

Albee's Substitute Children: Reading Adoption as a Performative

Jill R. Deans

I was adopted and I am real. The child in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* was metaphorical, so I don't think there's too much relationship there . . .

—Edward Albee¹

Nothing belongs . . .

—from Albee's *Box*²

One of Edward Albee's most existential dramas, *Box* (1968) expresses succinctly the paradox of adoptive identity. While contained in the "box" of the theater, watching an empty cube set within the open "box" of the proscenium, the audience hears again and again from a disembodied voice, "nothing belongs." There and not there, both defined and empty, the "box" resembles adoptive subjectivity, present in absence. This study ventures to unpack the box, theoretically, to determine how adoption *works*, and how adoptive identity is necessarily *wrapped up* in performance.

The point is not to link biography with its fictional representation, to insist, for example, that the metaphorical child in *Woolf* is Albee after all or that *Box* has anything literal to do with the expression of a troubled adoptee. Any brief biographical glance will establish the fact that Edward Albee was adopted by a wealthy Westchester couple, argued with his adoptive parents to the point of disinheritance, and channeled his alienation and their hypocrisy into his work.³ As Albee himself puts it: "one is always making art out of oneself. The art is the interesting thing, not the carcass."⁴ My project doesn't *quite* resonate with this high modernist assertion, however, since I do find the context of Albee's art "interesting," and more importantly, seek to trace broader social tendencies through dramatic literature. Specifically, I aim to expose adoption on linguistic terrain, a place where performance becomes *performativity*, where visual "Acts" are distilled into verbal acts.⁵ Albee is particularly useful for this project not only because he employs adoption as a device, but also because his plays are widely recognized for

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their potent dialogue.⁶ While Albee's language has been luring academics for decades, revisiting his early plays now can assist cultural critics investigating the relationship between identity and various social scripts, of which adoption is only one. I begin my reading by identifying substitution as a complex apparatus for social and personal identity shifts in Albee's work. After establishing substitution as a trope, I work through the notion of the text as a general locus for substitutive "acts," towards performativity in *Wolf* as a specific example of linguistic adoption. The result is an incipient theory for understanding adoption as a narrative act (rather than merely acting in narrative); for this discovery, Albee has been an invaluable test site for the study of adoptive subjectivity.⁷

Now You See It, Now You Don't

How is a subject recognized within the social text? When does invisibility yield to resolution? Conversely, how might controversial individuals disappear as they are subsumed within the status quo? Displaced "bastards," for example, often take the place of "rightful" children who never materialize. Can we identify socially, culturally, psychologically, the before and after of such legitimizing acts? Edward Albee questions the "now you see it, now you don't" rhetoric of adoption and illegitimacy in terms of its broader social significance. Substitution is more than a convenient force to sustain the failing nuclear family, it's a pervasive mechanism for shaping illusions on a national scale.

After evoking the Cold War climate that fostered Albee's masterwork, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962), Matthew Roudane summarizes:

The pot of gold at the end of the rainbow surely loomed just beyond the horizon, most Americans felt, even as Albee lamented in 1960 that the people of the United States have substituted "artificial for real values in our society," and that his theater was "a stand against the fiction that everything in this slipping land of ours is peachy-keen."⁸

For Albee, the decline of "real values" (presuming a Golden Age deep in the recesses of the American past) is enacted through substitution—the *ole switerchoo*, evoking images of swindlers and con artists practicing slight-of-hand, a vaudeville trope that Albee may have gleaned from his adoptive grandfather and namesake, theater maven Edward Franklin Albee II.⁹ Albee III's chrome-plated Cold War edition of the shellgame is a reversal of the original, however, leaving us stripped not of cash, but merely and most profoundly of our integrity. His most insipid characters, those who play the game with increasing desperation, are (as I and many other critics have already implied) stage renditions of his own adoptive parents: a

brow-beaten white collar man and his vociferous, emasculating wife. They spend their stage-time in furious dialogue, carving up embittered, embattled illusions to feed to an audience that suddenly isn't sure if it's hungry (the dynamic of Albee's childhood *writ large*).

Thus, not only have artificial values been substituted for real, but illusion takes the place of reality through and as a function of language and performance. The dialogue in an Albee play, however, does not simply generate fantasy, although many of Albee's scenes are fantastic or surreal. Words serve in more tangible ways to demonstrate the slippage between what is *meant* and what is *communicated*. When, in *The American Dream* (1961) for example, Mommy asks Mrs. Barker, "Are you sure you're comfortable? Won't you take off your *dress*?" [my italics], she replies, "I don't mind if I do," and removes her dress.¹⁰ We can understand the "slip" in two ways, the more Freudian one and the literal one (which Mrs. Barker wears for the rest of the play). There is a gap between referent and sign, to evoke the poststructuralist implications here, that Albee isolates frequently with puns and equivoques to emphasize that language is not just a "metaphor" for reality, but a process of signification. Explains Jacques Derrida in "Signature Event Context":

We would not assert, as one might be tempted to do, that semio-linguistic communication acquired its title *more metaphorico*, by analogy with 'physical' or 'real' communication, inasmuch as it also serves as a passage, transporting and transmitting something, rendering it accessible.¹¹

The problem is that in this "passage," some of the baggage can get lost along the way. Language thus remains substitutive in terms of its *iterability*, its constant-if-inexact application in the *absence* of sender and/or receiver. Sandy Petry, who emphasizes the importance of implied absence in Derrida's understanding of dissemination, explains further: "For Derrida, the 'logic of supplementarity' is that by which the essential and the unessential, the outside and the inside, incessantly replace and supplant one another."¹² My reason for this brief foray into deconstructionism is to illustrate how, in this view, language itself enacts, on minute levels, what Albee expresses as a trope: the substitution of one subject (essential/inside) with another (unessential/outside).

By turning to *Seascape* (1975), a short sci fi/fantasy parable of evolution, we can begin to compile the range of substitutions in an Albee drama to illustrate its tropic quality. Early in the play, Nancy reveals the emptiness of her and her husband, Charlie's lovemaking: "They don't talk of that: the sad fantasies; the substitutions. The thoughts we have."¹³ In this example, the physical and linguistic intersect in a place where subjects (children) are potentially conceived. The "play"

of language, “the thoughts we have” disrupt the reality of sexual play at the same time that it makes it possible to continue (through fantasy). This is important to establish in a stage “play” that broaches some very real issues about human dignity and the fate of the species in a surreal circumstance. In *Seascape*, Albee mocks outright humanity’s low-grade fertility when Leslie and Sarah (two humanoid creatures who’ve crawled out of the sea) describe their reproductive capabilities: Sarah has laid over seven thousand eggs! They have hundreds of children, whereas Nancy and Charlie have only three.

