

العقم في مسرحية من يخاف من فيرجينيا ووف؟ لأدورد البي

Sterility in Edward Albee's Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf?

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المستخلص

تعالج هذه الدراسة مسرحية من يخاف من فيرجينيا ووف؟ لألي حيث خلقت حقيقة عقم الزوجين طفل وهمي. تبين المسرحية ان مواجهة الحقيقة قد ساعدت الزوجين على بناء زواجهم على اساس جديد.

Abstract

The present study deals with Edward Albee's Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf? where sterile reality creates an illusory child. It shows confrontation with reality that helps the characters to rebuild their marriage on a new basis.

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Introduction

After the Second World War, a feeling of deep disillusionment and loss in the meaning of life has been characteristic of countries like France and Britain. In the United States, there has been no corresponding feeling. The American dream of good life is still very powerful and the belief in progress that characterized Europe in the nineteenth century is maintained into the middle of the twentieth century in America.²

In America, during the 1950's, the importance of a happy family is emphasized by both politicians and popular culture. Many Americans measure happiness and success by having one's own house, car, wife and kids. According to these measures, the 1950's is a stable, productive time for the United States of America. Yet, these measures often cover real problems which will eventually emerge in many communities.

It is this truth beneath the phony exterior that Edward Albee tries to reveal in his plays.³ He describes his works as:

An examination of the American scene, an attack on the substitution of artificial for real values in our society, a condemnation of complacency, cruelty, and emasculation and vacuity, a stand against the fiction that everything in this slipping land of ours is peachy-keen.⁴

Albee attacks the very foundations of American optimism and the false standards of the American society like physical fitness, progress and faith in the national mission. He also probes deeply the sentimental ideals of family life to prove their fakery.⁵ Thus, many of his plays are overrun with unhappy families whose members are "devouring mothers, castrating wives, and remote husbands."⁶ Therefore, Albee's concept of marriage is no more than domestic warfare.

Sterility in Edward Albee's Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf?

Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf? is concerned with two couples, George, Martha, Nick and Honey. The events of the play take place in a small New England College. The scene is the living room of George, a history professor,

²- Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (London: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 311.

³- Cecilia Liu, "Modern and Contemporary U. S. Drama: Albee: Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?", 5 Nov. 2002 (file:// A:\ Albee Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? htm.), 5 Feb. 2003.

⁴- Ibid.

⁵- Esslin, p. 312.

⁶- Geoff Cowper Smith, "The War of the Women", 9 Sept. 2002. (file: \\ A: \ S2\ Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? htm.) 5 Feb. 2003.

who has been married for over twenty years to Martha, the daughter of the college's president. One night, George and Martha receive Nick and Honey, a biology professor and his wife, in their house. The two couples stay up drinking after a party given by the president of university to the teaching staff. It is through the events of the night the play moves towards exposing the black and fearful realities underlying both marriages. Albee uses "each married couple to catalyse the relationship of the other."⁷

That is to say, each married couple acts as a sort of touchstone to the other. Before the night is over, there are self-revelations for all the characters. These revelations bring to light their inability to arrange their "private... [lives] so as to inhibit ... [their] self –destructive compulsions."⁸

George and Martha are the characters whose marriage is the main subject of the play. In common with Nick and Honey, their marriage is built upon debilitated foundations that are about to crack and lead to the destruction of their marriage. Their comfortable house with door chimes, portable bar and a permanent supply of liquor on hand is, in fact, the residence of frustrated husband and wife. Martha describes the living room as a "dump."⁹ It seems that her dissatisfaction with her marriage influences her opinion about everything around her.

We learn that Martha marries George because she and her father see in him a successor to the presidential chair, but George proves to be inadequate for the role she and her father have planned for him. George informs Nick about his failure in this respect, saying that "I did run the History Department, for four years during the war, but that was because everybody was away. Then ... everybody came back."¹⁰ It is evident that only the absence of the others due to the war gives George the chance to be the head of the history department. He loses this position after their coming back because he lacks efficiency. Hence, it is impossible for a man who fails to run a department to run a university. It is worth mentioning that Martha is closely attached to her father and admires his professional success. Talking affectionately about her relationship with her father, she says:

Mommy died early, see, and I sort of grew up with
Daddy... I admired that guy I worshipped him. I
absolutely worshipped him. I still do. And he was

⁷ - Ronald Hayman, *Contemporary Playwrights: Edward Albee* (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1971), p. 30.

