

REMY BUMPPPO
think theatre

FIELD GUIDE



Directed by James Bohnen

Featuring Will Allan, Annabel Armour,
Michael Joseph Mitchell, and Nick Sandys

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Synopsis

With *The Goat or, Who is Sylvia?*, Edward Albee stretches both deep into the bowels of theatrical history and toward the forefront of modern playwriting, creating a story that stirs our most primal and contemporary instincts, reflexes, and beliefs. We hope that this Field Guide enriches your experience of the play both by illuminating the past—classical tragedy, poetic allusions, relationships in previous Albee plays—and by offering a glimpse into this particular Remy Bumppo production—discussions with the actors, books we’ve been reading, ruminations on the innards of the play.

The Goat or, Who is Sylvia? is the final play in our season themed “Secret Lives, Public Lies.” In this play, Albee investigates how what was a private secret can prove catastrophic when pushed into the public realm—how the revelation, as Stevie says in the play, “shatters the glass.” When Martin’s secret is outed, understanding and forgiveness seem impossible, even (or especially) from those we love the most.

We’re left with the question: can something be forged out of the destruction of bonds both personal and social? That’s a question that we hope starts with the reading of this guide and will continue until long after you’ve seen the play.

Edward Albee

In March 1928, the newborn Edward Harvey was adopted by the Albees of Westchester, NY, whose wealth derived from the Albee-Keith Vaudeville empire. Despite the somewhat prescient family business, Albee’s adoptive parents did not welcome his early bent toward the theater. In 1940, twelve-year-old Edward wrote his first play. *Aliqueen*, a three-act sex farce, was immediately thrown away by his mother, an early episode in a series of conflicts between Albee and his adoptive parents. The elite private schools in which he was placed also disagreed with the young boy. Slightly later in life, he was dismissed after three semesters at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut. In his early 20s, after a clean break with family and home, Albee relocated to New York’s Greenwich

Village, where he worked odd jobs while expanding upon the literary skills that he had been developing throughout his tumultuous youth.

Throughout his 20s, Albee considered himself primarily a poet. He absorbed the work of W.H. Auden and Thornton Wilder, who upon reading some of Albee's poetry suggested that he try his hand at writing plays. And indeed, just before turning thirty, upon inheriting \$100,000 from his grandmother, Albee devoted himself to writing for the theater. His first mature play was *The Zoo Story*. Though it would achieve iconic status in the following years, the frank and jarring play was rejected by the American theater of 1959. Its premiere occurred that year at Berlin's Schiller Theater, part of a double-bill with Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*. The production was wildly successful, and Albee was counted as an exciting newcomer to the stage. After its German production, *The Zoo Story*, again paired with *Krapp's*, was presented at the Provincetown Playhouse early in 1960, ringing in what was to be an auspicious decade for this new writer in American theater.

In the 1960-61 season alone, New York saw three additional Albee premieres: *The Sandbox*, *The American Dream*, and *The Death of Bessie Smith*. All three delivered a fairly scathing view of contemporary American society, in which racism, closed-mindedness, or superficiality creates an unfulfilling existence. The America of these early plays runs according to the laws of indifference rather than compassion, blind tradition rather than creativity or even competence. The search for the genuinely human—sometimes uproarious, sometimes vicious—runs through all of Albee's work.

Albee followed this series of one-acts with one of the behemoths of American theater. *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* opened in 1962 and frightened a lot of people. Although less experimental in form than his early work, it too is regularly interpreted as a scathing undressing of the myths by which the nation functions. The Pulitzer Prize for Drama was not awarded at all that year because it was generally acknowledged that it would have to go to the towering achievement of Albee, whose play was too edgy for the Pulitzer board. By any other measure, though, *Woolf* was wildly successful. With the profits from the production, Albee founded the Albarwild Theatre Arts, Inc., the New Playwrights Unit Workshop, which fostered new voices for the stage. He rounded out the decade's work

by winning the Pulitzer for 1967's *A Delicate Balance*. After his one-time partner, composer William Flanagan, died in 1969, Albee established the William Flanagan Memorial Creative Persons Center, another home for developing the work of artists, writers, and composers.

The 1970s and 1980s were quieter, though they did bring Albee a second Pulitzer for *Seascape*. After 1975's *Seascape*, a string of badly received plays pushed Albee away from the center of the New York theater that he had occupied for over a decade. Then in 1991, two years after the death of his adoptive mother—with whom he had established a functioning if always tense relationship—Albee's most autobiographical play catapulted him back into the role of theatrical master. Echoing 1959 and *The Zoo Story*, *Three Tall Women* premiered abroad, this time in Vienna and directed by Albee himself. Its 1994 New York debut coincided with the city's Signature Theatre devoting its year to Albee's work. His resurgence continued through the century shift and into the present decade. In 1996, Albee received both the Kennedy Center Honors and the National Medal of Arts. While awarding the latter, President Clinton said, "Tonight our nation—born in rebellion—pays

tribute to you, Edward Albee. In your rebellion, the American theater was born." Despite the heady accolades, Albee has not ceased to be controversial (*The Goat or, Who is Sylvia?* serving as a prime example). Although 1996's revival of *A Delicate Balance* was universally lauded (Remy Bumppo's 2004 production was similarly well-received), other plays have divided audiences, critics, and artists. *The Play About the Baby* (1998) built upon certain unsettling themes in *Virginia Woolf*, inviting inevitable comparisons to the earlier piece. In 2007, Albee adventurously added a companion piece to the much-loved *The Zoo Story* called *Homelife*, naming the double-bill *At Home at the Zoo*, which some called ingenious and others mere tinkering. Famously within the theater community, Albee remains active in

