

THE ANIMAL WITHIN: EDWARD ALBEE'S DECONSTRUCTION OF HUMAN  
PRIVILEGE IN *WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF?*

A Thesis  
by  
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## ABSTRACT

### THE ANIMAL WITHIN: EDWARD ALBEE'S DECONSTRUCTION OF HUMAN PRIVILEGE IN *WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF?* (August 2011)

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In 1962, with the premiere of Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* came a firestorm of ardent yet ambivalent responses from scholars and critics alike, who acknowledged the play's dramatic intrigue but also its over exaggerated portrayal of the "battle of the sexes." Albee's theatrical spectacle disturbed many, and as a result, many reviewers and scholars began to use a notable discourse to discuss the play, calling the characters "diseased," the language "murderous," and the play as proof of civilization's "decadence" or possessing the breadth of apocalypse. In this thesis, I argue that, in *Who's Afraid*, Albee's critique of human privilege (privilege related to class, gender, nationality, and ultimately humans' perception of their "privilege" over animals) was a primary catalyst to this fervent response. The recently burgeoning field of Animal Studies has allowed scholars to examine the significance of not only animals in literary works but also how humans can use animals as a way to assert power over "abnormal" individuals. Cary Wolfe, for example, argues that "speciesist" discourse is an "institution" that "involves systematic discrimination against an other based solely on a generic characteristic" (*Animal Rites* 1). In other words, scholars of Animal Studies can examine texts in order to show that humans use

specific animalistic discourses against one another for a myriad of purposes, specifically as a way to make sense of their position within a society.

Examining Albee's text (and some of his texts beforehand such as *The Zoo Story* and *The American Dream*), one can see that Albee's primary strength, as a playwright, was to utilize these types of discourses. *Who's Afraid's* primary conflict can be seen in the theme of language and communication breakdown and through positioning his characters into a "speciesist" discourse (Chapter 2), which ultimately is deconstructed through a plot driven by becoming more of an "animal self," a doubling effect of George and Martha against Nick and Honey (Chapter 3). This last chapter demands the most theoretical foregrounding, so I will extensively discuss Albee's incorporation of the concept of the cyborg, or the body as a human-animal hybrid. Extracting the animal-human binary and its collapse out of *Who's Afraid* demonstrates the Mid-20<sup>th</sup> century American panic towards the fall of human privilege, embedded within both Cold War rhetoric and the changing social climate of America. This is a play not so much about a discontented marriage as a disillusioned society (with which marriage is inextricably intertwined), the fears of the privileged class, and the animal as the Other emerging.

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## Introduction:

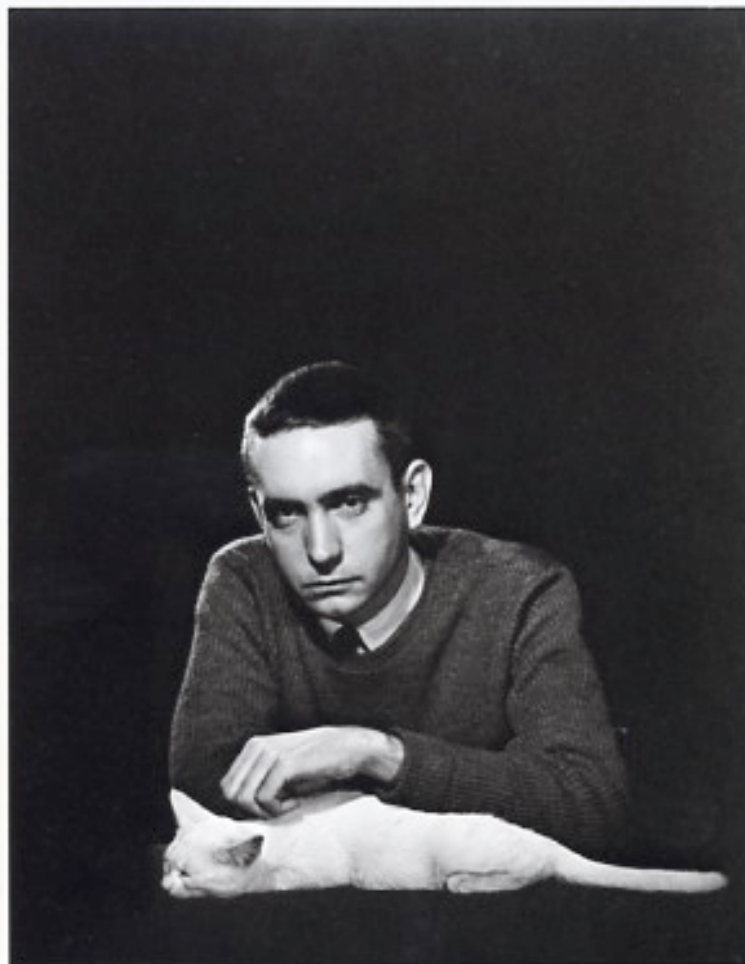
*Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* at the Intersection of Postmodern Studies

Fig. 1: Halsman, Phillippe. *Edward Albee*. 1961. Photograph.

In 1961, world-renowned photographer Phillippe Halsman took a black and white portrait of Edward Albee (see fig. 1). While simple in its execution, the photo at the same time exudes and encompasses a wide range of ideological plains that Albee's 1962 play, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, would address, in addition to Albee's canon as a whole: the

animal. Halsman's portrait of Albee uses all blackness to accentuate the two beings in the picture, Albee and a white cat. Most notable about the picture is that the all-white cat starkly stands out against the darker, lurking, and rather serious-faced Edward Albee, who is in the motion of stroking the cat's back, or appears to be so. Albee, the human, fades into the black, almost becoming indistinguishable and merging into the unknowability that engulfs the photo while the cat lies prostrate appearing to be dozing and unaware of the man above him. It is perhaps the intensity of Albee's earnest gaze into the camera that makes the portrait so mystifying, causing viewers to possibly ask questions on why such a serious man is petting a fluffy, white cat. The gaze, in fact, does not suggest any poignant emotion; his expression remains unreadable, stoic perhaps, but emotionless to the degree that the photo will make any interpreter search for an emotion to impose upon him.

Quite ironically, with a splash of light above his head, Edward Albee, the man or the subject, casts a slight shadow over the cat. In this photo, between man and animal, innumerable questions begin to surface about who this man is, and why we do not trust him. Questions of ambiguity arise about the two beings, the man and the cat: What is the unknown? And when one really begs the question, who really is the animal? Who is the threat to human civilization? Who is the true lurker amidst the shadows? Who do we really understand better? Relying upon traditional colors of black and white, Halsman's photo has created an ethical dilemma, which Albee's canon has dramatized. Black, traditionally believed to be "bad," becomes immediately disrupted with the non-threatening, more appealing whiteness of the cat. The intense gaze of Albee seems to reflect these traditionally charged colors of good and bad, as his face amalgamates with the blackness of the drop. At the heart of Halsman's photo is what Albee has represented for American drama: the



boundaries that human civilization imposes upon nonhumans are slippery at best. The animal, an entity that humans have tried to mitigate as inferior and uncivilized, lingers far more closely and personal than assumed—within one’s self, not external, not through the Other before us or the death far beyond us, but within the Real that we believe to be contained within the shadows and under the reins of our control. However, the Animal is indeed within us all.

Western philosophy has not by any means dismissed this Animal-within-us mantra. In fact, the fuzzy and slippery lines that distinguish man from animal have been representative of humans’ need to control the unknown and any threat to human civilization, and the sense of security supposedly endowed with human civilization is riddled in a discourse about the animal. The hierarchies that humans have placed upon the animal, especially within Western World religions (like Noah’s Ark for example), reveals concerns beyond just what kind of threat the animal poses to human civilization, but also how the animal has transformed into a philosophical center of discourse about the “mark” (to use Derrida’s term) of the human, this mark being metalinguistical awareness and an ability to self-reflect on existence, before, now, and beyond. In many ways, this rather broad and complicated discussion about the Human as privilege has led academia to its current position especially seen in the Cultural Studies fad, where human subjectivity is a preexisting framework to understanding history, literary works, science, etc. Thus, quite naturally, the question of the animal (or the Wild or the Unknown) has led to an inherently deconstructive place. Subjectivity has always placed the animal outside the borders of the human through such distinctive and extremist strategies that the binary of Animal/Human has begun to collapse upon itself. In fact, these strategies have become so overtly extreme that the human, in fearing the loss of civilization, has

animalized the human and, in this act of animalizing the subject, the hierarchy of human over animal has been overturned.

Halsman's portrait photo of Albee is so telling to this discourse that has only recently burgeoned into a serious point of consideration, currently known as Animal Studies (although innumerable and interchangeable labels such as Zoopoetics are being tossed about in academia). The photo, more than likely unconscious on the part of Halsman, topples the animal-human binary that has been so assumed throughout Western World thought. Again, this is not to say that the animal-human binary has not been exhaustibly questioned through a myriad of ways, such as Charles Darwin's landmark work *The Origin of Species*, but there is a recent awareness, especially in the study of literary texts, that all criticism and scholarship has worked within an assumed framework—the Human. All analytical and interpretative tools have always utilized a human relation, meaning all *understood* acts of the human are measured with a yardstick of humane acts or inhumane acts. Those who move outside the humane margin exceed a boundary that civilizations of power have deemed unknowable, strange, or a direct threat to security, and these breakers of margin immediately are rendered crazy, insane, or animalistic. Western World academia has now recently positioned itself into a mode of discourse, which establishes this razor-thin boundary between human and inhuman as germane to limiting our knowledge, and brings meta-awareness to why we shun the animal and assume it to be unknowable.

In establishing this broad context (which I will be continually delving into throughout this thesis), I now move to my primary focus, Edward Albee and his landmark work, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, a play that shattered the theatrical landscape almost fifty years ago. Halsman's photo, taken even before the arrival of *Who's Afraid*, justifies much of the

ardent response that Albee induced early on in his career, especially with *Who's Afraid*. Artfully disrupting the human-animal binary, the photo suggests the darkness of the Human and the ambivalence that humans have towards the Animal. While scholarship on Albee over the last fifty or so years has undoubtedly probed the question of how Albee depicts the human-animal relationship, scholars and critics alike have predominately avoided dwelling upon these questions in regards to the play that made him a theatrical celebrity, *Who's Afraid*. Nevertheless, without fail, all of Albee's plays bring up the question of the animal in some shape or form, as with the theme of civility in *A Delicate Balance*, as religious breakdown in *Tiny Alice*, and most notably in a direct questioning of animal-human discourse in *The Zoo Story* and *Seascape*. Even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, when the theatre community has come to view Albee as a hoary playwright of the past, his play *The Goat: Or Who is Sylvia?*, a play centered entirely on an animal and the theme of bestiality, has fomented ambivalent and angry responses of disgust (Bigsby, "Edward Albee..." 150).

The animal and Albee's works are inextricably bound and yet, ironically, scholars have only touched the surface of how the animal functions in his plays. However, even Albee himself only offhandedly mentions the importance of the animal in regards to his plays, not permitting the discussion to go much further than that. For example, Irving Wardle conducted an interview with Albee in 1969, in which the animal does creep up in the conversation, but Albee's approach to the topic reflects an undecided disposition:

It's true that animals crop up in my plays from *Zoo Story* onwards. You can judge a fair amount about the human being from the way his animals respond to him. I'm fond of animals, all kinds; people too. At the moment I have cats and dogs, and birds and fish, and sheep... Will I write a play for animals? You'll have to see what I do

after the fish play. I wouldn't be surprised. Nothing I do surprises me. Some of it interests me, and some of it doesn't; but none of it surprises me. (Wardle 99-100)

At a rhetorical level, Albee displays a traditional, ambivalent response to the animal and speaks mainly in terms of controlling or domesticating the animal. For example, at first, he establishes how the line between animal and human is blurry, but he subconsciously controls the animal by saying “*his* animals,” as to suggest that animals are commodities. This continues when he runs through a list of animals he possesses, but then a few moments later his language begins to lose its articulation when he reexamines reasons on why the Animal does appear in his plays. His question, “Will I write a play *for* animals?” reinforces the animal-human divide but somehow also disrupts it, as in suggesting that his work could embody an effect intended towards an animal understanding. Nevertheless, in this particular interview, Albee exemplifies a discourse riddled with complications and problematic, loose ends, which leads to a broader question for scholars to consider: How *does* one articulate the animal?

Thus, Albee appears to be equally entrapped within the traditional discourse of taming the Animal, and his plays similarly position themselves directly into this discourse, but he does so with a means towards *pathos*, not so much to stimulate intellectual discussion. In other words, the animal exists as a theatrical effect, a literary technique to render emphasis to the breakdown of Human and American society altogether, not so much to raise the Animal up in an ecocritical fashion. However, in this effect, Albee has automatically uprooted the discourse of the animal because his plays often approach the topic from the inside out, as opposed to the outside in. This difference is evident, in that his plays depict the *process* of the dismantling of the human, not the *product* of a dismantled human. Albee

employs what Cary Wolfe, a current notable scholar of Animal Studies, is theorizing when Wolfe summarizes all the philosophical discussion about reframing the discourse of the Animal as "...the point of thinking with renewed rigor about the animal is to *disengage* the question of a properly postmodern pluralism from the concept of the human with which progressive political and ethical agendas have traditionally been associated" [his italics] (Wolfe, *Animal Rites* 9). Albee, essentially, hollows out the human subject (destabilizes pluralism) and leads his characters to a more "primitive" being, or a state of existence for which the Human and Animal are one and the same, which leaves the audience with an emotion of ambivalence and unsettledness.

This specific process occurs in a majority of his plays, but to avoid generalizing Albee's canon, I will be examining *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* specifically in order to show how Albee uses the animal (1) as a theatrical experience and (2) as a critical apparatus towards Cold War rhetoric. Altogether, *Who's Afraid* "disengages" the human from existence by advancing its "plot" through the characters disembodiment, or in other words, their subjectivities unraveling. I intend to show this "unraveling" through a number of interpretative strategies, including rhetorical analysis, discourse analysis, deconstruction, and close reading. These strategies, at the same time, will be dovetailed with a theoretical foundation; however, the following thesis is *not* theoretically-driven by any means. In fact, my emphasis will be on the animal as a theatrical phenomenon, especially within the context of an animal-less play such as *Who's Afraid*. Other Albee works such as *The Zoo Story* or *Seascape* directly address the animal, but I will argue that this particular play was the "perfect storm" of Albee's canon, with multiple intersecting ideological planes that address social and political concerns, especially in regards to the domestic sphere. Therefore, the

responses of horror, uncertainty, and ambivalence that playgoers felt over *Who's Afraid* are moments that deserve notice; how does this play remain so shocking beyond its sexual language? Why have reviewers and scholars alike had so much trouble classifying the play? Why has the play been so heavily criticized for a lack of characterization or having “inhuman” or hollow characters? Perhaps, a more radical question could be: did Albee intentionally create hollow characters?

In my examination of this play, I endeavor to point out what were once intellectual criticisms to be Albee's strengths. These criticisms include a lack of plot and a lack of believable characters. However, as evidenced with the reviews and the long time the play stayed on Broadway, the play still creates an intense experience for the audience; Albee's theatrical spectacle disturbed many, and as a result, many reviewers and scholars began to use a notable discourse to discuss the play, calling the characters “diseased,” the language “murderous,” and the play as proof of civilization's “decadence” or possessing the breadth of apocalypse (nuclear bomb discourse to be exact). Altogether, my central argument is that Albee created such discourse through the collapse of the human/animal binary. He does this through a pungent reminder of language and communication breakdown and through positioning his characters into a “speciesist” discourse (Chapter 2), which ultimately is deconstructed through a plot driven by *becoming* more of an “animal self,” a doubling effect of George and Martha against Nick and Honey (Chapter 3). This final chapter demands the most theoretical foregrounding, so I will extensively discuss Albee's incorporation of the concept of the cyborg, or the body as a human-animal hybrid. Extracting the animal-human binary and its collapse out of *Who's Afraid* demonstrates the Mid-20<sup>th</sup> century American panic towards the fall of human privilege, embedded within both Cold War rhetoric and the

changing social climate of America. This is a play not so much about a discontented marriage as a disillusioned society (with which marriage is inextricably intertwined), the fears of the privileged class, and the animal as the Other emerging.

Not only does deconstructing the animal within *Who's Afraid* lead to more sophisticated questions about why the play effected such an impression on audiences over the years, but also this theoretical approach explores the topic of alterity, which Albee scholarship has surprisingly neglected up to this point. Predominantly, scholars have approached *Who's Afraid* and the subject of alterity reluctantly, focusing on Martha as a "failed" mother or on George and his "failure" of masculinity. Thus, if one is to establish Albee as a vital component of theatre history, one must also seriously consider how Albee amalgamated his social criticisms with his criticisms about privileged societies. The play appeared during a notable juncture in American history in 1962, a time in which there was the burgeoning of civil rights, the panic of the Atomic Bomb, and a ubiquitous aporia towards the future of the United States. While these topics of discussion all remain within a humanist framework, moving outside the framework will still illuminate these areas and establish Albee as a playwright of social consciousness, a voice to the Other.

A brief review of scholarship on Albee shows many gaps that critics have failed to explore, gaps that need to be recognized especially at the current moment, when Cultural Studies is in vogue and the marginalized voice has now become an integral voice of American history. As will be seen, Albee scholarship has so focused on the dramatic technique (or lack thereof) that there has been a negligence on realizing and celebrating his rather unconventional way of speaking *for* the Post-WWII attitude of his generation. Despite *Who's Afraid* appearing on Broadway, there was nothing conservative about the play when it

opened in 1962, and scholarship has diminished his role as a theatrical game-changer, not so much a societal one. Realigning the framework of the scholar is dire if one wants to recognize Albee's vital bearing on the American experience.