⁸ - Howard Taubman, "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?: Dramatist's First Play on Broadway Opens" in *On Stage: Selected Theatre Reviews from the New York Times 1920- 1970*, eds. Bernard Beckerman and Howard Siegman (New York: The New York Time Company, 1973), p. 447.

⁹ - Edward Albee, *Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (New York: McClelland, 1962), p. 3.

¹⁰ - *Who is Afraid?*, p. 38.

Pretty fond of me, too... Daddy built this college...
 He built it up from what it was. It's his whole life.
 He is the college... [and] the college is him. You
 know what the endowment was... and what is
 now?¹¹

Martha tries to make George another copy of her father. She does not aspire to lose her prestige in the college. She wants her title to be changed from the daughter of the college's president to the wife of the college's president. Martha cannot achieve professional success by herself, therefore she wants George to achieve it for her. But, George falls short of her expectations. George does not meet the minimum standards for a husband that are set by society. Thomas E. Proter demonstrates that "the conventional image demands that the husband be [a] breadwinner... [and] a practical man of affairs."¹² As a result, Martha pays George no respect and is convinced that her father is superior to him. Martha invites Honey and Nick to join them in a party without informing George. She does so because her father tells her that they should be nice to the newly appointed teacher and his wife. Martha always springs things on George. This shows the dominance of her father over their lives. It also indicates that George lives in his house as a figurehead. Throughout the play, Martha tries to show Honey and Nick the huge gap between her father and George. She tells them that her father "knows how to run things."¹³

Commenting on George's failure at his job, she says "he didn't have any... personality, you know what I mean? Which was disappointing to Daddy, as you can imagine. So, here I am stuck with this flop."¹⁴ Martha feels that George has abandoned his responsibility as the dominant figure in the household. In consequence to that, she believes that her family will collapse without her strict and overweening rule. Therefore, she endlessly battles with her husband in order to maintain control and the upper hand in the leadership of her family.¹⁵ Thus, Martha is "unpleasant parody of the independent and aggressive American female."¹⁶ The image of the dominant assertive wife is a recurrent image in Albee's plays. Commenting on this image, Geof Cowper-Smith states that:

As hateful, and vengeful these women act though,
 they really do have a strange kind of "love" for their
 men. Albee portrays this love not so much as intense

¹¹ - Ibid., pp. 77- 78.

¹² - Thomas E. Porter, *Myth and Modern American Drama* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1969), p. 229.

¹³ - *Who is Afraid?*, p. 27

¹⁴ - Ibid. p. 85.

¹⁵ - Cowper Smith, Internet.

¹⁶ - Porter, 229.

feelings of sexual desire or fondness, but more so of an underlying need for their [husbands'] companions. ... support... and to be someone they can direct their energy towards. They would be left with little without their Men.¹⁷

Accordingly, Albee represents a deformed kind of love in *Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*. Martha's love for George is coated with disrespect. Disrespect makes love lose its meaning. Martha blames George for her disappointment, in their marriage. She neglects the fact that husband and wife should share half the responsibility of making their marriage a successful one. For that reason she decides to put George into an "inferno of emotional torture."¹⁸ She turns their marriage into a battle. One of Martha's weapons in her emotional combat against George is humiliation. She stamps him with the stigma of failure and puts his points of weakness under the microscope. She presents him to the guests as a failure as a husband and as a professional man. When Nick and Honey arrive, they find themselves in the middle of warzone where George and Martha exchange insults without trying to moderate their behaviours and be civil around their company. Martha uses Nick to arouse George's jealousy. She describes him as the good looking blonde man. Evidently, she finds him more attractive than her husband whom she deems an unfruitful person. She also changes her clothes into something more attractive. Something she rarely does according to George. That is to say she "is not changing for ... [George]. Martha hasn't change for ... [him] in years."¹⁹ She flatters Nick for his success in receiving his master's degree at an early age and shows her admiration of his abilities as a quarterback and a boxer. She develops this admiration of athleticism into flattery of his "pretty good body."²⁰ On the other hand, she tells of how twenty years ago, her father has attempted a physical fitness programme for his faculty and asked George to put on the gloves with him. George has refused, but Martha has sneaked up behind him and knocked him down. This story shows George in a sarcastic light. Hence, Martha destroys George emotionally to keep her power over him. Her cruelty is so strong and overwhelming that pushes George to joke about killing her. He pretends that he wants to kill her with a gun that appears to be a fake one.

