**Edward Albee**

(playwright; born March 12, 1928, Washington, DC - died September 16 2016 in Montauk NY.) Edward Albee burst onto the American theatrical scene in the late 1950s with a variety of plays that detailed the agonies and disillusionment of that decade and the transition from the placid Eisenhower years to the turbulent 1960s. Albee's plays, with their intensity, their grappling with modern themes, and their experiments in form, startled critics and audiences alike while changing the landscape of American drama. He was unanimously hailed as the successor to Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, and Eugene O'Neill. Albee's 25 plays form a body of work that is recognized as unique, uncompromising, controversial, elliptical, and provocative. A canon that is, as Albee himself describes it "an examination of the American Scene, an attack on the substitution of artificial for real values in our society, a cond nation of complacency, cruelty, and asculation and vacuity, a stand against the fiction that everything in this slipping land of ours is peachy-keen." No wonder, then, that this forty-year career has seen as many commercial failures as successes. The '80s, in fact did not yield a single Albee play that could be considered a commercial hit. "There is not always a great relationship between popularity and excellence," he says. "You just have to make the assumption you're doing good work and go on doing it." Perseverance ultimately triumphed; his most recent drama reclaimed Albee's position as America's leading dramatists. Three Tall Women enjoyed a stunning, sold-out success in New York and has been staged across the country and around the world. It received Best Play awards from the New York Drama Critics Circle and Outer Critics Circle and earned Albee his third Pulitzer Prize, an honor that is bested only by Eugene O'Neill's four awards. Born in Washington, D.C., Albee was adopted as an infant by Reid Albee, the son of Edward Franklin Albee of the powerful Keith-Albee vaudeville chain. He was brought up in great affluence and sent to select preparatory and military schools. Almost from the beginning he clashed with the strong-minded Mrs. Albee, rebelling against her att pts to make him a success as well as a sportsman and a member of the Larchmont, New York, social set. Instead, young Albee pursued his interest in the arts, writing macabre and bitter stories and poetry, while associating with artists and intellectuals considered objectionable by Mrs. Albee. Albee left home when he was 20 and moved to New York's Greenwich Village, where he took to the era's counterculture and avant-garde movements. After using up his paternal grandmother's modest legacy, he took a variety ofemenial jobs until 1959 when The Zoo Story made him a famous playwright, first in Europe, where it premiered in Berlin, and then in New York. This short work, in which a bum entices an executive to commit murder, together with 1962's full-length Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, a brutal portrait of a hard-drinking academic couple, and 1966's A Delicate Balance, his first Pulitzer Prize-winner, created the mold for American drama for the rest of our century. Throughout his career, Albee has shown a fascination for a wide variety of theatrical styles and subjects. The Zoo Story conveyed the alienation and disillusionment of the existentialist drama. In 1959, Albee explored American race relations in the southern Gothic atmosphere of The Death of Bessie Smith. He gave birth to American absurdist drama with The Sandbox (1959) and The American Dream (1960). Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? and A Delicate Balance are classic studies of American family life in the mode of O'Neill's Long's Day's Journey into Night. 1964's Tiny Alice is a metaphysical dream play in which Albee explores hiSempersistent theme of reality versus illusion, this time out in mystical, abstract, and even religious terms. In 1975, Albee won his second Pulitzer Prize with Seascape, which combined theatrical experiment and social commentary in a story about a retired vacationing couple who meet a pair of sea lizards at the beach. The Lady from Dubuque (1979) is a fable in which the title character is none other than death. Death, in fact, has been a running character throughout his works. In spite of the wide range in styles and subject matter, Albee has said that all his plays oconfront being alive and how to behave with the awareness of death. Every one of my plays is an act of optimism, because I make the assumption that it is possible to communicate with other people. The people who think Virginia Woolf was a love story are a lot closer to the truth than those who think it was a tragedy. At least there was communication in that marriage." And like George and Martha, whose long night's journey finally ends in day, Albee and his public have communicated withemeach other ever since they met--through periods love and exhilaration, anger and neglect, truce and reconciliation.  
  
**The Sandbox as a sample of the Absurd Theater**

Edward Albee wrote The Sandbox on commission from the Festival of Two Worlds at the Spoleto Festival in Italy in 1959. Its first production took place in New York the following year. The Sandbox is linked to a longer play by Albee titled The American Dream, a play he had written earlier in his career. For The Sandbox, he plucked characters from his full-length work and created a 14-minute absurd meditation on death and grief.

The Sandbox is dedicated to Albee’s grandmother on his mother’s side, an influential figure in his life, and follows an abstracted depiction of the death of "Grandma," an older woman who, in her dotage, is cared for by "Mommy" and "Daddy." The "sandbox" of the title is a small playing area situated upstage, where a muscular young man does calisthenics. While he does not speak much in the play, we learn by the end that he is both a young aspiring actor in Southern California, and the "Angel of Death."

Self-referential components associated with postmodernism are used throughout the play, with actors inserting commentary on the events taking place and speaking directly to the audience and alluding to the theatricality of the space itself. The characters are aware that they are not in a realistic space, but instead inside a highly abstracted stage space, and allude to this knowledge throughout. The result is a kind of psychoanalytic dreamscape, one in which characters are defined and signified by their familial relationships or by their relationship to the stage. A musician accompanies the proceedings and Grandma makes a curiously affectionate connection with the Young Man, as he gently and indirectly ushers her towards death.

In spite of its distinctly absurdist nature, The Sandbox is considered one of Edward Albee’s most autobiographical works. The playwright himself continued to insist it was his finest play even after Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf? became one of the defining stage dramas of the 1960s.