## Chapter One:

### The Scholarship on *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*: Old Models, New Paradigms

As Matthew Roudané reiterates, it is undeniable that scholarship on *Who's Afraid* has been prolific, especially immediately following its premiere (Roudané 41). For the most part, the academic circle has ironically picked away at the academic epicenter of the play's fabric, on its metaphysical nature and its need to assert a philosophical statement. In 1962, Albee brought to life a work that, in many ways, redefined American theatre because theatre, particularly Broadway, remained grounded in the Naturalist technique so heavily reinforced by Albee's predecessors Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, and Arthur Miller. Nevertheless, a brief review of the scholarship demonstrates that scholars based all of their arguments on two salient axioms, which are applied across all of Albee's plays: language (or communication) breakdown and the Reality-Illusion theme. Expounding on these two threads, scholars went on to ask questions that inherently imposed binary-like discoveries upon *Who's Afraid*, through questions that could only draw Yes or No responses. This imposition of binaries upon the play has not only irreducibly led to academic quandaries over very specific theatrical elements to the play, but also to limiting the play to a work of metafiction, which has less to do with characterization than with technique or form.

As will be seen, this need to classify has only begun to diminish within the past ten years. Thus, I have constructed my critical history twofold: first, chronologically in order to emphasize that the play introduced a new dramatic paradigm, Albee's brand of American Absurdism, which busied scholars for years about its functionality and overall consequence; secondly, my scholarship will narrow into a delta zone, so I can explore how Albee scholarship has treated the play as a social document. In turn, I will consider scholars'

treatment of Otherness in this play and his canon as a whole, particularly bringing attention to the Animal, an undeniable element of his other works such as *The Zoo Story*, *Seascape*, and more recently *The Goat; Or, Who is Sylvia*. The methodologies that scholars employed in these critical works can be loosely transferred over to *Who's Afraid*, although my thesis as a whole intends to extrapolate critical apparatuses from the more recent and burgeoning field of Animal Studies in order to better understand the topics of unknowability, subjective loss, and animality in *Who's Afraid*.

The first and most prevalent scholarly response to *Who's Afraid* treats the play as a social statement, quite ironic to my argument above. This came more than likely from the reviewers' ardent declaration that the play lacked substance and most importantly lacked any depth in regards to characterization. Many scholars labeled the play an allegory, a morality play, or some form of a fable, that led to a clear-cut conclusion about the reality-illusion theme. Therefore, many scholars reduced the characters to absurd symbols or types, continually relating the play to Albee's earlier work *The American Dream*. By downplaying the realism of the characters and heightening their symbolic function, scholars perceived them to possess a simplistic function. All of these interpretations ultimately generated a perception of the play as lacking tri-dimensional characters. For example, C.W.E Bigsby, the quintessential Albee scholar, was the primary reinforcer of this collegiate attitude of making sense of the madness by deeming the play an exercise in ideological-pushing.

Bigsby's 1967 article, "*Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?: Edward Albee's Morality Play*," characterizes the primary scholarship up to that point and subsequently. Bigsby declares that "Albee is concerned with demonstrating the vacuity underlying the social façade and with stressing the need for courage and truth" (Bigsby 258). Bigsby goes on to

claim the play to be “a modern secular morality play” with “a gospel” that emphasizes, “the primacy of human contact based on an acceptance of reality” (Bigsby 264). With buzzwords such as “truth” and “reality,” Bigsby’s article clearly desires to render Albee as a social patriot and the play as comprehensible when one realizes that the characters function as pawns in a statement about societal degradation. Bigsby was not alone and builds upon much of the prior scholarship that had appeared. This includes Wendell Harris’s 1964 “Morality, Absurdity, and Albee,” proclaiming the play as “morally hopeful” (Harris 249), Charles Thomas Samuels in 1964 with “The Theatre of Edward Albee,” which deems the play “formally conventional” and an obfuscation of “naturalism and sentimental melodrama” (Samuels 188), and Emil Roy’s 1965 “*Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and the Tradition,” which summarizes the play as a fusion of Absurdism and Naturalism, rendering Albee a “moralist” who emphasizes, as an artist, the vitality of “purging...impulses which otherwise strengthen our self-destructive urges” (Roy 36). In general, just subsequent to the play, scholars engaged in a process of pigeonholing the play into a genre or a form and declaring it to assert an overall social message, especially in connection with George’s exorcism.

From there, the scholarship continued in this vein, but for the most part perpetuated the confusion over classifying or even justifying the madness that the play presents. In other words, how could a supposed masterpiece of American theatre contain hollow and flat characters? Diana Trilling, in one of the earliest pieces of *Who’s Afraid* scholarship, poses such questions in her 1963 article, “The Riddle of Albee’s *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*” She expresses at the beginning that Albee’s characters “did not speak a recognizable human truth,” but she later declares the play to contain “truth—moral truth, psychological truth, social truth, one or all of these truths, but truth” (Trilling 82). Her quandary with the play,

never resolved, is mirrored in the scholarship that comes later such as Melvin Plotinsky's 1965 article "The Transformations of Understanding: Edward Albee in the Theatre of the Irresolute." Plotinsky resolutely declares Albee's dramatic flaw, as evidenced in *Who's Afraid*, as being a lack of resolution, an easy and, as will be seen, quite popular response to Trilling's quandaries. Similarly, Anthony Channell Hilfer's book article, "George and Martha: Sad, Sad, Sad," addresses Albee's issue with characterization, concluding that there is a substantial gap between the symbolic exorcism and the characters' lived experiences, here again a reiteration of a failure in Naturalism technique. Richard Dozier also reinforces this argument in "Adultery and Disappointment in *Who's Afraid*" later on in 1969. This scholarship epitomizes the division over characterization, showing scholars and critics could only sum up their critical quandaries with more questions and more division. There are no decisive answers to the play, just bifurcated answers of undecidability.

Landmark works that come subsequent to this post-premiere split continue to sift through these complicated questions but in much smaller chunks (focusing on specific techniques and not the whole functioning of the play) and also in relation to more traditional or rigid models, whether dramatic, philosophical, or psychological. A notable example is Joy Flasch's 1967 article that appears in *Modern Drama*, "Games People Play in *Who's Afraid*?" Flasch applies researched, psychological games as outlined by Eric Berne, M.D. in his book, *Games People Play* in order to show the more realistic, psychological components of *Who's Afraid*. Paul Witherington does a similar approach to the play but through Gothic literary models in his 1970 article, "Albee's Gothic: The Resonances of Cliché." With looser models, there appeared numerous thematic or literary comparisons such as Eugene H. Falk comparing Sartrean Existentialism in "*No Exit* and *Who's Afraid*: A Thematic Comparison," Thomas

Adler utilizing O'Neill in "Albee's *Who's Afraid: A Long Night's Journey in Day*," and Rictor Norton's 1971 article, "Folklore and Myth in *Who's Afraid*," an analysis of the play from a Dionysian/Apollonian point of view. As can be seen, almost ten years subsequent to the play, the usage of models became a prolific, albeit expected practice, as evidenced also in Duane R. Carr's "St. George and the Snapdragons: The Influence of Unamuno on *Who's Afraid*" and Orley Holtan's 1973 article, "*Who's Afraid* and the Patterns of History." All of these scholars approach the play as an allegory of American history and the failure of the American dream.

During this time, however, in the early to mid 70s, there also arose many defining scholarly works on *Who's Afraid*, specifically full-length monographs that allowed for more space to flesh out underdeveloped ideas. The most notable of these are Anne Paolucci's *From Tension to Tonic* and Michael E. Rutenberg's *Edward Albee: Playwright in Protest*. Rutenberg's monograph states in the introduction, "Albee has given a resurgence to the history of social protest in the theatre..." (11). He takes this theory and applies it to *Who's Afraid*, unearthing social threads throughout the play such as sterility, the debunking of existentialism, and a critique of the elite classes. Rutenberg's observations are the first to really extend Albee's play outside the theatrical sphere and beyond, but still he pulls together sources that have otherwise reinforced the theatrical models as a form of argument, especially Artaud's concept of the cruel theatre. However, Rutenberg's analysis of the imaginary child is noteworthy, as he explains, "The only approach to an understanding of the child's place in the drama is to accept it as an effect and not a cause of the couple's predicament" (104). Rutenberg reframes George and Martha in terms of social beings and not absurdist characters, granting more accreditation to how the play functions.

While Rutenberg's 1969 work pushed forward more a character-driven approach to the play, Paolucci's *From Tension to Tonic* similarly articulates the play as an "existential dilemma" (46), which exposes "the agony of love" (63). While Paolucci still typifies the characters, placing them in roles, she complicates assumptions towards the play through a lens of fishing out the "humanity" found in the play, particularly in regards to human love. For example, the symbolic exorcism transforms into a mythical, religious experience and supports her overall theory that a new dawn for George and Martha, which comes about paradoxically through frustration, agony, and suffering, sustains the drive of the play. Hence, the tension paradoxically leads to a moment of tonic, a burst of semi-salvation for George and Martha through the symbolic exorcism. Although Paolucci was not the first to establish the cleansing aspect of the exorcism, her landmark work propelled scholarship into redefining its assumption that Albee was bitterly portraying the pitfalls of marriage. In fact, most of the scholarship that followed Paolucci's text reexamined the core of the play, language, by approaching Albee as a master of portraying the arbitrariness of language.

In 1983, Julian Wasserman, for example, acknowledged his appreciation for Albee's theatrical language by saying, "The play, then, is a linguistic exercise, a teaching of language or at least a forging of a common language founded on an initial act of exclusion and followed by an initiation or movement towards inclusion." Much subsequent scholarship echoed this mantra such as James Kastely's 1988 "Some Things are Sad, Though: Accident in *Who's Afraid*," in which he points out that the play is a critique of narrative, not marriage, but ultimately ends up in a "community of commonly shared selves" through a mutual language (Kastely 55). Similarly, Matthew Roudané's 2005 analysis, "Toward the Marrow" reads the exorcism as positively symbolic of a transformation as evidenced in a "grammar of

new beginnings” found at the end of the play (Roudané 41). And finally, in 1983, Dan Ducker’s “‘Pow!’ ‘Snap!’ ‘Pouf!’: The Modes of Communication in *Who’s Afraid*” argued that the play is forged on “the concern for establishing community” through methods of shared communication. As can be seen, moving further away from the 1962 premiere, scholars began to re-question Albee’s theme of communicative breakdown and more so allowed the ending to speak for the whole, a final note that language can indeed be shared.

For the most part, scholarship on *Who’s Afraid* from 1990 onwards has fizzled out, probably because of the arrival of two major Albee plays, *Three Tall Women* and *The Goat*. Nevertheless, the scholarship to appear has attempted to probe unexplored areas, venturing out to consider more Cultural Studies-driven critical apparatuses. These outliers, as I will call them, do not in any way paint the full picture of the scholarship on *Who’s Afraid*, but have been loose attempts to establish the importance of Albee’s work within the canon of twentieth century drama. For example, in 2005, Peter Nesteruk’s “Ritual and Identity in Late-Twentieth Century American Drama” closely examines Martha as an Other, desperately searching to find her autonomy. Nesteruk approaches the exorcism, as many previous scholars have, in terms of a ritual cleansing, but at the same time takes into account feminist theory to assert that positions of patriarchal power plague her. Therefore, the ritual cleansing under closer examination is in fact an exchanging of identities for Martha, a ritualistic sacrifice of her own self through the assertion of George. In other words, “whilst certain identities are being reaffirmed, other (imaginary) identities are being rejected...” (Nesteruk 46), and Martha, not the imaginary child, becomes the sacrificial Other in this cleansing ritual. Nesteruk utilizes Roudané’s Giraldian analysis in *Drama since 1960* to buttress his argument but ultimately shows that scholars are just now getting around to approaching

Martha as a victim and less of a monster, which is similarly mirrored in Claire Virginia Eby's 2007 article, "Fun and Games with George and Nick: Competitive Masculinity in *Who's Afraid*."

Thus far, my aim has been primarily to highlight the scholarship just subsequent to the play's premiere (about 15 years) in order to emphasize that the ambivalent but rather pronounced response to the play is inextricably intertwined with the scholarship. In effect, the massive body of scholarship collectively demonstrates the play to be notable, as scholars have attempted to "make sense" of the play's technique, but it was only through classifying the play that a more focused approach on characterization could occur. At the same time, this pigeonholing by scholars has inevitably left gaps pertaining to the play's effect as opposed to the play's overall message. Jody Pennington's recent 2005 article, "Public Discourse on Marriage & Privacy—Concealment or Revelation? The Reception of *Who's Afraid*" brings this message to light most lucidly. Her illuminating article characterizes scholars and reviewers as being dominated by pigeonholing through academic labels such as existentialist, absurdist, etc., but she goes on to declare, "by eviscerating the continuities between each of the categories listed above, such choices make clear distinctions that should remain fuzzy" (Pennington 41). As I mentioned above, imposing binaries distracts the interpreter from more sophisticated discussions about *why* the play elicits such an ardent response and *how* the play does not necessarily appeal to *logos* as much as to *pathos*. Trying to find ways to render sense from this horror, as will be seen, was embedded within a discourse of the animal, which can ultimately be tied to Cold War rhetoric and apprehensions towards the rise of civil rights.

**Exposed Bodies: Albee's "Scalpel" and the Cold War Anxieties of George and Martha**



Subsequent to the 1962 premiere of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, an arduous and often boiling-hot response incurred over the play's significance and overall meaning. These debates occurred especially within the theatre community, as questions began to surface about Albee becoming the new Eugene O'Neill, and *the* playwright to speak for the post World War Two generation. Those who adamantly disagreed with this burgeoning mantra were those that found the play repulsive, as evidenced by reviewers' titles such as "For Dirty-Minded Females Only" by John Chapman in *New York Sunday News* or "The Play You'll Love or Loathe" by Robert Coleman in *New York Mirror*. The ideological division over the play intensified to such a heated level that when the play was up for a Pulitzer Prize, Columbia University decided to drop the play because it was too perverse and subsequently two members withdrew from the committee out of protest. *Who's Afraid*, layered in sexual language and situations, shook audiences to the core about the possibility (and realism) of an academic elite couple speaking to one another in such a perverse and uncontrolled fashion as depicted in the play.

There are no reviews or subsequent scholarship that epitomizes this divided response more than the interchange between the director of the original production, Alan Schneider and, at the time, editor of *Tulane Drama Review (TDR)*, Richard Schechner. Their exchanges, although brief, appeared in *TDR* and began in 1963 when Schechner summarized *Who's Afraid* as "doubtlessly classic: a classic example of bad taste, morbidity, plotless naturalism, misrepresentation of history, American society, philosophy, and psychology." Schechner goes on to say that "The lie of his work is the lie of our theatre and the lie of America. The lie of decadence must be fought" (Schechner 64). Shortly thereafter, Alan Schneider directly refuted Schechner's scathing statement by pointing out his exaggerated

and over zealous response to the play: “what baffles me is why the Editor is making such a fuss. Is Western Civilization actually in danger...?” (Schneider 67). Nevertheless, depicted in this exchange are the two polarized reactions to the play, and most notably reveal how such a bizarrely dramatic event such as *Who’s Afraid*, which generated such a varied response, could be possibly reframed. A majority of the reviews express having an ambivalent response to the play, leaving reviewers dazzled but unable to pinpoint exactly their own emotions.

It is important for scholars to consider critically these types of varied responses to the play, as it shows how critics, audiences, and scholars alike framed a discourse for the play. Schechner’s seemingly extreme response of applying the work to civilization as a whole in terms of a “decadence” is telling of what the play represents. Beyond just filthy language, the force of the play represented a threat to culture as a whole, an underlying and looming force that struck at a personal level with Schechner. Similarly, Schneider’s position as taming Schechner’s position and saliently labeling his response as, “Why So Afraid,” shows a deliberate downplaying of art’s potential to alter consciousness. In this vacillating continuum, the scholarly response herein lies and is representative of how the play jabbed at matters much more personal but still inconceivable. Other reviews lend evidence that demonstrates the play’s ability to foment an ubiquitous feeling of unease and blatant horror, despite no violence occurring on stage.

A brief examination of the responses to the play (which, by response, I am referring to the reviews) reveals a particular discourse that was utilized to make sense of the “horror” Albee’s play conjured. Altogether, despite such polarizing reviews, all of the reviews share a similar rhetoric and discourse in describing the play as either savage, bloody, or frighteningly unsettling. These categories possess a common discourse that was prevalent at the time,

which involved an obsession with the degradation of the body. Inherent in this degradation lies an apocalyptic, or nuclear bomb, discourse ridden with the fear of the extinction of the human race. For example, George's initial response to Nick, when he first learns he is a biologist, demonstrates this discourse: "I read somewhere that science fiction is really not fiction at all...that you people are rearranging my genes, so that everyone will be like everyone else. Now, I won't have that! It would be a...shame. I mean...look at me!" (178). Although George is being somewhat facetious, his statement dovetails two Cold War anxieties: the manipulation of the natural body and the loss of humanity or individualism. Both of these uncertainties were ubiquitous in discussions of the post-apocalyptic environment and reflect that the manipulation of the physical body coincides with a loss of autonomy. Establishing that the reviewers, by explaining their horrific response to the play in terms of bodily disintegration, will reveal two major insights: 1) *Who's Afraid* is horrifying not only because it suggests the breakdown of the marital institution but also because it sustains an image of the subjective core of the human as inherently animalistic and 2) the play conjures up the panic of the nuclear bomb threat by the Soviets, which was often encapsulated within a discourse of an animalistic invasion, or an I/Other mentality. This first Chapter will end on clarifying this response to the play in order for Chapter Two to analyze the play to justify this response.