As Nick leaves the room, Honey asks him not to bring guns with him. Martha intrudes in the conversation suggesting that Nick does not need any "fake... gun"²¹.

¹⁷- Cowper Smith, Internet.

¹⁸- Amacher, p. 92.

¹⁹- *Who is Afraid?*, p. 46.

²⁰- *Ibid.*, p. 52.

²¹- *Ibid.*, p. 61.

Her suggestion implies that she feels that George is sexually impotent in comparison to the younger Nick. Furthermore, she thinks that it is good for Nick to be in the biology department. Biology has physical and sexual contents that appeal to her. This indicate that she considers Nick “an object of sexual desire.”²² Martha, like the rest of the university staff, seeks immoral adventures. George tells Nick that “musical beds is the faculty sport around here.”²³ Clearly, the atmosphere of New Carthage lacks the moral restraints that might prevent a discontented wife like Martha from restoring to immoral behaviour.

It is noticeable that the moral decadence of the town is suggested by its name. New Carthage is an ironic comment on the comparison between the American and the Roman civilizations. The inhabitants of the American New Charthage, like those of Roman Carthago, are in process of destroying themselves from within. The enemies of the town are its occupants.²⁴

The two sterile couples are samples of the sterile community of New Carthage. In its turn, New Carthage is a paradigm of America. Albee presents childlessness as an outcome of emotional, moral and spiritual sterility both in the two couples' lives as individuals and in society as a whole. Sterility also indicates the break- down of real communication between husband and wife. The theme of the lack of communication among individuals is tackled by Albee in many of his plays. Jerry, the protagonist of *The Zoo Story*, says “we neither love nor hurt because we do not try to reach each other.”²⁵ George and Martha can not reach each other through love because the materialism and false values of New Carthage make it impossible for love to be a source of communion. Thus, their love is turned into destructive, sado-masochistic relationship. They try to reach each other through hurting each other. Their love takes the shape of hatred. Albee “seems to indicate that love can quickly transform into hatred.”²⁶ This echoes Anderson in Shaw's *The Devil Disciple* who says that it is surprising “to find how like hate is to love.”²⁷ Both George and Martha are interested in continuing their love-hate relationship, the fun and games of their “exercising [and their] walking what's left of ... [their] wits,”²⁸ as George describes their quarrel. The reason why they connect to each other by these games is that they are afraid to communicate in a sincere way. They hide their true emotions and do not admit that they need each other. Their attempts to reach each other

²²- Amacher, p. 89.

²³- *Who is Afraid?*, p. 34.

²⁴- Porter, p. 227.

²⁵- Edward Albee. *The Zoo Story in 20th. Century Drama*, eds. Ruby Cohn and Bernard Dukore (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 668.

²⁶- Liu, Internet.

²⁷- G. B. Shaw, *The Devil's Disciple* (London: Longmans, 1966), p. 51

²⁸- *Who is Afraid?*, p. 50.

through the games strengthen the troubles of marriage, namely, jealousy, pride, anger, hatred, bestiality, frustration, defeat and despair²⁹ and make them creep into the core of their marriage.

George and Martha are unable to face their sterile reality, therefore, they create an imaginary child to provide them with a common meeting ground. The illusory child and the games provide George and Martha with the refuge they “take when the unreality of the world weighs too heavy on... [their] tiny heads.”³⁰

They agree that they should not reveal the secret of the fantasy child that they could never have. But, Martha breaks their agreement and tells Honey about the child. This shows that Martha is eager to tell everybody that she is a mother. She forces George to support this illusion.

