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## The Cambridge Companion to Edward Albee

Edward Albee, perhaps best known for his acclaimed and infamous 1960s drama *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, is one of America's greatest living playwrights. Now in his seventies, he is still writing challenging, award-winning dramas. This collection of new essays on Albee, which includes contributions from the leading commentators on Albee's work, brings fresh critical insights to bear by exploring the full scope of the playwright's career, from his 1959 breakthrough with *The Zoo Story* to his most recent Broadway success, *The Goat, or Who is Sylvia?* (2002). The contributors include scholars of both theatre and English literature, and the essays thus consider the plays both as literary texts and as performed drama. The collection considers a number of Albee's lesser-known and neglected works, provides a comprehensive introduction and overview, and includes an exclusive, original interview with Mr. Albee, on topics spanning his whole career.

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo  
Cambridge University Press  
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK  
Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)  
Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9780521834551](http://www.cambridge.org/9780521834551)  
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First published 2005

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

*A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library*

ISBN-13 978-0-521-83455-1 hardback  
ISBN-10 0-521-83455-4 hardback  
ISBN-13 978-0-521-54233-3 paperback  
ISBN-10 0-521-54233-2 paperback

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All my plays are about people missing the boat, closing down too young, coming to the end of their lives with regret at things not done, as opposed to things done. I find that most people spend too much time living as if they're never going to die. They skid through their lives. Sleep through them sometimes. Anyway, there are only two things to write about – life and death.

Edward Albee, interviewed in 1991

Don't forget the laughs and slapstick so essential to the success of any of my plays.

Albee to the cast of *A Delicate Balance*, 1967

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## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

THOMAS P. ADLER is Professor of English at Purdue University, where he has taught dramatic literature since receiving his Ph.D. from the University of Illinois at Urbana in 1970. He has published widely in the areas of modern British and modern American drama, with a particular emphasis on Williams and Albee. Among his several books is *American Drama, 1940–1960: A Critical History* (1994). This essay marks his fifth appearance in a Cambridge Companion volume.

LINDA BEN-ZVI is Professor of Theatre Studies at Tel Aviv University, Israel, and Professor Emerita in English and Theatre at Colorado State University. She has published *Samuel Beckett* (1986) and *Susan Glaspell: Her Life and Times* (2004). She has edited *Women in Beckett* (1990), *Susan Glaspell: Essays on her Theater and Fiction* (1995), *Theatre in Israel* (1996), *Drawing on Beckett* (2003), and *The Road to the Temple* (2004), and is co-editing with J. Ellen Gainor *The Complete Plays of Susan Glaspell* (2005).

CHRISTOPHER BIGSBY is Professor of American Studies at the University of East Anglia. He has published more than twenty-five books on British and American culture, including *Albee* (1969), *The Black American Writer* (1977), the three-volume *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth Century American Drama* (1982–85), *David Mamet* (1985), *Modern American Drama 1945–2000* (2000), and *Contemporary American Dramatists* (2000). He is the editor of *Contemporary English Drama* (1981), *Arthur Miller and Company* (1990), *The Portable Arthur Miller* (1995), the three-volume *The Cambridge History of American Theatre* (with Don Wilmeth, 1998–2000), and two volumes titled *Writers in Conversation* (2001). He is also the author of four novels: *Hester* (1994), *Pearl* (1995), *Still Lives* (1996), and *Beautiful Dreamer* (2002). Most recently, he has edited *The Cambridge Companion to David Mamet* (2004) and written *Arthur Miller: A Critical Study* (2004).

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JOHN M. CLUM is Professor of Theatre Studies and English and Chair of the Department of Theatre Studies at Duke University. He has published essays on Tennessee Williams, Sam Shepard, and Larry Kramer, among others. His books include *Acting Gay: Male Homosexuality in Modern Drama* (1992), *Something for the Boys: Musical Theater and Gay Culture* (2001), and *He's All Man: Learning Masculinity, Gayness and Love from American Movies* (2002). He is also a playwright whose work has been produced in theatres across the United States.

RUBY COHN is Professor Emerita of Comparative Drama at the University of California (Davis). She has written and edited some dozen books and a hundred articles on contemporary drama.

