AMERICAN CONSERVATORY THEATER
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PRESENTS

WORDS on PLAYS
INSIGHT INTO THE PLAY, THE PLAYWRIGHT, AND THE PRODUCTION

The Goat or,
Who is Sylvia?

BY EDWARD ALBEE
DIRECTED BY RICHARD E. T. WHITE
GEARY THEATER
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CHARACTERS, CAST, AND SYNOPSIS OF
THE GOAT OR, WHO IS SYLVIA?

The Goat opened on Broadway at the John Golden Theatre on March 10, 2002.

CHARACTERS AND CAST

MARTIN GRAY  
Don R. McManus

STEVIE GRAY, his wife  
Pamela Reed

BILLY GRAY, their son  
Joseph Parks

ROSS TUTTLE, Martin’s best friend  
Charles Shaw Robinson

TIME AND PLACE

A living room. The present.

SYNOPSIS

Scene one. The living room. Stevie onstage, arranging flowers. Martin and Stevie, a happily married couple, prepare for the arrival of Ross, Martin’s best friend. Martin, a successful architect at the pinnacle of his career, has achieved several milestones in the past week: he celebrated his 50th birthday, became the youngest person ever to win the prestigious Pritzker Prize (architecture’s equivalent of the Nobel), and was asked to design The World City, a $200 billion dollar dream city of the future in the American Midwest. A TV journalist, Ross is coming over to interview Martin on camera for the television show “People Who Matter.” Martin and Stevie banter playfully, teasing each other with affection: he is forgetful, she smells something odd on him, they joke about him having an affair with a goat.

Ross arrives and Stevie leaves. As the two men begin taping the interview, Martin is still preoccupied and unresponsive, and Ross, frustrated, stops the interview to ask Martin what is wrong. After much equivocation, Martin admits that he is having an affair. Though he is still in love with Stevie, and had never been unfaithful to her in their 22 years together, he is now also inexplicably in love with Sylvia, whom he met while looking for a country house for the family. After much prodding, Martin reluctantly shows Ross a photograph of Sylvia. She is a goat.
SCENE TWO. The living room, a day later. Martin and Stevie are with their 17-year-old son, Billy. Stevie is holding a letter she received that day from Ross, in which he reveals Martin's sexual relationship with a goat. Billy and Stevie are understandably shocked and outraged by the news and confront Martin together. When Billy objects to his father's unsavory sexual activities, Martin in turn brings up Billy's homosexuality. Martin and Stevie ask Billy to leave the room, and he does, visibly hurt. Stevie demands that Martin explain, in detail, how this unbelievable situation could have come about.

Martin explains that he met Sylvia in the country while house hunting. While buying vegetables at a roadside stand, he looked over and saw her. He looked into her eyes and instantly experienced what he can only describe as an “epiphany,” “an ecstasy and a purity, and love of an unimaginable kind.” He knew that they would “go to bed together,” and was powerless to resist. Mystified by the power of the experience, he has even been to a therapy group for people in similar circumstances, but didn’t feel he belonged there, because he is truly in love with Sylvia. As his story unfolds, Stevie reacts with increasing horror and rage and slowly destroys most of the valuable art and objects in the room. Martin insists that he loves both Stevie and Sylvia, deeply and equally. Painfully stung, Stevie can’t believe that he fails to see the enormity of the situation; he has destroyed her and their “splendid life.” She storms out of the house, vowing that, since Martin has brought her down, she will bring him down with her.

SCENE THREE. An hour or so later. The living room is in ruins. The front door slams and Billy enters. He demands to know from his father what happened and where Stevie is; Martin doesn’t know where she has gone, only that she has vowed to bring him down. Billy is undone by the realization that the ideal family he has always known has disappeared. Martin hugs Billy to comfort him, and, overwhelmed by his pain and desire for his father to reassure him, Billy turns their embrace into a passionate, sexual kiss. At this point Ross enters and condemns Martin for this further evidence of his perversity. Martin describes the fine line between love and sex and the ways in which sexual arousal often creeps into places we don’t think it belongs. He then lets Ross have it for betraying his confidence by writing the letter to Stevie, and thereby causing the irreparable damage done to his family.

Amid the argument between Martin and Ross, Stevie returns. She drags in the bloody carcass of Sylvia, whom she has brutally killed. Martin, devastated, apologizes to his family. Billy ends the play with a plea: “Dad? Mom?”
A stage direction from scene two of *The Goat or, Who is Sylvia?* serves as an apt distillation of the themes of domestic discord and illusionary ideals that Edward Albee has dramatized in many of his plays: “There is chaos behind the civility, of course.”

Ever since his career-making theatrical debut with the explosive one-act *The Zoo Story* (1959)—about a violent encounter between a complacent book editor and a desperate, truth-telling loner—Albee has been attuned to the emotional, moral, and linguistic forces that perpetually threaten to rend the calm surface of middle-class life. Marriage itself was recast by Albee as an epic battlefield in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962), his extravagant verbal duel between a husband and wife fighting to the death of their illusions. Albee has explored this conflict between fantasy and truth in many subsequent plays, emphasizing repeatedly the importance of living an open, passionate, and courageous existence, in defiance of the dangers inherent in fully embracing life.

Albee has always been outspoken in his belief that theater should employ imagination in the service of challenging assumptions, rather than confirming an audience’s prejudices and beliefs. He described his play *The American Dream* (1966) as “an attack on the substitution of artificial for real values in our society, a condemnation of complacency, cruelty and emasculation and vacuity, a stand against the fiction that everything in this slipping land of ours is peachy-keen.” In two of his Pulitzer Prize-winning dramas—*A Delicate Balance* (1966) and *Seascape* (1974)—a couple’s uneasy peace is again
disrupted by unexpected visitors (in this case, by two giant sea lizards). In *Three Tall Women* (1990), for which Albee received his third Pulitzer, the unsettling intruder is memory itself, dragging with it reminders of a life’s wounds and mistakes.

“If there is a single theme that runs through Albee’s work,” wrote Larissa MacFarquhar in the *New Yorker* this spring (on the occasion of *Virginia Woolf*’s current Broadway revival), “it is the importance of being open to a full consciousness of life, with all the social and emotional risk that entails. ‘Dangerous’ is one of his highest terms of praise, and ‘restful’ is one of his worst insults.”

After 19 years without a new play on Broadway, during which time Albee’s work met with mixed critical reception, he returned in 2002 with *The Goat or, Who is Sylvia?* The Goat earned Albee his second Tony Award for best new play, while generating controversy among critics and audiences with its frank and disturbingly humorous depiction of a man tormented by love of “an unimaginable kind.”

This time it is Eros’s turn to wreak havoc, upending a family’s happy life, as tragedy always has, with an unthinkable betrayal. Like Oedipus and Orestes before him, Martin Gray (the architect in *The Goat*) is confronted by the unsettling power of his own desires and “the throes of his fate, like any of the classic Greek heroes,” says director Richard E. T. White. White spoke with us as he began rehearsals of Albee’s “classical tragedy for a modern audience.”

**JESSICA WERNER: WHAT INTERESTS YOU MOST ABOUT **THE GOAT OR, WHO IS SYLVIA**? ARE THERE PARTICULAR CHALLENGES WHEN DIRECTING A PLAY WITH A CONTROVERSIAL REPUTATION?**

**RICHARD E. T. WHITE:** When I first read the play, I was immediately struck with Albee’s bravery in pursuit of a rich and evocative dramatic metaphor. I’ve been an Edward Albee fan for many years, ever since my senior year in high school. There was a point in my life where other people were writing, “Clapton is God,” and I was writing, “Albee is God.” As a teenager who was falling in love with theater, I found Albee absolutely transporting and terribly exciting and dangerous. And his work still feels absolutely that way to me.

**ALBEE HAS SAID HE ABHORS “PURPOSEFUL SHOCK,” YET HE OBVIOUSLY RELISHES SHAKING OUR NOTIONS OF CONVENTIONALITY BY CONFRONTING OUR BOUNDARIES AND TABOOS.**

I think his best work has always challenged accepted notions of taste and appropriateness of style and subject matter in theater to ends that are unexpected and revelatory—consider the ecstatic conflation of violence and tenderness in *The Zoo Story*, and how extremes of
drunkenness and obscenity in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* reveal the aching heart of a childless American family. In *The Goat or, Who is Sylvia?: Notes Toward a Definition of Tragedy*, to use the full title, he is attempting to reshape the themes of classical tragedy for a modern audience—seeking out a situation that parallels powerful mythological stories like Leda and the swan or Pasiphaë and the bull, to attempt to put in a modern context that moment when humans are shaken by desires that redefine their very humanity.