George and Martha use Nick and Honey as means for expressing their own sides of their mutual story. Each tries to represent himself/herself as a good parent and blames the other for the son's sickness. George accuses Martha of behaving immorally with their son. Martha claims that George is the source of their son's unhappiness. Albee seems to hint that even if they have had a son, he would not have been happy. Besides, each one of them has a different account about the ease of birth and the child's colour of the eyes. While Martha claims that “it was an easy birth.... [George alleges that Martha] labored.”³¹ Whereas George says that their child “has blue eyes.... [Martha insists that] he has the loveliest green eyes.”³² Thus, a real child is supposed to bring his parents together, but the dream of one that they have created is tearing them apart. In fact, even a real child can not bring his parents together, unless their relationship is based on respect and understanding.

George and Martha have escapist characters. They drink heavily to forget their problems. Alcohol is one of the means that are used by them to avoid sincere communication because it will lead to the revelation of the truth about themselves. They want to escape from the world of truth to a world of illusions. This is also asserted by the title of the play, *Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*. The title comes from changing the words of the children's song, “Who is Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?” Which comes up as a joke in Martha's father's party. The change of ‘the big bad wolf’ to ‘Virginia Woolf’ is important.³³ In her writing, “Virginia Woolf attempts to reveal the truth of human experience, emotions and thought: all of the things that the couples in this play try to cover up.”³⁴ The couples sing the song together to make fun of their own fear of the truth.

²⁹- Amacher, p. 101.

³⁰- *Who is Afraid?*, pp. 187- 188.

³¹- *Ibid.*, p. 217.

³²- *Ibid.*, pp. 74- 75.

³³- Liu, Internet.

³⁴- *Ibid.*

Sometimes, George uses the song to stop Martha from revealing truth about himself or to tease her hiding from the truth behind an affair with Nick.

Concerning Nick and Honey, their sterility is by Honey's deliberate choice. She does not want to be a mother because she is afraid of the pain of childbirth. Their sterility is the offspring of Honey's selfishness and Nick's lust for power, success and money. We know that Honey tricks Nick into marriage by telling him that she is pregnant. Then, it turns to be a false, hysterical pregnancy. Nick admits that he marries her because she has inherited a fortune from her father. Nick is a true representative of a community in which money has become the ultimate touchstone of all other values including love, religion and marriage.

In *Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, marriage is a matter of expediency. It is the occasion of vivid antagonism, a highway to success and an opportunity for sexual fun and games.³⁵ Nick is unfaithful to Honey, especially in the interest of his professional success and "his relationship with Honey is an excellent barometer of his relationship with the rest of the world."³⁶

He admits that he is ready to make affairs with "a few pertinent wives"³⁷ on campus whose influence might serve his ambition and help him to establish himself in Carthage.

Being the daughter of the president of the university, Martha is "the biggest goose in gangle,"³⁸ as Nick describes her.

The events of the night and Nick's conversation with George help the audience to explore Nick's real personality. At the beginning of the play, Nick behaves politely in the face of George's unwelcoming reception and Honey's embarrassing behaviours. He gives the impression that he is a promising young man who is modest about his achievements in athleticism and in his profession. He tells George that he does not want to be involved in George and Martha's marital problems. As a matter of fact, he wants to keep a safe distance between him and the others to avoid the exposition of his real character. It is revealed that he is an opportunist who is ready to use cheap means to achieve his goals. The audience is introduced to two kinds of sterility physical sterility like that of George and moral one like that of Nick. George warns Nick about the danger of climbing the social ladder by adultery, but Nick does not listen to George's advice. In one of his longest speeches in the play, George laments the fact that after trying to construct a noble civilization out of mankind, all of the structures will definitely crumble in the hands of others, that is, the Nicks:

³⁵- Porter, p. 230.

³⁶- Anne Paolucci, *From Tension to Tonic: The Plays of Edward Albee* (London: Feffer and Simons, 1972), p. 50.

³⁷- *Who is Afraid?*, p. 112.

³⁸- *Ibid.*, p. 114.