J. ELLEN GAINOR is Professor of Theatre and Associate Dean of the Graduate School at Cornell University. She is the author of *Shaw's Daughters: Dramatic and Narrative Constructions of Gender* (1992) and *Susan Glaspell in Context: American Theater, Culture, and Politics, 1915–48* (2001), both of which received *Choice* awards for outstanding scholarship. She has edited the collections *Imperialism and Theatre* (1995) and *Performing America: Cultural Nationalism in American Theater* (with Jeffrey Mason, 1999), and is currently co-editing with Linda Ben-Zvi *The Complete Plays of Susan Glaspell*. She is also an editor of the forthcoming *Norton Anthology of Drama*.

PHILIP C. KOLIN is Professor of English at the University of Southern Mississippi and the founding co-editor of *Studies in American Drama, 1945–Present*. He has written extensively on Albee, David Rabe, and Tennessee Williams. He has edited, among many other books, *Critical Essays on Edward Albee* (with J. Madison Davis, 1986), *Conversations with Edward Albee* (1988), *David Rabe: A Stage History and Bibliography* (1988), *Speaking on Stage: Interviews with Contemporary American Playwrights* (with Colby H. Kullman, 1996), and *The Undiscovered Country: The Later Plays of Tennessee Williams* (2002). He wrote *Williams: A Streetcar Named Desire* for the Cambridge Plays in Production Series (2000), and most recently edited *The Tennessee Williams Encyclopedia* for Greenwood (2004). Kolin has also

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published several books on Shakespeare and is currently the General Editor of the Routledge Shakespeare Criticism Series. With Maureen Curley he has founded a new poetry journal entitled *Lilies: A Journal of Christian Poetry*.

GERRY MCCARTHY was until recently Professor of Theatre Studies at the University of Ulster. He has particular interests in acting and in the critical languages which address processes of acting and other media of performance. He has worked practically as a director and as an acting coach in France, Canada, and the United Kingdom. His published work ranges from Shakespeare and Molière to Beckett and contemporary American dramatists. He is the author of *Edward Albee* (1987) and *The Theatres of Molière* (2002).

BRENDA MURPHY is Professor of English at the University of Connecticut. Among her books are *American Realism and American Drama, 1880–1940* (1987), *Tennessee Williams and Elia Kazan: A Collaboration in the Theatre* (1992), *Miller: Death of a Salesman* (1995), *Congressional Theatre: Dramatizing McCarthyism on Stage, Film, and Television* (1999), *O’Neill: Long Day’s Journey Into Night* (2001), and, as editor, *The Cambridge Companion to American Women Playwrights* (1999).

MATTHEW ROUDANÉ is Professor and Chair of the Department of English at Georgia State University in Atlanta. He has written two books on Albee: *Understanding Edward Albee* (1987) and *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?: Necessary Fictions, Terrifying Realities* (1990), and is the editor of both *The Cambridge Companion to Tennessee Williams* (1997) and *The Cambridge Companion to Sam Shepard* (2002). His other books include *Conversations with Arthur Miller* (1987), *Public Issues, Private Tensions: Contemporary American Drama* (1993), and *Approaches to Teaching Miller’s Death of a Salesman* (1995). Roudané is editor of the *South Atlantic Review* and served as dramaturge for 7 Stages Theatre in Atlanta, where he worked with Joseph Chaikin, who directed Albee’s *A Delicate Balance* in 2002. As a Fulbright scholar, he taught American drama at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Spain, in 2004.

RAKESH H. SOLOMON teaches in the Department of Theatre and Drama at Indiana University, Bloomington. He is the author of *Albee in Performance: The Playwright as Director*, forthcoming from Indiana University Press, and is currently completing *Culture, Politics, and Performance in Colonial India, 1753–1947*. He has published numerous journal articles on contemporary American theatre as well as British and Indian theatre, and has contributed essays to *Edward Albee: A Casebook* (2003) as well as

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## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

*Alan Ayckbourn: A Casebook* (1991). Other essays are forthcoming in *Theatre International: Essays on the Theory and Praxis of World Theatre, Popular Theatres of South and Southeast Asia*, and *Rewriting National Theatre Histories*. A past editor of *South Asian Review*, Solomon has received senior fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the American Institute of Indian Studies.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my thanks to all the contributors to this book – for their cooperation in all things, and for their prompt responses to my inquiries. Thanks to them, my first experience of editing a collection has proved a less onerous task than I had imagined it might be. I am especially grateful to Matthew Roudané, for his advice in the early stage of approaching contributors, and to Tom Adler, for graciously consenting to act as “editor” on my own chapter for this collection – and in doing so, offering such useful feedback, and not asking for cuts! I would also like to thank Richard Bapty, at Glasgow University Library, for his advice on all things bibliographic, and Vicki Cooper, my ever-enthusiastic commissioning editor at Cambridge University Press.

