Camp and Subjectivity in Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

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Introduction

Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is a play that gives us an opportunity to think about family and sexuality in the era of queer theory. When Mizuki Oura, a former Takarazuka Top Star—The Takarazuka Theater is an all-female theater whose top stars play male parts—played Martha in the 2003 Benisan Pit production in Japan, she somehow impressed me as a drag queen. The performance enabled me to reconsider the significance of (homo-)sexuality represented in the play by the performers.

Ingmar Bergman, the Swedish film and stage director, reportedly said "he had considered using an all-male cast for his 1963 Stockholm production" (Qtd. in Bottoms 104) of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*. Albee himself told an interviewer in 1966 that "a number of the movie critics of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* have repeated the speculation that the play was written about four homosexuals disguised as heterosexual men and women" (Kolin, *Conversations* 52). Oura's Martha partly and covertly realized on the stage the idea with which Albee has not agreed.[1] The play has also tempted critics to undertake gay readings, which has caused attacks from various sides. John M. Clum summarizes them in *Still Acting Gay*:

> Albee has been attacked from all sides: by Kauffmann for being closeted and, therefore, distorting the truth of heterosexual relationships and by Gilbert for being closeted and, therefore, distorting the truth about heterosexual relationships, women, and homosexual relationships. (Clum 148)[2]

As critics argue, the interpretation of the play as depicting "closeted homosexuality" (Clum 144) was closely linked with homophobia and heterosexism at that time. Many critics who insisted "the disguised homosexual influence" (Qtd. in Clum 146) really showed their fear of admitting the existence of strong women as represented by Martha who show overt sexual desire or the couple who enjoy fierce verbal attacks against each other. Stanley Kauffmann, a *New York Times* critic, emotionally argues that "the homosexual dramatist" distorts heterosexual relationships:

> A recent Broadway production raises again the subject of the homosexual dramatist. It is a subject that nobody is comfortable about. All of us admirably "normal" people are a bit irritated by it and wish it could disappear. However, it promises to be a matter of continuing, perhaps increasing, significance. . . . If he writes of marriage and of other relationships about which he knows or cares little, it is because he has no choice but to masquerade. (Kauffmann n.p.)

Richard Schechner, the former editor of *Tulane Drama Review*, wrote a review that slyly impugns the play:

> We must not ignore what Albee represents and portends, either for our theatre or for our society. The lie of his work is the lie of our theatre and the lie of America. The lie of decadence must be fought. (Schechner 64)

Sky Gilbert, a critic with "a militant gay point of view" (Clum 147), on the other hand, finds an "ultimately misogynist" Martha, and regards the couples in the play as "unrealistic" because of the author's homosexual bias:

> [U]nfortunately the play is limited by the closet aspect. Sure,

> heterosexuals act like this, but this is not a closely observed heterosexual relationship; it is a closely observed gay relationship masquerading as a straight one. So the observations are less piquant, less truthful, more off-putting and confusing. . . . But this leads us to the central problem in Albee's piece, because not only is the play about gay men, it is a critique of their lifestyles and presents many of Albee's anti-gay feelings, but buried deep inside the closet. (Gilbert 58)

John M. Clum, who introduces the critical history, regards *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* as "an exercise in camp" (152), "an exercise in gay metatheatricality and an exorcism of the claims of heterosexuality" (152), but concludes that "[w]hen the bitchiness and game-playing end, the play's *raison d'etre* is eliminated and one is left with an empty, joyless conclusion." David Van Leer, who discusses gay writings in "Gay Writers in Straight Fiction," finds campiness in the play but he denies "a homosexual reading" of the play (25). He, who criticizes Susan Sontag in her "Notes on Camp" that she "understated [camp's] relation to the gay community" (20), concludes that "*Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is essentially a well-made family drama in the high moral tradition of Henrik Ibsen, Eugene O'Neill, and Arthur Miller"; "Albee's story is not camp."