When the reviews started coming in late October and early November of 1962, they all spoke in a relatively similar fashion: the play will create a response in the viewer, but the audience will find the whole play solely ridiculous and most notably the characters "inhuman." C.W.E. Bigsby even reflects this notion in his latest 2000 scholarship on the play, "Edward Albee: Journey to Apocalypse." Bigsby, being one of the first quintessential

Albee scholars, was there to witness the transformation of Albee throughout the past half-century. However, still reflecting back on Albee's place in the American theatre, he points out that his canon and particularly *Who's Afraid* and *A Delicate Balance* showcase "figures [that] are incomplete." Furthermore, he goes on to observe, "As a consequence they become hollow men and women, evidence of their own spiritual emptiness" ("Edward Albee...", 147). Beyond a reminder of T.S. Eliot's famous poem, Bigsby's observation is notable because it questions the dramatic paradigm that all "strong" or memorable characters contain a tri-dimensionality but also asserts that it is possible that Albee purposefully created characters that were slightly unbelievable. Nevertheless, this begs the question further: What is the difference between *flat* and *hollow* characters? As evidenced by the reviews, Albee's supposed "hollow" or "inhuman" characters generated anxiety and borderline adamancy for reviewers, as they established having a response to the characters, but responses that did not appeal to their logical sense.

One notable example is *Time Magazine's* review of the 1962 performance entitled "Blood Sport," which criticizes Albee for creating "inhuman" characters, an observation that grows increasingly interesting as the review goes into further detail about *Who's Afraid*:

In the long and lacerating annals of family fights on stage, here has been nothing quite like Virginia Woolf's mortal battle of the sexes for sheer nonstop grim-gay savagery. The human heart is not on view, but the playgoer will know that he has seen human entrails. (*Time*)

Embedded within this reviewer's reaction to the play is a discourse long sustained by alterity, a radical shock in witnessing the disintegration of normal conventions such as marriage; automatically, the reviewer from *Time* separates the action on stage from "normal"

Americans, comparing the verbal exchanges of George and Martha as a scene of bloodshed, as a gore-infested spectacle for which the audience will be able to relate, but only in a manner of horror from the vestiges of “human entrails.” Most notable is that *Time*’s reviewer sums up the battle on stage as “grim-gay savagery,” a loaded phrase which mirrors Schneider’s response: George and Martha are not us, but them—the long ago, uncivilized, and savage cultures that American society does not tolerate. The “blood” on stage is as savage as a Mayan ritual of sacrifice, yet Albee created this response through little to no physical violence, the only exception of course being when George strangles Martha.

This metaphorical gore reflects an effect on reviewers that entails the characters engaging in violence *through* language. Moreover, the characters, in essence, elicit a discourse that is much related to warfare, or more specifically the Cold War. As the reviewer from *Time* points out, the “battle of the sexes” ensues through a supposed blood-splattered confrontation; however, more notable is that *Time* reiterates an excess of physicality, so much so that the verbal battles can spill the guts of George and Martha. The image of internal organs more than just envisions for readers a fight gone awry, but suggests a more pronounced extension of the metaphor, “battle,” to the point that the characters are so savage that they “claw each other like jungle beasts,” as Harold Taubman describes the play in *The New York Times* (Taubman 33). The trope of a mangled body, derived from the “savage” characters of George and Martha and as an extension of the “battle of the sexes” mantra, can be seen similarly in many other reviews. Believing George and Martha to be savages (despite their white, upper-middle class, elite status) left reviewers with only one reaction: these characters cannot possibly be real. Civilized people do not act like this.

The reviewer from *Time* not only reinforces the civilized/savage binary but his/her metaphors of carnage furthers a Cold War rhetoric occurring at this time, especially in relation to gender and the body. Suzanne Clark articulates this well in her book, *Cold Warriors: Manliness on Trial in the Rhetoric of the West*, which explores hypermasculinity as an American rhetorical device against the true realities of the Cold War. Her argument also delves into the complexities of this hypermasculinity as a defense mechanism against the palpable danger that the Cold War presented, these dangers being a nuclear Holocaust or even the extinction of the human species. “Danger threatens to break down the boundaries of self and other and the differentiation that structures language...It is the waste of bodies...and their final reduction to waste, as corpse, that marks the act of definition, and difference, in the Cold War—the body as abject” (Clark 26). This can be tied to, as Clark argues, the body as a physical marker of the Real and a means to “deconstruct essential subjectivity” (Clark 27). Clark’s argument holds a bearing to the reviews of *Who’s Afraid* because they show the play to induce a response which aligns with Cold War anxieties, so much so that the rhetoric George and Martha employ as verbal weapons is in fact inextricably interwoven with Cold War rhetorical tactics—“the body as abject”—and thus shows that George and Martha exist as an effect that invites the breakdown of subject/other, as Clark points out that this particular “abject-body” trope did with American politics.

For example, when Nick becomes an argumentative tool for George and Martha to divvy out their martial blows, George repeatedly expresses that Nick symbolizes a bodily degradation, especially at the cost of selfhood. As George notes in Act II, Nick “represent[s] a direct and pertinent threat to my lifehood” (228). George’s observation can be hearkened back to his description of Nick as a part of “a civilization of men, smooth, blond, and right at

the middleweight limit” (198). While George’s fear of this “super-civilization” does not appear to directly reference Clark’s description of “the waste of bodies,” he does point out these “glorious men” to be moving towards metaphorical death, through a loss of autonomy, diversity, and finally the binary of the Subject/Other that Clark argues collapses in Cold War rhetoric: “There will be a certain...loss of liberty. I imagine, as a result of this experiment...but diversity will no longer be the goal. Cultures and races will eventually vanish....the ants will take over the world” (199). Ultimately, George’s defense against Nick, both as a way to tear down Martha’s sexual desire towards him and as a way to deconstruct his hypermasculine qualities, is to express his fear about the loss of the body and ultimately the loss of the individual.

In addition to *Time*’s descriptive review of bodily degradation, a bulk of the reviews critique the play for having a negative pathology, possessing a moral sickness that is contagious to playgoers. This rhetoric of disease not only reinforces this abject body trope but also shows the play to possess an uncontrolled *power* to taint the imaginations of playgoers. Harold Taubman’s salient *New York Times* review metaphorically describes the play as a digestible poison, “brewed in a witches’ cauldron,” which will “disgust” you but by no means will the play be easily forgotten. With this particular metaphor, Taubman speaks of the play in terms of an effect that can rot you from the inside out, yet quite ironically he still encourages readers to attend the play. Robert Coleman, in *The New York Mirror*, describes the play as “a sick play about sick people” who belong in a sanitarium. Just as with Taubman’s belief that the play can infect its audience, Coleman is much more explicit, in that he describes Martha and George as carrying a moral disease that, in grave terms, needs to be quarantined. These two reviews speak to a whole collection of reviews that, much like

Victorian discourse, pronounce a fear of the characters and their supposed sickness to invading the audience; George and Martha, through their antics, indeed possess an airborne power to infect the minds of the audience.

Most notable about these reviews, however, which differentiates them from antiquarian modes of discourse, is that the reviewers never explicitly say that the “disease” of the play is contagious to playgoers but merely suggest it through these metaphors. In all of these reviews, the reviewers clearly build an invisible wall between Albee’s characters and the audience, a thin wall of protection. Yet, as can be seen, subtle techniques rhetorically force the audience into a dangerous corner, as with Taubman’s description of the play as a “potent brew,” which will “suddenly” transform the supposed humor of the couple’s antics into a “grimness” on “your lips” (Taubman). Implicit within Taubman’s extended metaphor is that the play’s effect possesses the potential to act like a poison, although Taubman never explicitly warns the audience against this possibility. Coleman, like Taubman, separates himself from the characters in a much similar way to a society that borders off the insane because it perceives that the “sick” or insane potentially hold danger to society. Essentially, seen in this response, reviewers quickly dismiss George and Martha as automatically “sick,” as defacing their bodies, or as just not believable because of their insanity.

The abject body was not just a theme among select reviewers, but an ubiquitous feature to how reviewers responded to the ‘madness’ and ‘savagery’ of the play. Richard Gilman’s review from *The Commonwealth* perhaps utilized this metaphor the most saliently (and yet—with the most subtlety). Describing vividly George and Martha’s exchanges as “hopeless embraces” and “glancing blows,” Gilman’s focus on metaphorical gore actually invades the whole fabric of the play and, in turn, the play becomes a body that Albee kills



with a “shaft of fantasy designed to point up our sad psychic aridity and fix the relationship between reality and illusion.” To Gilman, Albee’s murderous blow to the “body” of the play in fact bleeds the play to death, and as a result, the supposed “fix” Albee attempts does not succeed; according to Gilman, “The paradox is that human reality can best be apprehended today by indirection, by ‘inhuman’ methods...,” which is to say that Gilman believes Albee’s play too poignantly mutilates itself to have a conducive effect on the audience (Gilman 175). Albee’s technique is so direct in savagery that the audience cannot connect with the characters. As can be seen, Gilmore’s rhetorical transmutation of Albee’s play into a wounded body best encapsulates the discourse of the body of difference and a glimpse into the Real, referring back to Clark. Other reviewers reflect Gilman’s interpretation such as Jesse H. Walker’s metaphorical description of Albee as a surgeon, who “dissects his characters to a degree where they are all exposed” (Walker). The play *as the Other*, as diseased and a threat to society (shared among positive and negative reviews) reflects *Who’s Afraid* to produce an effect that uncomfortably invites the audience into an unfamiliar and uncomfortable position of realistically staring into radical unknowability.

Harkening back to the Schechner-Schneider exchange, it should be noted that they frame their discourse around feminizing Albee’s play. Schechner justifies his scathing response by describing Albee’s play in terms of lacking strength. For example, he says, “there is no real, hard bedrock of suffering in *Who’s Afraid*,” going on to mention it having “no solid creative suffering.” Moreover, he describes Albee’s play as a “skeleton,” physically weak and possessing no bodily stamina, a play that attempts to “crawl back into the womb” in fact (Schechner 63-64). Emasculating the play, in subtle rhetorical terms, holds as an equal metaphor for his polemic opponent, Schneider, who takes offense to Schechner calling “his

girl” a “degenerate whore” (Schneider 68). By feminizing the play, both Schneider and Schechner reiterate the rhetorical lines between the communist and anticommunist debate at the time. According to Clark, Americans imbued their foreign policy rhetoric with unflinching hypermasculinity, the traditional image of the New Frontier, as a form of imaginary defense against the feminized, weak Soviet Union. Thus, if Albee’s play caused reviewers to implicitly focus on pertinent anxieties pertaining to the Cold War, it is obvious that Albee’s play probes into a deeper madness, one that moves beyond just questions of domestic breakdown or politics but a Real that incites an anxiety about how the play is representative of a degradation of culture. The reviews, as I have shown, move along a continuum with George and Martha as abject bodies to the play implicitly diseasing the audience to finally the play embodying a wounded body or a “degenerate whore.” Nevertheless, the response furthers questions about the anxiety of the Other, which was penetrating such a couple as George and Martha.

The personal is politic would be a mantra to develop later in the 60s, in correspondence with the Second Wave feminist movement, but which can also certainly be applied to the supposed “emotional” response to *Who’s Afraid*. Through embodying the play into a metaphorically sick body (or a body of lesser strength, the feminine body), the reviews doubly reflected American society’s *need* to keep clearly defined lines between civilization/savagery and human/animal through the binary of male/female. On the one hand, an exposed body was a rhetorically-driven defense mechanism to smother the threat of the Other, in this case being the most removed Other geographically, the “imaginary” enemy of the Soviet Union. However, as with many plays addressing these similar themes during the time, one must question why *Who’s Afraid* could foment such a personal response and more

specifically why the political *had* to leak into the discourse of the reviewer's metaphorical language. Universally agreed upon to be a horrific play, the remainder of my thesis will address these interpretative gaps, in which the personal and political intersect. As Clark points out,

The phobic response of American culture to the evident capacity of civilization to destroy itself manifested by World War II had the effect of enclosing reason within the violence of aggressivity. The aggression always seemed to happen elsewhere, dissociated from the American landscape and the naturalized terrain of home. Thus manhood was dislocated from place. (Clark 207)

George and Martha certainly exhibit this “aggression,” and Albee presents this chiding aggression within the domestic sphere, embedded within characters who should, hypothetically speaking, be far removed from the personal. As the remainder of my thesis will show, this discourse intersected the political and personal in such a “cutting” and penetrating fashion not only because George and Martha were *supposed* to be the quintessential American family, but also because Nick and Honey are the subjective “constants,” the normalizers that stay to witness the mutiny and linger ever so close to it. Most notably, within the discourse of the play, there is not only a breakdown of the human boundaries that were sustaining Cold War rhetoric, but also Albee's plot inherently deconstructs the animal-subject binary through animalizing his characters. As I have shown, the response, just like the scholarship, reacted to the animalistic madness in a way that “normalized” Nick and Honey and tended to only focus on George and Martha, the animals. As many critics of the play have argued, Nick and Honey are too normal while George and

Martha are too abnormal. This is precisely how the Animal (and ultimately the Other) emerges and why it does so in such an unsettling manner.

## Chapter Two:

The “sub-human monster yowling at ‘em from inside”:

Deconstructing Humanism, Speciesist Discourse, and the Metaphorical Zoo in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

During Act II of *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, Martha and George’s marital battles progress from mere childish games into much more savage and personal attacks. Up to the end of Act II, the “games” of George and Martha still remain ambiguous, leaving the audience to decipher the motivations behind their bizarre language and sexual antics.

However, Martha finally speaks candidly after the game of “Get the Guests”:

You know what’s happened, George? You want to know what’s *really happened?*  
*(Snaps her fingers)* It’s snapped, finally. Not me...*it*. The whole arrangement. You can go along...forever, and everything’s...manageable. You make all sorts of excuses to yourself...*you* know...this is life...the hell with it...maybe tomorrow he’ll be dead...maybe tomorrow *you’ll* be dead...all sorts of excuses. But then, one day, one night, something happens...and SNAP! It breaks. And you just don’t give a damn anymore. (260)

This honest speech not only applies to George and Martha but also expresses an uncertainty that was ubiquitous in Cold War America: How can a marital “arrangement” so easily “snap,” and if this is so, what else can go “snap”? Martha subverts the domestic institution by expressing a deep internal need to overcome false illusions that are speciously sustaining her “civilized” order of life—the American family, the “arrangement.” This is why, after this speech, it is appropriate for George to respond with, “You’re a monster...*you are*” (260). Ironically though, George’s emphasis on *are* suggests that Martha’s existence as a woman,

and not necessarily her as an individual, coerces him to label her inhuman. This perceived alienation, as Albee dramatizes, cannot be overcome with human illusion, though. George faces the reality that humans inherently possess an unnatural need to order their lives, despite impulses, “snap[s],” that exist internally and are often out of their control.

George’s strident response to Martha’s subversive comment about marriage as a specious illusion was interwoven with several conflicting and emerging anxieties surrounding the ideology of American domesticity in the early sixties. The Cold War perpetuated the belief that America was the strongest country in the world, especially after the United States’ emergence from World War Two as an economic and political superpower. However, with the successful launch of Sputnik and then, in 1962, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the United States perceived their short-lived power to be crumbling and that their “saving,” heroic efforts from World War Two were going to be undermined by a competitor with supposed anti-democratic philosophies. In order for Americans to sustain the illusion that their country held the top crown in the world and to alleviate anxieties that this power could slip away from them, there arose illusions about America’s civility, an ethnocentric-induced belief that Americans held a privileged position of familial stability and more so a rightful way of everyday living. For example, the “savage” was being regularly portrayed in pop culture and continued to be “animalized” in these portrayals. Also, other American ideologies such as the “containment” of Communism rendered savage cultures or governments to be distant and removed from American culture. In other words, there were several methodologies that sustained the belief that the American family was being protected from the dangers of the outside world.

In movies and television shows, these “Other” cultures were depicted as distant yet gradually closing in on Americans. Dozens upon dozens of movies and television shows explored the civilized/uncivilized binary by placing characters in “out-of-place” environments. This included Paul Henning’s rural-themed television shows such as *The Beverly Hillbillies* (1962), *Petticoat Junction* (1963), and *Green Acres* (1965); other examples included shows that required the civilized to make homes in untamed environments, as seen in *Gilligan’s Island* (1965), *Swiss Family Robinson* (1960), and *In Search of the Castaways* (1962). Finally, innumerable films during the early 60s retold the stories of heroes encountering and overcoming savage cultures such as *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1962), and quite interestingly a film with John Wayne entitled *Hatari!*, which was a soaring adventure about hunters trying to capture wild animals to sell to zoos. In addition to the dozens of Westerns or the New Frontier films, Americans paradoxically placed the savage into the spotlight and more so depicted the American hero or the nuclear family put in environments that required adaptation to uncontrollable, natural forces. While the savage or the animal was a common narrative device, these depictions of shifting environments always downplayed the threat of savage impulses through comedy or a heroic, American family or clan uniting around utilitarian values and possessing the democratic means to trump their environment. Thus, while the savage or animal remained common in American media, it still remained under the heel of imperialist privilege in order to emphasize that the family, in particular the nuclear family, could overcome woes.