Once again, he is working in extremes: What would happen if the happiest and most successful family in America, a family who truly, deeply loves each other—who, like Oedipus and Jocasta, are at the pinnacle of their lives—is completely and irrevocably shattered by the infidelity of the father? And it's not just an affair with, as the wife puts it at one point, “some chippy,” but with an almost unthinkable object of ardor and attraction? I guess you could call *The Goat* a “situation tragedy,” because it is based on a very clear plot point, which Albee basically lays out for the audience in the first five minutes of the play, making it clear that this play isn’t about plot. Albee doesn’t want *[The Goat]* to be about the shocking revelation that a man is having a love affair with a goat—and I really don’t think it is meant to be taken literally, as a defense of man/animal love. He wants the play to be about the consequences to relationships when something happens that crosses personal boundaries in a profound and shocking way. And that is the value of the metaphor of the play to me. I’ve been struck with the power of a writer taking the most courageous and powerful metaphor he possibly can for the kind of obsession that shatters expectations and the consequences of such a catastrophic act.

**This play highlights the degree to which Albee’s plays have always been seen as both realistic and absurdist.**

What I love about *The Goat* is how Albee, ever the master of contradictory impulses, manages to make the people in this play accessible, honest, engaging, funny, and deeply human, even as all of them make choices that go terribly awry from accepted modes of behavior. I think he has expertly set it up so the play shares with you the point of view of everybody in that situation: the transgressor, the spouse, the child, and also the friend. Throughout, the play shifts its perspective, taking the central event of the revelation of Martin’s affair and turning the viewfinder from one character to another, so the audience is constantly questioning: If I were Martin, what would I do? If I were Stevie? Billy? Ross? I think [Albee] aims to create a complicated response.
DO YOU EXPECT PEOPLE WILL HAVE ANY TROUBLE FEELING EMpathY FOR MARTIN, IN TERMS OF UNDERSTANDING WHY HE WOULD RISK EVERYTHING, AND BE WILLING TO DESTROY THE BEAUTIFUL CALM OF HIS LIFE?

Part of that is solved by the brilliance of the writing, in portraying Martin as a man who has not made up his mind, who has that quality of living in the question. When we first see him, his mind is looping back on itself constantly, but he's not forgetful because he's absent. He's forgetting things because his mind is swirling with the question of, How can he live his life like this? How can he love both his wife, Stevie, and Sylvia? How can he be the same person at home as he is in the country? Who was he for the previous 50 years of his life, that he could be so changed now? He is living continuously in a state of questioning, and I think that makes him empathetic to the audience, because he is not doing something blindly. He is on a quest, and in the throes of his fate, like any of the classic Greek heroes.

I think some people will judge Martin harshly, and some people will judge the play harshly, if they can't see beyond dismissing it as "disgusting," and something they don't want to "deal with." I think Albee has intentionally structured the play so it is very friendly and seductive in the beginning, drawing the characters' virtues—their affection for each other, their playfulness, their warmth and comfort with each other—very quickly and skillfully, so the audience will engage. That's why he ordered the play as he did: the first scene is really a comedy, the second scene is a drama, and the third is a tragedy. He's very canny about that [progression]. I think if he made these very sober, serious, judgmental people right at the beginning, and attempted to delve into their predicament with great psychological acuity, it would be a very different play. It would be a sociological play about zoophilia.

AND WHO WOULD WANT TO SEE THAT?

Right [laugh]. So, instead Albee asks, What, in our modern, self-conscious lives, would be a tragedy? And how would we respond to it? How do we live with unimaginable catastrophe? We can imagine a lot of catastrophic things now, because we are so saturated with information and news of the outrageous. So Albee has tried to find something that is still a secret in our society and build on that thing that is undisputed, that you're not going to see even on "The Jerry Springer Show."

The play achieves the level of tragedy partly because, like Oedipus, Martin is a great man, surrounded by other great people, the kind of people who in theory we would want to be—admirable, loving, intelligent, compassionate people. Albee gives us an exceptional relationship, the kind of relationship we would want to be in. He gives us a person at the pinnacle of his success, who seemingly has everything one would want: a mate who loves him in a profound and intimate way; a son who's just ambitious and rebellious enough to
be really proud of. He even gives Martin a kingdom—a “World City” he’s going to build on the American prairie—because tragedy requires a fall from an enormous height. That fall propels the “hero,” and everyone one around him, from a state of order to one of great chaos, which is something I’ve been thinking about lately.

One of the things that attracted me to *The Goat* and the power of its metaphor is that the turmoil it depicts, and the consequences of Martin’s act, resonated powerfully with me because of something that happened in my own life. Reading the play, my mind flew back to a moment when I was just out of graduate school, in the seventh year of what I thought was a pretty happy committed relationship—and I met a young woman one day and had that moment when I looked into her eyes and dived in, and fell in love instantly. When Martin describes his response to Sylvia, it is almost identical to that moment when I fell in love on that particular day. It’s still one of the most vivid memories of my life. Nothing like that had ever happened to me, and it sent my life into a tailspin. It took me from order to chaos almost overnight.

I think that is a kind of situation many people are familiar with. People behave differently when profound things happen to them, but everybody can sympathize with that sense of being shattered by the intrusion of the unexpected. We have all experienced catastrophe, or we’ve seen our friends or parents experience it. Living with an awareness of the catastrophic makes you aware that you do have choice and power in those circumstances. You might not think you do, but you are presented with choices all along. Exploring this play is about looking for those moments of choice, where the characters either surrender or meet the responsibility of the catastrophe head on.

**OUR SOCIETY SEEMS TO VALUE THE IDEA THAT WE ARE IN CONTROL AND ABLE TO DIRECT OUR OWN DESTINIES, SO IN THAT CONTEXT MARTIN’S ACCOUNT OF THE MOMENT HE FIRST SAW SYLVIA IS EVEN MORE SHOCKING. HE DESCRIBES IT AS IF A ROMANTIC POSSESSION TOOK PLACE—A MOMENT BEYOND CHOICE.**

We need to keep in mind the scope of what Albee is going for. He is harkening back to moments like those when Oedipus is confronted with a profound and horrifying revelation, and yet he *must* go forward. Albee has captured that instant when you feel the breath of the gods on you. There are times in people’s lives when they feel like something larger is in control of them, something over which they have no control. The Greeks called them the “Mysteries,” to capture that sense of what is mysterious in life, that there are still some things that can come to you that are not explainable in a rational way. I think that is another one of those things that is fundamental in Albee’s writing.
There are plenty of Albee-isms and puns throughout the play, something his work has been known for, ever since *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Characters in The Goat still use language to play and spar with each other, even during an emotional crisis, when they're talking about the most disturbing things.

Albee is canny in making sure some of the play’s appeal is its very playfulness. He is a playful writer and has created playful characters who are constantly self-aware of the meta-theatrical nature of their lives. In the middle of an argument Martin or Stevie will still say, “That was great, very clever.” They play little word games and literacy games with each other, and this kind of almost obsessive, compulsive love of words is a sort of signifier throughout Albee’s work. It is also a way that some people cope, which is not that far from real life. As conscious beings, we do listen as the tapes run in our heads. It’s something I find myself doing constantly—interrupting myself to comment on and rearrange my thoughts, and in a heated moment how you say something can have as much impact as the content of what you’re saying.

It raises the question of whether words can ever be adequate to the task of describing and reckoning with the truly outrageous. Can you ever compass something you can’t articulate?

This play is very much about how we cope, and language itself plays a role in how [the family’s] coping mechanisms fall apart, the challenges to the things that held them together—their jokes, their affection, their love of words. These people are obsessive-compulsive word people. It’s a very interesting psychological gesture that Albee gives the characters the sense that, as soon as a word leaves their mouths, they’re immediately aware of it. That’s an interesting trait to play.

I’m really struck by the play’s subtitle, “Notes Toward a Definition of Tragedy.” It’s an important thing for an audience to think about. Since it’s Albee, there is wordplay under each of these elements: There is a literal goat; there is the goat in the sense of the sacrificial goat, and the scapegoat who is [blamed as] the

The Gray family at A.C.T.: (l to r) Billy (Joseph Parks) Stevie (Pamela Reed), and Martin (Don R. McManus). Photo by Ryan Montgomery.
cause of everybody’s problems. I think there is also the sense that these are people who are taking “notes” on their own lives with a level of awareness and intelligence that is both a blessing and a curse to them. And, because Albee is such a musical writer, there are also musical “notes” in the play, and we have to respect the musical rhythms of the language.

**HAS WORKING ON AN ALBEE PLAY LED YOU TO REFLECT ON YOUR EXPERIENCE WORKING ON MAMET?** [White directed *American Buffalo* at A.C.T. in 2003.] Both Mamet and Albee are known for the specificity of speech they require of actors, including stresses and pauses, and they share a philosophy about the degree to which directors and actors should be interpretive.