Albee wrote this play in the early seventies at a time, according to Elaine Tyler May, when “childfree” advocates defended the infertile and the voluntarily childless against social pressures to procreate.¹⁴ This playwright may be reacting more strongly, however, to his own adoptive parents’ infertility, which during the thirties would challenge particularly his mother’s womanhood in addition to his father’s virility. After World War II, as Albee himself reaches maturity, public perception of the childless hardens further until the failure to embrace parenthood is equated with un-Americanism.¹⁵ Indeed, Albee, who himself will remain childless as a gay man, critiques the drive to assemble nuclear families at the cost of individual alienation (of both parent and child)—such pressures are, he infers, un-American in more fundamental ways, harkening back to the age of constitutional beginnings when strong, socially minded individuals forged democratic ideals. Never mind the obvious paradox in mourning the passing of an age when gay men, women, African Americans, etc. were denied basic rights; Albee’s wry, affable grandmother characters appeal convincingly to the “good old days” when people had *substance*. In general, Albee’s concerns are located nostalgically around the insistence that subject identity be accompanied by both personal agency and communal support, and that this recipe for integrity has been compromised, particularly by his parents’ generation.

While a lack of fertility symbolizes in his plays, as it did for his parents, a lack of vitality, merely *having* children (biological or adoptive) does not necessarily remedy this lack if parenting fails to include certain core values like love and liberty (and justice for all). Thus, in *Seascape* as inadequate as the human species may seem with regards to its procreative capabilities, it redeems itself when Nancy and Charlie explain how they protect their three meager offspring: “Well . . . we love them.”¹⁶ Quality parenting *supplants* quantity. Leslie and Sarah seem ignorant of emotions; even if they *feel*, they lack the reason to qualify those feelings. Albee encourages the celebration of human potential with *Seascape*, allowing Leslie and Sarah to stay on land and make a go of it as rational creatures, but only after Charlie, the retired skeptic seems ready to participate in life, to become passionate about his existence. “I think the only thing to do is to *do* something,” Nancy warns from the beginning, sensing that their lives have

stagnated, that their existence is all *talk*, as the play demonstrates."¹⁷ Substitution here initially denotes failure and impotence, but "evolves" as one couple learns to substitute reason with passion and vice versa, suggesting that both ingredients make us human.

Throughout his work, Albee continues to equate sexual energy and the lack thereof with a more general life force, romanticizing a vague wondrous potential (characteristic of unfettered individualism) that many of his characters fail to achieve. George in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is the classic example of a man who "didn't have the *stuff*" according to Martha and her emasculating father. "George didn't have much . . . push," she continues, "he wasn't particularly . . . aggressive. In fact he was sort of a . . . FLOP!"¹⁸ Martha's criticisms are often framed to reflect George's impotence (deflecting her own sterility). "In a bloody repartee," writes psychoanalytic critic Harold Blum, "each partner is disparaged for a lack of virility and fertility, blame is projected, and the shared fantasy of parenthood is an insufficient bulwark against overwhelming feelings of injury (castration) and loss."¹⁹ Both George and Martha substitute verbal acuity for physical fertility, producing a child out of language to stand in for the heir they failed to conceive: an academic solution to waning vitality.

This kind of substitution does not hold as much promise for individual freedom and growth as the *Seascape* example and typifies the dark side of adoptive strategies. Despite the fact that Albee doesn't see "too much relationship" between himself as adoptee and the "metaphorical" adoptee in *Woolf*, Blum crafts a convincing reading of the play that assumes "the fantasy of adoption [as] the fundamental underlying theme" of *Woolf*.²⁰ Although his project examines adoption more as a subject *in* narrative, rather than *as* narrative, Blum explains the adoptive "relationship" in terms of the critical and literal apparatus of analogy (a form of substitution):

the two couples form two sets of parents one associated with chromosomal biology, the other with known recorded history, both childless, and yet "parents." This is analogous to the two sets of parents of an adopted or foster child.²¹

Honey, wife of the *biology* professor, gave birth with her hysterical pregnancy to an imaginary child. Martha and George, the *history* professor (keeper of records and "official" narratives), *adopt* the imaginary child and *raise* him (through narrative) in the *absence* of his biological parents (symbolized by his *absence* of a body). Nick and Honey's visit is a threat to George and Martha, initially, since Nick's glamorous field of genetics and high-tech biology supersedes George's worn-out history department. (I would add, along the lines of my focus, that

“biology,” in this way, comes back to challenge the adoptive, narrative identity.) But Blum’s astute observation points out, conversely, that Nick and Honey will one day “substitute” for the declining George and Martha not as victors in a custody battle, but as losers: as two more bitter, sterile people trapped in a marriage of convenience.

The American Dream serves as a prototype for the kind of savage “exchanges” that made *Wolf* so controversial and popular, and creates the climate for Blum’s potent analogies. Albee admits the kinship between the two plays once again in terms of the “substitution of artificial for real values.”²² Whereas he is reluctant to acknowledge the presence of adoption in *Wolf*, he cannot deny its impact in *Dream* as a central device. Here the phrase “we want satisfaction” becomes a refrain for the “switches” or slippages that occurs throughout on at least three levels of substitution: from (1) the crass material exchange of a beige hat for its identical wheat one to (2) the random appearance of the Young Man who appears to take the place of his mutilated infant twin to (3) the final understanding of the entire play as the depiction of substantive human values swapped casually for a chronic obsession with material goods. The play invites a Marxist reading by demonstrating the economics of substitution through the commodification of adoption.²³ Mommy and Daddy “buy” a baby from the “Bye-bye Adoption Agency” and when it appears to be an imperfect substitution for a *natural* child, they dismember it out of frustration. The main action centers around their desire to seek restitution, to obtain a replacement for this inferior product.