Considering this brief historical context paves the way for scholars to approach *Who’s Afraid* as a confrontation of these anxieties. Like these dozens of shows and movies, the “guests,” Nick and Honey, who arrive to George and Martha’s home enter an environment

that makes them “out-of-place” and at the mercy of savage, barbaric rituals. Ironically, though, this savage environment is in the heartland of America, in a college town called New Carthage, which forces the “normal” Americans Nick and Honey to come to terms with this invisible jungle that is George and Martha. As with this play and several others in his canon, Albee deconstructs American civility through the trope of the animal. On the one hand, Albee dramatizes the consequences of an individual unleashing animalistic impulses, but, on the other, he raises questions about the human *animal* entangled within the power structures of the home, which he presents as a metaphorical zoo. Moreover, *Who’s Afraid* offers an exploration into the American disillusionment of the nuclear family as a “civilized” and “normal” structure; he does this through more subtle techniques of placing the animal against these institutions that aim to control the animal, the mechanisms of power that “zoos” place upon the human subject. As will be seen, Nick and Honey attempt to survive in order to distance themselves from this savage environment but to no avail. Martha and George possess the power to tear down these cultural “cages” and get at the heart of the American—the animal, or the “savage” side that Americans try to repress through ordered family structures.

The recent field of Animal Studies is a way for scholars to transition into innumerable discussions about the mechanisms of power that dictate certain discourses about the Other. In the application of Animal Studies to *Who’s Afraid*, one can better perceive the irony at work within the play, especially in the way that Albee presents images or situations of civility in an uncivil way. George and Martha, a couple who lives the American Dream through disillusionment, are simultaneously ruled by yet are attempting to subvert institutions that perpetuate their disillusionment, institutions that include gender roles, the boundaries of



being “civilized,” and the nuclear family. In this chapter, I will analyze Albee’s trope of the animal, as he employed it in his first play *The Zoo Story*, and how this animal metaphor, in subsequent plays, allowed him to deconstruct the tension between the American and the institutions that tried to order Americans’ lives. The animal metaphor does not only emerge through the particular discourse of George and Martha’s marital battles, but also in the way that the play’s central tension revolves around debunking the assumed “privilege” of the human, as seen in the breakdown of language and particularly the nebulous assertion of the play’s title. In turn, the animal functions as a literary device for Albee to debunk systems of power, including the speciousness of the American dream and also the disillusionment surrounding the Cold War. For Albee, as seen in *Who’s Afraid*, the animal possessed the political significance to unravel the “certainties” of American audiences, precisely because the animal challenged boundaries of civility and American privilege.

Thus, if one is to shift focus and examine the *non-human* tendencies of George and Martha, one cannot possibly pigeonhole Albee’s play into a morality play, as the “gospel” of the play is no longer about rationale understanding but the lack of understanding, comprehending, or rationalizing. This is a radical shift for Albeean scholarship, as most all scholars agree upon Albee’s play as confronting the thin line between illusion and truth that, as humans, we participate in and must reckon with. Lincoln Konkle, for example, makes the argument that Albee criticizes character typology such as George the historian, attacking the Puritan discourse of typology and the progress narrative. Matthew Roudané interprets the ending of the play as a hopeful look into George and Martha’s newly created identities, evidenced in their language that “privileges a grammar of new beginnings” (41). Similarly, many scholars interpret George and Martha’s imaginary son as the way in which illusion can

actually exist as a reality. As Julian Wasserman comments, "...the illusionary is made real in the imaginary son and...the real is made illusion in George's 'autobiographical' novel" (32). All of these interpretations naturally formulate their meaning within the assumed framework of human subjectivity, whether the play's assertion deems human subjectivity to be disjointed, fractured, inconsistent, flawed, or inherently disillusioned.

Moving outside of this framework, however, of assumed human subjectivity can render a new and insightful interpretation of the play. What if the experience of the play has more to do with the *collapse* of subjectivity? At what moments do George and Martha in their language games lose their sense of humanness, and how important are these moments when George and Martha tear down language and its toxic effects? Instead, what if George and Martha are animals that are trying to ward off their subjective impulses, as opposed to subjective beings trying to tame their animalistic ways? This theoretical shift uproots the darkness, the fear, deep at the heart of the play and can be a particular source for the sense of anxiety or intellectual criticism that playgoers and scholars have experienced alike. First though, it is important to establish that the play functions by drawing fine lines between the subject and the animal and then disturbing these simple boundaries, in a continuous motion, until the central actions in the play begin to mirror or simulate this disturbance. While Bigsby believes that there is some nebulous "reality" George and Martha must accept, I am arguing that the play propels forward through a disruption of the human/animal binary, or civilization/the wild, or Subject/Other. Eventually Martha and George achieve an animal state in the final moments of the play, via an unraveling of their subjectivities. In turn, *Who's Afraid* yields the effect of fear and does so through a deconstruction of the human/animal binary.

## I. Deconstructing Human “Privilege”

When *The Zoo Story* premiered in 1959, critics and reviewers expressed shock and wonder over the one act, a response quite similar to *Who’s Afraid* three years later. *The Zoo Story* hinges upon one of the most quotidian of human events—meeting a stranger at a park bench. However, as the brief play progresses, the normalcy of this encounter transforms into a transcendental moment for an individual to validate his humanness. Through the animal metaphor, Albee, from the beginning of his career, blurred one of the most rigid human constructions—the differentiation between human and animal—as a way to conjure up an insecure response within audiences. His most blatant way of blurring this line was through utilizing the animal as a narrative device, which allowed the characters to draw clearly marked boundaries between their desire to be treated humanely and their connection with a more unconscious animalistic desire. This hybridity is what Albee presents on stage through his animal trope, which will come to be a commonly used device by Albee. Most saliently, in *The Zoo Story*, Albee uses the animal as a questioning of human privilege, which, when analyzing *Who’s Afraid*, shows that Albee’s characters often use a “speciesist” discourse to demarcate lines between privilege and Otherness, to communicate with people, and ultimately to convey fear or desire about the “cages” in their own lives.

As will be seen in *The Zoo Story*, the animal as a narrative device transforms into an everyday rhetorical device for Albee’s characters to structure their views about civilization and madness. In *Who’s Afraid*, the usage of an animal as a form of communication, whether using the animal as a figure of speech or just as a way to reveal the character’s interior emotions, appears over one hundred times. Surely, animals permeate our everyday speech, but under closer analysis Albee utilizes the animal in order for characters to challenge the

“bars” that make them feel alienated, as Jerry says about the significance of zoos (34). In a 1967 interview, Adrienne Clarkson asked Albee, “Are animals more interesting than people?” Albee responded with, “I don’t make that distinction usually. People do, between themselves...and other animals....I like animals too, but everything’s got to exist on two levels, a real level and a symbolic level” (Clarkson 90). Albee’s quote here deserves more recognition because 1) he expresses that the animal can be used on both a “real” and a “symbolic” level and 2) Albee perceives animals as a way for people to be separated from other *people*. Examining the relationship between the “real” and the “symbolic” reveals that Albee’s comment is referring to the animal as a metaphor versus the animal as a true human condition (which is often repressed). Thus, examining the symbolic will lead to more insight into the real and vice versa, according to Albee’s observation; for scholars, truly establishing the symbolic significance of the animal, as employed in *The Zoo Story*, can lead to better insights with his other plays, particularly *Who’s Afraid*, especially when his characters employ an animalistic discourse in relation to their own selves or other people.

By animalistic discourse, this does not only mean that Albee uses the animal as a psychological symbol for his characters’ internal anxieties; more so, Albee’s characters utilize the subaltern status of animals, especially in *Who’s Afraid*, as a means towards power over other individuals. This power often translates into characters deeming other characters animalistic to reinforce hierarchies, or oftentimes characters dehumanizing other characters in order to validate their own desire to be rendered human. However, a core objective of Animal Studies is the exploration and ultimately dismantling of this “speciesist” discourse. Cary Wolfe, in *Animal Rites*, writes extensively on the issue, calling all Postmodern scholars

who have any interest in cultural studies to reconsider “the question of nonhuman subjectivity.” He goes on further to say:

This framework [Speciesism], like its cognates, involves systematic discrimination against an other based solely on a generic characteristic—in this case, species. In the light of developments in cognitive science, ethology, and other fields over the past twenty years, however, it seems clear there is no longer any good reason to take it for granted that the theoretical, ethical, and political question of the subject is automatically coterminous with the species distinction between *Homo Sapiens* and everything else. (1)

Wolfe’s argument about reexamining the cultural studies lens holds merit to Albee’s works, in that, as Wolfe points out, speciesism is an “institution” that not only dictates how particular societies perceive and ultimately control animals but also acts as a way for other various institutions and dominant ideologies to reinforce strictures on the human subject (7). In turn, a discourse emerges for which biology and the ideologically-charged hierarchy of species can make one subject devalue and “other” another subject. As Animal Rights activist Paola Cavalieri argues, “...empirically there is a correspondence between some biological characteristics and the presence or absence of capacities that are morally relevant, so that biological group membership may be appealed to as a mark of this difference” (Cavalieri 73). Like Cavalieri’s observation that the discourse of the species can lump certain people together, Albee points out that the animal can possess both a symbolic and real level that “mark[s]” certain individuals outside the margins of civility or even humanness, based on “morally relevant,” “speciesist” qualities.

In *The Zoo Story*, this hierarchy of human civilization over animalistic impulse is dramatized through the characters of Peter and Jerry. In many ways, the characters appear to be the opposite, not only in the way they conduct their lives but also in how they perceive the world. Their seemingly opposed ways of life begin to collapse, though; the invisible boundaries that we as the audience perceive differentiating Peter and Jerry, whether it is class, sexuality, demeanor, etc. unravels through the trope of the animal. Unlike in *Who's Afraid*, the animal trope in *The Zoo Story* is presented in a rather explicit fashion, through a story about a dog. Jerry prefaces "THE STORY OF JERRY AND THE DOG," as he calls his story, by providing a detailed description of his landlady, describing her as a "fat, ugly, mean, stupid, unwashed, misanthropic, cheap, drunken bag of garbage" who has a "pea-sized brain...an organ developed just enough to let her eat, drink, and emit" (25). Jerry's description does not differ much from his description of the dog, which he describes as a "black monster of a beast, bloodshot, infected, maybe; and a body you can see the ribs through the skin" (27). Both "animals" possessing uncontrolled sexual urges in addition to unpleasant physical traits, the beginning of Jerry's story breaks down the boundary between animal and human in a way that makes the two characters interchangeable. While Jerry's story begins with the animalized human, the story shifts in perspective and slowly unveils the humanized animal, coming full circle and collapsing the binary altogether.

In other words, the animal as a narrative device allows Jerry to dramatize his own position within the confines of civilization. The dog, as it blurs with the landlady, soon takes the position of merging with Jerry as well. As Jerry comments later in the story, "Whenever the dog and I see each other we both stop where we are. We regard each other with a mixture of sadness and suspicion, and then we feign indifference. We walk past each other safely; we

have an understanding” (31). As can be seen, Albee breaks down the walls between species through saliently pointing out that Jerry possesses the ability to communicate with the dog, even if this communication is not a form of talking. Ironically, as will be seen with *Who's Afraid*, talking becomes a much less reliable form of communication, and in fact communication breakdown becomes a catalyst towards George and Martha's demise as a couple. Deborah Bailin, in her article “Our Kind: Albee's Animals in *Seascape*, and *The Goat Or, Who is Sylvia?*,” considers several Albee plays within an Animal Studies framework. She comments on Albee's canon as a whole, “Not surprisingly, even language, perhaps the most ‘human’ of human qualities, often fails, as the idea of the beast comes to suggest not a human lacking *human* qualities, but a human lacking *animal* qualities” (Bailin 9). Embedded within Jerry's story is a dramatization of Jerry's subaltern status as a human, as he is forced to communicate with the dog, but at the same time Albee uses the dog to deconstruct the human privilege of talking, or rational communication.

As presented in *The Zoo Story* and as will be seen with *Who's Afraid*, Albee's deliberate blurring of human and animal is not to depict a savagery inherent in individual characters but as a way for Albee to comment on how we as humans communicate. Throughout his canon, the breakdown of communication is Albee's most prominent theme, ranging from its lack thereof to the absurdity of trying to overcome battles with semantics. The animal trope further emphasizes Albee's need to explore this theme, as humans primarily distinguish themselves from animals through our ability to communicate at a higher level, Albee aims to debunk this so-called privilege and ultimately shows that the animal-within-the-human can be the most abrasive yet most intimate of human connections. Many scholars have pointed to Albee's ability to engage the audience in language play as one of his highest

strengths as a playwright. As Wasserman remarks, “The play [*Who’s Afraid*], then, is a linguistic exercise, a teaching of language or at least a forging of a common language...” (37); Ruby Cohn describes *Who’s Afraid* as a display of “illusion thriv[ing] on a pungent idiom” and ultimately “bolstered by subtle sonic effects” (217, 219). Throughout the play, the interspecies communication between humans remains fickle at best. While language play is the heart of *Who’s Afraid*, Albee portrays language as a failed signifier, as evidenced in the characters constantly confusing words, substituting the meaning of one word for another (“gangle” for “gaggle”), subtle shifts in semantics [“I am *in* the History Department... as opposed to *being* the History Department” (178)], the absurdity of language [“Good, better, best, bested” (174)], and ultimately the breakdown of language itself as seen in the exorcism scene, in which George speaks the dead language of Latin to Martha. In *Who’s Afraid*, language collapses upon itself and shows that the subjective advantage to speaking among each other as a species is evidently not an advantage at all but often a downfall.

This breakdown-of-language-theme that grounds *Who’s Afraid* incites the audience to dismantle their speciesist mode of thinking and question the species “mark” of humanness. Carrie Rohman says, in taking consideration of Derrida’s theories about the animal, that “it is necessary to dismantle the humanist relation to language by recognizing linguistic modalities outside the human” (17). Additionally, while scholars have brought attention to Albee’s sense of wordplay and linguistic technique, they have failed to recognize these “linguistic modalities outside the human.” While *Who’s Afraid* does not include any animals on stage, Martha and George express moments for which “animalistic” communication (as seen with Jerry and the Dog) yield more communicative moments than rational discussion. For Animal Studies, language that exists outside of the human framework is a language that humans



cannot conceptualize; however, in moments of extreme language breakdown, as seen at the end of *Who's Afraid*, the subject no longer needs to communicate, but shares in a revelatory, shared silence where language is not transferred but communication nevertheless occurs. For example, at the beginning of the play, Martha walks into her home, yelling "Jesus..." and George silences her with a shush while at the end of the play, Martha utters "I am..." George affirms with a "nod," and silence naturally falls. Thus, examining this frame, the progression of the play can be seen to move from a subject/other binary to the primitive human origins of language, "I am." The subject/other binary collapses only when Martha and George return to their "origins" and communicate without language.

Within this progression, there is a movement that language symbolically break downs and in these moments, Albee presents the animal in a favorable light, as opposed to a savage one. Albee sets up Nick to function as a detached spectator, allowing him to loosely invite the audience to observe vicariously through his perspective. Nick is the scientist, the biological observer of animals and depicted as the human for which not even a tinge of animality can be perceived by the audience. As George suggests, Nick fits the Posthuman model (all of which will be discussed more extensively in Chapter 3). As a "constant" human, Nick frequently tries to interpret the actions and words of George and Martha but often to no avail. It is only at the end of the play when the exorcism has occurred that Nick "understands" that George and Martha's God-like creations of illusion cannot be put into words. Nick, faced with this transcendental moment, exits the house with the unfinished statement, "I'd like to..." (309). This conditional statement establishes Nick, the constant, the audience's vicarious marker, as projecting himself to an imaginative place beyond reality, as

wanting to be part of George and Martha's illusions. Once the guests leave, it is up to the audience to share this fascination with Nick.

This transcendence of language continually appears in the final moments of the play. If subjectivity can be loosely bordered off as a questioning of existence, a self-awareness of life itself ("I am"), then the one or two word utterances from George and Martha at the end of the play suggest that they have reverted back to the roots of humanity, the first moments of when the human acknowledged self-awareness. The audience, in full view, witnesses George and Martha communicate at a more primitive or animalistic level. This change is particularly evidenced in that their language is no longer loaded with underlying meanings; they speak concretely as opposed to abstractly and utilize language to its most basic function, communication. For example, they only ask simple questions, "Are you tired?," and continue with rather simple one or two word statements, the most rudimentary of language seen in the play by far. Simple statements such as "Yes," "I am," "I'm cold," "I don't...know," and "Yes. No," show that the symbolic exorcism was in actuality a subjective cleansing; language, as seen in the entire play, ceases to be loaded and arbitrary and falls back to its most primitive function—language as raw communication. For example, George's final rendition of the song, "Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf," leads to the most primitive utterance, "I am," from Martha and then to "Silence." The question, which throughout the play was mocked and sung in jest, now takes up the function as to be an understood and even answerable question. Subjectivity unravels by language losing its sophistication: the "Yes. No" to finally the "I am" is human language stripped to its rawest, and the silence that follows completes the transformation of George and Martha. They deny subjectivity and become the animal that was so blurred throughout the play, not the animal, Virginia Woolf,

the animal, the Big Bad Wolf. The human-animal binary is flipped through the final moments of the play, through the symbol of the primitive human. The human becomes animal through the sheer delight of being free (or exorcised) from the subjective forces of power. The animal is freedom, not fear.

The title of the play deserves recognition because from the get-go, embedded within this loaded title, arises the central tension of the play. The title, at face value, is non-sensical yet melodic in nature; its simple and rather confusing mantra leads the audience to dismiss it as a joke and only as another George/Martha “game.” What little scholarship that has attempted to analyze the question has often brought its function back to its allusion to Virginia Woolf or its metalinguistic dimension. For example, in 1965, Emil Roy hearkens the title back to works of Virginia Woolf and TS Eliot, arguing that the title dissolves any “logical connectives, rely[ing] instead on the direct perception of significance of the audience” (Roy 32). As Albee comments, the title of the play was not his idea but was written on the wall of a bar he frequented in the early 60s. The usage of this title, according to Albee’s story, came about from a mysterious intrigue with the words, not necessarily any carefully crafted plan to yield a message. More closely examining the title suggests that Albee’s intrigue with the title was indeed based upon an emotional response and not necessarily an intellectual one. However, its enigmatic nature rightfully and artfully fits within Albee’s intention of dismantling humanism through the animal.