Selected Works and Awards

1959	<i>The Zoo Story</i>
1960	<i>The Death of Bessie Smith</i> <i>The Sandbox</i>
1961	<i>The American Dream</i>
1962	<i>Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?</i> (Tony Award, New York Drama Critics Circle Award)
1964	<i>Tiny Alice</i>
1966	<i>A Delicate Balance</i> (Pulitzer Prize)
1968	<i>Box and Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-Tung</i>
1971	<i>All Over</i>
1975	<i>Seascape</i> (Pulitzer Prize)
1980	<i>The Lady from Dubuque</i>
1981	<i>Lolita</i> (adapted from Nabokov)
1983	<i>Finding the Sun</i>
1991	<i>Three Tall Women</i> (Pulitzer Prize, New York Critics Circle Award)
1992	<i>The Lorca Play</i>
1998	<i>The Play About the Baby</i>
2002	<i>The Goat or, Who is Sylvia?</i> (Tony Award, New York Critics Circle Award)
2004	<i>Occupant</i>
2004	<i>Homelife</i> (combined with <i>The Zoo Story</i> to form <i>At Home at the Zoo</i>)
2010	<i>Me, Myself, and I</i>

revivals of his plays, some would say distressingly so. But Albee continues to write, educate, and provoke, bridging the gap between mainstream theater and the avant-garde. He is perhaps the foremost American dramatist alive today.

Charlie Rose interview Albee (May 31, 2002)

Charlie Rose. A husband in this play confesses, acknowledges, that he is having an affair with this goat, and the goat is returning his affection?

Edward Albee. That is only fair.

CR. What is the symbolism? What are we saying? What is the play really about?

EA. The play is not about bestiality. I am not in favor of bestiality, especially on the animal's part. Just think of all of the terrible human diseases that an animal could pick up. Imagine yourself; imagine what you *cannot* imagine. Imagine that all of a sudden you found yourself in love with a Martian, in love with something that you can't conceive of. I want everybody to think about what they cannot imagine and what they have buried deep as being intolerable and insufferable, and I want them to think freshly and newly about it. The play is about this couple who is very much in love and have a wonderful marriage, and the unbelievable occurs. How do you deal with that which you cannot conceivably have imagined?

CR. Why did you choose the "goat"? Is this the best way to tell the story of this kind of love?

EA. I wanted to find something so out of that which we could think possible, that we even think about conceivably happening, and make us relate it to ourselves, and so I had to go *that* far away. There are so many things that one can fall in love with, that are intolerable, that are outlandish; there is the old theory, "Stick to your own kind"—that's pretty limiting these days especially. I wanted something that was so inconceivable it would force us to think about that which we had such knee-jerk and instant reaction that this cannot even be considered or thought about. That is what I wanted. Look around you, everywhere. The

Catholic Church is in serious trouble for sexuality of the priests—heterosexual and homosexual aggression against chastity. There are so many things that have fallen by the wayside that you can't hold up as being inconceivable anymore. But this?—still perhaps, I think. We have irrational and bizarre reactions to it.

CR. Why the title *The Goat or, Who is Sylvia?*

EA. “The goat” is the animal, and I also believe that a person can be a goat, the butt of the situation. I wanted the double use of “goat.” As to “Who is Sylvia?”—that was just fun.

CR. Is this your most political play?

EA. I think a play is political if it makes people think differently enough about things so that their life alters, including their politics; that's political. Anything that tries to make people examine themselves as a society is a political play; it doesn't have to be specifically political. It has to be about how we think about consciousness.... I want the audience to think about that which they can't imagine thinking about. I want them to imagine that they are involved in that which they are seeing, and see how they feel about it. If I am there, how would I feel about it? Not *could* I, but *if* or *when* I am there, how would *I* feel about it?

CR. And in doing that, they will learn what?

EA. They will learn probably something about the nature of love, and something about tolerance, and something about consciousness.

About this Goat

When *The Goat or, Who is Sylvia?* opened on Broadway in 2002, critics and audiences were fiercely divided, united only by the fact that whatever they felt—whether befuddlement, disgust, or rapture—they felt it strongly. One point of contention was *what* exactly the play was “really about.” Should it be taken at face value? Is it an allegory along the lines of Miller’s *Crucible*? And what do we make of this goat? The critics shot in every possible direction. Writing in *Variety*, Charles Isherwood posited that Martin’s love for the goat “stands for the secret failings, weaknesses, losses of way, moments of shame that mark every life—whether sexual or not...guarded from the scorn of public exposure.” The infamously scathing John Simon commented pithily: “One problem with the play is that it makes no sense.” And Jason Zinoman, writing for *Time Out*, proffered the allegoric view: “Albee, the sneakiest playwright working, seems to be building a case that Martin’s affair is a manifestation of another forbidden love.”

Albee, like many playwrights, initially chose to respond with silence—the play is the thing, and everything that must be said is there for the taking. A few years later, in his book of essays, *Stretching My Mind*, Albee did seek to amend the wobbling interpretations that had been heaped onto the play. Here is what he had to say:

How *The Goat or, Who is Sylvia?* got to be written is both simple and complex. It is a story of how one play didn’t get written and how—in its stead—another did.

Several years ago I discovered that I was thinking about writing a play about intertwined matters—the limits of our tolerance of the behavior of others than ourselves, especially when such behavior ran counter to what we believed to be acceptable social and moral boundaries, and our unwillingness to imagine ourselves behaving in such an unacceptable fashion—in other words our refusal to imagine ourselves subject to circumstances outside our own comfort zones.

I came to the awareness that I was involved in such an adventure not

by deciding that's what I wanted to do, but by discovering that that's what I had begun to do—by my awareness of a play constructing itself as an idea, informing me that that's what I intended to write about.

That's the way I work—a kind of unconscious didacticism.