I think doing *American Buffalo* was a great jumping-off point to come to Albee, and Mamet doesn’t even give you the degree of stage directions that Albee does. Shaw is the only other playwright I can think of offhand who makes so many tonal demands in his stage directions. My view is that it’s like receiving a score from a composer that tells you, this passage is slow, and this passage is fast, and so on. You do your best to find the emotional justification for each of those gradations.

**FITTING, SINCE ALBEE WANTED TO BE A COMPOSER BEFORE HE BECAME A WRITER.**

There you go. He composes with words. And his silences and pauses are also important. I have [directed] a tremendous amount of Shakespeare, and I think it’s been great training for Albee because it tunes you into verbal conceits, as well as working on Mamet and Martin McDonagh. I love their kind of [textual] precision. I know actors can find it constraining at times, if they feel they’re on a train of emotion and want to steam forward, and are called on to stop and hold for three counts before saying the next line, it can be frustrating. That’s one of those things that requires careful negotiation, because you don’t want the actors to feel they’re in straitjackets or rein in their impulses. On the other hand, you want to explore those truths that exist where the thing that is unsaid is more powerful even than the thing that is said. One thing that was instructive about directing [McDonagh’s] *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* was realizing the degrees of laughter that came when you played a pause correctly, which was significantly different from the degree of the laugh when the pause was not played correctly.

**I BET THERE WILL BE A LOT OF THOSE MOMENTS FOR AUDIENCES OF THE GOAT, WHEN YOU LAUGH AND THEN WONDER WHETHER YOU SHOULD BE**
Laughing, or you’re sickened by your own laughter, but it came naturally.

With Albee, I think those little silences and beats are part of the key to the humor, as well as to the terror of the play, and to those absolutely ripe, wonderful moments you hope to attain where terror and humor go hand in hand, and the audience has no choice but to laugh because the characters are feeling a kind of terror.

What kind of advice did you give the actors in preparing to work on this play?

When we first read the play, one of the things that came to my mind was the Brecht poem “Look for the Old in the New.” It is one of my favorite pieces of direction to actors, ever. What he asks actors to do is, when they first read a play, to look for the old in the new. Look for the old ways of thinking and look for the new ways of thinking. It’s in the dynamic tension between the old and the new where they will find their characters. Brecht was interested in, above all things, dynamic ambiguity. He didn’t want easy answers. He wanted to lob big questions into the audience. One of my favorite images from ancient Greek literature (and this play is rife with Greek allusions) is the apples of discord. Those are golden apples that you throw into a group of people who are in harmonious concord, and then they start arguing with each other. I think this play is an apple of discord. This play is meant to be thrown into a group of people who are sitting complacently and to start arguments among them, to confront them with ambiguity.

That ambiguity, that tension, comes from the dissonance between the old and the new. The new is not just good; Brecht was smart, he knew that the new is also terrifying. Something that is new, that is remarkable, that is a revelation, that is fantastic and life changing, can be for someone else terrifying and shattering. And the old is not bad, the old is the structure of our lives, the thing that holds us together. The tension between the old and the new is what we look for, and what we want to give gently, affectionately, forcefully, to the audience.

How did you develop the design of this production?

When [scenic designer] Kent [Dorsey] (who has been a longtime collaborator of mine) and I sat down to talk about the play, we asked ourselves, How do you create a space for an intimate domestic play that also has the resonance of a Greek tragedy? That was question number one.

Question number two was about the house, because this is about family, and therefore the place where these people live is very important [and the entire play takes place in their
living room]. My goal is that when the curtain goes up (if we use the curtain) the audience will think, I want to live there. I don’t want them to think of it as a set. I want them to think of it as a home, to see it and treat it as a home from the beginning. I love the fact that the play starts with Stevie doing something as lovely and domestic as arranging flowers. I wanted it to be a place where people would say, That’s the home of happy, interesting people.

We went through several permutations and looked at a lot of architecture. Martin is an architect. He’s an advanced thinker, so we had to imagine what kind of a place an advanced thinker would live in. His wife and son are also advanced thinkers. What kind of environment would these fine, progressive, smart people live in?

I wanted their home to feel both aesthetically beautiful and comfortable at the same time. I didn’t want it to be forbidding, to be cool. I wanted it to feel like a warm, engaging place, yet also a place where interesting, imaginative people live, people who view their lives as an art form. That is important to me about Stevie, that she is as aesthetically sophisticated as Martin. She is not an appendage, and she doesn’t freak out because Martin is the only thing she has. She freaks out because Martin is the most important and wonderful thing she has.
ABOUT THIS GOAT

BY EDWARD ALBEE (2004)

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 [Occupant,] 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 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 doppelgänger. Alas—perhaps—it had 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 14 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 United States 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 re-reviewed 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 some-how 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.

Neve trust a man who loves animals. First, ask him why he loves them. If he says that he loves them because they are artless and innocent, or incapable of duplicity, or because of the wholehearted unselfishness of their affection, or because their souls are not tainted by envy, or something like that, beware. It is likely that that man is of two minds about humans.

Edward Albee, the most important living American playwright, loves animals. He stops and chats with dogs he meets on the street. He likes to visit children's zoos where he can sit with animals close up and talk to them and play with them. He has always kept pets—chiefly cats and Irish wolfhounds. He claims that *Black Beauty* is one of his favorite movies. James Thurber, who wrote intimately about animals, is one of his favorite writers; another is A. A. Milne. “What do I love about *Winnie-the-Pooh* and *The House at Pooh Corner*?” Albee muses (a love from which, take note, he excludes Christopher Robin). “I think that these people have not been destroyed by anything. The purity of them. The fact that they’re always going to be that way, and nice. They’re forever good.”

The animals that appear in Albee’s plays are not forever good. They are not adorable or fluffy. But they have the animal quality of being thoroughly themselves. They are what they are, and humans feint and scheme around them. Albee’s first play, which opened in 1959, a one-act called *The Zoo Story*, centers on a narrative about a vicious dog and a man who tries to win him over, then tries to kill him, and then, having failed at both, resigns himself to a wary and cold détente. In Albee’s 1966 play *A Delicate Balance*, Tobias confesses that he had a pet cat killed at the vet’s because it had started to dislike him. A character in the 1993 play *Fragments* relates how she decided to enlarge by several feet the grave she had dug for...
her dead dog because he had been frozen at the vet’s and his tail was sticking straight out and she didn’t want to snap it off (this actually happened to Albee and his late Irish wolfhound Harry).

Albee is perhaps the only playwright to write two leading roles for lizards. And it is no accident that it was he who came up with the brilliant idea to write a play about a man who has fallen in love with a goat. “I’ve never seen such an expression,” Martin, the hero of his 2002 play The Goat or, Who is Sylvia?, says of his caprine beloved. “It was pure . . . and trusting and . . . and innocent; so . . . so guileless.” The poet and translator Richard Howard, who has known Albee since he was in his 20s, once wrote a poem about Albee and himself in which the Albee figure is named Feral. Albee’s plays tend to cherish, in both their animal and their human protagonists, childlike, creaturely, feral qualities—authenticity, impulsiveness, imagination, openness to unconscious thoughts. Woe betide any character who displays adult human virtues such as rationality, courtesy, prudence, or restraint.

The play that made Albee famous, Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, which opened in 1962 and is being revived on Broadway this month, is a carnival of wit in which George, a defeated middle-aged history professor, and his bitter, thwarted wife, Martha, use a young couple as foils for the dazzling cruelties they practice upon each other. Right from the start, the language is dense, complex, and spoken very fast; the cruelty is breathtaking, as is the amount of alcohol the characters consume; and all of this, combined with the play’s length (nearly three hours) and the fact that it never leaves the living room, produces a claustrophobia so intense as to be nearly unbearable. There is no relief, no light entry, no gentle fade-out—it is all second act. Whereas George and Martha are brutal and abandoned and, we are meant to see, truly in love, the young couple, an ambitious biology professor named Nick and his idiot wife, Honey, hold their marriage together with protective lies: Nick pretends to Honey that he loves her; Honey pretends to Nick that it is just bad luck that they have not yet had children. It is a measure of Albee’s allegiance to feral behavior and feral people that, at the end of the long, harrowing night, it is George and Martha’s marriage that is left standing. . . .

Albee does not consider directors and actors to be creative artists. Their role, in his view, is a strictly interpretive one: they are there to realize the vision of the playwright. The theater is not a democracy, and making people happy is not its mission: Albee will never compromise for the sake of social harmony. His vision is comprehensive. He knows exactly how each sentence should be enunciated—how loudly or softly, how quickly, how emphatically, at exactly what pitch and with what emotional coloring. He is reluctant to cut lines out of a play, and he will not tolerate an actor skipping a word or accidentally paraphras-
“No one goes around messing with composers’ work the way they do with plays,” he says. “That’s probably where I learned not to put up with that junk. Nobody takes three or four measures out of one of Bach’s fugues.”