The question of “Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?”, at a rhetorical level, functions two ways: first, it engages in triple word play over Virginia Woolf, the writer, the wolf as a “scary” species, and finally the Disney nursery rhyme, the Big Bad Wolf. The question then inherently overthrows the binary from the fear of the animal to the fear of rationale thought,

automatically dismantling the humanist privilege. Virginia Woolf is more than a perfect pun because her name includes the nursery rhyme but also she is well known for exploring the complexities of subjective thought and shifts in human perspective. Secondly, being in the form of the question, i.e. a subject addressing another subject, the question undergoes stages throughout the play, which move from a playful joke to an existential question for Martha, allowing her to utter the words, “I am” (311). This progression, from having solely a rhetorical function to one that prompts an answer of “I am” depends upon its open-endedness, its implied confusion over whether the question is meant to be answered or meant to be dismissed.

Considering the question within an Animal Studies framework suggests that it provides an interesting foundation for the play because it allows the audience to reexamine their own biases towards the concept of human privilege. The animal, in its singular sense, has always been a problematic term for Western civilization philosophy, as the animal denotes an all-encompassing *category* that, as humans, we classify the unknown nature of the animal under. Species Discourse then has become a blatant attempt to exert power over the animal through this linguistic feature. Derrida, more than anyone, points this out when he says “The animal, what a word!” (qtd from Wolfe 80). Working off Derrida’s proclamation of how humans remove subjectivity from the animal, Cary Wolfe encourages the “reopening of the question of language” because this will have “enormous implications for the *category* of the animal in general” (80). In other words, as both Derrida and Wolfe point out, the question of the animal resides in the very act of how we frame our discourse into the singular category of the animal. Questioning our traditional perception of the singularity of the animal comes down to a redefining of the boundaries that demarcate off the animal. In retrospect to

this postmodern reflection, Albee's title in its very rhetorical function questions the animal as a source of socialized anxiety and, in a methodology of deconstruction, has reversed the animal to equate to the Subject.

As I noted above, the title actually undergoes a progression throughout the play; it does not remain static and its meaning shifts in coordination with the changes seen in Martha and George's newly created selves. When the title is first introduced, it comes during a moment of breakdown between George and Martha. Martha announces that there will be guests, and George begins to sulk, claiming Martha is "always *springing* things on me." Martha proceeds to mock George for his melancholy disposition and proceeds to sing the song that they had sung at a cocktail party earlier in the night; she laughs all the while and says to George, "I thought it was a scream...a real scream." George can only respond with, "It was all right, Martha..." (161). George senses a particular existential breadth lingering beneath the surface humor of the question while Martha who jeers at it senses nothing but a declarative "scream" in the question. It is difficult to discern whether or not George's slight uncertainty can be derived from his premonition about how loaded the question is, or if it has to do more with how Martha (in the position of the Other) threatens the position of the Subject, George. The interchange of Virginia Woolf with the Big Bad Wolf shows that Martha is already the source of reversing the binary. If the animal is extreme alterity (and hence why it is *the* animal), this is why critics such as Frank Adorlino claim the title "depicts the threat represented by...the powerful modern woman" and can be interpreted as a confusing but subtle utterance of subversion (Adorlino 114). The animal (the Big Bad Wolf) is inherently subversive and thus questions the heart of assumed subjective privilege—fearing subjectivity, not animality.

Paving the way for the remainder of the play, the title becomes more of a source of tension for George and Martha, especially when the guests arrive. The second time Martha sings the song, she tells the guests that George doesn't like it and George bitterly says, "Unless you carry on like a hyena you aren't having fun" (170). In this comment, he is referring to Martha's animal-like response to the question, as he says that he found it funny but Martha—in her brutal honesty—says that George hates it. Here again, the tension that the question foments for George becomes increasingly more pronounced, and quite ironically, he cannot help but engage in a process of othering Martha, to tame the animal through his reference to her as a "hyena." Placing her in this speciesist category, as Cary Wolfe points out, there is a sense of taming the subversion that is subtly embedded within the question. This second singing comes earlier in the play, so "like the hyena" still existing as a simile and not a full blown metaphor shows that the anxiety lingers underneath but has not completely surfaced. In this second instance, the question holds a particular ground of autonomy for Martha, until George starts to sing it later on in the play, and the question induces panic within Martha.

The third time the song is sung comes at a highly tensioned moment at the end of act one, arguably the climax of act one. Also salient about this third singing is that George begins to sing it *simultaneous* to when Martha begins to attack George's masculinity by telling his personal history of not living up to his expectations as a husband. Their voices compete to match one another; assuming that language exists as the subjective privilege, one can begin to see that the song is becoming intertwined with alterity itself. This is why Adorlino's argument does not hold steadfast to this moment, as both George and Martha sing the song under highly pressured moments of communicative tension. When George begins to

sing it, Martha lashes back with “STOP IT!” and “a brief silence” follows (211). What started out as a “real scream” has shifted to disturb Martha directly, and by the end of act one, the linguistic threat of the song gains a palpable effect. Most notable about this moment is that George is singing the song while Martha candidly reveals the pressures she had felt from her father in marrying the “proper” man, but George has failed to fit this role. The song then elicits a disturbing response because it reminds her of this failed role as a nuclear wife (and ultimately mother). Moreover, the response from Martha shows that the implications of the question, especially by George assuming the role of the Other and utilizing the question as a weapon of agency, run much deeper than a play on words. The question contains a multitude of layers, which strike the heart of humanity itself. The question is not only about the Other, the animal, striking back but also about the animal debunking the security and privilege of civilization. Privileging the animal’s radical alterity then is equivalent to death, to non-being, to the lack of subjectivity itself, precisely the reason why the song does not reappear until the very end of the play, spoken by George, and eventually instigates Martha’s famous words, “I am.” George and Martha’s return to “primitive” origins implies that the play, through the title and the breakdown of language, aims to disrupt the humanist privilege of progressive rational thought.

Language then is the demise of the human subject and perpetuates disillusionments pertaining to power. Albee’s obvious hint at language’s inability to maintain security also has the power to alienate individuals, especially transgressive ones. Language then, in *Who’s Afraid*, is a powerful weapon, but it is also a weapon that perpetuates illusions, particularly the illusion that humans and animals differ. I will now examine George’s language in the play in order to argue that George must use speciesist discourse to alleviate the fear of his

own animalistic side and more notably to contain Martha's madness. This speciesist discourse, in turn, allows George to exercise power over his "caged" existence, which he perceives within the nuclear family structure. If Albee has represented the home as a metaphorical zoo, then he also allows his play to speak towards humanity's desperate need to break from these cages, which often entails animalizing others to validate one's own humanity. The play then not only aims to decenter human privilege, as I have shown, but it also dramatizes how models of normalcy, such as the nuclear family model or the human/animal binary, are in fact barriers for "real" communication between subjects. Therefore, Albee decenters subjective privilege through showing how language is a way to disperse power and ultimately repress the more primitive origins of what it means to be human.

## **II. Putting Martha on Display: Dovetailing Zoo and Domestic Ideologies**

As can be seen, *The Zoo Story* uses the dog as a narrative device in order to show that Jerry, a perceived social deviant, makes more meaningful communication with a dog than people. Similarly, in *Who's Afraid*, Albee explores and eventually deconstructs the human "privilege" of communication by centering the play on a communication-breakdown theme and a question of fearing human subjectivity. In turn, *Who's Afraid*, like many of Albee's plays, does not apply to the particular individuals seen on stage like George and Martha but comments on humanness as a species mark. In addition to communication, *Who's Afraid* looks at how this communication can indeed draw boundaries between individuals. In other words, closely examining the language that George and Martha employ not only emphasizes their communication breakdown, but it also reveals a much more specific rhetoric involving the human within the cage, or the metaphorical zoo. As Randy Malamud comments about



*The Zoo Story* and other Albee plays, “Albee’s audience can educe a zoo story, despite the lacunae and absences that seem to efface it: a story of pathetic constraint; oppressed humanity and animality; and ultimately, pointless exhaustion, failure” (Malamud 55). Malamud’s observation bears especial significance because he establishes that “lacunae” and “absence” render the zoo story an impossibility to articulate through language. More specifically, by “absence,” Malamud is observing that while Jerry uses the narrative metaphor of the animal, there is also the suggestion that Jerry is unable to communicate the story because he is speaking to Peter through language. This is why Jerry must subsume the role of an animal by throwing himself onto a knife and becoming “a slab of dead meat” (Malamud 54).

This narrative absence, like in *The Zoo Story*, plagues George and Martha as well. As Malamud suggests and for which I will apply more specifically to *Who’s Afraid*, the audience can still extract a “zoo story” from George and Martha’s desperate ploy to outdo each other in their marital battles. However, the narrative absence and their inability to articulate the constraints of the metaphorical zoos that are present becomes a need to frame their language around speciesist reasoning. This is why, in particular, examining the language that George uses against Martha reveals a discourse of the species, which specifically aims to alienate her through a species “mark.” Utilizing biological language and then applying “morally relevant” traits to these biological features (referring back to Cavalieri), George can “articulate” his own status as being entrapped within a “zoo,” the institution of the nuclear family and traditional gender roles, through dehumanizing and then classifying Martha under subsets of species traits. First, it is important to establish how *Who’s Afraid* uses the zoo as a metaphor, especially in connection with the home. From there, one can then see that transforming the

home into a zoo allows Albee to emphasize the tension between human and animal, from which the entire play decenters.

Moreover, Albee presents the home as a cage in order to show that the home contains institutional power over George and Martha. Not only are George and Martha disillusioned about the home as a free place but when “guests” arrive, or a better term may be spectators, they perform their martial role under the guise of this institutional power. At the very start of *Who’s Afraid*, Martha walks into the house and yells, “What a dump!,” a performance of a Bette Davis role. Once Martha begins to describe the movie, George and Martha, like Bette Davis and Joseph Cotton in the picture, become performers in their own home. Martha describes to George the characters, hoping he can identify the movie: “She’s a housewife; she buys things...and she comes home with the groceries, and she walks into the modest living room of the modest cottage modest Joseph Cotton has set her up in...” (157). There is the suggestion that Martha’s description, ironically, could transform into a parallel narrative for George and Martha’s domestic situation, as she repeatedly emphasizes “modest” but in a way that can be interpreted as sending a message to George. Her ironic usage of modest, through repetition, shows the home to be endowed with the possibility of performing gender roles and ultimately shows that George and Martha can have spectators, just like at a zoo, for which they act out parts of “modesty,” or as will be seen act out their more “savage” sides.

There is plenty of evidence in the play to suggest that Nick and Honey are more than just “guests” and have an important function of being spectators to George and Martha’s marital games. Just as they ring the doorbell, George makes a joke but a telling one: “Isn’t it nice that some people won’t just come breaking into other people’s houses even if they *do* hear some sub-human monster yowling at ‘em from inside?” (165). While George’s side

comment contains a facetious edge, it also blatantly sets up the rest of the play of the speciest discourse that will entrap Martha and George. George's jesting but honest comment positions Martha at the margins of society, a discourse that places her below the human and thus animalizes her. More importantly, though, George's comment just as the guests are arriving can be related to a very specific discourse on cages or zoos. For example, George's joke that civilized people will not enter a home with a crazed woman like Martha reveals the line between private and public that the institution of the home presents. The private nature of the home that George is joking about in this question becomes instantly a question of whether or not the home functions as a tension between the home as a place to be on display or the home as a private place, cut off from "guests" to intrude upon. This central tension plays out for the remainder of the play, as George finds offense in Nick and Honey as spectators to their caged status, while Martha appears to subsume the role of the performer and submit to her function of being an animal locked in the cage of the home.

Many scholars have commented on this tension; for example, Jody Pennington writes that *Who's Afraid* "exemplifies the manner in which changing understandings of privacy influenced changing views toward concealment and revelation within interpersonal relationships..." (Pennington 27). Pennington's main argument hinges upon the American audiences of the 50s and 60s, a time when issues about marital privacy were being brought into public discussions, particularly with the rise of second wave feminism. However, I would also like to expand on Pennington's argument, as it is related to the construct of the zoo. While, as Pennington points out, the play centralizes on a tension between George and Martha keeping their fantasy world private, a closer analysis of the play shows that this tension hinges upon the clash between performance and "real" identity. In other words, Nick

and Honey are the audience to their games, and when either George or Martha play the game better, then the other one must overcome it with a more sensationalist act. Joy Flasch, in an early article about the play, points this out, utilizing psychology and claiming that George and Martha are each, “more interested in the fact that his opponent is at his mercy” (Flasch 124). Thus, the absurdity of George and Martha rests in their need to outperform, which shows that the source of the play’s conflicts derives from a spirit of extreme competition. Ultimately, this competition to outperform for the guests further demonstrates that George and Martha’s marriage is metaphorically presented in a zoo-like display.

Their marriage-on-display echoes what many scholars have said about Nick and Honey’s role within the play. For example, Walter Davis, in *Get the Guests*, reinforces this interpretation, arguing that, “The audience’s pose—We are civilized, normal human beings who are politely shocked by your behavior—is what most arouses an actor’s aggression. George and Martha now hack at each other to bait and probe Nick and Honey” (Davis 220). Nick and Honey are overtly normal, passive, and even an implied idealized form of George and Martha’s marriage. Moreover, in their seemingly passive roles, Albee sets up Nick and Honey as the spectators, the on-lookers who are supposed to observe the subjects on display from a detached viewpoint. The following interchange between George and Nick demonstrates that George assigns the couple to this role:

GEORGE: I’d like to set you straight about something...while the little ladies are out of the room...I’d like to set you straight about what Martha said.

NICK: I don’t...make judgments, so there’s no need, really, unless you...

GEORGE: Well, I want to. I know you don't like to become involved...I know you like to...preserve your scientific detachment in the face of—for lack of a better word—Life...and all...but still, I want to tell you. (220)

Throughout the course of the play, Nick resists intruding into the private lives of George and Martha. George, however, drags them into the “cage” of his troubled marriage, establishing that Nick is an objective on-looker. Yet, as George establishes, he in actuality insists for Nick to become part of their madness. As Malamud comments about metaphorical cages, “when insanity infiltrates zoo stories, it may implicate those outside as well as inside the cage. Like the medical incidence of madness with its vague demarcations, the motif of literary madness, once introduced into a text, tends to disperse rampantly” (Malamud 129). Similarly, while Nick and Honey seem to be so withdrawn from the “monstrous” ways of George and Martha, the “caged” madness of George and Martha begins to permeate their spectator role, especially seen when George instigates the game of “Get the Guests,” where he reveals the secret of Honey’s hysterical pregnancy.

The metaphorical cage, in other words, emerges through Nick and Honey’s role as passive spectators who reluctantly get sucked into the madness of George and Martha. This adds another ironic dimension to the play because there are more spectators than just Nick and Honey, the actual audience. Just like Martha’s performance of Bette Davis whose story is contained within the “picture,” so too are Martha and George’s performances contained within the constraints of a play. Nick and Honey, in other words, function as a second audience but also mirror how the actual audience will strive to separate their own lives from the mutiny being witnessed on stage. Malamud not only comments on the zoo story possessing the ability to infiltrate the minds of those witnessing the madness, tearing down

the cage, but also “zoo audiences have a complete and penetrating look over the caged animals—they can look as much as they want, whenever they want. But they are not looking at something they respect...” (Malamud 127). Malamud’s observation loosely applies to George and Martha’s “caged” marriage; the spectators, the audience in addition to Nick and Honey, must believe they are not part of George and Martha’s environment. However, as Nick and Honey get sucked in, so too does the audience believe they will be victims and thus the play as a whole hinges upon the concept of a zoo. Generating the dichotomy between spectator and caged animal/madness, Albee utilizes the metaphorical cage as a way to draw parallels between the shocked audience and the “disillusions” of George and Martha.

More than just bringing emphasis to the spectator-caged animal metaphor, the metaphor of the caged animal appears through the specific language that George uses to “cage” in Martha. A speciesist reasoning structures the discourse that George and Martha use in their savage blows against one another. George, more explicitly, frames Martha to be subhuman, a “monster,” and ultimately a threat to society. He does this through language that heightens her physical features and metaphorically presents her as a different species than a human. At the beginning of the play, before the guests arrive, this speciesist discourse is already engaged and, to the audience, appears to be their quotidian habit of speaking to one another. At first it seems playful as George relates her ice-chewing habit to a cocker spaniel. “You’ll crack your big teeth,” he says and then she responds with, “THEY’RE MY BIG TEETH” (163). This exaggeration of Martha’s physical traits continues on; for example, she demands “A BIG SLOPPY KISS” at one point, possesses the ability to “swill” alcohol, and George refers to her talking as “braying” (158, 163-164). Thus, not only are her physical attributes exaggerated, but also George frames her around a discourse of a ravenous and

insatiable “sub-human monster,” who laughs like a hyena and “foams at the mouth” when discussing her father (165, 170, 180). While, at face value, George’s jabs appear to be a more strident version of the battle of the sexes, his language, as the play progresses, transforms into a much more frightening need to dehumanize her and thus demarcate her off as a separate species.