The play forming in my mind dealt with this: a renowned doctor of medicine—happily married, middle aged, at the top of his career—has come to the conclusion that he has reached his limits, is doing nothing but good and is a valued and deeply useful member of society, but that this zenith leaves him feeling incomplete. He feels the need to experience life as many of his patients do—his subjects, if you will—and so (this play was planned during the height of the AIDS epidemic, when even partial solutions were not available), he injects himself with the HIV virus, to suffer as his patients do, thereby to “understand” better the suffering all around him.

The play—had I written it—would have examined the hostility and condemnation this action would have produced, and would have raised questions about tolerable behavior—the effect of his actions on family and friends and—indirectly—the matter of suicide, which is illegal in the United States, and which is what the doctor was, indeed, committing, however slowly.

I mentioned the idea to a number of people whose opinions I respect, and I was shocked by the hostility and condemnation I received for even considering writing about such a matter.

I was surprised, for I thought I was “pushing the envelope” in a way playwrights are supposed to do.

I was completing a play about the sculptor Louise Nevelson, so I put this new idea aside for a while, planning to move it into reality right after. Imagine to my surprise, then, when a play opened in a tiny New York City theater with exactly the premise and characters I had been considering.

While the coincidence was staggering, the playwright was someone whose work I knew a little of and he was, as well, a reputable actor. I

dismissed anything *but* coincidence from my mind, and decided to see the damned doppelganger. Alas—perhaps—it immediately closed, having received deploring reviews. Naturally, I quickly decided that it was not the premise that had been at fault, but the execution.

Still—it was a concept I wanted to explore and I put my mind to work. Within a year (all dates approximate here as I do not keep a journal, having decided that since all writers' journals are really intended for publication no matter how private they pretend to be, and since I had not begun one at the age of fourteen or so, when all really revelatory journals begin, there would be no point in beginning later), within a year I had evolved the structure and manner of *The Goat or, Who is Sylvia?*

I mentioned the idea of the play to a number of people (though fewer this time) whose opinions I respect, and I was shocked by the hostility and condemnation I received for even considering writing about such a matter.

Clearly, I was on to something!—either the collapse of my mind or a set of propositions perplexing enough to demand examination. And on I went.

I showed the completed play to my U.S. producer, a lady wise to the ways of theater, who decided to produce it *on* Broadway (of all places!) in spite of the hostility and condemnation she received from quite a few of her confreres (or, possibly, *because* of it).

The play opened on Broadway in the spring of 2002 and received some very odd reviews, indeed. Aside from hardy and rational souls who were engaged and disturbed, and happy about that, a number of critics behaved as though the author had personally slapped them in the face. (This is, of course, a fantasy most playwrights have enjoyed more than once.) The Victorianism of these responses was amusing but not particularly helpful at the box office.

A few of the more influential daily critics of New York City newspapers “hedged their bets” or—equally hackneyed “did not want to go out on a limb” and wrote reviews making it clear they were hedging their bets, not

wanting to go out on a limb. Two of these powerful critics rereviewed the play four months into the run—when the public response had proven to be strong and enthusiastic. One of them discovered that the play had somehow changed and was now far more tolerable, and the other—bless her!—admitted that she'd screwed up royally the first time around and did an honest about-face.

Of course, *some* members of the audience were deeply offended by the play and walked out during the performance. It's kind of thrilling when that happens (and in the United States it's usually with older white couples) but we authors do not intentionally provoke it. We desire to engage, to upset, to trouble, but we want people to stay around till the end—to see if they were right in wanting to leave.

I'm not going to discuss here what *The Goat or, Who is Sylvia?* is about, for I would like you to discover all that for yourselves. You may, of course, have received the misleading information that the play is about bestiality—more con than pro. Well, bestiality is *discussed* during the play (as is flower arranging) but it is a generative matter rather than the "subject." The play is about love, and loss, the limits of our tolerance and who, indeed, we really are.

The play is about what it is about, and all I ask of an audience is that they leave their prejudices in the cloakroom and view the play objectively and later—at home—imagine themselves as being in the predicament the play examines and coming up with useful, if not necessarily comfortable responses.

Considering the quality of the talents involved in this production—actors, directors, designers—I am certain that whatever faults you find can be piled up at my door.

Who is Silvia?

In *The Goat or, Who is Sylvia?*, Stevie quotes—actually, misquotes—the following poem from William Shakespeare's *Two Gentlemen of Verona*.

*Who is Silvia? What is she?
That all our swains commend her?
Holy, fair, and wise is she;
The heaven such grace did lend her,
That she might admirèd be.*

*Is she kind as she is fair?
For beauty lives with kindness:
Love doth to her eyes repair,
To help him of his blindness;
And, being help'd, inhabits there.*

*Then to Silvia let us sing,
That Silvia is excelling;
She excels each mortal thing
Upon the dull earth dwelling:
To her let us garlands bring.*

“Why Look at Animals?”

Excerpts from John Berger’s essay in *About Looking*

The 19th century, in western Europe and North America, saw the beginning of a process, today being completed by 20th century corporate capitalism, by which every tradition which has previously mediated between man and nature was broken. Before this rupture, animals constituted the first circle of what surrounded man. Perhaps that already suggests too great a distance. They were with man at the center of his world. Such centrality was of course economic and productive. Whatever the changes in productive means and social organization, men depended upon animals for food, work, transport, clothing.

Yet to suppose that animals first entered the human imagination as meat or leather or horn is to project a 19th century attitude backwards across the millennia. Animals first entered the imagination as messengers and promises. For example, the domestication of cattle did not begin as a simple prospect of milk and meat. Cattle had magical functions, sometimes oracular, sometimes sacrificial. And the choice of a given species as magical, tameable *and* alimentary was originally determined by the habits, proximity and “invitation” of the animal in question.

White ox is my mother
And we the people of my sister,
The people of Nyariau Bul . . .
 Friend, great ox of the spreading horns,
 which ever bellows amid the herd,
Ox of the son of Bul Maloa.