Albee himself, indeed, denies "a homosexual reading" of the play, but he made a provocative remark that has enticed critics into such a reading:

> I would be fascinated to read an intelligent paper documenting from the text that *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is a play written about four homosexuals. It might instruct me about the deep slag pits of my subconscious. (Kolin, *Conversations* 53)

To discuss sexuality in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* seems difficult. The seeming difficulty lies partly in the influence of the

discourse of the American family after World War II. However, the theme of the family and sexuality should give us a promising clue to reappraise the play in the era of queer theory. "Camp" plays a crucial role in *Who's Afraid?* and a camp reading should lead us to the radicalism of the play.

Camp in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

Many critics perceive camp in the play; Clum and Van Leer are not exceptions. For example, Stephen Bottoms argues that "a gay sensibility is also evident in the play's occasionally campy wit" (87), introducing George's reference to "Christ and all those girls" (Albee, *Who's Afraid* 77). Reminding us of Bettie Davis as "a cult figure in the world" and "one of the favorite targets of female impersonators" (133), Foster Hirsch argues for "the play's essentially camp sensibility." Kauffmann finds in the play camp, "an instrument of revenge on the main body of society" (Qtd. in Bronski 126).

Camp elements should be pointed out. The first element we notice is Martha's words, "What a dump," which is a line of Bettie Davis, a camp icon at that time. The following exchange shows the scene when Martha quotes it:

> MARTHA: What a cluck! What a cluck you are.
> GEORGE: It's late, you know? Late.
> MARTHA [looks about the room. Imitates Bette Davis]: What a dump. Hey, what's that from? 'What a dump!' (Albee, *Who's Afraid* 11)

Jack Babuscio in one of the earliest essays that discussed camp and gay sensibility refers to Bettie Davis in *Beyond the Forest* (1949) as one of "certain stars whose performances are highly charged with exaggerated (usually sexual) role-playing" and for whom many gay people show "enthusiasm" (25). Imitation, it should be added, involves quotation.

"Campy wit" in word-play that reflects gay sensibility should be

mentioned next. Martha addresses George as "you old floozie!" (Albee, *Who's Afraid* 50). Honey responds to her that "[h]e's not a floozie . . . he can't be a floozie . . . (50). "Floozie" of course means, according to the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, "a woman who has sexual relationships with a lot of different men, in a way that you disapprove of." Therefore, Honey's words unwittingly become an explanatory note to the wit, because she cannot imagine a situation that the word is used outside the usual meaning. Martha also addresses George as "You Mother" (93). The word "mother" can be an elliptic use of "motherfucker" and also connote a homosexual person. This kind of word usage is word-play in a community where everyone shares the same sensibility.

This kind of "campy wit" is not an exclusive feature of Martha's. George proves himself to have the similar kind of wit. As mentioned earlier, George refers to "Christ and all those girls." It should be noted that the reference is made when George explains the game rules to Nick and Honey. As Clum argues, "Nick's very statement, confusing 'play' and 'be,' shows his inferiority to George and Martha. Nick doesn't know how to perform and ultimately becomes the butt of jokes in George and Martha's 'bits' " (152). Martha and George ostensibly show off their adversarial relationship; they are opponents in their game playing. However, they can easily cooperate and conspire when they make a "butt" of Nick and Honey:

> Nick: I'm nobody's houseboy. . . .
> George and Martha: . . . Now! [Sing] I'm nobody's houseboy now. . . .
> [Both laugh.] (Albee, *Who's Afraid* 116)

Martha says that George can "keep learning the games [they] play as quickly as [she] change[s] the rules" (113). Though George gives names to the games we see in the play, George and Martha completely share the games; they enjoy the games and they collaboratively make the rules. They have formed, in spite of Van Leer's words mentioned

earlier, a kind of “gay community” among them.