Of course, this core action is absurd; not only is the physical violence horrific and grotesque, but *owning* people has been technically illegal in this country since the Thirteenth Amendment. The casual enactment of these atrocities, however, signals an examination of the adoption “business” which, many critics claim, still turns a profit today, despite legal and ethical restrictions. “Headlines in 1980s newspapers,” notes anthropologist Judith Modell, “suggest this is a market worthy of attention: ‘Baby-marketing a big business’; ‘Lawyer profits from unwed mothers.’”²⁴ Modell is quick to point out, however, that the case for “independent adoptions” which require high fees for doctors and lawyers (versus state-regulated adoptions which are technically “free”) reassure *some* social welfare agents that the purchased child will be safe: “People *do* value what they have invested in, and payments can be ‘legitimized as symbolic expressions of sentimental concern’ by adoptive parents.”²⁵ Mommy and Daddy demonstrate the potential emptiness of such a rationalization when they destroy their “property” without hesitation, and with the full expectation of a refund. They expose a commodification principle that may easily explain much of the domestic violence committed against adopted children in a capitalist-driven society. Although adoption and foster care are important institutions through which a battered child can escape abusive biological

parents, extreme cases like the 1989 tragedy of Lisa Steinberg, tortured and killed by (illegally) adoptive parents Joel Steinberg and Hetta Nusbaum, expose the violence enabled by the sad assumption that the adoptee is not a *real* child, but an acquisition at the mercy of its owner.²⁶ In the words of Danielle Maree Baker, an adoptee who survived the abuse inflicted by her adoptive parents: "Adoptees don't get born, they get 'gotten'. I felt procured like furniture, like a commodity."²⁷

By further magnifying the process of commodification through both Marxist and poststructuralist lenses, we can see how subject identity is a product of ideological forces *and* signification. The oft-critiqued hat anecdote in *Dream*, for example, portrays the mounting tension between pluralistic and monologic forces of culture production as well as the "play" between referent and sign that actively *constitutes* identity. Mommy is sold a "lovely little beige hat," but when she runs into her ladies club chairman (none other than Mrs. Barker, the social welfare agent), she's told the hat is "wheat-colored." Returning to the store in a rage, Mommy exchanges the hat for another that is clearly identical, but guaranteed to be "beige." Later, after Mommy's gotten "satisfaction" for her purchase, Mrs. Barker insists that her own hat (which is supposed to be the same as Mommy's hat) is "cream" colored, destabilizing the whole picture all over again.

While there is obvious fun to be had in linking the reality of the hat with a descriptive word, one might also read the story as a critique of racial and cultural ideology. On the one hand, people (objectified as hats) come in all different shades. On the other hand, Mommy's different hats are really all the same, aren't they? Scrutinous Mommy and Mrs. Barker argue over the color of a hat, when really the store only stocks one shade, and this shade is relatively pale, no matter how you look at it. The store, therefore, is really an outlet for the dominant culture, distributing "wheat" colored hats to cover the even more diverse heads of America. Each hat, firmly situated, *shades* and objectifies the living entity beneath it—when Mommy's hat is questioned, her sense of belonging (in the Ladies' Club) is shaken. Her project becomes utter conformity.

The Young Man who appears at the end of the play, epitomizes this objectification, illustrating how extreme conformity can lead ironically to a *lack* of belonging, a void signified by the empty adoption recounted earlier in the play. *Apparently* perfect, the Young Man is blatantly mechanical in his desire to sell his "services." Having "done some modeling," he is supremely qualified at everything and nothing at all. As such, this transparent worker/machine easily becomes the scapegoat for all the other characters's social and emotional sterility. He is both the embodiment of loss and the surrogate for Mommy and Daddy's mutilated child: "We were separated when we were still very young," he explains:

. . . since that time I have been unable to see anything, *anything*,

with pity, with affection . . . with anything but . . . cool disinterest . . . I have been drained, torn sunder . . . disemboweled. I have now, only my person . . . my body, my face . . . I accept the syntax around me, for while I cannot relate . . . I know I must be related *to*.²⁸

Conforming to a vapid and vacuous dominant culture, the Young Man is able to “accept the syntax” that both defines and destroys him. This speech comes on the heels of Grandma’s historical narrative of Mommy and Daddy’s failed parenthood. The Young Man’s narrative serves to explicate the former, resembling the process of genealogy—quite literally—as Michel Foucault describes it in “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History”:

The body is the inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas), the locus of a dissociated Self (adopting the illusion of substantial unity), and a volume in perpetual disintegration. Genealogy, as an analysis of descent, is thus situated within the articulation of the body and history. Its task is to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history’s destruction of the body.²⁹

In the absence of the mutilated infant’s body, the Young Man’s shining vacant physique illuminates the previous adoption debacle; it traces with surgical precision the cruel process of signification until it arrives at a convincing “origin” —the conclusion that the Young Man and the infant were twins separated at birth. Their “rupture” leads to the demise of the infant and the survival of the Young Man whose presence now *supplants* the former.

Blonde-haired, blue-eyed, wheat-skinned, the Young Man is a clear indictment of our nation’s superficiality. Later, in *Wolf*, a drunken George and Martha describe their son as blonde-eyed, blue-haired, a freakish adaptation of the original. In both cases, the child hardly seems *real*, but more an entity within an schema, a notion picked apart and deconstructed. Even in the most pro-adoption narratives, the subjectivity of the acquired (illegitimate) child is endangered as his or her identity becomes re-expressed in the new terms of legitimacy.³⁰ Fundamental liberties—agency and the freedom of self-awareness—must be violated first to transmute an affiliative bond into a filiative one. A certain masquerade must ensue to maintain an adoption.

Counting the Kids

HE (*Mildly curious tone; offhand*)
 How many children do we have?
 SHE (*Smiles; cheerful*)
 Three.
 (*HE just stands there. Her voice takes on a tiny edge*)
 Three!
 (*HE just stands there. Not believing it*)
 Four?
 (*HE just stands there. Reassuring herself*)
 Three!
 (*HE just stands there. Quite incredulous*)
 Four!?
 (*SHE exits. HE just stands there*)³¹

According to Brian Way (who takes his cue from Martin Esslin): “A writer’s vision is absurd when the arbitrary, the disconnected, the irrelevant, non-reason, are seen to be the main principle or non-principle of the universe.”³² Scene Sixteen of Edward Albee’s Vaudeville *Counting the Ways* (1975), above, is accordingly *absurd*, undermining a fundamental certainty—number of children—in the midst of a casual domestic exchange. As a result, this scene has both verbal and visual appeal: SHE counts her children expressively and with growing anxiety; HE, in his stillness and odd silence, is her blatant foil. Though the comedy is spare and economical, the social commentary is extravagant. Albee conjoins the subtle and the obvious, the fact that this nuclear family has atomized, to make us laugh at the legitimate, to make us question the so-called norm. Way, at this point, would suggest that Albee is no longer a true Absurdist because “[he] still believes in the validity of reason—that things can be proved, or that events can be shown to have definite meanings—and, unlike Beckett and the others, is scarcely touched by the sense of living in an absurd universe.”³³ According to Albee, our problem is not that the world is random and baseless, but that we’ve lost our grip on the substance that enables us to *count the kids*, so to speak.

Later, in Scene Eighteen, SHE returns to confirm that they do, indeed, have *three* children, per her initial response, revealing that HE may have conceived her doubt and the possibility of a forth child with his *pregnant* pause. In this case, a child is born, if briefly, from the spaces between words, demonstrating how easy it is to generate a subjective reality and subject identity. The “fourth child” does not exist off-stage, of course, as the other children presumably do, but on-stage the possible child flickers in the unstable dialogue. Language and its companion silence thus *embodies* the absurd (the possibility of a “baseless” or wholly discursive subjectivity) a point that Albee exploits, however, in order to recover

something more meaningful and substantive about identity.