George’s discourse of animalizing Martha has parallels with Martha’s inability to fall into a category of proper femininity, which sheds light on why George employs this discourse. There are many forms of dehumanization that George employs in addition to animalizing her, including silencing her, but also bringing attention to her inability to produce a child. Her unnatural inability to bear children, therefore, disrupts the rigid boundaries of the nuclear family model and places her outside the margins of the proper woman. Any forms of institutional powers such as gender can be related to a cross-species discourse, as Western World culture has always placed the animal in the lowest societal position. Going more in depth with this hierarchy, Cary Wolfe explains the “species grid” as a boundary between “animalized animals” and “humanized humans.” He goes on to say, “the ostensibly ‘pure’ categories of ‘animalized animal’ and ‘humanized human’ are the merest ideological fictions is evinced by the furious line drawing at work in the hybrid designations” (Wolfe 101). These “hybrid designations” (humanized animals, animalized humans) in other words, generate problematic strictures that the culture and law impose upon a society to maintain separation between human and animal. In turn, this “species grid,” Wolfe reiterates, speaks to other various categories that attempt to maintain the humanized human. If a category is disrupted, the discourse of animality becomes an easy way for power mechanisms to retain power over these transgressive individuals. Thus, the ideological charge to the

species grid becomes a tool for George to repress Martha's madness but also to deem her a "monster" and thus gain power over her.

Albee then allows Martha to vacillate within these "hybrid designations" and gain a role as a monster who has ultimately destroyed the nuclear family model. As George's advice to Nick goes, "The way to a man's heart is through his wife's belly, and don't you forget it," George goes on to qualify his statement by giving a telling description about the true nature of women who live like Martha:

And the women around here are no better than puntas—you know, South American ladies of the night. You know what they do in South America...in Rio? The puntas? Do you know? They hiss...like geese...They stand around in the street and hiss at you...like a bunch of geese. (229)

George's description to Nick imposes many categorizations upon women like Martha, which shows that infertile women, or women who choose to not have children, can only "hiss...like geese" and "stand around in the street." They are, in other words, unproductive to society except for sex and more so—through a postcolonial discourse—like savage South American women. Most pertinent to this discussion though is that George has to place women like Martha within a "hybrid designation" and ultimately blur her species orientation.

Presenting Martha's "unnatural" inability to reproduce as a speciesist mark, George also has several moments where he goes to further lengths to emphasize her "animal" side as predatory in nature and, in this, she becomes closer to a purer form of the animalized animal, thus wiping out her subjective awareness altogether, which finalizes through the exorcism act at the end of the play. In describing her as a mother, for example, George comments that Martha "used to corner him" during the night time (235) and later on in the play, when the



discussion goes from uncomfortable to serious, George's most honest attack is where his words culminate in an argument of animalizing Martha to its purest level. George describes his own cruel words by saying, "It's sort of to your taste...blood, carnage and all. Why, I thought you'd get all excited...sort of heave and pant and come running at me, your melons bobbing" (257). George's harsh words render some interesting points that allow Albee to transform Martha from an alcoholic floozy to a full-blown monster. Embedded within his discourse lies words deeming her a cannibal through the usage of "taste" and then finally an uncontrolled animal who "run[s]" at George with an invasive desire. Uncontrolled desire, the taste for "blood," and finally objectifying her to her "melons bobbing" allow George to demarcate Martha to the fullest extent, and thus when he calls her a "monster" a few moments later, he feels justified in his cruel label. Martha, entrapped within the discourse of the "animalized animal" can only respond by expounding on her animalistic state: "And I'm going to howl it out, and I'm not going to give a damn what I do, and I'm going to make the damned biggest explosion you ever heard" (261). In her attempt to gain agency within the "zoo" of an unnatural mother, Martha uses George's animalization of her as a means towards victory.

As can be seen then, *Who's Afraid* is just as much of a "zoo story" as his first play, *The Zoo Story*. The play hinges upon the discourse of animality and breaking down boundaries that separate species. However, Martha's "monstrous" behavior allows Albee to dramatize and thus render much more pertinent points about the American Dream and the nuclear family model. As the home transforms into a metaphorical zoo, as seen in the spectators that try to separate themselves from George and Martha's supposed madness and in the discourse that George employs upon Martha, Albee's play strikes at a much deeper

level with the American audiences watching this play in the early 60s. His first play, *The Zoo Story*, showed Albee inherently aiming to deconstruct the boundaries between human and animal. However, in *Who's Afraid*, this collapse of boundaries points a more judgmental finger at the audience, as Martha becomes a victim to speciesist reasoning due to her disruption of the nuclear family model. While Martha defends herself by feminizing George, George animalizes, dehumanizes, and eventually demonizes her for her inability to fulfill this role. This is why in addition to calling her a monster, George says, "I think I'll have you committed" (260). Speciesist reasoning comes hand in hand with institutional power, which reiterates Cary Wolfe's discussion of the "species grid."

The dramatic power of using Martha as the animal and George as the subject paved the way for Albee to dramatize the specious yet disastrous effects of the American Dream. In *The Zoo Story*, the animal exists as a narrative device while in *Who's Afraid* the animal transforms into a rhetorical feature that unravels the assumed source of both human and American privilege. Through Martha, Albee dramatizes the dehumanizing effects of those who do not fit this rigid model of normalcy. As Randy Malamud comments, "Stories of men in zoo cages highlight the ironies and indignities visited upon the subject human body; such degradations, certainly, engage the reader intimately" (117). To confine Martha's body, George had to tailor a specific rhetoric that effaced her humanness via a discourse that consistently animalized her. In turn, the "ironies" of this act was for Albee to present how Martha is so severely punished for her inability to reproduce, although her entire identity rests upon bearing the child, albeit a "fake" child. Therefore, Martha cannot overcome her own impossibilities and must be reduced to a "monster" by a speciesist-driven discourse. As I quoted at the beginning of this chapter, the "Snap" of the "whole arrangement" leads

Martha down a kamikaze path towards her own caging. Therefore, the only way for Martha to live with her situation is for her to tear down this cage and to embrace her position within society—as the animal.

In the next chapter, Martha's entrapment within the speciesist discourse can be attributed to much more than Albee's desire to "engage the reader intimately," as Malamud points out. Seen in *Who's Afraid*, the dramatic effect of the animal was both a source of unsettling the audience and causing the audience to ironically question their own judgments towards Martha. However, just as Martha is the Other, so is George an Other as well. For example, Nick's comment to George that he does want to witness him and his wife "go at each other, like a couple of...animals" reflects that George is equally placed within this stricture of madness (218).

I have argued that the animal and the zoo metaphor played a major role in *Who's Afraid*, a role that many scholars have overlooked; in the next chapter, I will examine how Albee has used the animalistic impulse within the subject as a way to construct his characters. Like Jerry and Peter are separate halves that merge together in the end of *The Zoo Story*, as opposite poles of civility and animalness, George and Martha also mirror Nick and Honey with a similar doubling effect. This doubling effect, however, unveils many political tensions that were prevalent during the early 60s. Albee depended upon the animal to create dramatic characters that both mirrored and clashed with an early 60s American audience.

### Chapter Three:

#### Down to the Marrow:

##### The Posthuman and the Animal Self in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

In this chapter, I will discuss a concept that Animal Studies scholars have commented on and explored extensively over the past twenty-five years: the cyborg or also known as the posthuman. In the previous chapter, I examined how Albee incorporated the “sub-human” into his work through the character of Martha. George’s speciesist reasoning led him to entrap Martha within a species category that was amorally connected to improper femininity. However, *Who’s Afraid* transforms into a work of even more layered ambiguities when considering the role of Nick and Honey. In the last chapter, I established their rather disconnected and even detached role as a hypothetical audience. Yet, it is insufficient to leave their function within the play as just observers. Nick not only becomes a vital pawn in George and Martha’s sexually-charged savage games but he also, as George says in Act II, “represent[s] a direct and pertinent threat to my livelihood” (228). Honey, on the other hand, slowly disappears outside the confines of visibility, a voice of reason that nobody cares to take seriously, but who –at the same time– is a catalyst connecting Nick to George and Martha through her hysterical pregnancy. In other words, Honey seems absent, but under closer examination, her presence actually fills the stage. Thus, both Nick and Honey begin as passive spectators but begin to pervade George and Martha’s marital battles, transforming into complicated and problematic mirrors of George and Martha.

This doubling becomes most pronounced through the discourse that George uses to combat Nick. Nick, most notably, is articulated through George’s perception that Nick falls under a category of “a race of scientists and mathematicians, each dedicated to and working

for the greater glory of the super-civilization” (199). These “glorious men,” as George labels them, harken back to Albee’s *The American Dream* in which he explored the theme of hyper-masculinity, or the posthuman. Posthumanism contains many varied meanings and in recent years has become a hotbed of discussion among scholars. Cary Wolfe’s book, *What is Posthumanism?*, breaks down the term and attempts to wield a clearer definition of what posthumanism constitutes:

...it comes both before and after humanism: before in the sense that it names the embodiment and embeddedness of the human being in not just its biological but also its technological world, the prosthetic coevolution of the human animal with the technicity of tools and external archival mechanisms (such as language and culture)...  
(Wolfe xv)

The first part of Wolfe’s definition debunks the assumption that the term merely means *after* the human and instead encompasses humanism in its widest sense. The posthuman, then, does not exclude the more primal traits of the human, and also includes the progression of the subject as he/she moves into interacting with technology and tools exterior to the body. The second part of Wolfe’s definition establishes that the “after humanism” is “a historical moment in which the decentering of the human by its imbrication in technical, medical, informatic, and economic networks is increasingly impossible to ignore” (Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?* xv).

As Wolfe suggests, posthumanism is inherently deconstructive; more specifically, the term disrupts the human/animal binary because it dovetails the biological impulses with questions about disembodiment, a humanism outside of the human. This futuristic human, the cyborg, is (dis)embodied and represented as a mishmash of human-animal, machine-

human, nature-culture, etc. Donna Haraway, in her famous work “A Cyborg Manifesto,” explains the ideological significance of the cyborg as inducing “a social revolution” within “the household” dissolving traditional psychoanalytic models such as the Oedipal Complex. She continues on to point out that, “The relationships for forming wholes from parts, including those of polarity and hierarchical domination, are at issue in the cyborg world” (Haraway 151). Like Wolfe’s posthumanism, Haraway exemplifies the nature of the cyborg as divided within itself, a speculative being that must bargain over how its whole is inherently problematic due to its parts. For example, a cyborg for current Americans foments a series of images connected to a post apocalyptic existence, such as with *The Terminator*, where technology and humans clash for imperialist ends. Yet, the cyborg is much more problematic, as evidenced by the definitions above. Haraway stretches the cyborg to include a disruptive tension that questions humanness itself and exists as a “border” between “organism” and “machine,” a “rework[ing]” of “nature” and “culture” (Haraway 150-151). Most importantly, though, Haraway and Wolfe saliently assert that we are all cyborgs or posthumans to a certain extent, evidenced by our need to work with tools external to the body, but also seen through the internal conflict of repressing “our animal origins” versus “transcending the bonds of materiality and embodiment altogether” (Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?* xv).

Certainly, this cyborg clash is a major aspect of Albee’s canon. In *The Zoo Story*, for example, Jerry and Peter exemplify the battle between the animalistic urges, Jerry’s “dog” state; and a disembodied projection, Peter’s intellectual image. Mary Castiglie Anderson acknowledges this by pointing out that Jerry and Peter “reveal different aspects of one personality...Peter’s reactions to Jerry correspond to struggles within himself” (Anderson

97). In other words, Jerry and Peter are essentially two halves of a singular human subject. Similarly, Virginia I. Perry interprets *A Delicate Balance*, Albee's next commercial success after *Who's Afraid*, as an uprooting of "ill-defined boundaries which separate sanity from madness" (Perry 55), and later plays such as *Seascape* were interpreted as a dramatization of Freudian principles, a conflict between the "desire for reality (order) and pleasure (chaos)," as Liam O. Purdon points out (Purdon 142). All of these tensions –sanity against madness, reality versus pleasure, civilization versus animal– run parallel to the cyborg divide that Haraway observes. However, there is a difference between literary works that graze the ideologies surrounding the cyborg and works that feature characters who embody the cyborg. These characters are often clearly noticeable and can contain many functions that either can disrupt the "normalities" or, on the other side of the spectrum, reinforce these normalities. This fluctuating role is what makes the cyborg ultimately disruptive through its very presence and oftentimes foments fear within the audience due to their inability to easily categorize the cyborg. Cyborgs, as Haraway asserts, *are* the boundaries as opposed to being closed off within a boundary.

Through an analysis of George's rhetoric, it becomes apparent that George perceives Nick to be one of these boundary breakers. Relying on more than just George's individual perspective, though, I will argue that Albee infused Nick with the ideologies of the cyborg in order to centralize *Who's Afraid* on the tension between human and animal. George, in many ways, exhibits the conflict that can be typically seen when facing the cyborg. On the one hand, he resists Nick because, on the surface level, he embodies the posthuman image, a "super-civilization" in which the human is all machine and has lost all "natural" qualities. On the other hand, George resists Martha because she is all organic, all animal, all human body.

Her hyper-sexualized performance paired with Nick's post-humanist role reveals the primary conflict for George throughout the course of the play and mirrors Jennifer Gonzalez's differentiation between these roles: "...an *organic* cyborg can be defined as a monster of multiple species, whereas a *mechanical* cyborg can be considered a techno-human amalgamation" (Gonzalez 268). Gonzalez's distinction between these two types of cyborgs is seen in Martha, the "monster," and, on the other side, with Nick, who George claims, "rearrange[s] the chromosomes" (177). Stuck in a world between fantasy and reality, George cannot compromise a balance between these two internal aspects of himself that are in conflict. This inability to balance these two conflicting yet intertwining selves allows Albee to present George as an ironic yet contradictory character. George is both a savage and an intellectual; he rationalizes yet desires to be without rationale; he feels entrapped by institutions yet reinforces hierarchies. George, in a nutshell, is not within boundaries but is constantly transgressing boundaries. C.W.E. Bigsby describes George well when he describes him as in a "suspended animation" (Bigsby 131). George continually strives to disembody, but this disembodying act proves to be a futile effort, and as a result he must further project his in-flux state onto elaborate, taxing fantasies.

Animal Studies and particularly cyborg theory can provide insight into George's unsettled state. Most importantly, applying cyborg theory to this play shows that Albee has a particular technique of decentering human privilege through juxtaposing characters with such extremely opposed functionalities and then collapsing these opposites. For example, in *Who's Afraid*, George and Nick appear to be so dissimilar down to every minute detail. George is humanities, Nick biology. George is old, Nick is young. George finds solace in fantasy, Nick is grounded in the concrete. These opposing traits work similar to how Jerry



and Peter differ so blatantly in *The Zoo Story*. However, the point of considering the cyborg is to show that Albee's play continually blurs boundaries, decenters opposing ideologies, and dismantles common Western World hierarchies, specifically the animal/human dichotomy. Albee's specific way of doing this in *Who's Afraid* is to use George as the hegemonic voice who, at the same time, is "caged" in because he has no real authentic self until the end of the play. Albee then, like in many of his plays, uses a doubling effect in order for competing discourses to collapse upon themselves. These discourses are cemented through George; to delve deeper into George's imbalance shows that he cannot fit the posthuman model that is actualized in Nick. George's embodied state leaves him alienated, which allows Albee to assert that the American Dream is an *unnatural* impossibility that is far from the reaches of the authentic human—the animal self.

More closely examining the language of George, one can see emerge a contradictory discourse on the physical body as a means towards an authentic self. This search for more an authentic self is what George aspires to through the course of the play, but ultimately finds to be a specious sign of self-fulfillment. The body, as Albee presents it in *Who's Afraid*, comes to dominate and even define the characters. For example, George is "paunchy" (189); Martha has a particularly masculine strength, as seen with the boxing story (190-191); Nick has a "firm body" (188); Honey is "slim-hipped" (179). Altogether, physical appearance transforms into how the characters judge or define the other characters, particularly George's belief that Nick presents a future threat to the autonomy of the individual. Because the body defines the characters so much in Albee's play, George's aspirations and perceived threat in Nick, with his perfect body, shows that George determines his place within society due to these traits. His aspiration towards challenging Nick forces George to compensate for his

bodily status below Nick, and as a result, the duration of the play shows George to be dominated by the rhetoric of the mechanical body. The cyborg, or the posthuman, conception becomes front and center to George's existence, and yet—it is an impossibility to ever achieve this physical prototype of a hypermasculine, genetically “superior” image like Nick's. Although the mind can be altered, the body certainly cannot be to great lengths, unless one is to consider the conception of the cyborg.

In other words, there arises an unclear difference between mind and body within George. Instead, he must rely upon his need to move outside the body in order to fulfill his dream of being *like* Nick. It is in this need to disembodiment that allows Albee to comment on how convoluted and rather superficial the American Dream has become. By presenting the American Dream as the posthuman model, Albee asserts that this “dream” is a hegemony which deceives individuals into the belief that ideal physicality is self-fulfillment. However, in actuality, if physicality is true self-fulfillment, even if it is at the loss of autonomy, then so too is the self further removed from its natural quality. The animal self then disappears because a mechanically-reproduced body, such as the cyborg, depends upon externalities to the body in order to improve the dignity of the individual. And while George aspires towards the posthuman, he also simultaneously fears its possibilities.