(The Nuer: a description of the modes of livelihood and political institutions of a Nilotic people, by Evans-Pritchard.)

Animals are born, are sentient and are mortal. In these things they resemble man. In their superficial anatomy—less in their deep anatomy—in their habits, in their time, in their physical capacities, they differ from man. They are both like and unlike.

“We know what animals do and what beaver and bears and salmon and other creatures need, because once our men were married to them and they acquired this knowledge from their animal wives.” (Hawaiian Indians quoted by Lévy-Strauss in *The Savage Mind*.)

The eyes of an animal when they consider a man are attentive and wary. The same animal may well look at other species in the same way. He does not reserve a special look for man. But by no other species except man will the animal’s look be recognized as familiar. Other animals are held by the look. Man becomes aware of himself returning the look.

The animal scrutinizes him across a narrow abyss of non-comprehension. This is why the man can surprise the animal. Yet the animal—even if domesticated—can also surprise the man. The man too is looking across a similar, but not identical, abyss of non-comprehension. And this is so wherever he looks. He is always looking across ignorance and fear. And so, when he is *being seen* by the animal, he is being seen as his surroundings are seen by him. His recognition of this is what makes the look of the animal familiar. And yet the animal is distinct, and can never be confused with man. Thus, a power is ascribed to the animal, comparable with human power but never coinciding with it. The animal has secrets which, unlike the secrets of caves, mountains, seas, are specifically addressed to man.

The relation may become clearer by comparing the look of an animal with the look of another man. Between two men the two abysses are, in principle, bridged by language. Even if the encounter is hostile and no words are used (even if the two speak different languages), the *existence* of language allows that at least one of them, if not both mutually, is confirmed by the other. Language allows men to reckon with each other as with themselves. (In the confirmation made possible by language, human ignorance and fear may also be confirmed. Whereas in animals fear is a response to signal, in men it is endemic.)

No animal confirms man, either positively or negatively. The animal can be killed

and eaten so that its energy is added to that which the hunter already possesses. The animal can be tamed so that it supplies and works for the peasant. But always its lack of common language, its silence, guarantees its distance, its distinctness, its exclusion, from and of man.

Just because of this distinctness, however, an animal's life, never to be confused with a man's, can be seen to run parallel to his. Only in death do the two parallel lines converge and after death perhaps, cross over to become parallel again: hence the widespread belief in the transmigration of souls.

With their parallel lives, animals offer man a companionship which is different from any offered by human exchange. Different because it is a companionship offered to the loneliness of man as a species.

Such an unspeaking companionship was felt to be so equal that often one finds the conviction that it was man who lacked the capacity to speak with animals—hence the stories and legends of exceptional beings, like Orpheus, who could talk with animals in their own language.

What were the secrets of the animal's likeness with, and unlikeness from man? The secrets whose existence man recognized as soon as he intercepted an animal's look.

In one sense the whole of anthropology, concerned with the passage from nature to culture, is an answer. All the secrets were about animals as an *intercession* between man and his origin. Darwin's evolutionary theory, indelibly stamped as it is with the marks of the European 19th century, nevertheless belongs to a tradition, almost as old as man himself. Animals interceded between man and their origin because they were both like and unlike man.

Animals came from over the horizon. They belonged *there* and *here*. Likewise they were mortal and immortal. An animal's blood flowed like human blood, but its species was undying and each lion was Lion, each ox was Ox. This—maybe the first existential dualism—was reflected in the treatment of animals. They were subjected *and* worshipped, bred *and* sacrificed.

Today the vestiges of this dualism remain among those who live intimately with, and

depend upon, animals. A peasant becomes fond of his pig and is glad to salt away its pork. What is significant, and is so difficult for the urban stranger to understand, is that the two statements in that sentence are connected by an *and* and not by a *but*.

The parallelism of their similar/dissimilar lives allowed animals to provoke some of the first questions and offer answers. The first subject matter for painting was animal. Probably the first paint was animal blood. Prior to that, it is not unreasonable to suppose that the first metaphor was animal. Rousseau, in his *Essay on the Origins of Languages*, maintained that language itself began with metaphor: "As emotions were the first motives which induced man to speak, his first utterances were tropes (metaphors). Figurative language was the first to be born, proper meanings were the last to be found."

... During the 20th century, the internal combustion engine displaced draught animals in streets and factories. Cities, growing at an ever increasing rate, transformed the surrounding countryside into suburbs where field animals, wild or domesticated, became rare. The commercial exploitation of certain species (bison, tigers, reindeer) has rendered them almost extinct. Such wildlife as remains is increasingly confined to national parks and game reserves.

... Public zoos came into existence at the beginning of the period which was to see the disappearance of animals from daily life. The zoo to which people go to meet animals, to observe them, to see them, is, in fact, a monument to the impossibility of such encounters. Modern zoos are an epitaph to a relationship which was as old as man. They are not seen as such because the wrong questions have been addressed to zoos.

... The zoo cannot but disappoint. The public purpose of zoos is to offer visitors the opportunity of looking at animals. Yet nowhere in a zoo can a stranger encounter the look of an animal. At the most, the animal's gaze flickers and passes on. They look sideways. They look blindly beyond. They scan mechanically. They have been immunized to encounter, because nothing can any more occupy a *central* place in their attention.

Therein lies the ultimate consequence of their marginalization. That look between animal and man, which may have played a crucial role in the development of human society, and with which, in any case, all men had always lived until less than a century

ago, has been extinguished. Looking at each animal, the unaccompanied zoo visitor is alone. As for the crowds, they belong to a species which has at last been isolated.

This historic loss, to which zoos are a monument, is now irredeemable for the culture of capitalism.