The “fourth child” here serves as an example of “presence in absence”—to evoke Sartre’s enigmatic use of the phrase—that one could trace roughly across Albee’s work from the empty picture frames in *The Zoo Story*, to the ghost of a child dismembered in *The American Dream*, George and Martha’s verbal child in *Wolf*, the unseen Alice of *Tiny Alice*, the unnamed fear in *A Delicate Balance*, the aphasic girl in *Listening*, and so on to the silent son in *Three Tall Women*. I borrow from Sartre more generally, however, to recall Derrida and his contention with J.L. Austin’s speech-act theory. Austin’s 1955 lecture series *How to Do Things With Words* (with all its attending debate) is the obvious place to begin making a case for the use-value of adoption read as a performative.³⁴ The *act* of adoption—to adopt, I adopt you—begins and ends in language even if it is accompanied by a physical shift between families. Adoption would qualify, in fact, as an “explicit performative,” a category of usage that even Austin weakens with more exceptions than rules, but none-the-less establishes some clear examples of words that act: when you “bet” or “promise” or say “I do” at a marriage ceremony, you elicit what he calls “illocutionary” force, producing social moments (that can succeed or fail according to certain criteria like context and intention). Such force embedded in the rhetoric of adoption, as an explicit performative, enables the fantasy of the nuclear family to continue even in the face of infertility. Whereas the word “birth” can only *refer* to or *describe* an act (be it a significant one), the phrase “I hereby adopt . . .” doesn’t *refer* directly to anything, but actually *makes* (given the proper context and intention, etc.) a legitimate child through language.

Both Sandy Petry and Stanley Fish point out that Derrida had a bigger problem with Austin’s conception of how language operates as *language* than with the notion that speech can act.³⁵ This has to do with that *iterable* quality of language I discussed earlier which necessitates a degree of *absence* to operate discursively. If all language depends upon absence, how can descriptive or “locutionary” language *refer* so directly, claiming the pure *presence* of the signified? The impossibility of this essential union between referent and signifier in descriptive language, leads to the conclusion that all language *must* act.

In this sense, all text possesses adoptive potential; once its language is in play, it can venture out into the world—“orphaned speech” as Fish puts it, available for interpretation (i.e. adoption). Drawing from Jonathan Culler’s line, “Some texts are more orphaned than others,” Fish investigates the degree to which text is mediated by the presence or absence of an “origin,” “context,” and “interpretation,” only to conclude that: “all texts are equally and radically orphaned in the sense that no one of them is securely fastened to an independently specifiable state of affairs.”³⁶ As for the term *iterable*, Fish finds it analogous to *readable*, since all text is separated from pure “origin” and must be deciphered. While all text may

be “equally orphaned,” however, the *subjects* of language remain at varying removes from their referential beginnings. This may account for the potency or *presence* that lingers in the performative sense of adoption. Returning to Sartre, we can understand this “sense” by linking performatives with the force of visual images.

In an essay about Roland Barthes and the force or *punctum* embedded in the photographic image, Michael Halley discusses Sartre’s book *L’Imaginaire* which “proceeds to characterize the ‘image’ by comparing it with, appropriately enough, the ‘sign.’ The ‘most important distinction’ he makes between the two,” writes Halley, “is that the image represents presence in absence and the sign absence.”³⁷ This idea has developed since Sartre’s earlier work, *Imagination*, which declares that: “An image is an act, and not some thing” only in conclusion.³⁸ It might be useful to connect outright image and act by suggesting that the “presence in absence” which characterizes image, also characterizes so-called performative language (or language that *acts*), whereas *absence*, as Sartre, Derrida and Fish all argue, necessarily characterizes language in general.

I ask whether that same presence in absence exists in the performative sense of adoption and in resulting adoptive subjectivity. For while the adoptee is displaced, there remains a trace, an “original” sense of identity, and even after placement there exists a glaring presence in the space left by that first identity. The scripting of the adopted self requires both acknowledgment and denial of a prior self, a duality that shifts one way or the other depending on the adoptee’s current sense of belonging. The trope of substitution is in this way complicated by the significant traces that mark the process of legitimization. Consider in Albee, for example, the function of those empty picture frames in *The Zoo Story* (1959), nestled, amidst: “a cup, a saucer, a drinking glass . . . eight or nine books, a pack of pornographic playing cards”³⁹ There is clearly an absence recorded by those frames, *and yet*, juxtaposed to the very presence of some common and not-so-common items, the frames imply a presence too. When Jerry, the hapless “stray” explains to Peter, the hopeless conformist, that he doesn’t have any pictures to put in the frames, Peter works to fill the obvious gaps with “legitimate” relations: “Your parents . . . perhaps . . . a girl friend”⁴⁰ Both of Jerry’s parents are dead; girls are another matter. Homosexual “for eleven days” as an adolescent, Jerry finds himself unable to sustain a relationship with a woman or a man. Because there are two frames, the audience might logically favor the absent parent theory, but given Jerry’s bisexuality, the two spaces could imply the girlfriend and boyfriend that Jerry never had. Love— from parents or romantic partners—is missing and the absence framed nostalgically in a way that emphasizes the *presence* of his loss.

In terms of adoption, that potent emptiness symbolizes the alienation of

someone outside of historical connections, outside the discursive realm that constructs identity. In this way, Jerry and all his neighbors—boardinghouse transients from the “colored queen” next door to the disembodied voice sobbing upstairs—are social orphans yet to be placed within confirming structures, relationships or families whose rhetoric of love would legitimize or embody them. But they still exist, disembodied, even in their *absence* they are *present*. Albee’s family dramas illustrate overtly the problem of belonging for adoptees caught between “original” (inner) identity and adoptive (observed) identity—a presence in absence in terms of image but also in terms of language.

