

Edward albee



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Edward Albee burst onto the American theatrical scene in the late 1950s with a variety of plays that detailed the agonies and disillusionment of that decade and the transition from the calm Eisenhower to the turbulent 1960s. Albee became a serious dramatist dealing with serious but always relevant themes, primarily having to do with the predicament of humanity in a society with moral decay, as well as the conflict between reality and illusion. His work is considered to be unique, uncompromising, controversial, elliptical, and provocative.

Born on March 12, 1928, in Washington D. C., Edward Albee was a couple weeks old when he was adopted by Reed and Frances Albee. He was taken to live in Westchester, New York. His adoptive father owned a chain of vaudeville theaters there, which gave the young Edward an early exposure to theater personalities. It was said that he lived a comfortable childhood having servants, tutors, riding lessons, winters spent in Miami and having an enormous wardrobe in his room sized closet. He was not very happy however. His strong-minded mother and him shared different views. While she tried to mold him into a respectable member of the Larchmont, New York social scene, he strongly opposed and chose to associate with artists and intellectuals whom she found quite objectionable. He felt dejected when she kicked him out of the family mansion for homosexuality. From there he moved to Greenwich Village where he took up such jobs as an office boy, record salesman, and a messenger for western union which was his favorite. " I didn't use my mind at all, and walking around the Upper West Side was good exercise."

School was not a favorite for Edward Albee. He was sent to select preparatory and military schools, which he was first shipped off to at the age

of eleven. Albee attended the Choate school from 1944 to 1946, when he enrolled at Trinity College, which was a small liberal arts institution in Hartford, Connecticut. He stated, " I discovered that the required courses were not the ones I required." Edward decided to cut the classes that he found boring and audit the ones he liked. Sophomore year was the last of his formal education. He says it wasn't a big deal because he figured out a way to educate himself and keep on doing it. Albee did mention however that even though his stay at Trinity was brief, he did gain some dramatic experience playing the role of characters in his performances there. Albee describes his work as " an examination of the American Scene, an attack on the substitution of artificial for real values in our society, a condemnation of complacency, cruelty, and emasculation and vacuity, a stand against the fiction that everything in this slipping land of ours is peachy-keen." It was after quitting his job as a messenger that Albee decided to write *The Zoo Story* (1959), a play about a middle-class man in the publishing business hounded into killing an alienated man who happened to confront him in Central Park. Having been rejected in New York, the play was an instant success in West Germany and soon thereafter gained fame in the US once it returned. It was this play Edward says that changed his life, which played off-Broadway for three and a half years. Albee has shown a fascination for a wide variety of theatrical styles and subjects. *A Delicate Balance*, which was about a family unable to communicate, won him his first Pulitzer Prize along with Best Play awards from the New York Drama Critics and Outer Critics Circle. He gave birth to American absurdist drama with *The Sandbox* (1959) and *The American Dream* (1960). In 1975, Albee won his second Pulitzer Prize with *Seascape*, which combined theatrical experiment

and social commentary in a story about a retired vacationing couple who meet a pair of sea lizards at the beach. Albee was hailed as the leader of a new theatrical movement and labeled as the successor to Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, and Eugene O'Neill.

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf, a smash on Broadway, was the most famous play that Edward Albee produced, written in 1962. Albee gives a clear cut, honest picture of the reality of marriage and the fears that go hand in hand with love and intimacy. The play is full of human emotions-distress, humiliation, love and hate. The play earned him the greatest-since-Miller accolade and the "depraved obscenity" tag. Pulitzer drama judges, torn between the two, select and then deny him the 1962 prize. Through the late 70's and all of the 80's were perhaps Edward Albee's worst playwriting times. He received many bad reviews, did not yield a single play that could be considered a commercial hit, and was consumed by Alcoholism. Albee says the reason for this is, "There is not always a relationship between popularity and excellence. You just have to make the assumption you're doing good work and go on doing it." When Albee came out with Three Tall Women in 1994, it reclaimed him as one of Americas leading dramatists. It enjoyed a stunning sold-out success in New York and has been staged across the country and around the world. It received Best Play awards from both the New York Drama Critics and Outer Critics Circle and it earned Albee his third Pulitzer Prize. Edward Albee is currently still playwriting, teaching, directing, and is having plays produced around the world.

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