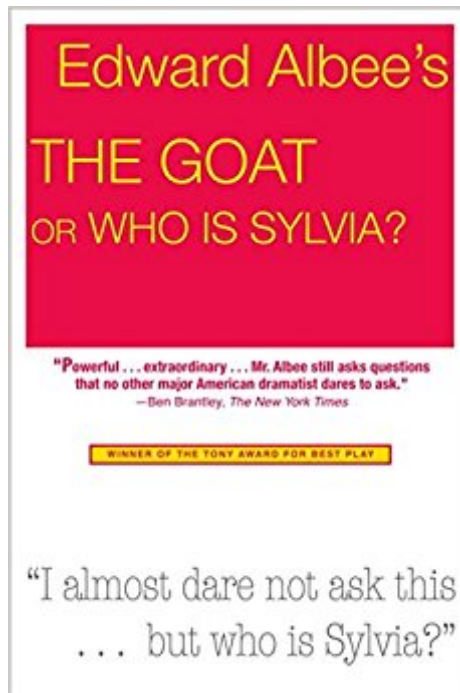




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The Goat, Or Who Is Sylvia?: Broadway Edition



Synopsis

“Four decades after Virginia Woolf sent shock waves through the mainstream theatre, Mr. Albee still asks questions that no other major American dramatist dares to ask.” —Ben Brantley, *The New York Times*

Three-time Pulitzer Prize-winner Edward Albee’s most provocative, daring, and controversial play since *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, *The Goat* won all the major awards for best new play of the year (Tony, New York Drama Critics Circle, Drama Desk, and Outer Critics Circle). In the play, Martin—a hugely successful architect who has just turned fifty—leads an ostensibly ideal life with his loving wife and gay teenage son. But when he confides to his best friend that he is also in love with a goat (named Sylvia), he sets in motion events that will destroy his family and leave his life in tatters. The playwright himself describes it this way: “Every civilization sets quite arbitrary limits to its tolerances. The play is about a family that is deeply rocked by an unimaginable event and how they solve that problem. It is my hope that people will think afresh about whether or not all the values they hold are valid.” •

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Customer Reviews

When he accepted the Tony Award for Best Play in 2002, Edward Albee said he was grateful that there was room on Broadway for a play about love. In 2003 we can be grateful that Overlook Press has published *The Goat*, or, *Who is Sylvia?* I was fortunate to see *The Goat* on Broadway both with the original cast (Mercedes Ruehl and Bill Pullman) and with the replacement cast (Sally Field and Bill Irwin). While both casts were superb, what was so satisfying was that the text allowed for two

very different interpretations. Having now read the play, its greatness is even more apparent. The story is a simple, though unusual, one: Martin, a successful and famous architect lives in domestic harmony with his wife Stevie and their gay son Billy. Then one day Martin falls in love with Sylvia, who happens to be a goat. Albee uses three scenes to tell his story: 1) Martin's confession to his best friend Ross about his new love; 2) Stevie's confrontation with Martin over Sylvia (whom she finds out about in a letter from Ross); and 3) the tragic, yet also hopeful (to me at least), conclusion. In this play Albee has harnessed the wordplay of drawing room comedy to the intense emotions of tragedy. In their confrontations, Stevie and Martin switch from emotional outbursts to clever repartee and back again. They even have the wherewithal to compliment each other on their bon mots. The audacity of this strategy and Albee's success in bringing it off, apparent on stage, become even clearer after reading the text. His intricate constructions and verbal virtuosity lend a musical feeling to the work, as if every shift of mood and emotion were part of a larger composition. Albee rings changes not only in the lives of his characters, but also in the perceptions and emotions of his audience.

Edward Albee's "The Goat" or Who Is Sylvia is, to the issue of Gay Marriage, what Arthur Miller's The Crucible was to McCarthyism. Albee manages to show an audience exactly what true love is and he uses a middle class WASP family with a homosexual son and a goat to do it. The end of the play has a hurt and confused wife holding forth a dripping burlap sack full of hacked up pieces of a dead goat as her husband weeps into his hands. Not only does it address the issue of how dare we define love, but Albee even is brazen enough to use a goat, which of course was the homophobic reaction to the issue of gay marriage in the first place: "If we allow this what is next? Do we allow a person to marry a goat?" This is ludicrous and anyone with a little common sense should see that to jump from same sex to bestiality is both crazy and propaganda. But let's play with this bit of stupidity for a moment: Imagine a young woman taking her goat home to meet the folks for the first time. "Mom. Dad" she says timidly, "This is Billy." In 1955 there were actually Senate Congressional hearings where individuals were seriously asked about their connections with the Communist Party and asked to give names of those with whom they worked who might just be "red" as well. Lucille Ball, married to a Cuban, managed to escape ruin because Ball and Arnaz ran one of the most powerful studios in Hollywood. No one was hiring Lucy; she did the hiring. And no Senator was going to tell Americans not to watch the beloved Lucille Ball. Others were not so lucky and were blacklisted, never to work again. Some managed to escape. Shirley Jackson and Stanley Edgar Hyman were members of the Communist party as students at Syracuse university in the 1930's.

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