For example, this dependence upon the external body includes biogenetic engineering, a scientific endeavor that George accuses Nick of doing (and ultimately representing). Just after a few minutes of Nick and Honey arriving, George learns that Nick is in the Biology Department and proceeds with a long line of questioning about how Nick will “rearrange the chromosomes” in order “that everyone will be like everyone else” (178-179). Placing Nick within a discourse of the “test tube baby,” George expresses worry over

this futuristic possibility: “There will be a certain...loss of liberty, I imagine...Cultures and races will eventually vanish...the ants will take over the world....And I, naturally, am rather opposed to all this” (199). George perceives, as the anti-biogenetic argument usually goes, the loss of an autonomous self in the posthuman world. More so, George envisions this world as a place where intellect and culture lose their human quality. Interestingly enough, George says “naturally” to point out that the opposing side, the one that Nick represents, is unnatural. George’s fear is that Nick, the cyborg representation, will be a push towards moving away from humanness. George’s interpretation of humanness, though, has more to do with the human as a harmony between rationality and irrationality, especially when he says, “There will be order and constancy...and I am unalterably opposed to it” (199). The “multiplexicity...of history,” as George labels it, will dissolve. In other words, the human will be much further removed from a more primitive origin, a self in which “natural” impulse leads to unpredictability and thus autonomy.

All of this discussion surrounding the unnatural body, or the posthuman possibility, pervades *Who’s Afraid* and is symbolized through Nick and Honey. However, this was not the first time that Albee had explored the posthuman model. Looking back at his previous play, *The American Dream*, shows that Albee believes the American Dream to be best symbolized in the posthuman construction. *The American Dream*, like *Who’s Afraid*, is an absurdist play about the disillusionment surrounding the nuclear family and the American Dream. Towards the end of the play, the Grandma declares that the American Dream just walked through the front door (134). She is referring to the character of the Young Man, who has many parallels to Nick. For example, the Young Man is from the Midwest, all muscle in physical appearance, and objective in perspective when he says that he is unable to love

(139). Thus, the Young Man can be seen as an earlier version of Nick, but also a more absurd take on his character. The Young Man gives a long speech about how he is entrapped within his body, albeit a body that is replete of any animalistic desire: “I have no emotions. I have been drained, torn asunder...disemboweled. I have now, only my person...my body, my face....As I told you, I am incomplete...I can feel nothing” (139). Not only is there the suggestion that the Young Man borders on life and death, his hollowness and shell-like state imply that he is a machine. He cannot love and, more notably, has no sexual desire. He is a body without instinct, a machine without impulse, a shell without natural function (“disemboweled”).

Albee’s vision in the Young Man is, of course, a much more exaggerated version of Nick. However, establishing that there are parallels between the two characters allows scholars to see the inspiration or at least the ideologies underlying the character of Nick. While Nick does not appear to be unable to love, he still has many of the drawbacks that can be seen in the character of the Young Man. First, there is no real dimensionality to the character of Nick; he is solely perceived in terms of his “middleweight” body (189). Martha, in this way, makes him out to be a highly sensational object of hyper-sexuality. However, while Nick possesses this bodily appearance that has a sexual allure in addition to a hypermasculine look, he at the same time is a desexualized character. This is evidenced in the final act of the play after Martha and Nick supposedly fooled around; she labels him a “flop” to denote his sexual incompetency and goes on to comment that, “Oh my, there is sometimes very nice potential, but, oh my!” (276). The discrepancy between Nick’s bodily image and his actual “performance,” as Martha deems it, transforms Nick into a signifier of ambiguity. On the one hand, he is very human, but on the other he does not “perform” this

humanity to its most authentic level. Therefore, through the Young Man in *The American Dream* and Nick, Albee has tailored a representation of the American Dream as infused with a deliberate speciousness, which is ultimately wrought with an ironic twist: the human and the animal become simultaneously teathed out, yet blurred, within a character like Nick.

This is especially evident when examining the biogenetic discourse that George frames around Nick. Nick then does not only function as a literary symbol but also as a way for Albee to incorporate an ideological territory for George and Martha to respond to. Jennifer Gonzalez, in her article “Envisioning Cyborg Bodies: Notes from Current Research,” provides an insightful argument about how the cyborg body “implies a new spatial configuration or territory—a habitat” (Gonzalez 272). Furthermore, Gonzalez makes the argument that cyborgs represent “the multiple fears and desires of a culture caught in the process of transformation” (Gonzalez 267). In other words, the cyborg exists as both a hypothetical and historical symbol, an entity that dovetails the repressed anxieties of a culture in a particular historical moment with a vision, a projection, of what these anxieties will lead to. Gonzalez’s use of “habitat” then refers to how the cyborg can exist as a zone, a spatial surface, that allows for others to interpret this surface and project their own uncertainties upon this tableau. Much like Jerry does with the dog in *The Zoo Story*, the cyborg is much like unexplored land to be reckoned with. And this is exactly what George and Martha do with Nick. Their perceptions of this understated cyborgenic figure reveal that the rigid boundary between human and animal is a secure place but one that is ultimately reflective of a human inauthenticity.

George and Martha’s realization of this human inauthenticity does not come until the exorcism and the death of their imaginary child. Meanwhile, the rest of the play shows that

George aligns his existence with a desire to become Nick, yet slowly realizes the impossibility of the Nick-mold. This desire, in turn, fuels the conflict between George and Martha. More so, George's autobiographical story about a young man who kills his mother "without even an unconscious motivation" and then ends up institutionalized for the rest of his life is a metaphorical snapshot of George's own fear of living authentically. The protagonist of George's story, a boy of fifteen, begins with the boy's misuse of the word *bergin* for bourbon at a bar one night, which instantly causes everyone in the bar to start laughing manically, unable to stop. The story then transitions into how the boy got in a car accident, killing his father, to finally ending up in an asylum after the hospital "jammed a needle in his arm" (218). George's bizarre, and what later comes to be understood as an autobiographical story and influences how he kills off his imaginary son, leaves the audience with very little clue to its meaning and why he is telling the story. However, if one is to establish George as entrapped within a fantasy world, the story of an institutionalized boy represents the madness that George perceives within himself and more so the fear that if this madness were to erupt, he would be locked away and his humanness would be regulated. The "needle" convolutes the story the most, as it is unclear whether the boy was "insane" to begin with or if technological hegemony altered his consciousness. Here again, the boundary between the natural, internal impulses and the technologically-regulated self becomes blurred.

Moreover though, the story suggests that George feels that he is boxed into a corner, in that his desire to live out his authentic self is unacceptable to society's standards. Yet, the most salient detail comes right after the story, when George makes a comment about the "insane": "They don't change...they don't grow old....They maintain a firm-skinned

serenity...the...the under-use of everything leaves them...quite whole” (218-219). What is most important about George’s statement is that it reveals more about his perception of sanity than insanity. Through bodily imagery (“firm-skinned”), George relates sanity to a mechanical performance, moving parts that get constant “use” and force the individual to “grow.” In other words, George’s subtle metaphor of being deemed insane dovetails a mechanical language with the body. The parts of the body retain both a physical and a moral quality, serenity represented as skin, the inner organs as worn out parts. George’s story, just like his views on saneness, correspond to a tension between an inner desire for uncontrolled laughing, an id-like state where killing is driven by no rationale thought, versus an institution, a cultural repression, and a mechanical state of living. George’s narrative then reveals a much deeper conflict within himself, where he disembodies himself and perceives himself as an institutionalized boy.

There are other moments in which this body metaphor dominates George’s rhetoric, revealing how George places the body within a specific discourse, language that sketches the body as a mechanical device or as an external object. A prime example is when George, towards the end of the play, begins to realize his disillusioned life:

We all peel labels, sweetie; and when you get through the skin, all three layers, through the muscle, slosh aside the organs (*as aside to Nick*) them which is still sloshable—(*Back to Honey*) and get down to bone...When you get down to bone, you haven’t got all the way, yet. There’s something inside the bone...the marrow...and that’s what you gotta get at. (291-292)

George’s metaphor appears to be rather straightforward. However, a closer reading shows that this particular passage, a passage that many scholars have discussed, is fraught with

several unsettled tensions. Here again, George breaks the body down simplistically into three “layers” (or parts). This layering mimics the action of Honey’s statement that she was peeling the labels off of a liquor bottle. In addition to “peel[ing]” the skin away, “slosh” further extends the liquor bottle image, denoting a liquefied center. With subtlety, this image fuses the physical body with the disillusioning image of alcohol. Alcohol, which has dominated the play and obviously added to the disillusionment of George and Martha, transmute into the very being of the physical body. In other words, the body has lost its natural quality. Finally, George’s observation of “get[ting]” at the “marrow” shows that George is indeed perceiving a new function for the body. “Get[ting] at” implies travail, a laborious grinding away, and for George, his extended metaphor comes full circle, as the imagery of the liquor body, the body as a product, equates the most internal physical quality to be truth.

This passage obviously relates to the truth-illusion theme. Matthew Roudané articulates the meaning behind this passage well when he says, “the individual must explore the various levels of perception, from the surface to the deeper levels of consciousness and experience” (Roudané 53). Interestingly enough, Roudané’s connection of the passage to layers of consciousness further collapses the mind and body divide. Peeling away the layers of a physical bottle paired with peeling away the layers of the physical body transforms into an ideological dig into the mind and all at once, the discourse of the body becomes a search for truth. The ideology surrounding the cyborg, especially in its conception as a boundary disruption, concretizes in the rhetoric of George, particularly in his story and these two passages. For Animal Studies scholars, passages such as these, where an object—whether through language or imagery—become an extension of the body or amalgamates with the



body and exemplify a deeper uncertainty about the human-animal divide. In his landmark work, *Kinds of Minds*, Daniel Clement Dennett describes the phenomenon of *off-loading*, which entails humans “extruding our minds...into the surrounding world, where a host of peripheral devices we construct can store, process, and re-represent our meanings” and ultimately perfect our own modes of thinking. However, as Dennett saliently points out: “This widespread practice of off-loading releases us from the limitations of our animal brains” (Dennett 134-135). The prosthesis of our minds, “off-loading,” is a movement away from an animal self and a strive towards reckoning with our environment. Yet, it is important to note that moving outside the body is a form of disembodiment, a displacement from our animal selves, and often a way to repress more basic urges.

This “*off-loading*,” and a further display of George’s disembodied state, comes when he pulls a fake gun on Martha. Claire Virginia Eby recently wrote an article that explored gender as performative in *Who’s Afraid*, claiming that Albee “conceives of gender as less about biology than about assuming certain qualities” (Eby 604). Therefore, Eby argues that George’s toy gun exemplifies a “phallic impulse,” which successfully “establish[es] the primacy of imagination over biology” (605). Eby’s interpretation certainly acknowledges that the specious construction of gender pervades this particular scene, especially when Martha says to Nick, “No fake Jap gun for you, eh?” (195). However, I would like to expound on Eby’s argument and beg the question further; if one is to accept this scene as demonstrating gender as performance, why is a gun necessary to make this happen? Certainly, the phallic power behind the gun allows for George to establish a masculine dominance over Nick. However, it is a gun, a mechanical extension of George’s body, that transforms into a biological device, a sexual prosthesis. Although George does not use the gun for sex, he uses

the gun as a tool towards demarcating boundaries of biological power. So, therefore, I would agree with Eby's argument that George perceives a primacy of imagination in pulling the gun, but this does not mean that George does not believe imagination to trump biology. In fact, the mechanical symbolism of the "fake" gun shows that George is depending upon biological urges from Martha, the "fear" of power and the phallus. In other words, the performance of the gun depends upon staging the gun as a biological prosthesis of George's body.

This slight variation shows that Albee is absurdly toying around with the mechanical body image, which he has also done implicitly through George's literary imagination and language. The gun, more than anything, reflects George's need to depend upon an externality to assert a biological position of power. The cyborg-esque imagery of George's gun as a mechanical penis demonstrates that Albee is decentering a tension around the perceived power of technology and the posthuman versus the actual function of this biological extension. This is why making the gun into a fake toy prop allows for Albee to assert that the mechanical body, George's desire to externalize, is in fact an illusion. Thus, somebody like Nick, who embodies the cyborg image, turns out to be a specious image of sexuality as well. Most importantly, George's antic of pulling the fake gun on Martha is a success, causing everyone in the room to focus attention on him and even for Martha to say, "C'mon...give me a kiss" (193). Yet, there is nothing natural in George's biological extension, as Martha later points out. The unnatural methodologies of George's need to assert his animal state reflects how contradictory George's disillusionment really is. Nothing is more asserted in the image of the fake gun than how desperate George is and especially how separated he has

become from an actual animalistic behavior. The gun, in other words, yields a false sense of power, especially in connection with sexuality.

Thus, George's subtle imagery of the mechanical body, on the one hand, emphasizes how removed he is from his animal self. In the previous chapter, I showed that Martha's "improper" femininity caused her to be the object of George's speciesist reasoning and ultimately how his language reinforces hierarchical thinking as related to the animal. However, on the other hand, George cannot connect with an authentic self. His constant strive to disembodiment reflects an inward need to be freed from his embodied state and is probably why he depends upon intellect as his defense mechanism. Examining the discourse that he uses against Nick furthers this need, but his authenticity, as Albee presents it, is connected to his animal self. Peter Nesteruk interprets *Who's Afraid* as "a move towards the therapeutics of authenticity..." and goes on to argue that the ending of the play, the exorcism, symbolizes this authenticity being achieved through a communal ritual and Albee's imparting to the audience "their 'Other-side' as utopic potential and promise" (Nesteruk 45). Nesteruk, therefore, asserts that the authentic self is this "Other-side," a self that remains repressed or induces guilt within George and Martha. For the argument at hand, I am showing that the exorcism is not just a stripping away of illusion, as most scholars agree, but also a stripping away of the *unnatural*. If Martha and Nick are two sides of the cyborg phenomenon, George's exorcism is not a "cleansing" of illusion so much as a balance of these two worlds. This is most evidenced in the sacrificial act of the exorcism—the killing of the cyborg baby.

It would be a stretch to argue that Albee intentionally had the inclination of a "cyborg" baby in mind when writing the play. However, as I have been doing in this and

previous chapters, it is important to establish Albee's reliance upon the animal and his belief that the "animalistic" self equates to a much more authentic self. Likewise, Albee does this through not only disturbing boundaries that clearly demarcate the boundary between human and animal but also for incorporating specific overlapping discourses that collapse upon one another. For example, the "fake child" is only "fake" because the audience knows that the child is not "real" but rather an imaginative construction. This obvious statement demonstrates how simplistic terms such as fake and real are problematic in their usage because, for one, Martha and George really believe their child to be real. We, as the audience, can conclude this because George and Martha controlled its conception and death. Yet, on more metaphorical terms, when examining George's discourse of the posthuman, one can see parallels between Nick and George and Martha's fake child. On the one hand, George and Martha participate in a discourse of "perfecting" the baby's external qualities in order to make the "best" baby they can, a mindset that is closely intertwined with how George perceives Nick as "rearranging the chromosomes" (Albee 177). Additionally, the ambiguity over the baby being "real" or "fake" is a similar line of reasoning when it comes to the "natural" baby versus the "unnatural" baby. All of this ambiguous discourse comes back to Wolfe's definition of the posthuman as using a cultural prosthesis (the baby being imaginary) but also pervading the social networks that dovetail technology and the medical field (a connection between the fake baby and Nick). In conclusion, making Nick and Honey as the cyborgs allows for Albee to draw parallels between them and George and Martha. In turn, the killing of the baby brings up some interesting points concerning the "authentic" selves that George and Martha supposedly achieve at the end of the play.

George and Martha's fantasy child has always been a "make it or break it" detail for some spectators. For some, the fake child has been the demise of the play, an unnecessary and far-fetched detail that makes the whole experience seem futile. For example, Harold Taubman criticized this detail of the play in his 1962 review of the premiere, claiming "its falsity impairs the credibility of his central characters" (Taubman). Like Taubman, many followed suit that the fake child devalues the realism of George and Martha and, in its own way, makes them to look like truly "insane" people. Yet, the fake child (and his subsequent execution by George) has dominated the academic circles. Most scholars have approached the child as a literary device, an Aburdist symbol that pushes forward how disillusioned Americans have actually become. Other scholars have approached it with a more complex eye. For example, Michael Rutenberg, early on, argued that, "The only approach to an understanding of the child's place in the drama is to accept it as an effect and not a cause of the couple's predicament" (Rutenberg 104). Rutenberg's observation realigns the fake child with a much more deeply rooted "predicament," in which George and Martha *must* create a child due to other various problems or ideologies that have forced them to this situation. In other words, expanding on Rutenberg's comment, I would like to argue that the fake child is a cultural symbol that deconstructs humanness, and thus the human-animal boundary, through its very "unnatural" birth and death. The unnatural disposition to the symbol is what has caused many to dismiss it, but which allowed Albee to successfully push forward his goal of blurring the boundary between truth and reality, natural and unnatural, and finally the authentic, animalistic human self and the false, externalized inhuman self.

Throughout the course of the play, George and Martha "manipulate" physical traits of their fake son, a hearkening back to George's fear of the posthuman future. George, early on

in the play, establishes that his “chromosomological partnership” is his one certainty “in this whole sinking world” (202). Like Nick’s manipulation of genes in order to create order, George constructs his reality around the security of knowing that he created his son. In other words, the chromosomes dictate a firm sense of illusion for George. He goes on to say that this “chromosomological partnership” helped to “create” a “blond-eyed, blue-haired son” (202). George’s comment teeters on the edge of absurd, as no other characters seem to react to his confusion over mixing traits with the hair and the son’s eyes. On the one hand, this genetic mutation could be Albee’s way for slowly hinting at the child being fake; however, on the other hand, this could be interpreted as ironic because he expresses a security in the “chromosomological partnership,” although the son has a genetic “mutation.” While it is difficult to withdraw how deliberately Albee included these lines in order to emphasize the unnatural quality, there is a hint that their intentions for their son to be blue-eyed and blonde-haired, the prototypical Nick, is a specious illusion. This phrase then reveals George’s intention to base his own pride and security within a genetically superior child and yet, at the same time, this reveals just another specious element to George and Martha’s fantasy world.