The games George introduces in the play are alliteratively called “Humiliate the Host” (84); “Hump the Hostess” (85); “Get the Guest” (85); and “bringing up baby” (120). The first three share a characteristic of verbal fencing as Van Leer writes that “[c]amp is the best-known gay linguistic style, occupying within male homosexual culture roughly the same position as ‘playing the dozens’ or ‘signifyin’ within African American culture” (20). According to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, “signifyin” is “the act of boasting, baiting, insulting, or making insinuations” and “playing the dozens” “a game characterized by the exchange of insults.” The games remind us of “the Truth Game” in Mart Crowley’s *The Boys in the Band* (1968), which openly depicts closeted gay life (88–125). As Alan Sinfield points out, “[t]he truth game [of *The Boys in the Band*], calling up your one great love and telling him about it, recalls ‘Get the Guest’ in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*” (301). This resemblance can exemplify gay sensibility in campy wit of *Who’s Afraid?* in which two heterosexual couples appear.

As *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is criticized by Sky Gilbert as being closeted (Clum 148), so *The Boys in the Band* is criticized as being homophobic (Bronski 131). However, Michael Bronski defends *The Boys in the Band* for the reason that it “created possibilities for presenting gay material on the stage” (131). If the resemblance between the two plays can be detected, camp lies in the core of it.[3] The fact that Albee was involved in the first production of *The Boys in the Band* (Kolin, *Conversations* 200) illustrates the affinity between the two plays. Therefore, camp in the play cannot be denied, even though Van Leer tries to define *Who’s Afraid?* as not camp. Then, the following words of Van Leer’s become expressive:

> Camp quotation in the play is itself camped, performed “within quotation marks” as a formal device, but emptied of its customary meanings and used for purposes not common in the gay tradition from which it derives. (25)

He tries to demarcate the border between camp in the gay tradition and camp "within quotation marks." However, it can provide a crucial clue to the very structure of *Who's Afraid?*: camp as quotation.

Camp and the Embedded Structure

Double entendre and embedded structure are two conspicuous elements in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*. Double entendre is usually, according to *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, "a word or phrase that may be understood in two different ways, one of which is often sexual." The example of double entendres in the original meaning can be abundantly found in the play;[4] however, it has a more profound function beyond the original meaning. Likewise, embedded structure is metaphorized with Chinese boxes while the one in the play is based on quotation.

An intriguing example of double entendre is found in the following exchange when George knows that Martha lets the topic of their son slip to Honey although he entreated her to keep it secret to themselves:

> Martha: I said never mind. I'm sorry I *brought it up*.
> George: Him up . . . not it. You *brought him up*. Well, more or less. When's the little bugger going to appear, hunh? I mean isn't tomorrow meant to be his birthday, or something?
> Martha: I don't want to talk about it!
> George [falsely innocent]: But Martha . . .
> Martha: I DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT!
> George: I'll bet you don't. [To Honey and Nick] Martha does not want to talk about it . . . him. Martha is sorry she *brought it up . . . him*. (Albee, *Who's Afraid* 48, emphasis added)

The repetition of the phrase "bring it/him up" produces a strong impression on the audience. It emphasizes the usage of the pronouns while the two meanings of the phrasal verb "bring up" are focused here: Martha has looked after their son and she introduces the topic of the son

into discussion. Simultaneously, the repetition implies that "their son" and "the topic of the son" are interchangeable.

The topic of their son is first introduced by George's word "the bit" (18), as we will discuss below. That is to say, "the baby" and "the bit" are interchangeable. Here we should remember all the games have alliterated names. Martha and George "bring up" various kinds of games; they "bring up" their "baby." The word "bit" connects the games and their baby through the double entendre of the phrasal verb "bring up." Camp lies in the core of the games performed in the play, so the baby is connected with camp via the word "bit." The baby finally becomes a metaphor of camp in the play.

Albee reveals a secret about the structure of his play:

> I think that if people were a little more aware of what actually is beneath the naturalistic overlay they would be surprised to find how early the unnaturalistic base had been set. When you're dealing with a symbol in a realistic play, it is also a realistic fact. You must expect the audience's mind to work on both levels, symbolically and realistically. But we're trained so much in pure, realistic theater that it's difficult for us to handle things on two levels at the same time. (Kolin, *Conversations* 58)

"The bit" about "the baby" enacted before the audience is "a realistic fact," while "the baby" is "a symbol." The audience simultaneously watches "the bit" as "a realistic fact" and "the baby" as "a symbol." This duality or embedding is also supported by the embedded structure of the play.