Lovers and Friends in Albee

Shifting relationships in two other Albee plays familiar to Chicago audiences

A useful thought-experiment one can conduct with almost any dramatic work is to ask, “At what point could an alternate action dissolve the drama of this story? What other thing could happen that would make the rest of the story impossible or merely not worth the watching?” Juliet agrees with her parents and slams the balcony window in Romeo’s face. In response to Estragon’s suggestion, “Let’s go,” Vladimir responds, “Yes, why the hell would we wait for this arrogant Godot?” and Beckett’s two tramps huff off into the moonlight. In running this little experiment, one can discover the dramatic epicenter of the play, the navel from which all tension—and all motivation for the audience to continue to watch—comes forth. In *The Goat or, Who is Sylvia?*, as in several other Albee plays, the dramatic tension is sustained only because the characters decide to stay rather than just leave the room. George Bernard Shaw said that the modern drama was born the moment that Nora sits Torvald down and forces the conversation—husband and wife, two full people, addressing a problem. Similarly, the essence of Albee’s drama is born when two people in a relationship decide to preserve their bond by addressing the truth, difficult though that truth may be. “We will now discuss it,” Stevie tells Martin. From that decision flows the heart of the play.

- Jim Manganello, Artistic Intern

WHO’S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF?

The grizzly games George and Martha play on that infamous all-nighter are doubtlessly cruel, sometimes vicious. They do, however, serve to both destroy the secrets they hold—from the others, from themselves—and, possibly, allow them to confront reality.

GEORGE

I’ve got to find some way to really get at you.

MARTHA

You’ve got at me, George...you don’t have to do anything. Twenty-three years of you has been quite enough. You know

what's happened, George? You want to know what's *really happened?* (*Snaps her fingers*) It's snapped, finally....

GEORGE

I don't believe you...I just don't believe you. There is no moment...there is no moment anymore when we could...come together.

MARTHA (*Armed again*)

Well, maybe you're right, baby. You can't come together with nothing, and you're nothing! SNAP! It went snap tonight at Daddy's party. (*Dripping contempt, but there is fury and loss under it*) I sat there at Daddy's party, and I watched you...I watched you sitting there, and I watched the younger men around you, the men who were going to go somewhere. And I sat there and I watched you, and *you weren't there!* And it snapped! It finally snapped! And I'm going to howl it out, and I'm not going to give a damn what I do, and I'm going to make the damned biggest explosion you ever heard.

GEORGE (*Very pointedly*)

You try it and I'll beat you at your own game.

MARTHA (*Hopefully*)

Is that a threat, George? Hunh?

GEORGE

That's a threat, Martha.

MARTHA (*Fake-spits at him*)

You're going to get it, baby.

GEORGE

Be careful, Martha...I'll rip you to pieces.

MARTHA

You aren't man enough...you haven't got the guts.

GEORGE

Total war?

MARTHA

Total.

(*Silence. They both seem relieved...elated.*)

A DELICATE BALANCE

In *A Delicate Balance*, the long-term friendship between Tobias and Harry functions as counterpoint to Tobias' relationship to his wife, Agnes. And though the men relate to one another on a plane separate from romantic affection, Albee suggests that some version of love is the ordering principle of this bond as well. As in a marriage, friendship exists outside the rules of "fairness." In this scene, Harry—who has essentially claimed the right to stay with Tobias and Agnes indefinitely—admits that he does not think he would reciprocate the kindness that Tobias has extended toward him. Perhaps Albee's title is an ironic one: the relationships in this play are not balanced at all; and in fact that is not the point of a true bond, which exists outside of rational equilibrium.

HARRY

I told Edna upstairs, I said: Edna, what if they'd come to us? And she didn't say anything. And I said: Edna, if they'd come to us like this, and even though we don't have...Julia, and all of that, I...Edna, I wouldn't take them in.

(Brief silence)

I wouldn't take them in, Edna; they don't...they don't have any right. And she said: yes, I know; they wouldn't have the right.

(Brief silence)

Toby, I wouldn't let *you* stay.

(Shy, embarrassed)

You...you don't *want* us, do you, Toby? You don't want us here.

TOBIAS

(Softly, and as if the word were unfamiliar)

Want?

(Same)

What? Do I what?

(Abrupt laugh; joyous)

DO I WANT?

(More laughter; also a sob)

DO I WANT YOU HERE!

(Hardly able to speak from the laughter)

You come in here, you come in here with your...wife, and with your terror! And you ask me if I want you here!

(Great breathing sounds)

YES! OF COURSE! I WANT YOU HERE! THIS IS MY HOUSE! I WANT YOU IN IT! I WANT YOUR PLAGUE! YOU'VE GOT SOME TERROR WITH YOU? BRING IT IN!

(Pause, then, even louder)

BRING IT IN!! YOU'VE GOT THE ENTRÉE, BUDDY,
YOU DON'T NEED A KEY! YOU'VE GOT THE ENTRÉE,
BUDDY! FORTY YEARS!....

(Soft, as before)

Doesn't friendship grow to that? To love? Doesn't forty
years amount to anything? We've cast our lot together,
boy, we're friends, we've been through lots of thick OR
thin together. Which is it, boy?

(Shout)

WHICH IS IT, BOY?! THICK?! THIN?! WELL,
WHATEVER IT IS, WE'VE BEEN THROUGH IT, BOY!

(Soft)

And you don't have to ask. I like you, Harry, yes, I really
do, I don't like Edna, but that's not half the point, I like
you fine; I find my liking you has limits....

(Loud)

BUT THOSE ARE MY LIMITS! NOT YOURS!

(Soft)

The fact I like you well enough, but not enough...that best
friend in the world should be something else—more—
well, that's my poverty. So, bring your wife, and bring
your terror, bring your plague.

