest that healthful conditions will exist only where the principles of imagination and fervour combine with those of reason and action. Virginia Woolf shows us how each principle has its part to play. It is the task of the imagination to initiate, to formulate the ideal, to inspire, to point the way. Reason, logic, mathematics, science, these are expected to bring about the good life, the condition of light, to create it physically. Albee shows delinquency on both sides. Martha, like all mankind, is longing, waiting, wanting. George and Nick both fail Martha; mankind is being failed by the humanities and science alike. "I am the Earth Mother, and you're all flops. I disgust me", says Martha. The species is disgusted with its own incapacity to rouse in man the strength to succeed. At the end of the play, when we hear George's "Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf . . .?" we may remember that Virginia Woolf was the one who told us that, for the journey to the lighthouse, both imagination and reason were needed: one to inspire and promise, the other to bring about fulfilment. When Martha answers: "I . . . am . . . George . . . I am . . .", we may hear in this the cry: "but what if our poets are failures who are giving up altogether; and what if our scientists, for all their good potentialities and efforts, remain inadequate; what then?"