Shinichi Shigihara writes in an Afterword to the Japanese translation of *Tiny Alice* that readers should read *The Zoo Story* in order to understand *Tiny Alice* and he points out the embedded structure observed in both plays. He remarks about Albee's two plays that the "story" as a play within the play is repeated in the "STORY" of the play itself as if repeated in Chinese boxes or rondo in music (309). An

incident that happens in a miniature of “a mansion—a castle,” “a huge doll’s-house model of the buiding” set in the mansion, also happens in the mansion itself. This setting in *Tiny Alice* throws the embedded structure in relief. The intention why Albee visualizes the structure is to show that, as a character’s phrase clearly indicates, it blurs the distinction between the original and the imitation: “men make God in their own image” (Albee, *Tiny Alice* 494). Albee intends to show that the relationship between the original and the imitation is arbitrary; they are interchangeable. Visualization of the structure enables the audience to grasp that something unseen lies behind what is seen. *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is chronologically situated between *The Zoo Story* and *Tiny Alice*, so it seems reasonable that a structure similar to the latter two can be detected in the former. The two couples give a clue to the structure in *Who’s Afraid?*. The relation of a couple can be repeated or “quoted” in another couple; a couple who watches another is watched by couples in the audience: this “embedded structure” blurs the distinction between the original and the imitation in the relationships of couples, families.

Albee characterizes the two couples as follows: Honey, “26, a petite blonde girl, rather plain”; and Nick, “30, her husband. Blond, well-put-together, good-looking.” Martha, “a large, boisterous woman, 52, looking somewhat younger. Ample, but not fleshy”; and George, “her husband, 46. Thin; hair going grey” (10). Honey and Nick can be viewed as a representative couple under compulsory heterosexuality, while Martha and George cannot. However, “baby” forms a linkage between the two couples, which forges a “family.”

Matthew C. Roudané writes that “Albee’s dialogue creates an uneasy intimacy between actor and spectator” (41). Using Herbert Blau’s words “watchers watching the watchers watch,” he argues that “[t]his is a play about those seeing and those seen.” Martha and George are watched by Honey and Nick, all of whom are watched by the audience. This is one side of the embedded structure in this play; the other side suggests that the audience is also watched by the performers.

The audience is horrified along with Honey when George aims a rifle at Martha; they empathize with Honey. On the other hand, they stand on Martha and George's side when they watch how Nick and Honey cannot understand the rules of the games. The audience responds to the performance of the performers; their response is their performance. The performers and the audience are interchangeable. If Honey and Nick could be mocked when they cannot respond to George and Martha, the audience would be mocked by them when they cannot respond promptly and smartly. Van Leer's observation partly illustrates the point: "Throughout the performance Albee has trained his audience to accept highly artificial camp exchange as a 'natural' mark of intelligence and emotional depth" (24).

The relation between the watchers and the watched is not fixed; it is reversible. Albee intentionally shows the interchangeability and reversibility using the embedded structure. Roudané concludes that "Albee subverts the authority of his own dramatic text by casting the seers (the audience) into what is being seen (the performance). . . . He rejects the audience as voyeur. He courts the audience as active participants" (46–47). Alan Sinfield observes that "the principal rationale for the internecine taunting that constitutes the dialogue" is "anxiety about the American family" (226). When the reversibility of the original and the imitation in the two couples is linked with the "anxiety," it reminds us of the argument that camp, especially drag, has subversive power over the hetero-normative gender system.