(Loud)

BRING YOUR PLAGUE! I DON'T WANT YOU HERE!
YOU ASKED? NO! I DON'T. BUT BY CHRIST YOU'RE
GOING TO STAY HERE! YOU'VE GOT THE RIGHT!
THE RIGHT! DO YOU KNOW THE WORD? THE RIGHT!

(Soft)

You've put nearly forty years in it, baby; so have I, and if
it's nothing, I don't give a damn, you've got the right to be
here, you've earned it

(Loud)

YOU STAY WITH US! I DON'T WANT YOU HERE! I
DON'T LOVE YOU! BUT BY GOD...YOU STAY!!

(Pause)

STAY!

(Softer)

Stay!

(Soft, tears)

Stay. Please? Stay?

(Pause)

Stay? Please? Stay?

Discussion with the actors

Dramaturg Kelli Marino talks to Remy Bumpo Artistic Associates Nick Sandys and Annabel Armour, who play Martin and Stevie in *The Goat or, Who is Sylvia?*

Kelli Marino. Annabel, you're playing Stevie in our production. Tell me about her.

Annabel Armour. We are just learning the text right now before we get into rehearsals, so this is my instinctive response. When I did Albee's *At Home at the Zoo* at Victory Gardens this fall, my thoughts in the beginning changed completely as rehearsals progressed. The character I played in that play became a completely different person than the one I had first imagined. In *The Goat*, so much of Stevie is defined by the relationships with the other characters. They are such definite people. What you see in this play is the characters' fight for each other. You are seeing the most extreme moments of this couple's life. I love the first scene because you get a window into Martin and Stevie's normal life. It is bright and smart. I love that she is arranging the flowers in the first scene, and when Martin asks what the flowers are for, she replies, "To make the camera happy." She understands what Martin is doing, what this world means. She is also accomplished in answering all of Martin's questions. She is competent, and it is done with such style and grace and a sense of humor.

Nick Sandys. I love the fact that Stevie still wears gloves. She is a lady who still wears gloves.

AA. That speaks of a different generation of woman. She is a different class of people.

KM. And what does that do for you as an actress stepping into this role?

AA. With *At Home at the Zoo*, it was like stepping into the stream every night. The stream has its banks, it has its own course, but the way you follow the stream is different every night. And that allegory really stuck with me. Albee is so clear. If you stick to his exact words and his punctuation, it will happen, anything will happen. And that is quite exciting. I

love when Martin is telling the story about him going to the support group for having affairs with animals. And Albee has such a musicality that every time Martin says an animal, Stevie breaks something. It is syncopated that way.

NS. Albee's work is so brilliantly constructed. The rhythms interlock. There's self-correction. People strive to express their inner truth. That constant definition of words creates realism, but it is a hyper-constructed realism. You are always on the search for truth. It's the same with acting the play: you are trying to get close to that truth.

AA. To me, *The Goat* is the consummation of Albee's life's work. It takes all the thematic stuff his previous plays had been playing with—the beast within, the nature of love and relationships—and puts it into one hyper-extended metaphor: “I am in love with a goat.” Nothing could push the situation further. It is Stevie's struggle to understand what exactly this is. I love the moment when she says, “I am just trying to understand this so I know why I am going to kill you.” It is just fabulous.

NS. Right. Stevie says, “You know, I'm going to kill you.” To which Martin replies, “Yes, probably.” There is such great humor along the way. They catch each other saying stupid things, and that is the natural way of language. We fail to say what we mean, fail to reach the truth. The constant ear of Albee to put his characters into a class and catch each other failing, using the wrong pronoun or the wrong adverb, correcting each other: “You are not accurate enough. You're not telling me the truth because you are using the wrong word.” It is a great theater exercise.

There is a wonderful moment in the play where Billy, their son, calls Martin a “semanticist” and Martin responds, “Where did you learn that?” Not “No!”, but “Where did you learn that? Very impressed by your education that I paid for.”

There are so many little riffs in Albee's work.

KM. So, it is part of Martin's nature to constantly correct the others' language. What else is

there to Martin?

NS. It is very important that Martin is turning fifty, that he is in the perfect crescendo of a middle-age crisis, especially because he is a product of everything that is good in western society: he is an architect, he is bettering mankind, he has just been given this wonder city to build in the midwest, and he is the youngest person to win the Pritzker. And it is *constantly* repeated that he is fifty. Albee has set him up to be in a place of complete power and comfort. I mean, this is a normal day in their life. Albee portrays that normality in the first scene.

When I was working on *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* at Steppenwolf and Albee came to rehearsal, he said that the first ten minutes should feel like this is a typical Saturday night for them; this happens all the time.

AA. Then something turns, and *that* is Albee.

NS. Martin and Stevie go out of their way as the play and conflict progress to express how “right” they are for each other—at the height of this present drama, they never feel any lack of faith in that fact. That is the strangeness of it.

KM. Their relationship is so strong and then, you look at the play’s subtitle “Notes toward a definition of tragedy,” in which Albee essentially tells the audience what they’re going to get.

AA. Which is what is so amazing about him. “I am telling you exactly where this is going to go so you are not surprised.”

NS. And you are still shocked by it. It is unimaginable and he still goes there. Albee has written a tragedy about a man who has achieved everything, has a great marriage and has done this thing that he cannot comprehend. That is what makes him a common man, *anybody* could do this. Even this man, who *should* be happy with everything he has, can do

something that is so from another world.

AA. I think that happens to both Stevie and Martin. It is what pushes Stevie to the end and makes her act in a way audiences would think her incapable of.

KM. And Albee says in every interview, "This is unimaginable."

NS. It is primal. It is primeval. It is like the *Bacchae* with a mother ripping her child's head off in a frenzy and then waking up to find her son's body parts floating in the river. She wakes up to see what she has done, and that recognition is so important.