To ease his sense of alienation, Jerry attempts to escape from the zoo-like boardinghouse to explore Peter’s stable, middle-class model family, complete with wife, two daughters, two cats and two parakeets (each pair suitable for framing). This play infers, however, that the “model family” structure is as or even more dangerous than individual alienation because it serves to mask alienation without remedying it. Adoption *appears* safe, a system of refuge, as I indicate earlier, for abused and neglected children. Even Albee, regarding the “adoption” of his three cats, notes:

The [Greenwich Village Humane] League people go out and look for abandoned cats on the street, and save them from the awful things that happen to homeless kittens in New York, like being tossed into bonfires by mean kids . . . ⁴¹

His offhand remark reminds the reader that to take in these vulnerable cats is to save them from the brutality of a harsh, uncaring world. And yet virtually *all* of Albee’s family dramas depict brutality *inside* the home. Mommy and Daddy in *The American Dream*, George and Martha in *Wolf*, Tobias and Agnes in *A Delicate Balance*, the entire cast of *All Over* are very much like the “mean kids” who toss homeless innocents into their bonfire of greed and pain. In this way, Albee dismantles the barrier between so-called civilization and the ravages of man’s animalistic nature, a project he begins in *The Zoo Story*. Jerry cannot fully *exchange* viewpoints with Peter, however, except through his own death whereupon he trades his liminal status for a full leap into *stable* emptiness (to join ultimately the void signified in the picture frames), while Peter, as an agent of Jerry’s death, gleans that the living world is far less stable than he’d thought. Modern society may *appear* safe in its institutions of family and community, but the volatile reality of adoption and exchange illustrates that it is anything but secure.

This may be because the family in each case is a cultural *performance*, and not necessarily an affirming *reality*. In the introduction to his 1968 volume on

American Kinship, cultural anthropologist David M. Schneider establishes some basic connections between culture and language which premise his analysis of kinship:

Insofar as a word is the name for something, and insofar as the word names among many other things a cultural unit or construct, one might conclude that culture consists of the language; that is, the vocabulary, grammar, and syntax, or the words and their definitions and their relationships to each other.⁴²

Since the advent and growth of cultural studies, as a more formal (inter)discipline, Schneider's statement seems hardly new. He complicates this issue, however, by privileging the biogenetic or procreative understanding of kinship as a *model* in American culture. Identity can be constructed, but it must be based on the example of biology to be recognized in our society—a certain valued “syntax” will evoke the notion of “American Dream.” Rallying around its “syntax,” the family is able, in the words R.D. Laing: “to serve as a defense or bulwark against total collapse, disintegration, emptiness, despair, guilt, and other terror.”⁴³ What happens, however, when that structure shifts, grows or redefines itself as it must with adoption? Though Schneider doesn't fully address adoption as a category, by reminding us that *all* kinship structures (even those premised on biology or genetics) are conferred in language, his study indicates that adoptive kinship can be equally sustaining.⁴⁴ The point is that nurturing elements of kinship are easily transformed into “naturalizing” factors by the rhetoric of legitimacy and the nuclear family, a rhetoric that reflects the power of love *and* politics and occurs *in language* to stabilize the “terror” of anomaly. In short, adoption can *substitute* for defective or uncooperative biology.

Later, in his chapter “A Relative Is a Person,” Schneider explains individual “cultural units” called “people”: “These units are different from other kinds in that they are defined by American culture as being able to do something or to act” (author's italics).⁴⁵ Hence *relatives* in this biogenetically modeled family “act” in accordance with or against certain “roles” or expected patterns of behavior. In *Families We Choose*, a book about gay and lesbian kinship, Kath Weston critiques Schneider's dependence on this model, especially in terms of the “roles” it implicates.⁴⁶ If heterosexual genealogy staves off anomaly, homosexual kinship then encourages “deviance.” It's worth keeping Weston's qualifications of Schneider in mind, when we examine Albee. Since Albee is a gay adoptee, his view of American kinship may be valanced by a critique of heterosexual biogenesis as a model for relatedness. How stable is the family as an institution as long as it

is pervaded by these “people” who “act” and/or act out?

While Weston explores what gays and lesbians are doing to disrupt the model, Albee critiques the nuclear family from within. What exactly can “people” *do* to invent their roles? How far can they go in the construction of their identities (or the identities of others)? These are the key questions entertained by Albee in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* as a parody of so-called “normative” kinship.

Crying *Woolf*

There are very few things in this world that I *am* sure of . . . nationalism boundaries, the level of the ocean, political allegiances, practical morality . . . but the one thing in the whole stinking world that I am sure of is my partnership, my chromosomological partnership in the . . . creation of our . . . blond-eyed, blue-haired . . . son.⁴⁷

Woolf is a play about conception and deception. It is also one of Albee's more significant adoption plays, as Blum has pointed out, since sterility, seemingly endemic to his *haute bourgeoisie*, forces characters to invent their children. The “partnership” that George describes above is far less “chromosomological” than linguistic. He and Martha have conspired verbally to constitute their son even before their post-party gathering with Nick and Honey. This discursive form of adoption exaggerates the defining practice of “citing” an individual in order to recognize him or her within a socially sanctioned context. In other words, adoption in general serves to establish “stray” identities in relation to an approved social unit; adoption in *Woolf* relies on this narration utterly, even without the body of the child over which to negotiate.

This is where scholars like Judith Butler enter the critical discourse, to draw from Austin, Derrida, as well as Foucault, to address not only how language enacts a subject identity, but how social forces inform the citational quality of language that recognizes the subject. Thus, before I resume my reading of *Woolf*, I wish to invite both Butler (and, necessarily, her critics) into my already noisy conversation on adoption, substitution, and performativity. If a subject exists through iterable citation, does that subject exist outside citation as well—in the *flesh*, so to speak? Such was the worry over Butler's initial study, *Gender Trouble* (1990) which in its attempt to disrupt gender categories, seems to sever the biological or “innate” from the discursive reality of a subject: “There is no gender identity,” she writes here, “behind the expression of gender.”⁴⁸ But Butler's next book, *Bodies that Matter* (1993), attempts, even in its title, to address the concern

that her deconstructionist tendencies might disembodied living identities. The introduction, more specifically, tempers the original force of *Gender Trouble* by asking: "What are the constraints by which bodies are materialized as 'sexed,' and how are we to understand the 'matter' of sex, and of bodies more generally, as the repeated and violent circumscription of cultural intelligibility?"⁴⁹ Identity, thus, is fleshed-out, but through a violent regulatory process.