Albee feels that a playwright should notate his writing with the same commanding precision as a composer notates his. To this end, he is extravagant with punctuation. (Even in his more naturalistic plays, his punctuation tends to be absurdist: his is fond of exclamation points, and even more fond of multiple exclamation points followed by multiple question marks.) His preoccupation with precision and control seems to have grown over the years. In his more recent plays, nearly every line has an instruction attached to it, such as these, for instance, from the first three pages of the 1991 Three Tall Women: “Small smile”; “Longer pause; none too pleasant”; “From a distance; curiously lighter, higher voice”; “Oddly loud, tough”; “A bit as if to a child”; “Quick smile”; “Dismissive laugh”; “Under her breath”; “Shakes her head in admiration”; “Ugly; suddenly”; “Tiny pause”; “Annoyance at herself”; “Placating”; “Small, smug triumph”; “Dogged, but not unpleasant”; “Weary”; “Clucks”; “Imitation”; “Purrs.” Some instructions are so obvious that they seem almost paranoid: the line “What an answer! What a dumb . . .” carries the direction “Scoffs.”

It’s not just lines that Albee likes to control—he is a theater man, and he concerns himself with every aspect of the production, from props and staging to costumes and lights. . . . Albee observes theatrical protocol: he never gives notes to actors himself; he speaks only to the director. But he can be belligerent in defense of his prerogatives. . . .

Albee often directs his own plays, though actors can be reluctant to work with him: he can direct as though teaching cows to speak. Even when he is not directing, he is hardly a diplomat. At the first read-through of The American Dream (1961), Albee told its female star that her character was a “tumescent monster”; she quit the play that afternoon and refused to take the director’s phone calls. The actors in the film version of A Delicate Balance found Albee so intimidating that they begged him to stop visiting the set. (“It is indeed fortunate that the character of Agnes is very much like Katherine Hepburn,” he observed afterward. “Of course, if she played King Kong, it would still be Katherine Hepburn.”). . . .

Albee works best with actors who are humble but not needy. He doesn’t like a lot of questions about who their characters are and what they’re up to—he will say that the answers are in the play. Lavish praise, expected in the theater, is not his style. “If you get a word from him, that’s enough to live on,” Marian Seldes, who has acted in many of Albee’s plays and is also a friend, says. “We are really the servants and he is the master. The fact that you’re you goes away and you become Edward’s creature. I’ve always felt shy with him, because I don’t want to waste his time.”
How Albee came to be so self-possessed is a complicated story. He was adopted shortly after his birth, in 1928, by Reed and Frances Albee, a wealthy couple who lived in Larchmont, New York. The family money came from Reed’s grandfather, who as a youth ran away to join the circus and ended up owning a chain of vaudeville theaters. Reed himself was an unimpressive figure with few interests, a passive, taciturn man with a glass eye who called his wife Mommy and spent much of his time in Manhattan having affairs with showgirls. Before she met Reed, Frances was a shopgirl from Jersey City, but she took to the life of a rich woman with ease—she dressed well and became an able horsewoman. She was six feet tall, cold, and imposing. Each year, the family decamped to Palm Beach in two private railcars. The racial restrictions of Palm Beach suited the Albees, who, like everybody in Larchmont, refused to hire black servants. “They were even anti-Irish,” Albee says. “That’s carrying it pretty far.”

Albee was pampered but unloved. He was sent away to boarding school and, in the summers, to camp. He responded by conceiving of himself as completely separate from his family: he became shy and secretive, and when he was told, at six or so, that he was adopted, he claims to have felt only relief. (Even now, Albee refers to his adoptive parents as “those people.”) The persona that Albee came up with for himself was not one to invite intimacy. At seven, he walked around wearing a smoking jacket and carrying a cigarette holder. He was fat and autocratic. He called his Choate roommate Caliban.

Albee figured out he was a writer when he was eight, and that he was gay when he was twelve. “I took to that like a duck to water!” he says. “One of the virtues of being away in private school.” He wrote poetry and, at fourteen and sixteen, what he affectionately describes as possibly the two worst novels ever written. His poetry was not bad, he felt, but it was imitative rather than original. He was kicked out of two schools for failing to attend class, but he managed to graduate from Choate, and briefly attended Trinity College before being expelled for the usual reason. One morning soon afterward, following a fight with his parents about his coming home late, leaving the car covered in vomit, and failing to turn the lights off in the driveway, he left home in a taxi and never went back. When his father died, he didn’t attend the funeral, and he didn’t see his mother again for 17 years.

When Albee left home, just after the war, he moved to Greenwich Village and fell in with a crowd that consisted mostly of composers. He began an affair with William Flanagan, a charismatic composer several years older than he was, and they lived together for seven years. The two of them drank a great deal and were famous for their malice and rage. “They would go to the Eighth Street bars and they would go to opposite ends of the bar,” Ned Rorem told Albee’s biographer Mel Gussow. “They were known as the Sisters Grimm because they wouldn’t smile. They would sulk and they would swill down straight
shots of whiskey with beer.” “Edward was sour and mean, especially when he was drinking,” Richard Howard says. “He was dark and passionate and difficult.” When Howard first read the acid dialogue in *Virginia Woolf*, it reminded him of fights between Albee and Flanagan and himself. “There was a lot of bickering about who was going to pay for what,” he says. “And we all had this rivalry as to the people we’d pick up and sleep with. Edward was very attractive in those days. He was littler than the rest of us. He was like a small furry animal. After his success, he went to the gym and really buffed himself up, and we all made fun of him for that.” Albee and Howard had a falling out in the late 50s but became friends again. “I think he learned that he was the person he wanted to be,” Howard says. “He’s become nicer and nicer. Now he’s always extremely friendly and gracious and funny in a way that would have been inconceivable earlier on.”

When he turned 21, Albee came into a small trust fund from his grandmother, and he supplemented it with various odd jobs. He worked as a messenger boy for Western Union, as a salesman at Bloomingdale’s, as an office boy at an ad agency, and at the luncheonette counter of the Manhattan Towers Hotel. He went out all the time. “I saw all the happenings, all the small theater productions, all the early exhibitions of the Abstract Expressionists,” he says. “I went to every poetry reading, all the concerts of avant-garde music, all the dance companies. Everyone did all that stuff. We were absorbing what was exciting and best in our culture as naturally as breathing. That’s not as easy now. It’s partly the expense, but there’s something else that’s getting in the way. I don’t know what it is. It’s all becoming so self-conscious for people. It’s not as natural as breathing anymore.”

It was ten years after he left home and moved to the city that Albee wrote the play that started his career—ten years during which he was consorting with all sorts of accomplished people. But, he says, he never doubted himself, never felt like a hanger-on or worried that he would fail. Once, visiting Flanagan at the MacDowell Colony, he met Thornton Wilder and showed him a few poems. Wilder suggested that he try writing plays. Albee wasn’t insulted—he simply took the suggestion at face value. He was confident that one day he would write something extraordinary; so when *The Zoo Story* suddenly popped out of him, in the course of three weeks in the winter of 1958, he was neither elated nor surprised. . . .

*The Zoo Story* had an enormous influence on younger writers. “Theater for years became littered with park benches,” John Guare wrote. “To show you were avant-garde, you needed no more than a dark room and a park bench.” The play was followed, in 1960, by an uncharacteristically didactic race drama, *The Death of Bessie Smith*, and *The Sandbox*, of which Albee is especially fond—a 14-minute one-act in which a perky old woman, Grandma, dies in a sandbox, attended by an endearingly clumsy young man who turns out to be the Angel of Death. . . .
As these plays were being produced, Albee was talked about as part of the theater of the absurd; he was said to be the first playwright to bring this European sensibility—epitomized by playwrights such as Beckett, Pinter, and Ionesco—to America. Albee encouraged this association—the first scene of The American Dream is a virtual rewriting of the first scene of Ionesco's The Bald Soprano. Martin Esslin, in his 1961 book The Theatre of the Absurd, which popularized the term, defined it as theater after the death of God: theater that attempts to convey the situation of mankind in a universe without meaning. To Esslin, absurdist theater was vital because, by confronting its audience with an existential vision, it forced the audience to experience and come to terms with frightening reality. It represented, in that sense, a return to the original function of theater as a form of religious ritual. But not all absurdist theater was of this type: in his view, there was another sort of absurdism that was satirical rather than ritualistic—the absurdism of Ionesco rather than of Beckett, which concerned itself with parodying the pettiness of society rather than with dramatizing the void. More often than not, Albee's plays belong to this second category. In his work, meaninglessness appears less a quality of the universe, a primary fact of the human condition, than as a personality flaw for which particular benighted people can be blamed and mocked.