Special thanks are due to Edward Albee himself, for consenting to be interviewed for this collection, for his swift approval of the resulting transcript, for permission to consult his closed archive at the Billy Rose Theatre Collection of New York Public Library, and for his kind permission to reproduce brief quotations from the unpublished manuscript of his play *Occupant*, in the essays by Ruby Cohn and Christopher Bigsby. I am also very grateful to Mr. Albee’s assistant, Jakob Holder, for his unstinting help in facilitating all this.

## NOTES ON THE TEXT

Edward Albee's plays frequently use three-dotted ellipses . . . to suggest brief pauses, or as indications of how an actor is to pace a speech. Since quotations including such ellipses feature throughout the essays in this collection, I have chosen to use square-bracketed ellipses [. . .] as an indicator of those instances where the author of the chapter has abbreviated the quotation itself. Albee's own dots remain unbracketed, and thus clearly distinguishable. To avoid unnecessarily cluttering the text, however, ellipses in quotations from sources *other than* Albee's plays are indicated with dots but not brackets, as is conventional.

Dates attributed to Albee's plays indicate the year of first performance, rather than of composition or publication, unless the text clearly indicates otherwise (for example, in the case of an unperformed play).

## CHRONOLOGY

- 1928 Born March 12 in Washington D.C. to Louise Harvey. Adopted by Reed and Frances Albee at two weeks of age. Raised by this wealthy family, inheritors of fortune made by Keith-Albee chain of vaudeville theatres.
- 1939 Leaves Rye County day school.
- 1940 Goes to Lawrenceville boarding school, New Jersey.
- 1943 Expelled from Lawrenceville. Enrolls at Valley Forge Military Academy, Pennsylvania.
- 1944 Expelled from Valley Forge. Enrolls at Choate School, Connecticut.
- 1946 First play, *The Schism*, published in *Choate Literary Magazine*. Graduates from Choate and goes to Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut. Expelled for failure to attend classes and chapel.
- 1947 Works for WYNC radio.
- 1949 Enrolls briefly at Columbia University. Writes three-act drama of familial and sexual tensions, *The City of People* (unpublished, unproduced). Following fight with adoptive mother, Albee leaves home and moves to Greenwich Village, working odd jobs and writing poetry and prose.
- 1951 Writes *Ye Watchers and Ye Lonely Ones*, a play in three scenes, dealing with struggles of four gay men (unpublished, unproduced).
- 1952 Moves in with composer William Flanagan, who becomes an important mentor figure.
- 1953 Meets Thornton Wilder, who encourages Albee to write plays. Writes *The Making of a Saint*, a verse play set in a railroad station, and dedicates it to Wilder (unpublished, unproduced). (Other unpublished plays and play fragments from the 1950s include *The Invalid*, *The Ice Age*, *An End to Summer*, *The Dispossessed*, and others.)
- 1955 Begins work as telegram delivery boy for Western Union.