Albee exaggerates precisely this tension between the discursive and the material when, for example, he deflates Honey's hysterical pregnancy and undermines her femininity in the process. The physical sterility of all four characters in *Wolf* mediates the potency of their discursive selves. Bodies and language, as we have already seen in *The American Dream*, are violently intertwined for Albee. Whether or not we can agree that *Wolf* is a "speech-act play," as Stanley Fish deems *Coriolanus*, we can be certain that *Wolf* is a *speech-driven* play, noted for its barbed language.⁵⁰ The primary physical action is the arrival and departure of George and Martha's post-party guests, the new faculty member Nick and his "silly" wife Honey, who after an evening of cruel dialogue and some off-stage adultery, retreat (as if from battle) sometime before dawn. When Leonard Leff traces the play's adaptation into film, he uncovers numerous aborted attempts to infuse the dialogue with physical activity. Only the "roadhouse scene" remains from this Hollywood thirst for action; the rest of the story revolves around the bar in George and Martha's living room. Leff also finds many places where Albee's "caustic" language is restored from earlier, gentler screenplays, concluding that: "*Virginia Woolf* was a commercial project whose notoriety was strongly tied to its language."⁵¹

In the play itself, however, dependence on language is introduced as a criticism: "You didn't *do* anything," complains Martha to George when they return from a faculty party at the beginning of the play, "you never *do* anything; you never *mix*. You just sit around and *talk*"⁵² This is the same complaint, you may recall, that Nancy files in "Seascape" after Charlie retires: "We are *not* going to be around forever, Charlie, and you may *not* do nothing . . ." she insists, making the most of a double negative to *incite* her woefully stagnant partner.⁵³ The critique in *Wolf* is likewise ironic, since both George and Martha, like Nancy, *do plenty* with their *talk*. They play; they incite; they wound; they even conceive and kill which stirs the audience to wonder, just how *do* they do it?

To begin with, there are simple exchanges in the play which practically mimic Austin's examples of the "overt performative." For example, just as Martha is about to recount to Nick and Honey the downward trajectory of George's academic career, he cuts in:

GEORGE
 I warn you.
 MARTHA (*Incredulous*)
 You *what*?
 GEORGE (*Very quietly*)
 I warn you....
 MARTHA
 I stand warned!...⁵⁴

The warning “stands,” despite Martha’s decision to defy it. There’s a context and a convention at work here, not only according to our general understanding of what it means to *warn*, but also according to an implicit understanding between George and Martha. For her to continue her train of speech would be to *invite* retaliation on his part. Something *happens* at this moment, if only in the words themselves. Action, at the beginning of the play, is so *utterly* discursive that Martha can only recognize George in language: “I swear . . . if you existed, I’d divorce you . . .,” she threatens in the opening scene.⁵⁵ She senses that to enact the overt performative, “divorce,” she would have to base it in a physical reality that both characters are afraid of—a reality that includes sterility and decay. In this way, the talk *substitutes* for more literal losses. As the play progresses, however, the physical will creep into the night, so to speak, and weaken the structure of George and Martha’s discursive relationship, breaking down their defenses.

Until that time, dialogue takes on some obvious characteristics of action: “Martha and I are merely . . . exercising . . . that’s all . . . we’re merely walking what’s left of our wits,” explains George.⁵⁶ Even if the “performatives” are not so “overt,” things are constantly happening in language. Groundrules are being laid out and dismissed, scenarios are woven and unraveled, *games* are played to keep these characters “fit” since they have no other “fruitful” activity in their lives. During one such “exercise,” in which Nick is materialized as a “personal screwing machine,” Honey covers her ears: “Dear, you mustn’t . . . you mustn’t . . . you mustn’t . . . such language . . .”⁵⁷ In this scene, Honey’s more afraid of the *words* her husband utters than the reality of his adulterous potential. It’s through dialogue that both conception and deception take place. The presence of an alternate reality beneath the discourse, however, lends force to the performative. Louis Paul describes this “alternate reality” as grief in his “game analysis” of *Wolf*:

. . . one of these life games, Our Son the Pretend Child, is of special interest because it points to a major defect in identity, the lack of procreation and generativity, which is repaired by imaginary restitution; and that this game or life project or script represses a core of grief.⁵⁸

It is the presence in absence, the ghost of all four character's short-comings, that enacts the performative, that seeks out substitutions for painful losses, that *adopts* an imaginary child to rally around.

In her essay "Burning Acts," Judith Butler explains the parameters of performativity: "It is not simply that the speech act takes place *within* a practice, but that the act is itself a ritualized practice."⁵⁹ So thus while all language has "play," perhaps there is a dimension of language—the ritualized practice—that enhances this play. Indeed, game theory corroborates: "Following Berne," writes Paul, "'game' is taken as a serious technical term denoting an ongoing, reciprocal, stereotyped relationship between two or more people unfolding toward a well-defined, predictable outcome and having an ulterior or unconscious motive."⁶⁰ George and Martha ritualize the discursive existence of their child as a game. They practice it, however, to the same perilous potential of all text: "Writing," explains Foucault in "What is an Author," "unfolds like a game (*jeu*) that invariably goes beyond its own rules and transgresses its limits."⁶¹ The performative sense of child survives in tact only as long as both parents (or authors) exist. Once they cease to exist as parents/authors, the ritual *unfolds* as narrative, as "orphaned speech."

Martha transgresses the boundaries of the ritual, by first mentioning "sonny-Jim" to others, then by seducing Nick as a son-figure (a doubly illicit act). By the end of a long night of discursive torture, physical violence begins to bleed into the dialogue as the text reaches beyond its verbal limits. So that after Martha seduces Nick (and verbal play becomes sexual play), George sets the stage for his retaliation with pointed physical abuse:

(Grabbing her hair, pulling her head back)

Now, you listen to me, Martha; you have had quite an evening . . . quite a night for yourself, and you just can't cut it off whenever you've got enough blood in your mouth. We are going on, and I'm going to have at you, and it's going to make your performance tonight look like an Easter pageant . . .⁶²

In this passage, the threat of both physical and verbal violence is symbolized by the "blood" in Martha's mouth. George then transgresses the text of parenthood by "killing" their son in a narrative about a car accident—a narrative he has been constructing for some time in the form of a novel or perhaps an autobiography (we're never quite sure). When (and if) George *did* kill his parents (according to that original script), that destruction enabled his writing power—the orphaned text could unfold, until a new father figure (Martha's father) emerges to stop its publication (by adopting and destroying it).

By using the story that disabled his academic rise, George attacks the Father as a governing institution, destroying not only himself as father, and referring perhaps quite literally to the death of his own father, but also by defying Martha's father as author of his dead-end career. Thus, the old narrative *unfolds*:

Martha . . . (*Long pause*) . . . our son is . . . **dead.**

(*Silence*)

(*A tiny chuckle*) on a country road, with his learner's permit in his pocket, he swerved, to avoid a porcupine, and drove into a . . .