If there is a single theme that runs through Albee's work, it is the importance of being open to a full consciousness of life, with all the social and emotional risk that entails. "Dangerous" is one of his highest terms of praise, and "restful" is one of his worst insults. Albee defines himself against the O'Neill of The Iceman Cometh, who suggests that people cannot survive without the comfort of their delusions. In The Iceman Cometh, the truthteller who, with the best intentions, strips a group of failures and drunkards of their fantasies turns out to be the most destructively deluded character of them all. In Albee plays, though, truthtellers are brave and wise, and the damage they do is all to the good. Jerry, in The Zoo Story, tells Peter that his life is dull and limited; George, in Virginia Woolf, forces his wife to give up her fantasy that she has a child; Man and Woman, in The Play About the Baby, destroy Girl and Boy's fantasy that they have a baby; Tobias, in A Delicate Balance, tells his best friend that he doesn't love him; the Wife, in All Over, tells her children that she doesn't love them; Cordelia, in Finding the Sun, tells Abigail that her husband doesn't love her; a and b, in Three Tall Women, tell c that she will not marry for love. "If you have no wounds how can you know if you're alive?" says the Man in The Play about the Baby. "If you have no scar how do you know who you are?" It is not surprising that a man who has never experienced self-doubt has no respect for comfort or compromise or safety.
Albee himself used to be a notorious truthteller, during the decade or so, from the late '60s to the late '70s, when he was drinking. He abused people at dinner parties. One time, he and a friend walked out of a play in the middle of an act, shouting insults at the cast. “When I was drinking, I would feel the need to set people straight,” he told Gussow. “I knew what phonies they were, what duplicity and hypocrisy I saw. . . . I felt the need to expose people to the world for who they really were. I did not want to let them get away with anything anymore, even if that demanded embarrassing or humiliating them. I was a scourge.”

When Albee was drinking, he lost control of his finances and found himself deeply in debt. He even lost control of his work—sometimes he would write lines and not know what they meant. His life was saved, he says, by Jonathan Thomas—a sculptor and painter whom he met in 1971 at the University of Toronto, when Thomas was 24 and Albee was 43. Albee decided to stop drinking and smoking at the same time. He didn’t go to A.A.—he did it on his own, with the help of Antabuse, a drug that, if taken in combination with alcohol, makes you sick. “I have will,” he says.

Albee and Thomas [stayed] together [until Thomas’s death, from bladder cancer, in May]. People who don’t know Albee are often surprised by his devotion. It is a side of him that is not always apparent. “I have this list of people I call every Christmas to see how they are,” he says. “And people have told me that they’re startled and happy that I seem to care. Maybe I give the impression of being aloof and distant. I’m private.” Albee is known primarily as a writer of brutal intrafamilial wars or detached absurdism, but he has also created plays that are wonderfully moving, and characters who love each other. Seascape involves two affectionate couples—one human, one reptile. Counting the Ways, a beautifully wrought series of vaudeville-style short takes separated by blackouts, consists of conversations between a husband and wife about their love. In The Goat, Martin is not only in love with the goat, Sylvia—he is also in love with his wife, and runs into trouble because he actually expects her to understand his situation. The problem with marriages in Albee plays is usually not that the husband and wife are at odds, but that they are too little at odds—with the result that, over years, they build themselves a reassuring cage of habits and understandings and forget how to be alive. . . .

Albee’s reputation has been more unstable than that of perhaps any other playwright of his stature. Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf? made so much money that Albee bought a house and an old barn in Montauk, at the tip of Long Island, started a foundation to benefit young artists, and began amassing his art collection. But there was a period of about 15 bad years in the middle of his career, from the mid 70s until the early 90s, when he was persona non grata on Broadway.
Even at the height of his early popularity, in the 1960s, he had his ups and downs. His 1964 play *Tiny Alice*, for instance—the labored saga of a sexually repressed and religiously obsessive young lay brother who is prostituted by the Church to a mysterious rich woman and ultimately martyred—was derided as pompous and baffling to such a degree that Albee felt obliged to hold a press conference to try to explain it. (He did not succeed.) "Its tediousness, its pretentiousness, its galling sophistication, its gratuitous and easy symbolizing, its ghastly pansy rhetoric and repartee," an enraged Philip Roth wrote in *The New York Review of Books*. "*Tiny Alice* is so unconvincing, so remote, so obviously a sham—so much the kind of play that makes you want to rise from your seat and shout, 'Baloney.'" The play's star, John Gielgud, was so bewildered by it that he threatened to quit almost daily, implored Albee to cut down his nine-minute dying monologue because he had no idea what he was talking about, and had to be sustained by brandy. (At this point, even Albee doesn't much care for the play.)

*Tiny Alice* was chum to the press. *A Delicate Balance*, produced in 1966, won a Pulitzer, and *Seascape* won him a second Pulitzer, in 1975, but he had more flops than hits. *A Delicate Balance* was followed, in 1968, by the paired plays *Box* and *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-Tung*, an unsuccessful experiment in verbal polyphony—three characters and one disembodied voice take turns telling a story, reciting an amusingly bad 19th-century poem, and declaiming the sayings of Chairman Mao. Between 1963 and 1981, Albee wrote a series of adaptations for the stage—of Carson McCullers's *The Ballad of the Sad Café* and Nabokov's *Lolita*, among others—none of which really worked. (Noël Coward was a great fan of Albee's, but when Albee took him to see *The Ballad of the Sad Café* Coward sighed loudly throughout the performance and told him at the end, "Dear boy, this is not my kind of play.") Albee was, bizarrely, asked by the producer David Merrick to rewrite the book for a stage-musical version of *Breakfast at Tiffany's*: at the first preview, as Albee put it, "an incredible wave of loathing came across the footlights," and he managed, as he said later, "in only two weeks, to turn something that would have been a six-month mediocrity into an instant disaster."

*The Man Who Had Three Arms*—a play that Albee wrote in the early '80s about a man who grows a third arm, becomes a celebrity, and then turns bitter when the arm disappears and he finds he is no longer desirable—was probably the nadir of his career. "You owe me something, you people!" cries the man. "You loved me in the good times, and you're fucking well going to love me now!!" The play itself is actually quite funny, in the tradition of Gogol's "The Nose," but inevitably it was interpreted by the critics as a bratty protesting of his treatment at their hands. The *Times* called it "a temper tantrum in two acts." Things got so bad that, when Albee first started showing people *Three Tall Women*, which later
became a big hit and won him his third Pulitzer Prize, nobody in New York wanted anything to do with it. It was produced first in Austria, and then by a small repertory company upstate, and only made it to an off-Broadway theater several years later. *Three Tall Women* involves a conversation between three characters, a, b, and c, who are loosely based on Albee's mother at three different ages; 92 (a), 52 (b), and 26 (c). As much as it says about Albee's caustic, unsentimental mother, the play is also about the times of life: the way that certainties grow flaccid and doubts hard; the difference between the cruelty of the old and the cruelty of the young.

In 1965, in the middle of the *Tiny Alice* fiasco, Albee received a phone call from his parents' secretary telling him that his mother was ill and lonely. (His father had died four years earlier.) He went to see her for the first time since he left home. "I hear his voice and it all floods back, but I'm formal," a, in *Three Tall Women*, says of this meeting. "Well, hello there, I say. Hello there to you, he says. Nothing about this shouldn't have happened. Nothing about I've missed you, not even that little lie. . . . There are no apologies, no recriminations, no tears, no hugs; dry lips on dry cheeks; yes that. And we never discuss it? Never go into why? . . . We're strangers; we're curious about each other; we leave it at that."

They then saw each other regularly: she would attend his opening nights and dinner parties in his apartment; he joined her on trips to Palm Beach. Because she couldn't tolerate homosexuality, Albee often sent his partner out of the house when she came over for dinner. One evening, at a party he was giving in his loft, a tall older woman walked up to him as he was talking to two friends. He turned to introduce her to them but couldn't quite place her and couldn't remember her name. Luckily the friends knew that she was his mother. . . .

Albee is an acute detector of other people's tics, but of course he has tics of his own. His characters are always correcting each other's grammar or word usage at unlikely moments—in the middle of emotionally damaging arguments, for instance. They talk in baby talk or Southern accents when they mean to be sarcastic. They wryly characterize their own statements ("he chirped," "she mimicked"). And they are perpetually misunderstanding or mishearing each other in the most improbable ways. Sometimes these misunderstandings serve the wrong-noun joke formula, as in this exchange from *The Goat*:

ROSS: Hello there, old man!
MARTIN: I'm fifty!
ROSS: It's a term of endearment. Nice flowers.
MARTIN: It is?
ROSS: What? What is?
MARTIN: “Hello there, old man.” Ranunculi.
ROSS: Pardon?
MARTIN: … the flowers.