## CHRONOLOGY

- 1958 Writes *The Zoo Story*. Stops work with Western Union.
- 1959 September: *The Zoo Story* premieres in German, in translation by Pinkas Braun, at Berlin's Schiller Theater Werkstatt, in double bill with Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*.
- 1960 January: *The Zoo Story* receives American premiere at the off-Broadway Provincetown Playhouse. Directed by Milton Katselas, it is again paired with *Krapp's Last Tape*. In April *The Death of Bessie Smith* premieres in Berlin at the Schlosspark Theater, and *The Sandbox* at the Jazz Gallery in New York. *FAM and YAM* premieres in Westport, Connecticut, in August.
- 1961 January: *The American Dream* premieres in New York at the York Playhouse, with Sudie Bond as Grandma. Initially in double bill with Albee's adaptation of Melville's short story *Bartleby* (written as libretto for William Flanagan's operatic score), but *Bartleby* is swiftly closed and replaced in March by American premiere of *The Death of Bessie Smith*. *Dream* and *Bessie* both directed by Alan Schneider.
- 1962 October: *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* premieres on Broadway at the Billy Rose Theatre. Directed by Alan Schneider, with Uta Hagen as Martha and Arthur Hill as George. Critical response is mixed, and Albee is controversially denied the Pulitzer Prize for Drama for 1962–63. However, production is an instant box-office hit and runs until 1964, when it transfers to London for British premiere, with stars intact.
- 1963 October: Albee's adaptation of Carson McCullers's novella *The Ballad of the Sad Café* premieres on Broadway at the Martin Beck Theatre. Directed by Alan Schneider, with Colleen Dewhurst as Miss Amelia. Also that fall, Albee and his producers, Richard Barr and Clinton Wilder, use some of profits from *Virginia Woolf* to establish the Playwrights' Unit at the Village South Theatre, providing a platform for untested new playwrights. Albee also makes first attempt at directing his own work, with a low-profile production of *The Zoo Story* in Pennsylvania.
- 1964 December: *Tiny Alice* premieres at the Billy Rose Theatre, prompting critical controversy. Directed by Alan Schneider, with John Gielgud as Brother Julian and Irene Worth as Miss Alice.
- 1965 British premiere of *Tiny Alice* staged in London by Royal Shakespeare Company. Albee is reconciled with adoptive mother after seventeen-year estrangement (father died in 1961, while Albee was incommunicado).



## CHRONOLOGY

- 1966 January: Albee's adaptation of James Purdy's novel *Malcolm* premieres on Broadway at the Schubert Theatre. Critically panned, it closes inside a week. In September *A Delicate Balance* opens at the Martin Beck Theatre, starring Jessica Tandy and Hume Cronyn, and goes on to win Pulitzer Prize. Both plays directed by Alan Schneider. Meanwhile, Warner Brothers premieres Mike Nichols's film version of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, starring Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton, and Albee is brought in as script doctor on a musical adaptation of Truman Capote's *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (closes in December during out-of-town try-outs).
- 1967 November: Albee's "Americanization" of Giles Cooper's play *Everything in the Garden* opens on Broadway at the Plymouth Theatre, directed by Peter Glenville, with Barbara Bel Geddes and Barry Nelson.
- 1968 September: following March premiere at Buffalo's Studio Arena, *Box* and *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-Tung* open on Broadway at the Billy Rose Theatre, in repertory with other Albee shorts. Directed by Alan Schneider.
- 1969 British premiere of *A Delicate Balance* staged in London by Royal Shakespeare Company.
- 1971 March: *All Over* premieres on Broadway at the Martin Beck Theatre, under John Gielgud's direction, with Jessica Tandy and Colleen Dewhurst as Wife and Mistress. Playwrights' Unit closes. Albee begins life-long relationship with sculptor Jonathan Thomas.
- 1972 British premiere of *All Over* staged in London by Royal Shakespeare Company.
- 1973 American Film Theater releases film version of *A Delicate Balance*, directed by Tony Richardson, with Katharine Hepburn and Paul Scofield.
- 1975 January: *Seascape* premieres on Broadway at the Schubert Theatre. Directed by Albee, starring Deborah Kerr and Barry Nelson. Goes on to win Pulitzer Prize.
- 1976 March: *Listening* premieres in U.K. as radio play on BBC Radio 3, codirected by Albee and John Tydeman. In December *Counting the Ways* premieres in London at the Royal National Theatre, directed by Bill Bryden. Albee also directs acclaimed Broadway revival of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* with Colleen Dewhurst and Ben Gazzara.
- 1977 January: *Listening* and *Counting the Ways* receive American stage premieres together at the Hartford Stage Company, Connecticut, under Albee's direction. Angela Lansbury and William Prince star.