KM. If *The Goat* does follow the structure of Greek tragedy, what is the moment of recognition?

NS. I don't know yet. There are a number of stages in the play. I think it is only right at the end. He has driven his own wonderful wife to an unimaginable act. *That* is the wake up call. And maybe when he apologizes. It takes the *other* people in his family to respond for him to realize what he has done. But the actual act remains a mystery even to him.

KM. Something about the end of the play implies that this family will survive.

AA. It would be animalistic to stay with this, to not let it go. They *have* to understand it, get around it. "Make me not believe this. And if I *need* to understand this, then there *has* to be something."

KM. I have always admired Stevie's character for that fact, that she does not let this problem go, that she refuses to give up on Martin or their family because of love. She *wants* to understand this. She fights in hope that they will get through this. They are going to deal with this.

AA. There is something that James said in preparation for this play: “There is a chance that Stevie will kill Martin.” It really is looking at him and acknowledging that she will either kill him or kill somebody else or kill herself. This is a woman who has been betrayed.

NS. And the betrayal is almost more from Ross, Martin’s friend, someone outside the family unit, than it is Martin. Even though Martin committed the betrayal, Ross has given the secret away.

KM. Ross thinks he has a special relationship with both Martin and Stevie, which is the exact reason why he feels comfortable in telling Stevie, which is why Martin tells Ross to begin with.

NS. And back to your earlier questions of how, as actors, do you relate to this experience? It is unimaginable. We need to find that way in. To look at those times when we have betrayed or been betrayed. And ask, “How close am I to this situation, not just the betrayal, but all of it?”

Glossary

Albee delights in hidden references—both broadly comic and subtly informative—which may or may not assist in comprehending the total story. We hope the following definitions and explanations will enrich the experience of viewing the play, but they should by no means be understood as skeleton keys to the play’s “meaning.” That much must be left to you.

Pritzker Prize

Established by the Pritzker family of Chicago in 1979, this highly competitive international prize is awarded each year to a living architect for significant achievement. The award consists of \$100,000 and a bronze medallion. The self-professed purpose of the Pritzker Prize is “to honor a living architect whose built work demonstrates a combination of those qualities of talent, vision, and commitment which has produced consistent and significant contributions to humanity and the built environment through the art of architecture.” The 2010 laureates were Japanese architects Kazuyo Sejuna and Ryue Nishizawa.

Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mama's Hung You in the Closet and I'm Feelin' So Sad: A Pseudoclassical Tragifarce in a Bastard French Tradition

Arthur Kopit’s 1962 play about a mother who carts her son and husband off to a Caribbean resort, the twist being that her husband is dead. Fancying itself as a kind of alternative absurdist farce, the play was—according to Remy Bumppo Artistic Director James Bohnen—“very much of its time.” It was made into a 1967 film with Rosalind Russell, who originated the role of the mother first off- then on-Broadway.

Bucolic

A pastoral poem relating to countryside. The Greek poet

Theocritus and the Roman poet Virgil are known as bucolic poets.

Eumenides

Dreaded goddesses of Greek mythology (in Roman mythology, “the Furies”), which holds that they were born of the Earth when she was impregnated by the spilled blood of the castrated father-god Ouranos. The etymology of the actual word *Eumenides* is “kindly ones,” a euphemism developed so the speaker could avoid articulating the real name of these terrors. They emerged from Tartarus, their home, with blood in their eyes, serpents in their hair, and wings to punish humans for improper acts. A somewhat more benign view of the goddesses is assumed in Aeschylus’ final play of his *Oresteia* trilogy, *Eumenides*. In that play, the hitherto relentless goddesses are placated by the new wisdom and restraint introduced by Athena and Apollo. They agree to acquit Orestes of the murder of his mother, Clytemnestra. As modern creatures, they must forego unmitigated revenge and apply reason to justice.

The Goat and the Greeks: Tragic Connections

By Kelli Marino

Nearly everything about *The Goat or, Who is Sylvia?* tempts audiences to look for something deeper than what is explicitly said or enacted within the confines of the play. And that is especially the case with the play's provocative, if seldom cited subtitle, "Notes Toward a Definition of Tragedy." Just what is Edward Albee up to? As critic Thomas Falkner has noted, the very word "tragedy," taken from the Greek *tragôidia*, translates as "goat-song." Ancient sources indicate that this peculiar and striking phrase's etymology derives from three possible associations. First, the winning tragedian in day-long festivals of plays received a goat as his prize. Second, sacrificing a goat—the original "scapegoat"—was considered a purifying ritual during the theatrical Festival of Dionysus, at which the dramatic ancestors of the tragedies we know were performed. Finally, the tragic form is derived from the satyr play, in which a group of goat-footed satyrs serves as chorus. Though Albee's play works on its own, each of these historical precedents offers an interesting prism through which *The Goat* can shine.

The great theoretician of tragedy, Aristotle, included in his *Poetics* three elements of the tragic plot. They are: (1) *Peripety*, or sudden reversal; (2) *Recognition and Discovery*, in which the truth of the situation is laid bare; (3) *Pathos*, the sentiment aroused in witnessing the consumptive act that caused the hero's downfall. One could certainly assign distinct points in *The Goat* as fulfilling each of these structural elements. And what of the archetypal hero of tragedy? Do we find a descendent of, say, Oedipus in Albee's Martin? True, Martin's no king. But Aristotle himself was already defining the tragic hero more broadly as a good-natured man, one to whom the audience relates, who "merely" makes a fatal error. As a happily married man at the top of his profession and with a warm family and home, Martin endears us. His fall from grace is precipitated not by essential selfishness or vindictiveness, but by a single, if irreversible, misstep.