But often a character will ask another what he is talking about when only narcolepsy would explain the confusion. “What?” (or, rather, “What??!!”) must be the most common locution in the Albee cannon.

Writerly tics were not, however, Albee’s main concern. “There are two ways plays get written,” he said. “One is, ‘I’ve got an idea, now let’s find a situation that will encompass the idea.’ Those tend to be didactic plays. The other kind is what I laughingly call, about my own process, ‘I write my plays to find out why I’m writing them.’ I’m not saying that one is preferable, necessarily, but I suspect that Ibsen and Arthur Miller did the first, and Chekhov and Tennessee Williams did the second.” . . .

It [is] characteristic of Albee to identify the trouble with a play as a matter of process rather than plot. Most people, from time to time, become aware that an idea has popped into their heads, seemingly from nowhere. For Albee, though, this is the central experience of his imaginative life. He never tries consciously to invent a plot or characters, nor does he find himself thinking, as a result of some inspiring encounter, Now, that would be a good idea for a play. Rather, one day he will discover that, without quite knowing it, he has been thinking about a new idea for some time—the idea has been germinating somewhere inside him and has developed without his help. When the idea presents itself to him, he will turn it over in his mind once or twice, and think, Isn’t that interesting; and then he will push it back down whence it came, to let it grow and ripen. He will not make a note of it. This process can go on for years. Often, it is two or three years before he will write anything down.

If Albee feels that an idea is approaching maturity, he will test it: he will go for a long walk, often on the beach, and introduce his characters to a situation that is not part of the play. If they behave easily and naturally—if he is able to improvise dialogue for them without effort—then he will decide that he and they know each other well enough, and he will start to write. Once he has started writing, he will write one draft, read it over, make corrections, and write out a second. Then he is finished. Very occasionally, he will make further alterations once he sees how a play is working or not working in rehearsal. (After watching the first run-through of his 1975 play Seascape, he went home and cut out the entire second act.) But usually, once he has completed his second draft, that’s it.

Albee feels that his imaginative powers come from his unconscious, and that they must be protected from consciousness lest they wither and harden, like underwater plants...
exposed to air. He dislikes explaining his writing process or the origin of his ideas, even to himself. “I don’t consider myself an intellectual,” he says. “I’m not sure that I think coherently terribly well.” He defers to his unconscious in most things, because it knows more than he does. He has a terrible memory, he says, but finds that his characters can quote whole passages from books he can’t remember having read. “You mustn’t write the three-page précis of what the play’s going to be about and what’s going to happen in each scene,” he says, “because you’re going to find that your characters have their own ideas about it. You’ve thought about what you’re doing a lot more than you’re aware that you have; so if you’re tempted to say, ‘That’s not what I meant,’ be careful—because it may be what you meant.”

Albee holds it a principle never to rewrite a play once he has lost the state of mind in which he wrote it, because he feels as though it had been written by somebody else. He doesn’t stick quite so rigidly to this principle as he claims. He cut a large chunk out of Jerry’s dying speech in The Zoo Story some 30 years after he wrote the play, for instance, feeling that a man discoursing for several pages with a knife in his chest was too operatic for his taste at that point. For [Broadway’s currently running] production of Virginia Woolf, he made a very significant change: he removed the implication that George had accidentally killed both his parents, feeling that that distracted from what had really ruined his life—his failure to stand up to his father-in-law. But those are rare exceptions. “I think it would be dishonest to what caused the play,” he says. “I wouldn’t let anyone else rewrite it, why let me?” Albee, in other words, is not only protective of the unconscious as the source of his livelihood; he defers to it, and respects its territory. An unconscious has its own ways and moods and thoughts, he feels, and they should be respected by its host. Albee is a union man. The unconscious does work; therefore the unconscious has rights.

Albee is doubly removed from a sense of rootedness: he was adopted, and then he rejected his adoptive family. Since he was about six or seven, he has felt that he invented himself. Perhaps this is why he is so attached to the idea of his unconscious: it is the part of him that he feels is given, that has always been part of him, that he has no power to control. It is, in a way, his biology. “I’ve had plenty of opportunity to find out who my natural parents were,” Albee says. “The fact that I haven’t bothered indicates to me that I don’t want to go to the trouble. I know who I am. Once I figured out who I was, whatever care or interest I may have had in where I came from vanished completely—I was indifferent to my past.”

Excerpted from The New Yorker, April 4, 2005.
INTERVIEW WITH EDWARD ALBEE
BBC RADIO “Front Row” (2004)

BY MARK LAWSON

Edward Albee is one of the five great American playwrights to emerge during the 20th century (the others being Eugene O’Neill, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, and David Mamet). But Albee is unique in having achieved critical and commercial success over such a long period. Born in 1928 in Washington, but adopted at 18 days old by a rich New York couple, he became famous in 1962 with Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, a portrait of a destructive marriage, later filmed with a real life notorious couple, Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton. Albee’s next major play, A Delicate Balance, in which a terrified couple seek refuge at a friend’s house from a horror they can’t name, won the Pulitzer Prize in 1966. But there followed a long series of flops and abusive reviews. That’s common enough in American theater; it happened to Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller after their early hits. But the difference is that Albee made a remarkable critical and commercial comeback, first with Three Tall Women, which won another Pulitzer Prize in 1992, and now with The Goat, written at the age of 74, which won four important theater awards and ran for two years on Broadway. This surreal tragedy about an architect who falls in love with a goat opened in London in February 2004. While in the UK to supervise rehearsals, Albee reflected on the period between his two spells of success.

EDWARD ALBEE: There was a period of about eight or ten years where I couldn’t even get arrested in New York City. Or get a play on. In New York City. Though even then I was having productions around the world, everywhere else except New York City. It was vaguely what you say but not down to the depths.

MARK LAWSON: I UNDERSTAND, BUT IF YOU LOOK, SAY, AT THE CAREER PATH OF AMERICAN PLAYWRIGHTS, IF YOU LOOK AT YOUR FRIEND TENNESSEE WILLIAMS, IT IS UNUSUAL, ISN’T IT?
They used to say there are no second acts in American drama. A lot of our playwrights have had problems. Tennessee with drugs and alcohol, he wasn’t writing to his full skill for the last third of his writing career. And it does happen to people. I’ve been very fortunate that I seem to be writing with the same, what, skill, perhaps? Certainly with the same enthusiasm as I did when I started out, when I was 28.
How do you account for that period in the middle when you were getting fantastically savage reviews on Broadway?

I think it was in part because I have never learned that you aren't supposed to talk back to critics. And when I thought they were being particularly obtuse, or vengeful perhaps, I'd make a public statement about the fact. And I don't think they liked that. But maybe the plays that I was writing then were not accessible, but after you write a play like *Virginia Woolf*, which was my fifth play after four short ones, everybody wanted me to write *Son of Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* or *Virginia Woolf, Part 2*. And I came up with *Tiny Alice*, this metaphysical melodrama which so puzzled those who wanted me to keep writing the same thing over and over again, and I wasn't writing what I was supposed to write. I was writing what wanted to come out, and so my career wasn't following the dictates of those who thought they were making my career. And these things happen. The thing you mustn't do is get terribly upset by it. Yes is better than no anytime, but if they're going to be attacking you they're going to be attacking you, and eventually they'll go away.

And it might be pertinent to remind people at this point about some of the original reviews of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, now regarded, and rightly, as one of the great theatrical classics. “A sick play for sick people” was how it was described by one of the earlier reviews . . .

Well, that helped, that helped.

John Chaplain of the *New York Daily News* said it was “three and a half hours long, four characters wide, and a cesspool deep” and suggested someone should have taken young Albee out behind the metaphorical woodshed and spanked him with a sheaf of hickory switches. Some review.

But there was one review that you didn't quote that probably added half a year to the run of the play. One critic said it was a play that should be seen only by dirty-minded women. That probably helped a lot, all those reviews helped. The scandal of it helped a lot.

We'll talk more about *Virginia Woolf* later, but I happened to be at the first night of *The Goat* on Broadway, and a number of people walked out apparently in disgust. No critic and no playwright would want the whole audience to walk out, but presumably
THERE IS SOME SATISFACTION IN PRODUCING THAT KIND OF REACTION TO YOUR PLAY.
I remember when we did Tiny Alice originally in the middle '60s on Broadway and people were setting off smoke bombs in the theater. When we did Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-Tung, there were protests and people making riots both outside and in the theater. It’s nice when people are alive. And if somebody was deeply offended by something in The Goat—there are a couple of areas that might offend a few people in The Goat: a religious comment in the third scene which suggests there was a certain amount of sexual hysteria in St. Sebastian's reaction to having the arrow shot into him, and a couple of people walked out there; a couple of people walked out occasionally when the gay son in the play kisses his father sexually, yes, a few people walked out there. But, odd places to walk out. Nobody seemed to be walking out over the so-called subject of the play, bestiality, which wasn’t the subject of the play anyway.