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- 1980 January: *The Lady from Dubuque* premieres on Broadway at the Morosco Theatre, directed by Alan Schneider. Irene Worth takes the title role. It closes after twelve performances.
- 1981 March: Albee's adaptation of Vladimir Nabokov's novel *Lolita* premieres on Broadway at the Brooks Atkinson Theatre, with Donald Sutherland as Humbert Humbert. Produced by Jerry Sherlock and directed by Frank Dunlop. Albee disowns the production, which closes swiftly. Also that year, he writes *Another Part of the Zoo*, a variation on the scenario of *The Zoo Story*, for showing at a private benefit function.
- 1983 April: *The Man Who Had Three Arms* opens on Broadway at Lyceum Theatre, following a try-out run in Chicago the previous fall. Directed by Albee, with Robert Drivas, it closes swiftly. In the following month, *Finding the Sun* premieres under Albee's direction at the University of Northern Colorado, Greeley. Also staged at University of California at Irvine, in double bill with another new piece, *Walking*, which is subsequently abandoned by Albee.
- 1987 May: *Marriage Play* premieres at the English Theatre in Vienna, Austria, under Albee's direction, with Kathleen Butler and Tom Klunis. American premiere comes five years later in 1992, at the Alley Theatre of Houston, again with Klunis, and with Albee directing.
- 1988 Named Distinguished Professor of Drama at the University of Houston, where Albee teaches annual playwriting class.
- 1989 Death of Albee's adoptive mother, Frances Cotter Albee.
- 1991 June: *Three Tall Women* premieres at Vienna's English Theatre, under Albee's direction, with Myra Carter as A.
- 1992 April: *The Lorca Play* premieres under Albee's direction at University of Houston but is subsequently withdrawn by the playwright. July: American premiere of *Three Tall Women* at River Arts Repertory, Woodstock, directed by Lawrence Sacharow.
- 1993 October: *Fragments* premieres at the Ensemble Theatre of Cincinnati, Ohio, under Albee's direction. The same fall, New York's Signature Theatre Company opens season of works by Albee, which includes New York premieres of *Finding the Sun*, *Marriage Play* and *Fragments*.
- 1994 February: New York City premiere of Sacharow's production of *Three Tall Women* at the off-Broadway Vineyard Theatre, with Myra Carter, Marian Seldes, and Jordan Baker. Transfers to Promenade Theatre, and wins Pulitzer Prize. Meanwhile, British premiere of *Three Tall Women* opens at the Theatre Royal,

## CHRONOLOGY

- Haymarket, before transfer to Wyndham's Theatre in West End. Directed by Anthony Page, with Maggie Smith.
- 1996 April: Broadway revival of *A Delicate Balance*, directed by Gerald Gutierrez, with George Grizzard, Elaine Stritch, and Rosemary Harris. In the fall, in London, the Almeida Theatre's acclaimed production of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, with Diana Rigg and David Suchet, transfers to West End run at the Aldwych Theatre. Directed by Howard Davies.
- 1997 October: major British revival of *A Delicate Balance* opens at the Haymarket Theatre. Directed by Anthony Page, with Maggie Smith.
- 1998 September: *The Play About the Baby* premieres in London at the Almeida Theatre. Directed by Howard Davies, with Frances de la Tour.
- 2001 February: American premiere of *The Play About the Baby*, at New York's Century Center for the Performing Arts. Directed by David Esbjornson, with Marian Seldes. May: British premieres of *Finding the Sun* and *Marriage Play* at the Royal National Theatre, directed by Anthony Page.
- 2002 March: *The Goat, or Who is Sylvia?* premieres on Broadway at the Golden Theatre, directed by David Esbjornson, with Bill Pullman and Mercedes Ruehl. Wins Tony award for best new play on Broadway. Meanwhile, projected premiere of *Occupant*, at the Signature Theatre Company, is cancelled owing to illness of its star, Anne Bancroft. (As of 2004, the play remains unproduced and unpublished.)
- 2004 April: Almeida Theatre's British premiere production of *The Goat* transfers to West End run at the Apollo Theatre. Directed by Anthony Page, with Jonathan Pryce.  
 May: *Peter and Jerry*, a double bill of *The Zoo Story* and its new companion piece, *Homelife*, premieres at the Hartford Stage Company, Connecticut. Directed by Pam McKinnon.



Figure 1. Edward Albee, circa 1962.