But beyond this checklist of elements common to classical Greek and modern Albee-an tragedy, perhaps *The Goat's* greatest inheritance from the ancients is the immediate

experience of catharsis that the play requires of its audience. In this sense, Albee does not just allude to the tragic form, but recreates it for his contemporary audience. *The Goat's* characters—and by empathetic extension, its audiences—are forced to confront the most deeply masked corners of their lives. They share, and perhaps ultimately purge, the heightened and potentially toxic feelings and words that reside there. Through this cathartic process, *The Goat*, like classical tragedy, has a regenerative quality: if those who are closest to Martin do not allow his actions to simply pass, if they push the conversation beyond the point of no return, it is perhaps because they hope to preserve the bonds of love and friendship they've forged over many years, and perhaps in some way to move forward.

Billy the Kid

The pivotal role of the son in *The Goat or, Who is Sylvia?*

When he hears his mother smashing expensive pieces of pottery out of rage, Billy rushes into the living room to save a small vase that he had given her as a gift. Actor Will Allan (left), our Billy, spent a day in search of the perfect vase to portray this treasured childhood gift from son to mother. After several antique shops, a small, tacky piece was found, perfect in the child's eyes to compliment his mother's pottery collection. Will gift wrapped and presented it to Annabel (Stevie) and it will appear in the show. James Bohnen recommended this Billy Collins poem to encapsulate the great meaning of such a gift.

"The Lanyard"

by Billy Collins

The other day I was ricocheting slowly
off the blue walls of this room,
moving as if underwater from typewriter to piano,
from bookshelf to an envelope lying on the floor,
when I found myself in the L section of the
dictionary
where my eyes fell upon the word lanyard.

No cookie nibbled by a French novelist
could send one into the past more suddenly—
a past where I sat at a workbench at a camp
by a deep Adirondack lake
learning how to braid long thin plastic strips
into a lanyard, a gift for my mother.

I had never seen anyone use a lanyard

Director James Bohnen on the role of Billy in *The Goat or, Who is Sylvia?*:

If you think of *The Goat or, Who is Sylvia?* and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* as pillars in Albee's career, forty years apart, I think *The Goat* is a more powerful statement about the American family because Billy is not only real but visible to the audience, so that his loss and displacement are a shattering aspect of the later play. When George "kills" the imaginary son at the end of *Virginia Woolf*, we are moved, but it has much less impact than watching Billy struggle to come to grips with his confusion, anger, and fear of the future as it clangs against the deep love he still has for both parents. Particularly challenging, though, is his need for his father's love and tenderness. Albee gives Billy a simple word, repeated, at the very end of the play that is heartbreaking: "Help. Help." In that moment, Albee effortlessly reminds us all of the rippling consequences of our behavior. It makes *The Goat* a better play, and a play that claws at us longer after we have left the theater.

or wear one, if that's what you did with them,
but that did not keep me from crossing
strand over strand again and again
until I had made a boxy
red and white lanyard for my mother.

She gave me life and milk from her breasts,
and I gave her a lanyard.
She nursed me in many a sick room,
lifted spoons of medicine to my lips,
laid cold face-cloths on my forehead,
and then led me out into the airy light

and taught me to walk and swim,
and I, in turn, presented her with a lanyard.
Here are thousands of meals, she said,
and here is clothing and a good education.
And here is your lanyard, I replied,
which I made with a little help from a counselor.

Here is a breathing body and a beating heart,
strong legs, bones and teeth,
and two clear eyes to read the world, she whispered,
and here, I said, is the lanyard I made at camp.
And here, I wish to say to her now,
is a smaller gift—not the worn truth

that you can never repay your mother,
but the rueful admission that when she took
the two-tone lanyard from my hand,
I was as sure as a boy could be
that this useless, worthless thing I wove
out of boredom would be enough to make us even.

Recommended Reading and Viewing

Mating in Captivity: Reconciling the Erotic and the Domestic

by Esther Perel

Alison Ramsey, who when she's not acting as Remy Bumppo's Production Manager, is a couples' therapist, recommends this book as an insight into sexuality within long-term relationships.

The Birth of Tragedy

by Friedrich Nietzsche
&

Modern Tragedy

by Raymond Williams

Interested in what tragedy looks like today? In addition to Albee's "Notes Toward a Definition of a Tragedy"—the subtitle to *The Goat or, Who is Sylvia?*—artistic intern, **Jim Manganello**, recommends these books to explore the tragic in contemporary society.

Committed: A Skeptic Makes Peace with Marriage

by Elizabeth Gilbert

Kristin Larsen, Remy Bumppo's Executive Director, raved about this individual woman's exploration of the cultural and religious contexts that have shaped the institution of marriage in order to resolve the author's personal questions on the issue.

The Way We Were (film)

James Bohnen, Remy Bumppo's Artistic Director and Director for *The Goat or, Who is Sylvia?*, says portraying a realistic, long-term friendship is one of the hardest

things to do onstage. He used Sydney Pollack's 1973 film as an example of a rich friendship (between Robert Redford and Bradford Dillman)—like that of Martin and Ross—and a testament to the power of "joint memories."

Edward Albee: A Singular Journey

By Mel Gussow

Director **James Bohnen** and Dramaturg **Kelli Marino** agree, if you're going to read one biography of Albee, make it this one.

The Theatre of the Absurd

By Martin Esslin

Edward Albee isn't always considered the most obvious member of the absurdist writers, especially with his more linear, naturalistic plays like *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and *The Goat*. But some other Albee works remain firmly in the absurdist tradition, and the "logic" of absurdity runs through even his straightest plays. Dramaturg **Kelli Marino** says she uses her original copy from 1961 on almost every theater project.

Stretching My Mind

By Edward Albee

Albee, like many playwrights, usually prefers to let the plays stand for themselves. This rare foray into essay writing—about his work and also the world at large—proved especially useful and intriguing to Dramaturg **Kelli Marino**.

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