You take the trouble to construct a civilization ... to build a society, based on the principles of ... you endeavor to make communicable sense out of natural order morality out of unnatural disorder of man's mind... you make government and art, and realize that they are, must be, both the same...you bring things to the saddest of all points... where there is something to lose.³⁹

George is Albee's mouthpiece in this play. He is more intellectual than the other characters and a good observer of the defects of his society. He is aware that social conventions and euphemistic language serve as masks behind which persons like Nick and Martha hide their real personalities. George enjoys exposing Martha's real character to the guests. Before Nick and Honey's arrival, George and Martha are involved in quarrel. Just as Martha utters obscene words at the top of her voice, George intentionally opens the door to Nick and Honey who receive Martha's obscenity. In the stage directions, Albee indicates that George is really satisfied at having Martha's explosion overheard. However, during the party and under the influence of alcohol, Nick and Martha use dirty language openly. When Honey expresses her wish to powder her nose, Martha responds that she will show Honey the house. Honey and Martha avoid the reality that Honey wants to go to the toilet because she has drunk a lot. George says "Martha, won't you show her where we keep the... euphemism?"⁴⁰ George uses the word 'euphemism' to make fun of their efforts to hide the simplest facts about their lives and their attempts to create false images about themselves.

Thus, the barrenness of their lives is an outcome of their immorality, self-deception and superficial nature.

Nevertheless, George is also involved in creating illusions. After all, he is a part of the community of New Carthage. In this community everybody participates in establishing a play world of illusions and games whose rules shape their lives. This does not prevent George from showing his dissatisfaction with his life and the persons around him. He expresses his opinions frankly about Martha's father whom everybody praises. George describes his father-in-law as a white mouse with beady little red eyes and a great shock of white hair. He tells Nick that "if you happen to be teaching at a university, there are easier things than being married to the daughter of the president of that university."⁴¹ It is true that Martha's father supports George's position in the university, but his dominance over his personal life deprives George from his position in his

³⁹- Ibid., p. 117.

⁴⁰- Ibid., p. 29.

⁴¹- Ibid., p. 27.

home. George also says that Martha's father is a crooked man who is rich because he steals from the university.

It seems that George is an intellectual man who faces difficulties in living in such materialistic community. There is conflict between his intellectual nature and the demands of his environment. Ronald Hayman suggests that George's inability to occupy the position of the head of the history department is "partly a failure and partly a choice."⁴² In point of fact, a person's failure to rise as a high ranking administrator does not necessarily mean that he is a failure. But, George lives in a competitive world where everybody wants to succeed in any possible way. George feels that Martha and her father push him to be a success, but he does not want to be involved in such competitions. At the same time, George wants to satisfy Martha because he really loves her. He wishes that he could achieve professional success to be a source of pride to Martha. That is why he feels jealous of Nick who wins Martha's admiration.

According to George, biology, as typified by Nick, is a destructive science that might lead to the end of civilization. He describes Nick as a conspirator working on a system to control genetic variation and trying to create a race of people who do not have mental or physical defects. George thinks that the removal of human imperfections and imbalances will be at the expense of variety, liberty, creativity and individuality. All people will be alike and life will be mechanistic. George sees the growth of science as progress towards sterility. This indicates that George does not trust the future of science. He accuses Nick of being the one who is going to

make all that trouble, making everyone the same, rearranging the chromosomes [sic]. ... All imbalances will be corrected ... [This] will assure the sterility of the imperfect... the ugly, the stupid... the ... unfit... with this, we will have, in time, a race of glorious men. ... We will not have much music, much painting. ... Culture and races will eventually vanish... the ants will take over the world.⁴³

One of the reasons of George's distaste for genetic engineering results from his jealousy of Nick. Another possible reason is that George does not want the biologists to create a breed of perfect men because their perfection might intensify his sense of imperfection and hence increases his spiritual ailment. Besides, the creation of such generation will lead to the negligence of the

⁴²- Hayman, p. 31

⁴³- Who is Afraid?, pp. 37- 67.

subject of history. The new men will not be interested in reflecting on the experiences of culture and races which have been George's life's study.