WHAT WAS PROVOKING THEM WAS THAT THEY TOOK IT AS, WE NEED TO BE FRANK, IT IS A LOVE STORY ABOUT A MAN WHO IS IN LOVE WITH A GOAT.
That is something that happens during the course of it, but it is basically a story about how we face chaos and crisis, and do we face it with resolve and intelligence, or do we become hysterical and fall apart. That’s really basically what the play is about. It’s not about incidents that occur in the play.

IT’S ALSO, ISN’T IT, AT LEAST ABOUT THE IDEA OF TOLERANCE AS TO WHAT PEOPLE WILL . . .
The limits of our tolerance, what we are willing to tolerate. That which we have decided that we believe, and we are unwilling to ever reexamine that.

WHICH IS WHY THE SON IS GAY. BECAUSE IT’S ASKING SOME OF THE MEMBERS OF THE AUDIENCE THAT . . .
No, actually, the son is gay because he is gay. In other words, I didn’t make him gay, consciously make him gay, to test the audience: “Wow, this will be fun, I’ll put a gay son in here.” I’m not that manipulative.

NO, BUT IT DEEPENS THE THEMES OF THE PLAY, DOESN’T IT?
I think it probably does, and I’m grateful that Billy turned out to be gay. Yes, I’m very grateful that he did. . . .

The something under the settee.

**THE WEASEL UNDER THE COCKTAIL CABINET.**

You can't write a very interesting play about a bunch of people who are getting on terribly well who don't have any serious problems. The weasel has got to get under the table. It has to or you don't have any drama. You have television.

**YOUR BIOGRAPHER AND SOME CRITICS HAVE MADE A POINT OF THE FACT THAT YOU WERE ADOPTED. THEY SEE THIS AS SIGNIFICANT IN WRITING ABOUT MARRIAGE.**

I don't know why it is that even as good a biographer as Mel Gussow, even he like all people who are writing biographies insist that we writers don't have any creative imagination at all, that everything in our work comes from our experience. No. I do not appear in my plays; let me put it that way. I'm a mute character in *Three Tall Women*. No, the notion that our creative imagination is limited to that which we have experienced is preposterous. No good work would ever be written if that were true.

**NO, I UNDERSTAND THAT. THE ARGUMENT IS, WHICH I'LL AT LEAST PUT, IS THAT IT COULD BE PSYCHOLOGICALLY SIGNIFICANT TO WHAT YOU WRITE THAT YOU WERE ADOPTED. I MEAN THAT IS A SIGNIFICANT FACT IN SOME-ONE'S LIFE.**

It may well be. But I don't know that I've written about adopted people.

**YOU HAVEN'T, BUT I'M GOING TO HAVE ONE MORE GO AT THIS, WHICH IS . . .**

I'm not saying you're not right. But I think it is . . . whether facts have led to the creative imagination is less important than what the creative imagination does with facts and how it distorts them into something interesting.
I understand that, but again, just for the sake of argument, [for] someone who is adopted, there is the mystery, first of all, of the relationship they come from, but they’re also, and perhaps this is arguable, perhaps more of an outsider in the family into which they’re adopted.

I think that being adopted—though I’ve never not been adopted—I suspect that having been adopted gave me a kind of objectivity. I had no great interest in my natural parents, since they didn’t seem to want to have anything to do with me, and I didn’t get along with my adoptive parents at all, and so I think I developed quite early an objectivity about the people I was with and why I was with them, and who I was. I think I was maybe able to develop more of a sense of self earlier than I would have had I had either a happy or an unhappy natural home. But I can’t be sure.

... 

In your biography, Mel Gussow suggests that [your mother] changed her will after being told that you were gay. Is that true?

Yes. I was told she finally changed it down to practically exclusion from the will because she didn’t approve of my being gay. Eh, tough.

... 

Beckett is an obvious influence, you’ve mentioned, and Thurber, James Thurber is another one.

There are so many influences. I think of the 20th-century playwrights, I find the three most important to be Chekhov, Pirandello, and Beckett. That’s the essence of our theater, really the possibilities of it so far. But James Thurber is a wonderfully funny and sad, deeply unappreciated American humorist-slash-serious writer. I loved his work greatly, and admired it in its way as much as I admire Beckett’s work or anybody else’s work. But that which influences us, you know, is not necessarily that which we ultimately think is the greatest.

The relationship with Beckett interests me, and this is a critic’s opinion, which you can dismiss, but to some extent what you are doing is you’re taking, the influence of Beckett is there, but
YOU’RE TAKING HIS SURREALISM OR ABSURDISM, WHATEVER, AND PUTTING IT INTO A MORE CONCRETE DOMESTIC SETTING.
I talk about what I think I have learned technically from Beckett more than anything else. I hate to talk about relativity of ideas and similarities or dissimilarities of philosophy, or whatever. I don’t like to talk about that stuff. But I think I learned from Beckett a great deal about clarity and accuracy, specificity and essencing. Those are the things I have learned from Beckett.

WHAT IS ESSENCING?
To bring things to their essence. Did I invent a word?

YOU MAY [HAVE]. I JUST WONDERED WHAT YOU MEANT BY THAT.
Oh, that’s nice. I think I have. Gee.

BUT WHEREAS BECKETT’S PLAYS WILL BE SET IN DUSTBINS OR A HEAP OF SAND, YOURS ARE, VERY OFTEN THEY ARE IN A DRAWING ROOM.
Same thing. I’m convinced, by the way, that Beckett’s plays . . . You see, Beckett is the most clear playwright. There is nothing obscure in any of Beckett’s plays. Absolute clarity. If his plays, if _Endgame_ was set in a drawing room, nobody would have any problem with it. People suddenly decide they can’t understand what is going on . . .

BECAUSE IT’S DUSTBINS.
That’s right. Yes. But Beckett wants them set in dustbins, so they’re going to be set in dustbins, as long as his estate has any control over anything. Once it’s in the public domain they can start setting it in a Noël Coward setting.

THAT’D BE A FASCINATING THING TO DO, WOULDN’T IT? YOU WOULD CLEARLY LIKE TO DO IT AS A DIRECTOR.
I would love to, yes. Privately.

YOU TALKED ABOUT TENNESSEE WILLIAMS AND THE EFFECT THAT DRINK/DRUGS HAD ON HIS WRITING. YOURS IS THE OPPOSITE BECAUSE YOU STOPPED DRINKING, WHICH MUST HAVE SOME RELEVANCE TO WHAT HAPPENED.
I can’t think of very many American writers who haven’t had problems with alcohol at one time in their life or another. So, I had about a seven- or eight-year period there where I
drank a great deal. I think everybody has a certain amount that they are supposed to drink in the course of their life, and most sensible people start when they are 15 and stop when they are 80. But some of us concentrate it into a seven- or eight-year period, drink it all then. And then we stop.

**BUT TO GO BACK TO WHAT I SUGGESTED AT THE BEGINNING, WE TALKED ABOUT THE MANY HITS AND THE FLOPS, THIS IS . . . IT’S ANTIHISTORICAL IN THEATER TERMS, WHAT’S HAPPENED TO YOU. THERE MUST BE A PLEASURE IN THIS.**

Just wait. Five or six years from now I'll probably be out of fashion again, and everybody will hate my new work. But, of course, by the time I hit my mid 80s I might be senile. Is it true, I read somewhere, that when he was in his 90s, Bernard Shaw started rewriting his plays to simplify them so he could understand them.

**I DID READ THAT SOMEWHERE, YES.**

I hope it's true. And they had to take them away from him to stop him. But, I think it’s such a delightful thought.

**YOU WOULD LIKE TO DO THAT, WOULD YOU?**

Well, I hope they'll take them away from me if I ever start. But I hope I live long enough so that I'll want to do that.

WHY READ PLAYS?

BY EDWARD ALBEE

The question is so absurd that we need not only answer it but find out why it’s being asked as well. Most simply put: plays—the good ones, at any rate, the only ones that matter—are literature, and while they are accessible to most people through performance, they are complete experiences without it.

Adjunctively, I was talking to a young conductor the other year whose orchestra was shortly to give the world premiere performance of a piece by a young composer whose work I admired. “Oh, I can’t wait to hear it!” I said, and the conductor replied, “Well, why don’t you? Why don’t you read it?” And he offered to give me the orchestral score—to read and thereby hear. Alas, I do not read music. Music is a language, but it is foreign to me and I cannot translate. If I did know how to read music, however, I would be able to hear the piece before it was performed—moreover, in a performance uncolored, uninterpreted by the whims of performance. This is an extreme case, perhaps, for few nonmusicians can read music well enough to hear a score, but it raises provocative issues, including some parallelisms. Succinctly, anyone who knows how to read a play can see and hear a performance of it exactly as the playwright saw and heard it as he wrote it down, without the “help” of actors and director.