Here we should refer back to Van Leer's observation mentioned earlier: "Camp quotation in the play is itself camped, performed 'within quotation marks' as a formal device." He, accordingly, concludes that camp in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is amputated from "the gay tradition." His argument seems to be grounded on the belief in the original "gay tradition." The following words of Judith Butler's can offer a refutation against the charge:

The repetition of heterosexual constructs within sexual cultures

> both gay and straight may well be the inevitable site of the denaturalization and mobilization of gender categories. The replication of heterosexual constructs in non-heterosexual frames brings into relief the utterly constructed status of the so-called heterosexual original. Thus, gay is to straight *not* as copy is to original, but, rather, as copy is to copy. (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 41)

Only heterosexual couples seem to appear on the stage of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*. However, Albee intentionally casts Martha and George as campy characters and brings in anti/non-heterosexuality. The embedded structure of the two couples "brings into relief the utterly constructed status of the so-called heterosexual original." That is why Albee visualizes camp in *Who's Afraid?*. Here also lies the reason why Albee forces George to kill their baby. Are we able to say that the campy subject can be the original in place of the heterosexual subject? Are we sure that, as Susan Sontag defines, "[t]o perceive Camp in objects and persons is to understand Being-as-Playing-a-Role" (280)? Is camp really performance? These questions are crucial for the appropriate apprehension and appraisal of *Who's Afraid?*. In order to arrive at our conclusion, we should analyze "quotations" in *Who's Afraid?* that come from another campy play, Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

Beyond *A Streetcar Named Desire*

Two instances in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, at least, clearly remind us of *A Streetcar Named Desire*.[5] One is the phrase "The Poker Night" (110), which appears in Martha's monologue with Gertrude Steinesque repetitive expression at the beginning of Scene Three: "Exorcism." The other is the line "Flores; flores para los muertos. Flores" that George uses when he appears in the same scene (115). Both Martha and George use phrases from *Streetcar*. Can their performance be regarded as, to use Van Leer's words, "camp quotation"?

"The Poker Night," Scene Three of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, which

is enacted by four poker players of "physical manhood," emphasizes codependency between violence and heterosexuality in reproductive relationship using the contrast between "a blow" and "a baby": Stanley, "the gaudy seed-bearer" whose "life has been pleasure with women" (Williams 128), deals his wife Stella "a blow" and Blanche tries to stop him because her sister Stella is "going to have a baby" (Williams 152). Therefore, the scene itself is intriguing because it is a kind of critique to hetero-normativity observed in the relationship of a heterosexual couple. However, it is still interesting in the strong indication that Blanche, who learns of her sister's pregnancy, begins an acquaintance with Mitch, one of the poker players. The scene, accordingly, intimates a happy marriage for Blanche. The "baby" here can be a symbol of the family: a legitimate reproductive relationship.

In *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, the phrase "the Poker Night" appears as follows:

> I cry all the time. And George cries all the time, too. We both cry all the time, and then, what we do, we cry, and we take our tears, and we put 'em in the ice box, in the goddamn ice trays [Begins to laugh] until they're all frozen [Laughs even more] and then . . . we put them . . . in our . . . drinks. [More laughter, which is something else, too. After sobering silence] *Up the drain, down the spout, dead, gone and forgotten. . . . Up the spout, not down the spout*; *Up the spout*: *THE POKER NIGHT*. *Up the spout. . . .* (Albee, *Who's Afraid* 273; emphasis added)

The phrase "down the spout" means "bankrupt," while the phrase "up the spout" has a meaning of "pregnancy." Blanche, who has lost Belle Reve and has gone bankrupt, knows her sister's pregnancy and meets a would-be husband. The phrase "up the spout, not down the spout; Up the spout: The Poker Night," therefore, hints at a happy blueprint of Blanche's having a baby in the near future. Here, the intimation of the "baby" is revealing.

The other quotation, “Flores; flores para los muertos. Flores” is the line of a vendor, “a blind Mexican woman” who carries “bunches of those gaudy tin flowers that lower-class Mexicans display at funerals and other festive occasions” (Williams 205). She appears in the scene when Blanche is blamed by Mitch for her lies. The vendor’s words are used symbolically. Just after Blanche hears the words, she says she “lived in a house where dying old women remembered their dead men” (Williams 206). Therefore, the Mexican vendor’s words symbolize Blanche’s death-laden life. The words appear in the scene when Blanche is losing the last grip on the happy family life. Accordingly, they also imply her losing a “baby.” The loss leads to the last scene: Blanche’s sanity is endangered; her senses are lost. The funeral flowers foreshadow the loss of her senses, her power to perform. Then, George’s intention to quote the vendor’s line is obvious: he foreshadows his killing of their imaginary son. As we argued, “baby” is interchangeable with “bit”: the death of “the baby” indicates the end of “the bit”; killing of the imaginary son renouncing campy games. The loss/death of baby implies that of camp. That is why *A Streetcar Named Desire* is quoted when the killing of the baby is alluded.