There emerge several other incidents where this genetic blurring occurs and further confuses the boundary between George’s perceived ideology of the posthuman and George’s adamant resistance to this ideology. Martha partakes in this genetic discourse as well. For example, just after George’s comment about a blue-haired son, Martha corrects him and tells Nick and Honey that their son has green eyes. However, George insists the son’s eyes to be blue and Martha finally snaps: “GREEN!...they’re real green...deep, pure green eyes...like mine” (204). Martha’s description not only reflects the biogenetic engineering discourse that George brought up earlier through her need to emphasize the “purity” and “real” of the green

eyes but also she insists that her son looks more like her, instead of like George who has blue eyes. Essentially, the genetic makeup of their son, especially his outward appearance, becomes a space for them to continually reconstruct their son's supposed betterment. However, this "betterment" runs hand-in-hand with George's belief that Nick represents the "super-civilization." Martha, for example, just as the exorcism starts in Act III, emphasizes the pure-bred quality of her son, pointing out again that his eyes were so green that they were bronze and, moreover, that his hair turned "fleece" in the sun (297). Martha's vision of her son, who is a construction of her imagination, is grandiose, a perfected bronze-eyed, fleece-haired purity. The genetic discourse of these few brief moments emerges with subtlety, but it ultimately shows that George and Martha aspire to have a genetically perfect son who fits a similar role to the posthuman that George describes Nick as.

This loose connection between their son and the posthuman model, however, is cemented in the very fact that their son was conceived in their imaginations. And from this very point alone, the fake son is open to the interpretation of being an artificial "creation" as opposed to an act of nature. This difference is absolutely salient when considering how Albee's play conjures up questions about the slight variations in the natural and the unnatural self, such as represented in Jerry and Peter in *The Zoo Story*. It could be argued then that Albee presents characters on stage that are so removed from themselves or so disillusioned due to dominant hierarchies that they do not know what it is to be human, whether this is a humanism that is more primitive in nature or a humanism that aspires to be above humanism, such as the posthuman. James Kastely, in his article entitled "Some Things Are Sad, Though: Accident in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*," similarly argues that George and Martha attempt to control their fates through the power of narrative, but to no avail. Kastely, more

specifically, examines their “childlessness...[as] a fact over which they have no control, so their life is, at a fundamental level, determined by a capriciously uncooperative nature” (Kastely 45). Kastely’s argument that the child, like the American Dream, has become a dehumanizing tool to control a universe that is uncontrollable reinforces their son as the most unnatural of creations. In other words, Albee plays with the concept of nature versus eschewing nature’s “laws”; George and Martha try to write their own rules. This is why, subsequent to killing the fake child, George declares, “I’m not a god. I don’t have the power over life and death, do I?” (306). Once the unnatural baby is exorcised, George finally acknowledges that their fake child was, as Kastely asserts, a way to overcome nature.

However, certainly beforehand, George does everything he can to control nature, and in this, Albee is asserting how the unnatural drives of his characters perpetuates the most illusion in their lives. For example, in Act III, George and Martha’s strange dispute about the appearance of the moon uproots a discourse of women’s menstruation periods. George insists, “...the moon may very well have gone down...but it came back.” Martha rebukes angrily: “The moon does *not* come back up; when the moon has gone down it stays down” (283). George disputes the *natural* life cycle, especially connected to a woman’s monthly cycle, and in turn, this shows that George is beyond constructing the universe around his own laws—he is creating laws that regulate Martha and emanate with a god-like power. The image of the moon going “down” and then back “up” also mirrors Honey’s hysterical pregnancy, which Nick describes as, “She blew up, and then she went down” (216). The “slim-hipped” Honey, therefore, reinforces this imagery of the moon, a comment on the unnatural body and how the mind has come to manipulate natural cycles. Thus, the death of the boy, interestingly enough, hinges upon the fact of a natural accident. While driving his



car, the boy “swerved to avoid a porcupine, and drove straight into a...” (304). George does not finish his statement, but as the audience already knows, their fake son, like George (maybe?), comes to face reality through nature’s assertion of its power over humans. The natural element, and the role of powerlessness, show that Albee constructs his plots around a return to a natural element, a more authentic self, and realizing that nature possesses power over the individual, as much as this individual tries to repress or reform this “Other-side.” The exorcism then becomes a return to nature while the American Dream model is ultimately constructed as possessing the hegemonic power to enforce unnatural limits, “cages.”

Thinking about the exorcism in terms of a primitive ritual, a return towards “origins,” dissolves any sense of progress that the American Dream was supposed to signify. The symbolism of the exorcism can be clearly seen in George’s utterances of Latin while Martha reflects on the fantasy boy’s existence and presents this imagery of an exorcism as a cleansing process. Presenting the “perfect” child as a botched, overambitious creation of George and Martha, Albee then could allow the symbol of exorcism to penetrate American minds with symbols of renewal, new beginnings, and extrapolation of demons. However, the moral charge connected to the exorcism symbol and imagery further emphasizes that Albee presents George and Martha’s renewal, their elimination of the American Dream, as a form of moral superiority. Albee’s incorporation, otherwise, of the exorcism shows that the Animal Self, the “Other-side,” is still tainted with the self of superiority. Hierarchies do not necessarily dissolve but are repressed. Nesteruk echoes this criticism too, claiming that the cleansing imagery of the exorcism, especially considering how George exorcises Martha, is a “coercion” rather than a “self-reconstruction” of Martha. “Liberation appears to be imposed” (Nesteruk 46). While this animal self still seems imposed by George, Martha’s “howl” after

the death of her fake son shows that a more animal self has been released. Thus, while Albee's symbolism may be problematic, his intentions of showing the authentic self to be more in line with a natural, more animal-based self is clearly visible.

Nevertheless, as I have established, Albee utilizes the mere presence of a posthuman figure like Nick to instigate a long discussion from George about the unnatural aspirations connected to the American Dream. George envisioned in Nick, as if he were a cultural artifact, a fear of an unnatural race of men. At the same time, George's discourse on the body reveals a desire to evade the body, revealing that George's cultural milieu harbors a restricting ideology about physical perfection as self-fulfillment. Subsequently, the boundaries between mind and body become blurred in the play, but more so raises questions about what is natural and what is unnatural. At the juncture when George performs the exorcism on Martha and sacrifices the baby, the play comes full circle to show that Albee presents the posthuman as a way for George to aspire towards a model of "creating" a universe in which he no longer remains embodied. The exorcism then becomes a natural cleansing and a return to a more authentic self. George, after purging the American Dream, can see himself as embodied and truly as a human, a more "natural" human.

### Conclusion:

#### Albee's Theatrical Play on the Fear of the Animal

In 2004, Una Chaudhuri, a New York University professor, wrote a compelling article for *American Theatre* entitled “Animal Acts for Changing Times,” in which she argued that the theatre has always been an artistic medium that has raised questions about the boundary between human and animal. With a subtitle that reads, “When does the non-human become more than a metaphor on stage?,” her article not only points out that postmodern works of drama have latched on to the animal theme but also she makes an interesting point about why this may be so:

To be willing to imaginatively enter into an animal being, while acknowledging its radical unknowability, is to let go of political and psychological certainties, to question the assumption of human superiority, and so also to dislodge the systems of preference and privilege that sustain oppressive social distinctions based on race, class, gender and nation. (Chaudhuri 39)

Animal transformation is a way to collapse the Subject/Other binary and escape the boundaries, albeit oppressive ones, that are imposed on the human body whether it is race, gender, sexuality, etc. As Chaudhuri observes, the function of the animal in dramatic works runs far deeper than just a metaphorical one: to “imaginatively enter” an animal is a mode of survival, an antidote to heal a fractured subjectivity, or sometimes a plea for evading oppressive systems. In other words, the animal in itself has the potential power to subvert the invisible systems of power that govern an individual's everyday life.

Chaudhuri's observation bears wisdom to the fact that animals, when more closely considered, are inherently transgressive to humans' “systems of preference and privilege.”

Because of this then, animals are also inherently dramatic and oftentimes frightening. It is not so much that animals induce fear because they are life threatening to the human species. On the contrary, animals represent a consciousness that is so foreign, the animal causes the Subject to see how boundaries of security are in fact illusions, misnomers. Derrida comments on this idea through his published lectures known as “The Animal That Therefore I Am.” Derrida analyzes the embarrassment of being naked in front of an animal, this shame deriving from the animal’s gaze. He comments on nakedness altogether, claiming that humans must use clothing to cover up their “sex,” while animals do not have “knowledge of their nudity, in short, without consciousness of good and evil” (5). Derrida’s proposed theories are interesting because he highlights that animals have the potential to raise consciousness about a human’s moral shame, whatever “shame” this may be. Thus, the gaze of an animal –frequently expressed in Albee’s plays– can be an insightful moment, whether conscious or unconscious for the character; it contains the potential to heighten shame for the individual, especially in relation to his or her “normalcy” or queerness.

Thus, questioning the human-animal boundary not only generates a dramatic effect for audiences and, in some cases, an appalled response but also the animal unravels the certainties of the audiences’ “civilized” lives. *Who’s Afraid*, as seen in Chapter 1, shocked audiences and critics, tossing up a dirt storm of uncertainty in which academics sought a way to “fit” the play into the American drama canon. Certainly, the ardent response was present, but to fully rationalize this response was a whole different matter. However, *Who’s Afraid*, unlike other of Albee’s plays, uniquely dramatized the animal onstage: by not presenting an actual animal on stage but showing how animals structure our consciousness in dark and often disturbing ways. By dismantling the hierarchies connected to the human privilege (the

illusion that we have “power” over non-human animals), *Who’s Afraid* went on to present the various shades of meaning behind what it means to be human, particularly the human animal. Oftentimes, as I have shown, the animal as a symbol, as an Other, as another half of our self, determines how we communicate and how we establish particular hierarchies or systems of power within given societies. *Who’s Afraid* brought these ideologies to life, showing how living within and under society yields an alienation or divide within ourselves from a more liberated, animalistic self. Societal “models” such as the American Dream restrict rather than set Americans free—this was not a message that people wanted to hear in the early 60s.

*Who’s Afraid*, then, “got at” the “marrow” (as George says) of the disillusionment surrounding the Cold War American family. Guy Oakes, in his book *Imaginary War*, provides a thorough analysis of how, during the 50s especially, the rigid, unwavering nuclear family was perceived to bolster defense against the Soviets and the possible threat of nuclear war. Oakes explains, “the family would serve as a tactical unit,” in which their duties such as “housework and house management, which had been purely domestic responsibilities, would become civic obligations.” These “civic obligations,” according to Oakes, were built on “the virtues of the early American republic and the old ties of family and community life” (Oakes 113, 131). Thus, George’s premonitory comment at the end of Act II, after which Martha and George declare “total war” on one another, ““And the west, encumbered by crippling alliances...must...eventually fall”” dissolves these ideologies of American household stability and thus penetrates American audiences’ imaginations with visions of nuclear holocaust (Albee 261, 272). Interestingly enough, subsequent to this comment, Albee indicates in the stage directions that George lets out a “part growl, part howl,” a subtle indication that George is accessing a more animalistic side of his personality, which will

concretize in the exorcism ritual. Thus, the true horror of the play is witnessing people like George and Martha (ironically, the names of the first U.S. President and First Lady), who are supposed to represent typical upper middle-class America, “go at each other like animals,” as Nick says, and tear down the comfortable belief that the family is a source of protection. Instead, Albee begs the question: how are Americans so superior when in actuality they are divided among themselves?

Albee challenged traditional perceptions of the domestic “stronghold,” incorporating images and moments of wildness, savagery, and animalistic behavior to debunk Cold War propaganda tactics and rhetoric. Even Albee’s vision of the set echoes this intention. Using production notes, interviews, and other exchanges between Albee and Alan Schneider, Rakesh Harold Solomon, in his book *Albee in Performance*, provides a detailed chapter about how Albee envisioned *Who’s Afraid* on stage. Albee insisted on the 1962 set exuding the appearance of a “womb or cave” (qtd from Solomon 120). Even for the 1990 production at Alley Theatre, which Albee directed himself, his set depended upon a lighting that “extend[ed] and accentuate[d] a dark circumference,” creating an illusion quite similar to a cave, as Solomon observes (Solomon 121). In just mere appearance, the domestic space of George and Martha contained a claustrophobic, cage-like feel, a double image of not only the home as a restrictive space, but also a space in which animals or more primitive *homo sapiens* are dwelling. More so, the “dark circumference” extended the metaphor of the animal self, a very real fear that we as humans all contain an animal self within us that is always lurking at the edges, whether we realize it or not.

This lurking darkness paves the way for actors and actresses to stress the domestic sphere as a locale of uncertainty. For example, Martha’s monologue at the beginning of Act

III allows for the director and actress to bring attention to the emptiness of the home, an unkind habitat that an individual would find in an uncivilized environment. Martha says, “Hey, hey...Where is everybody?...Deserted! Abandon-ed! Left out in the cold like an old pussycat” (273). Her monologue has a certain facetious edge to it, as Albee indicates in the stage directions. However, as her monologue progresses, these images of a cat “left out in the cold” start to make one wonder how truly abandoned Martha feels when she begins to repeat the words, “clink” to herself, with no response from anybody else (Albee 274). Nevertheless, showcasing the home as a probable space of insecurity demonstrates that Albee aimed to infuse his text with a performative potential that tore down the illusion of the home as a stronghold and moral bedrock. As seen in these instances, when characters feel abandoned, the boundary between human and animal dissolves, or is at least questioned.

Albee’s text then yielded performative opportunities to blur lines between the animalistic self and the “civilized” self; it is no wonder that American audiences had an ardent response, especially considering the palpable political atmosphere during the early 60s. Nevertheless, *Who’s Afraid* instigated strong responses more than just because of its attack on American ideals and Cold War rhetoric. As Matthew Roudané points out, “Albee altered the aesthetic background of defining nationhood with a dissenting voice of genuine theatrical and cultural power” (Roudané 43). His playtext, in other words, pushed forward horror through “theatrical...power,” meaning that Albee’s play did not preach the ideals of a declining nationhood but instead infused these disillusioned ideals within compelling characters. This point has contradicted what many scholars and critics have said, particularly C.W.E. Bigsby’s comment that Albee’s “figures are incomplete...hollow” (Bigsby 147). However, Bigsby’s comment can be justified when considering the teleological aims of

Albee's play, characters who reach down past their subjectivity and grasp for an animalistic or primitive state. As I have shown in this thesis, this technique is what made Albee's play such a compelling and befuddling experience. If subjectivity dissolves and humanness is questioned, then how can audiences connect to the characters? They do not so much, depending upon the viewer. The point is that George and Martha were deemed "vulgar" because they seemed so disconnected with the actual family. And yet—the theatricality hypnosis of their "performances," their "artifice" as Bigsby says, derives from a state that audiences knew existed within everyone, and this is precisely why Albee utilized the animal as a way to alienate and yet relate characters like George and Martha to his audience.

For the future of Animal Studies scholars, particularly those who examine theatrical or performative works, further questions can be asked about how the symbolic and/or the real animal contains a particular affect within performance. I have interpreted Albee's text only through the words on the page and delved—quite ironically—into the intellectual mind in order to ask questions about the performative possibilities within Albee's playtext. For example, highlighting how Albee's text is inherently deconstructive and hinges upon questions about the animal versus the civilized self can provide insight for performers and directors who want to extract the most emotional punch from the "lifeless" words on the page. Michael Peterson explores this very issue in his article, "The Animal Apparatus." For Peterson, the Animal Apparatus, whether this is the animal constructed through language or the appearance of an actual animal on stage, must be examined through a metatheatrical lens because this perspective will lead to questions of "how nonhuman animals are made part of the means of theatrical production but also how performance can produce the concepts of 'animal' or 'animality'" (34). Peterson centers his argument on exploring the ethical



implications of how animality gets “reduced to a sign” with no function but “expense and inconvenience.” Peterson calls for a more complex eye towards nonhuman subjectivity and points out how the animal as a cultural symbol induces a subset of specific hierarchies, fears, empowerment, etc within the spectator’s mind. In other words, the animal is not a “text,” unless an individual exerts considerable effort to make it so, Peterson points out (Peterson 43).

Echoing Peterson, I have drawn a similar conclusion by examining Albee’s specific usage of “animality” in *Who’s Afraid*. Animality is a general signifier for classifying and oftentimes alienating individuals. It would be ludicrous to claim that works such as *The Zoo Story* and *Who’s Afraid* promote animal rights. Instead, as I showed in the introduction, Albee simultaneously uses animality as a signifier of human oppression or human Otherness in order to emphasize the societal condition of some characters. Furthermore, Albee utilized the hierarchies that entrap animals in order to yield a particular emotional affect upon his audience, specifically fear, insecurity, shock, etc. when these hierarchies are disrupted. With *Who’s Afraid*, Albee in no way made an attempt to make animality into a comfortable, albeit feel-good emotion. Instead, he played off of the assumptions connected to animality, specifically humans who exhibit animal-like behavior or should be deemed animals because of “improper” behavior; in other words, Albee allowed these animalistic urges to become a window into empowerment or freedom from the societal strictures placed upon the human body. The question of the animal, as Albee presents it in *Who’s Afraid*, has more to do with how animality is both a discourse feature and a repressed state of being. In either case, the animal does not generate order or peace, but inherently foments disorder, uncertainty, and insecurity in Albee’s plays; Albee conveyed these emotions in order to produce a shock value

within the audience and to coerce the audience into asking more in-depth questions about how removed they may be from their authentic selves.

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