Another implied suggestion is that George, being unable to master science like biology, tries to convince himself that this science is destructive. He tries to assert the nobility of the subject of history in comparison to a science like biology. Hence, his negative attitude towards biology is the result of his living in a competitive society, Cecilia Liu states that "in the 1950's and early 1960's, many social scientists argued that the professional competitiveness that men felt was very destructive."⁴⁴

The scientific progress is encountered by religious decline. The second act of the play is entitled 'Walpurgisnacht.' This German word refers to the night before May Day when witches are supposed to meet together and create havoc. Walpurgisnacht is a pagan myth. Albee uses it to show the breakdown of modern civilization and the collapse of spiritual and family values in the modern age.⁴⁵ Indeed, religion does not have influence on the characters' lives. Martha, for example, is far away from religion. The decline of religion is mainly represented by Honey's father who gets his money from robbing the church.

Martha and Honey's father adopt crooked ways to latch onto money. Both of them occupy influential positions in their society. They are supposed to provide the younger generation with moral guidance. Instead, they present bad models to be followed. It is through those two men Albee attacks the religious and educative institutions. They give up their Nobel duties- one as a man of knowledge and the other as a man of religion for the sake of money because money is the secret of their power and success. Their money and prestige lead, in great part, to their daughters' marriages.

The two couples are dependent on those two men's wealth. Thus, they are represented as child- like persons who lack the sense of independence. The fact that the title of the play comes from children's song is significant. The song ties together

the themes of childhood and parenthood, [and] reality versus fantasy, ...The couples in this play do not have any children and remain tied to their parents, Martha and George rely on Martha's father for his position and his paycheck Honey and Nick rely upon Honey's father for the money that he left them.⁴⁶

⁴⁴- Liu, Internet.

⁴⁵- Ibid.

⁴⁶- Ibid.

It is also noticeable that the characters' relationships with their parents have negative influences on their lives. Martha's morbid attachment to her father hinders happiness with her husband. Albee also hints that George does not have happy childhood. George relates the story of his young friend who goes mad from the guilt of killing his parents in separate accidents. But, Martha has a different account of this story. She tells her guests that the story of the boy is the plot of an autobiographical novel by George who. does not publish it because of his father-in-law's objection to it.

We do not know whether the boy in the story is George or not. Richard Amacher thinks that if the boy in the story is not George, Albee may use the story to help us to understand George who is also suffering from psychological problems. A second possibility is that George is so confused about the boundary between illusion and reality. He identifies himself with the boy and that leads him to think that he is the boy when, in fact, he is not.⁴⁷

A third possibility is that the story is like the imaginary son. Hence, it is one of the varieties of fun and games through which the audience is introduced to the psychological state of the characters. Nonetheless, this story shows that Albee believes that the amount of the power that the parents have over their children might affect their lives negatively. This indicates that George's unhappy childhood shapes his personality as an indecisive individual who resigns to the pressures and values of his society, in spite of the fact that he is not satisfied with this society. Although, he is distressed at the amount of power Martha's father has over their lives, he surrenders to the old man's wishes and does not publish the novel he has written. It means that he submits to Martha's father's money, power and position. The novel could be the symbol of George's creativity that is crushed by the materialism of society.

Honey is an extreme example of the child-like adult. She fails to understand the conflict between George and Martha. She does not notice that Martha flirts with Nick to tease George. Concerning her physique, she is described as "a mousy little type without any hips, or anything."⁴⁸ This description associates her with the ideas of infertility and sexlessness. She tells George and Martha that she cannot have a child. Later, in her drunken stupor, she reveals to George that she fears the physical labor connected with childbirth. George realizes that she has been aborting and accuses her of being a secret murderer. George tries to tell her that her husband and Martha go to the kitchen to make love, but she refuses to understand that. According to all of these points, Honey keeps her child-like looks through her naive behaviours, her failure to understand what

⁴⁷- Amacher, pp. 96- 97.

⁴⁸- Who is Afraid?, p. 10.

is going on around her and her willful abortion. She is not mature enough to bear the responsibility of being a mother. When she discovers that Nick reveals the secrets of their personal lives to George, she reverts to the child's role. She "rolled up like a fetus, sucking... her thumb"⁴⁸ on the cool floor of the bathroom. She finds in the foetal position an escape from the bitter realities of her marriage.