Thus, we need to know how Blanche has been personified as a camp icon. Citing Harold Beaver in his “Homosexual Signs (In Memory of Roland Barthes),” Clum argues that Blanches “chooses” camp:

> Blanche chooses sanity, which means, for the homosexual, choosing camp, a theatricality that is a protective covering and a defensive stance toward the hostile, straight world: “Camp is the desire of the subject never to let itself be defined as object by others but to reach for a protective transcendence, which, however, exposes more that it protects.” And indeed, in Williams world such theatricality is not protection but exposure. Only Stanley can be theatrical, but, of course, without the irony, the awareness of acting, that makes theater complex and interesting. (Clum 125)

David Savran, referring to Clum's argument, observes that for "a 'transvestite reading' of . . . *A Streetcar Named Desire*" to be effective, "the interpretation must recognize the coexistence—and even codependency—of different modes of writing and reading, of the 'gross' and the 'indirect,' of the 'camp' and the 'straight,' of the reversal and radical subversion of gender" (119–20). In Savran's "coexistence," the straight would be personified in Stanley and the camp in Blanche.[6]

Youichi Ohashi argues that Williams created the metaphorical overlap between the tragedy of Blanche and that of homosexuals (105). He then detects "the performance of a drag queen who creates his own identity" in "Blanche as a woman who performs," and he concludes that she "takes on woman/gay duality" (106, translation mine). If Williams's plays are "revolutionary" (Sinfield 202), it relies on Blanche's "duality," and it depends on theatricality in her drag/camp performance.[7] Blanche, thus, personifies a camp character and she symbolizes camp.

We have already discussed that game-playing in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is strongly connected to camp. Four games are given in the play and "bringing up baby" comes last, which indicates the baby/bit is crucial, for the episode about "the bit" starts the embedded performance; Martha and George start acting before the double audience:

> GEORGE [moves a little towards the door, smiling slightly]: All right, love . . . whatever love wants. [Stops.] *Just don't start on the bit, that's all.*
>
> MARTHA: The bit? The bit? What kind of language is that? What are you talking about?
>
> GEORGE: The bit. Just don't start in on the bit.
>
> MARTHA: You imitating one of your students, for God's sake? What are you trying to do? WHAT BIT?
>
> GEORGE: Just don't start in on the bit about the kid, that's all. (Albee, *Who's Afraid* 18–19, emphasis added)

George orders Martha not to "start on the bit." The "bit" is, as Stephen Bottoms defines, "theatrical slang for a short skit or comedy routine" (109). The mention of the baby/bit at this early stage foreshadows the focusing of the baby/bit in the developed stage. We can also say that "the baby/bit" is the pillar of *Who's Afraid?*'s dramaturgy. The "bit" of "bringing up baby" becomes a metaphor of camp in the play. The reference to *A Streetcar Named Desire* is a device to theatricalize camp.

The Trouble of Camp Subjectivity as an Identity

We now argue that Albee thinks camp identity is also a problem that can be restrictive, so he dramatizes the giving up of camp as identity in killing/renouncing the baby/bit. Judith Butler's discussion on the subjectivity will support our argument. Butler discusses the subject "I" as follows:

> And if the "I" is the effect of a certain repetition, one which produces the semblance of a continuity or coherence, then there is no "I" that precedes the gender that it is said to perform; the repetition, and the failure to repeat, produce a string of performances that constitute and contest the coherence of that "I." (Butler "Imitation" 18)

The "I" does not exist before the construction of the "I." To put it in another way, the subject as identity is only the constructed. The subject ("I") as camp is no exception. Butler also argues the relationship between the subject and "its construction" as follows:

> The "I" who would oppose its construction is always in some sense drawing from that construction to articulate its opposition; further, the "I" draws what is called its "agency" in part through being implicated in the very relations of power that it seeks to oppose. (Butler, "Gender" 122–23).