Martha interrupts with "rigid fury"⁶³—"YOU...CAN'T...DO...THAT!"—underscoring the performative for us. George is not here describing an event that took place outside of language (even if he is, on one level describing a true event), he is *doing* something with his words that is intensely painful to Martha. In response, she tries desperately to *save* the "family" and keep the game going, not by resuscitating the "son" per se, but by insisting that even in death, he is a part of their lives. Through a poignant description of her son's invisible hands, she *authors* a counter-narrative that recalls the collusion between her and George to nurture their child as a defense:

and as he grew . . . oh! so wise! . . . he walked evenly between us . . . these hands, still, to hold us off a bit, for mutual protection, to protect us all from George's . . . weakness . . . and my . . . necessary greater strength . . . to protect himself . . . and us.⁶⁴

Martha's story is really a confession, revealing how their "son" has always functioned to defer their failure, to stave-off the pain, the *presence*, of their empty existence. George's bitterly cruel comment, "There's a real mother talking," shows no mercy. The "play" is over. The violence of "Sonny-Jim"'s deconstruction, the *collision*, thus counter-balances the power of the construction, the *collusion*.

"Man," according to Fish's reading of *Coriolanus*, cannot author himself (or his paternity) outside the regulatory schema that determines cultural intelligibility.⁶⁵ George is no exception to this conundrum, and he knows it. Walter Davis's exhaustive psychoanalytic rendering of the play in *Get the Guests* (1994), isolates George's reaction to existential and Oedipal failure as a key catalyst to Albee's vicious finale. After Martha's own electra dilemma prompts her to deny George's paternity of their "child":

The question Who is the Father? deepens the instabilities of George's present situation, for the essential definition he offers of fatherhood is revenge. In doing so, he reveals his present purpose: to repeat, with the surrogate son, roles reversed, what Martha's father did to him.⁶⁶

Basically, George annihilates father *and* son. He authors himself in his "autobiography" and his child in his and Martha's "game," but the structures and forces that permit that construction are both self-perpetuating and self-dissolving.

"Truth and illusion. Who knows the difference, eh, toots? Eh?" quips George to an increasingly baffled Nick.⁶⁷ The fuzziness of reality deepens the performative: "The possibility of truth depends on the possibility of falseness," explains Petry, "and successfully performative language cannot be true for the compelling reason that it cannot be false."⁶⁸ George and Martha's exchanges during the night have been neither true nor false, but sustaining in a way that breaks down ultimately, leaving them and us empty and exhausted with the effort. What can this tragedy tell us about adoptive subjectivity? The elaborate nurturing and painful erasure of "Sonny-Jim" recalls Schneider's emphasis on the role of language in maintaining the "cultural units" that govern kinship. What *Wolf* contributes is an exaggeration of the adoptee's invisibility as a "unit" lacking the affirmation of biology, a unit so vulnerable, even its absence couldn't prevent its demise. It also locates the "presence" of adoptive subjectivity in loss, as in *The Zoo Story*, only this time the loss is tied to parents who persist in "framing" an empty family portrait.

The possibility that people could, in this way, conceive and kill discursively was unsettling to many reviewers of the original production of *Wolf*.

Such vicious verbiage, they insisted, should be kept private, even locked up: "[*Wolf*] is a sick play about sick people," wrote Robert Coleman for the *New York Mirror*. "They are neurotic, cruel and nasty . . . They really belong in a sanitarium for the mentally ill rather than on a stage."⁶⁹ As if George and Martha were conscious of their audience, not actors but *real* people performing their lives for us, Coleman relegates them to an asylum for characters unfit for drama. The remark, however, is somewhat consistent with Albee's sense that the adoptee in *Wolf* is merely "metaphorical," whereas he, the author, is *real*. Where do George and Martha fit into his continuum of reality? They are clearly not metaphorical in the script, and yet they are the *figurative* product of Albee's imagination. If they are *real* enough to confuse critics, why can't their "son" (the figurative product of *their* imagination) be real too?⁷⁰ If only the parent ("author") exists to imagine the child, is Albee more *real* as an adoptee . . . or as an author?

A phoniness or absence of "real values" is, perhaps, what underscores the

perceived reality or *presence* behind these “sick” characters. Neither George and Martha nor Nick and Honey are able to author their parenthood outside the regulatory schema, or “normative” kinship model that simultaneously condemns them as sterile. George and Martha may construct their child, but their infertility—literal and symbolic—is a preexisting condition that audience members could recognize on many levels. Indeed, a common thread of both social and physical sterility runs throughout the dysfunctional families in Albee’s plays. Herein lie yawning *absences*, but it’s also possible to find adoptees (also literal and symbolic) languishing, half-expressed, on the margins of these dramas. My *bastardization* of “presence in absence” is designed to posit how adoption, as a performative requires the subject to “slip,” but not without a trace. We must further ask why adoption, in particular, is so highly regulated, why the containment of the adoptive identity is designed to expunge that trace, to keep the “fourth child” from *materializing*. It may be worth considering too why Albee, a highly prolific author and adoptee, gives all the dialogue to his parents, who then hang themselves with their sardonic lines—even in this, the adoptee’s voice as author, is present in absence.

When art begins to hurt...when art begins to hurt,
it's time to look around. Yes it is.
—from *Box*

Notes

1. Edward Albee, interview with Jackson R. Bryer, *The Playwright's Art: Conversations with Contemporary American Dramatists* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers UP, 1995) 21.

2. Albee, *Box and Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung* 1968. *The Plays, Vol. 1* (New York: Atheneum, 1991).

3. Major critics who provide biographical details include C. W. E. Bigsby, *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-century American Drama: Vol. 2, Williams, Miller, and Albee* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984), Ruby Cohn, *Edward Albee* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1969); Julien N. Wasserman, *Edward Albee: An Interview and Essays* (Houston: U of St. Thomas, 1983). An important source for this paper was Albee’s autobiographical talk, “The Playwright vs. the Theatre,” The Council for Equal Rights in Adoption [CERA] Conference, Doral Hotel, New York 1 Oct. 1995. Since he requested that the talk not be recorded, I will not quote from it, although concerns that Albee raised that day around adoption and authorship are reflected generally in my analysis.

4. Wasserman 18.

5. See Andrew Parker and Eve Kofskowsky Sedgwick, *Performativity and Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1995) for a recent discussion surrounding the distinction between these terms.

6. Scott Giantvalley’s *Edward Albee: A Reference Guide* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1987) contains over 400 pages of annotated bibliographical citations and claims, “more than that of any other American playwright, Albee’s language has been of central concern” (xiv). This is reflected in some very diverse studies, notably Ruby Cohn, “The Verbal Murders of Edward Albee,” *Dialogue in*

American Drama (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1971); Wasserman, "'The Pitfalls of Drama': The Idea of Language in the Plays of Edward Albee: 29-53; and Matthew C. Roudane, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?: Necessary Fictions, Terrifying Realities* (Boston: Twayne, 1990) among others.

7. I have explored several other texts in terms of their treatment of adoptive subjectivity, including Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* and Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* in my essay in *Modern Language Studies* 25.3 (1995). Concurrent and forthcoming work on adoption in literature by Garry Leonard, Michael Bowen, Margot Backus and Carol Singly and a lively discussion lead by Marianne Novy has enabled my focus.