It is impossible for persons like the two couples to be good parents. The only hope for them is to behave like grown- up persons who can face the bitter reality of life without the help of outside factors or illusion. George, the most rational of the four, realizes this fact and decides to announce the death of the illusory child. George considers the child a demon to be exorcised. To Martha, the illusory child is

the symbol of potency and virility, the imaginative embodiment of all the masculine roles idealized and idolized. He is the perfect lover, the perfect son and husband, ...[and] the creature of all her hopes.⁴⁹

Martha gives a long and sentimental account of the child's birth and childhood. She describes her boy walking "evenly between us... a hand out to each of us for what we could offer by way of support, affection, teaching [and] even love."⁵⁰

The child might be a Christ- like figure. In the play, there are many interesting analogies connect the child with Christ. Martha, for example, identifies the child with the lamb. She calls him a lamb and says that his hair becomes fleece in the sun.⁵¹ The lamb is one of the symbols of Christ. According to the Gospel, "John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."⁵² Like Christ and the lamb, the illusory child is a symbol of innocence and sacrifice.⁵³

The child is Martha's hope and her way of getting psychological relief.

According to her, his birth is easy, but his life is uneasy because he bears the burden of his parent's mistakes. There are also several hints to Virgin Mary. Martha refers many times to "my child [instead of] our child."⁵⁴ She also says that George is not sure that the child is his own son. In his account of the child's death, George mentions a tree against which the boy meets his death and the porcupine which he tries to avoid. The porcupine is "like the crown of thorns in the story of Christ."⁵⁵ In the Gospel, St. Mathew states that "when they had

⁴⁹- Paolucci, p. 56.

⁵⁰- Who is Afraid?, p. 221.

⁵¹- Paolucci, p. 59.

⁵²- ST. John, I, 29 in The Holy Bible: The Authorized King James Version (Ashland: Landoll, 1994),

⁵³- Ibid., p. 167.

⁵⁴- Who is Afraid?, p. 218.

⁵⁵- Paolucci, p. 59.

platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews.”⁵⁶ The crown of thorns is a symbol of pain and suffering. On this ground, the child’s death suggests “a new beginning, a kind of salvation in truth. His sacrifice should be the gift of love.”⁵⁷ His death gives life to their marriage and helps them to rebuild their marital life upon new bases of love and mutual need.

We learn that Nick fails to make love to Martha. His failure breaks the false images of both Martha as the “Earth Mother”⁵⁸ and Nick as the virile man. This, like the death of the illusory son, has good results on Martha and George’s relationship. It paves the way for bringing George and Martha finally together. Martha confesses that George is the sole man in her life who has ever made her happy. She tells Nick that:

George who is good to me, and whom I revile; who understands me, and whom I push off; who can make me laugh, and I choke it back in my throat; who can hold me, at night, so that it’s warm... who keeps learning the games we play as quickly as I can change the rules; who can make me happy and I don’t wish to be happy.⁵⁹

The events of the night help George and Martha to discover what is inside them- the fear from reality. Amacher states that we can “see in [George and Martha] something of the whole general problem of humanity suffering from forces beyond its control, forces which lie inside us as well as outside us.”⁶⁰

At the end, George sings “Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf?” to encourage Martha to live without the phoniness they used to. Martha admits that she is afraid of Virginia woolf- afraid to face the future without the fiction of the son. Concerning Nick and Honey, they witness the transformation that takes place in George and Martha’s lives. This might help them to transform their own lives. When Honey listens to Martha’s account of the childhood of the illusory child, she says that she wants a child. Martha’s account stimulates the feeling of motherhood inside Honey. This indicates that Honey and Nick have hope for better future.

⁵⁶- ST. Mathew, 27, 29 in The Holy Bible, p. 17.

⁵⁷- Paolucci, p. 60.

⁵⁸- Who is Afraid?, p. 189.

⁵⁹- Ibid., pp. 190- 191.

⁶⁰- Amacher, p. 108.

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