The above quotation is extracted from her essay "Gender Is

Burning: Questions of Appropriation and Subversion," in which Butler discusses "ambivalent drag" in the film "Paris Is Burning" (Butler, "Gender" 124–40). "Drag" is a representative form of "camp," so we can think that Butler's argument on drag applies to that on camp. Then, the subject ("I") as camp, who, opposing the compulsory heterosexuality represented by the hetero-normative family, does theatrical performance and, therefore, is thought to be subversive to it, is "drawing from that construction" of compulsory heterosexuality to "articulate its opposition." The subject as camp is constructed depending on its opposition, so it does not exist before the opposition. The subject as camp is formed as an identity against compulsory heterosexuality. Therefore, the performer who is aware of his/her performance does not exist before the subject is constructed; the subject of camp as an identity is "performatively constructed by the very 'expressions'" in the opposition. The subject as camp that has been thought to do performance on the basis of its identity can be involved in the construction of compulsory heterosexuality against its intention. This argument will clarify the very intention of Albee's "bringing up" a new "bit" of killing the baby.

When Clum and Van Leer arrive at their conclusions, they do not include the viewpoint of the performative construction of the subject, probably because they assume the subject "I" with gay identity exists a priori. Therefore, Clum does not appreciate the last scene and Van Leer concludes that *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is not camp.

There are many critics who appreciate the last scene and find a hope in the future of the characters. C. W. E. Bigsby remarks that "the ending, although not definitive, does hold out the hope of "a real companionship" (82). Matthew Roudané finds in the last scene George's realization of the need to strip away "the illusion governing their lives" and "to save, not his marriage, but his and Martha's very existence"(29). Rictor Norton, a social and literary historian and a former member of the Gay Liberation Front in Florida, observes that the play "demonstrates the cathartic principle that destruction and violence are

not ends in themselves" but "prepare the way for rebirth" (Qtd. in Kolin, Introduction 18).

Camp is a means to oppose the hetero-normative society. However, it can be "the illusion governing their lives" when we do not understand that the subject as camp is also performatively constructed. If the subject goes on camping, it will not be freed from the construction; that is to say, it will not be freed from the hetero-normativity itself.[8] Tennessee Williams "brings into relief" the subversive camp. Albee also does it, but he knows the danger of the construction. Therefore, he symbolically indicates the renunciation of camp, showing that George kills the baby and Martha and George end the bit.

At the very end of the play, George says "It was . . . time" (139) to mark the end of the bit. Martha's words "Just . . . us?" (140) in response to George's gentle persuasion strongly implies her fear to live without the baby/bit, for they, we now can say, have "cho[sen] camp" as Blanche did and Martha is afraid of losing the camp, "a theatricality that is protective covering and a defensive stance toward the hostile, straight world" (Clum 125). Then George "sings to her, very softly," "Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf/Virginia Woolf/Virginia Woolf." His singing sounds as if they do not need to fear without camp as identity. Gay people have agonizingly created camp as a means to oppose the hetero-normative society. However, the identity based on camp is also performatively constructed. In order to be freed from the intricate construction, the subject should stop camping and renounce depending on the construction. "The Exorcism," the title of Scene Three, reasonably signifies the renunciation. When we realize the significance, we understand the hope that is hinted at the ending. The end of the play is meant to be cathartic; it tries to exorcise the long history of agony and "prepare the way for rebirth." In a sense, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is both an hommage to *A Streetcar Named Desire* and a declaration of independence from the camp in it. Just before Martha quotes Bettie Davis's "What a dump!" she says to George, "What a cluck! What a cluck you are" (11). Recalling the famous line after our

argument, it might sound like "What a camp."