8. Roudane 5. He is quoting Albee's preface to *The American Dream* [published with *The Zoo Story* (New York: Signet, 1961) 54.]

9. See various interviews in Philip C. Kolin, *Conversations with Edward Albee* (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1988) 4, 32, 118, 194.

10. Albee, *The American Dream*.

11. Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context," 1977, trans. Samuel Weber. *Limited Inc.* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1988) 2. Derrida is here setting up an overview of graphematics (more fully explicated in *Of Grammatology*), in order to dispute the existence of performatives as a separate component of language. The notion that all language is active in this way—transporting meaning—problematises the distinction between descriptive and more operative text.

12. Sandy Petry, *Speech Acts and Literary Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1990) 132.

13. Albee, *Seascape*, 1975. *The Plays, Vol. 2* (New York: Atheneum, 1991).

14. Elaine Tyler May, *Barren in the Promised Land: Childless Americans and the Pursuit of Happiness* (New York: BasicBooks, 1995) 181-209.

15. Ibid. 153-159

16. Albee, *Seascape* 86.

17. Ibid. 11.

18. Albee, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* [W] 1962 (New York: Atheneum, 1983).

19. Harold Blum, "A Psychoanalytic View of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 17 (1969): 890.

20. Ibid. 888.

21. Ibid. 892

22. See Albee, interview with Paul Zindel and Loree Yerby, Kolin 17

23. Michael Bowen pointed out in "Cultural Narcissism: Albee and the Adoption Triad," Special Session on Albee and Adoption, MLA Convention, Sheraton Hotel, Washington D. C., 28 Dec. 1996 that "Albee's preface to *The American Dream* has led critics to view the play mostly in terms of its attack on consumerism . . . But Albee's hope that the play would be regarded as 'an attack on the substitution of artificial for real values' hints at the exchange in adoption of 'real' for adoptive parents." Thus, a Marxist analysis leads us easily to a deconstruction of adoption as a social phenomenon.

24. Judith Modell, *Kinship With Strangers: Adoption and Interpretations of Kinship in American Culture* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1994) 53.

25. Ibid. 54.

26. See overview of the Steinberg case in Robert K. Landers, "Independent Adoptions," *Editorial Research Reports* 2.22 (1987): 646-655.

27. Eric Blau, *Stories of Adoption: Loss and Reunion* (Portland, OR: NewSage, 1993) 46.

28. Albee, *The American Dream* 115.

29. Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," 1971, *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984) 83.

30. Elizabeth Barthelet, for example, writes effectively about her right to adoptive parenthood in *Family Bonds: Adoption and the Politics of Parenting* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993), but even she doubts her legitimacy as an adoptive parent: "There is a play-acting quality to my feelings as I wash and dress and feed this baby. He still seems a bit like someone else's child" (17).

Eventually, she finds a way to express “Christopher” as *hers*, far removed from his South American context, firmly situated in the world of a Harvard Law School professor. The awkward masquerade becomes a comfortable reality.

31. Albee, *Counting the Ways* 1975, *The Plays*, Vol. 2.

32. Brian Way, “Albee and the Absurd: *The American Dream* and *The Zoo Story*,” *Modern Critical Views: Edward Albee*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1987) 10.

33. *Ibid.* 9.

34. J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1962). For a summary of Austin and surrounding viewpoints, see Petry.

35. Petry 147; Stanley Fish, “With the Compliments of the Author: Reflections on the Austin and Derrida,” [WCA] *Doing What Comes Naturally: Change, Rhetoric and the Practice of Theory in Literary and Legal Studies* (Durham: Duke UP, 1989) 66-67.

36. Fish, WCA 44.

37. Michael Halley, “Argo Sum,” *Diacritics* 12 (1982): 73. This detail, explains Halley, is important for Barthes’s discovery of a photograph’s “punctum” or “ghost presence.” Indeed, the visual or “image” of self versus its written or scripted representation can play an enormous factor in an adoptee’s sense of identity, especially when the adoptee doesn’t look like his or her adoptive family.

38. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Imagination*, trans. Forrest Williams (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan, 1962) 146.

39. Albee, *Zoo Story* 23.

40. *Ibid.* 23.

41. Albee, interview with Lillian Ross, Kolin 3

42. David M. Schneider, *American Kinship: A Cultural Account* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1968) 3.

43. R. D. Laing, “The Family and the ‘Family,’” *The Politics of the Family and Other Essays* (New York: Vintage, 1972) 14.

44. Schneider explains briefly how step-parents act “as if” biological, 26. See Modell for a fuller analysis of how and why historically adoptive parents may act “as if” biological.

45. Schneider 57.

46. Kath Weston, *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship* (New York: Columbia UP, 1991).

47. Albee, *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* 72.

48. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990) 25.

49. Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York: Routledge, 1993) xii.

50. See Fish, “How to Do Things With Austin and Searle: Speech-Act Theory and Literary Criticism,” [HTD] *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1980) 200. Here Fish describes dismissing speech-act theory in such a way as “limited”: “I think the answer is that speech-act principles have *such* broad applicability that it can be scary to experience their explanatory power” (101). Thus the category “speech-act play” is highly contestable.

51. Leonard Leff, “Play Into Film: Warner Brothers’ *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*,” *Theater Journal* 33.4 (1981): 465.

52. Albee, *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* 7.

53. Albee, *Seascape* 9.

54. Albee, *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* 83.

55. *Ibid.* 16.

56. *Ibid.* 33-34.

57. *Ibid.* 69.

58. Louis Paul, “A Game Analysis of Albee’s ‘Who Afraid of Virginia Woolf?’: The Core

of Grief," *Literature and Psychology* 17.1 (1967): 47.

59. Judith Butler, "Burning Acts," Parker and Sedgwick 205.

60. Paul 47.

61. Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?" 1979 *The Foucault Reader* 102.

62. Albee, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* 208.

63. Ibid. 231.

64. Ibid. 221-222.

65. Fish, HTD 219.

66. Walter Davis, *Get the Guests: Psychoanalysis, Modern American Drama and the Audience* (Madison: U of Wisconsin, 1994) 228.

67. Albee, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* 201.

68. Petry 12.

69. Robert Coleman, "The Play You'll Love or Loathe," rev. of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, *New York Mirror* 15 Oct. 1962.

70. Garry Leonard in his paper "The Immaculate Deception: Adoption in Albee's Plays," MLA Session on Albee and Adoption, provided a somewhat similar analysis: "To say the child in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is a fantasy is to say no more nor less than it is a configuration of the adopted child, never more present than when most absent, and never really there at all, except in terms of its effect on how other people regulate their relationships with one another."