Family and compulsory heterosexuality are codependent and form the foundation of the hetero-normative society. Uprooting the hetero-normativity needs renouncing the identity performatively constructed even in performing camp. When we understand *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* in this context, we reappraise the play as a radical statement against the hetero-normative society that compulsorily enforces heterosexuality.

Notes

1. Albee remarks as follows:

   > The facts are simple: *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* was written about two heterosexual couples. If I had wanted to write a play about four homosexuals, I would have done so. (Kolin, *Conversations* 53)

   We can interpret those words of his as a statement that he does not want the play to be regarded as only a "closeted" play, a play of disguised and covert expression of homoeroticism or gay life.

   Oura Mizuki states her impression about New Yorkers' response to her performance in the collection of her essays *Muzuki@mail*: *Takarazuka/jp*. She remarks that New Yorkers seem to regard Takarazuka top stars as only female even if they perform male parts. She observes that the culture of female performers' playing male parts might be a culture specific to Japan (Oura 210). Therefore, somebody without the culture is likely not to have the impression that I had.
2. Philip C. Kolin and J. Madison Davis's summary of the critical history of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is brief but informative (Kolin, Introduction); Stephen Bottoms's summary is comprehensive and thorough (Bottoms 78–117). About homosexuality in *Who's Afraid?*, Georges-Michel Sarotte argues as follows:

   > *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, therefore, is a homosexual play from every point of view, in all its situations and in all its symbols. It is a heterosexual play only in outward appearance, since in 1962 it had to reach the mass public, and also because Albee *does not want* to write a homosexual work. (142)
3. Robert E. Morsberger, for example, argues the two plays in "The Movie Game in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*[*?*] and *The Boys in the Band*" (Morsberger 89–100).
4. For example, George says to Nick, "Martha is the daughter of our beloved boss. She is his . . . right ball, you might say" (34). Nick responds to this that he wished George "wouldn't talk that way in front of" his wife, so another meaning of the double entendre is clear enough.

5. There are other instances that remind us of the scenes in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. For example, Alan Sinfield suggests that "the truth game" recalls "Blanche's idea that she can save herself by phoning her long-lost beau" (Sinfield 301). Of course, George's idea of "somebody with a message" (Albee, *Who's Afraid* 107) to tell their son's death reminds us of Blanche's lie about "a telegram from an old admirer" of hers (Williams 209).
6. Alan Sinfield summarizes Savran's argument:

   > [Savran] argues that Williams' plays are revolutionary in their rejection of domestic realism. They undermine the hegemonic and hierarchical structure of masculinity itself by disclosing the contradictions on which its normative formulation is based." They do this primarily, Savran says, through "a process of *desubjectification*, an unbinding and deconstruction of the sovereign subject"; through "a profligacy of words that disrupts traditional notions of narrative continuity and dramatic forms." (Sinfield 202)

7. It is needless to say that "theatricality" is one of the most important notions used in defining camp:

   > This theatricalization of experience derives both from the passing experience (wherein, paradoxically, we learn the value of the self while at the same time rejecting it) and from a heightened sensitivity to aspects of a performance which others are likely to regard as routine or uncalculated. It is this awareness of the double aspect of a performance that goes a long way to explain why gays form a disproportionately large and enthusiastic part of the audience of such stars as, most notably, Judy Garland. (Babuscio 26)

8. Edmund White writes about camp in an essay, "The Political Vocaburary of Homosexuality":

   > In the past a regular feature of gay male speech was the production of such sentences as: "Oh, her! She'd do anything to catch a husband. . . ." in which the "she" is Bob or Jim. This routine gender substitution is rapidly dying out, and many gay men under twenty-five fail to practice it or even to understand it. This linguistic game has been attacked for two reasons: first, because it supposedly perpetuates female role playing among some gay men; and second, because it is regarded in some quarters as hostile to women. Since one man generally calls another "she" in an (at least mildly) insulting context, the inference is that the underlying attitude must be sexist: to be a woman is to be inferior. (Qtd. in Bergman 6)

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