Knowing how to read a play—learning how to read one—is not a complex or daunting matter. When you read a novel and the novelist describes a sunset to you, you do not merely read the words; you “see” what the words describe, and when the novelist puts down conversation, you silently “hear” what you read . . . automatically, without thinking about it. Why, then, should it be assumed that a play text presents problems far more difficult for the reader? Beyond the peculiar typesetting particular to a play, the procedures are the same; the acrobatics the mind performs are identical; the results need be no different. I was reading plays—Shakespeare, Chekhov—long before I began writing them; indeed, long before I saw my first serious play in performance. Was seeing these plays in performance a different experience than seeing them through reading them? Of course. Was it a more complete, more fulfilling experience? No, I don’t think so.

Naturally, the more I have seen and read plays over the years, the more adept I have become at translating the text into performance as I read. Still, I am convinced that the following is true: no performance can make a great play any better than it is, and most performances are inadequate either in that the minds at work are just not up to the task no matter how sincerely they try, or the stagers are aggressively interested in “interpretation”
or “concept” with the result that our experience of the play, as an audience, is limited, is only partial.

Further—and not oddly—performance can make a minor (or terrible) play seem a lot better than it is. Performance can also, of course, make a bad play seem even worse than it is. God help us all! When I am a judge of a playwriting contest I insist that I and the other judges read the plays in the contest even (especially!) if we have seen a performance. And how often my insistence results in the following: either “Wow! That play’s a lot better than the performance I saw!” or “Wow! The director sure made that play seem a lot better than it is!”

The problem is further compounded by the kind of theater we have today for the most part—a director’s theater, where interpretation, rethinking, cutting, pasting, and even the rewriting of the author’s text, often without the author’s permission, are considered acceptable behavior. While we playwrights are delighted that our craft and art allows us double access to people interested in theater—through both text and performance—we become upset when that becomes a double-edged sword. I am convinced that in proper performance all should vanish—acting, direction, design, even writing—and we should be left with the author’s intention uncluttered. The killer is the assumption that interpretation is on a level with creation.

I’m not suggesting you should not see plays. There are a lot of swell productions, but keep in mind that production is an opinion, an interpretation, and unless you know the play on the page, the interpretation you’re getting is secondhand and may differ significantly from the author’s intentions. Of course, your reading of a play is also an opinion, an interpretation, but there are fewer hands (and minds) in the way of your engagement with the author.
ZOOPHILIA
An Overview

Zooophilia (from the Greek zoon, “animal,” and philia, “friendship or love”) is a paraphilia, defined as an affinity or sexual attraction by a human to nonhuman animals. The more recent terms zoosexual and zoosexuality also describe the full spectrum of human/animal attraction. A separate term, bestiality (more common in mainstream usage), refers to human/animal sexual activity. The two terms are independent: not all sexual acts with animals are performed by zoophiles, and not all zoophiles engage in sexual activity.

Zooophilia is usually considered to be unnatural, and sexual acts with animals are usually condemned as animal abuse and/or outlawed as a “crime against nature.” Clinically, the activity or desire itself is no longer classified as a pathology under the DSM-IV (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association) unless accompanied by distress or interference with normal functioning. Defenders of zoophilia claim that a human/animal relationship can go far beyond sexuality, and that animals are (if allowed) capable of forming a loving relationship that can last for years, and that they do not consider it functionally different from any other love/sex relationship.

EXTENT OF OCCURRENCE
The extent to which zoophilia occurs is not known with any certainty. Scientific surveys estimating the frequency of zoosexuality, as well as anecdotal evidence and informal surveys, suggest that more than 1–2%—and perhaps as many as 8–10%—of sexually active adults have had significant sexual experience with an animal at some point in their lives. Studies suggest that a larger number (perhaps 10–30% depending on area) have fantasized or had some form of brief encounter. Larger figures such as 50% for rural teenagers (living on or near livestock farms) have been cited in some surveys, but these statistics are uncertain. Anecdotally, Nancy Friday’s 1973 book on female sexuality, My Secret Garden, is comprised of around 180 women’s contributions; of these, some 10% volunteered a serious interest or active participation in zoophilia.

LEGAL STATUS
No jurisdiction is known to recognize zoophilic relationships, as such. They are legally no different from that of a person who keeps a pet or owns livestock.

Zoosexual acts are illegal in many jurisdictions, while others generally outlaw the mistreatment of animals without specifically mentioning sexuality. Because it is unresolved
under the law whether sexual relations with an animal are inherently “abusive” or “mis-
treatment,” this leaves the status of zoosexuality unclear in some jurisdictions.

Just over half of the states in the United States explicitly outlaw sex with animals (some-
times under the term “sodomy”). Sex with an animal is a felony in five states and a misde-
meanor in nineteen (including California). Maximum penalties go as high as $50,000 in
Montana; Massachusetts and Rhode Island may imprison offenders for up to 20 years
(source: Vermont Animal Cruelty Task Force). Since 2000, six states have adopted new leg-
islation against it: Oregon, Maine, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, and Missouri. An anomaly that
arose in many states was that when laws outlawing “sodomy” (generally in the context of
male homosexuality) were repealed or struck down by the courts, some people thought sex
with animals would no longer be outlawed. But the 2004 conviction of a man in Florida
demonstrated that even in states with no specific laws against zoosexual acts animal cruelty
statutes can be applied (e.g., State vs. Mitchell, http://pet-abuse.com/cases/2206/fl/us/1).

As of May 17, 2005, Pet-Abuse.com lists 71 cases of animal abuse involving “bestiality”
in the United States (66, including one involving a goat), Canada (1), the United Kingdom
(4, including one involving a goat), and New Zealand (1, a goat). (See http://www.pet-
abuse.com/database/.)

In the United Kingdom, human penile penetration of or by an animal is illegal; section
69 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 reduced the sentence to a maximum of two years’
imprisonment. Zoosexual acts are illegal in Canada (section 160 forbids “bestiality”; note
that the term is not defined further, so it is not quite clear what it might cover).

ZOOPHILIA AS A LIFESTYLE
Separate from those whose interest is curiosity, pornography, or sexual novelty, are those
for whom zoophilia might be called a lifestyle or orientation. Zoophiles tend to perceive
differences between animals and human beings as less significant than others do, and view
animals as having positive traits (e.g., honesty) that humans often lack. Although some feel
guilty about their feelings and view them as a problem, others do not feel a need to be
constrained by traditional standards in their private relationships.

The biggest difficulties many zoophiles report are the inability to be accepted or open
about their animal relationships and feelings with friends and family, and the fear of harm,
rejection, or loss of companions if it became known. Other major issues are hidden lone-
liness and isolation (due to lack of contact with others who share this attraction or a belief
they are alone), and the repeated deaths of animals they consider lifelong soulmates
(because most species have far shorter lifespans than humans and they cannot openly
grieve or talk about feelings of loss).
Zoophilic sexual relationships vary, and may be based upon variations of human-style relationships (in particular, remaining monogamous), animal-style relationships (both participants making their own sexual choices, human as protector), or blending the two in various ways.

Zoophiles may or may not have human partners and families. Some zoophiles have an affinity or attraction to animals secondary to human attraction; others have a primary preference for animal companions. In some cases human family or friends are aware of the relationship with the animal and its nature, in others it is hidden. This can sometimes give rise to issues of guilt (re: divided loyalties and concealment) or jealousy within human relationships. Zoophiles sometimes enter human relationships to deflect suspicions of zoophilia, or due to growing up within traditional expectations. Others may choose looser forms of human relationship as companions or housemates, live alone, or choose other zoophiles to live with.

**PSYCHOLOGICAL AND RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES**

DSM-III-R (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association, 1987) stated that sexual contact with animals is almost never a clinically significant problem by itself, and therefore both this and the later DSM-IV (APA, 1994) subsumed it under the residual classification “paraphilias not otherwise specified.”

The first detailed studies which included zoophilia date from prior to 1910. Research into zoophilia in its own right has happened since around 1960. Each significant study from Masters (1962) to Beetz (2002) has drawn and agreed on several broad conclusions:

The critical aspect to study was emotion, relationship, and motive, not just assess or judge the sexual act alone, in isolation, or as “an act” (Masters, Miletski, Beetz).

Most zoophiles do have human relationships (Masters, Beetz).

Society in general at present is misinformed about zoophilia (Masters, Miletski, Weinberg, Beetz).

Zoophiles’ emotions and care to animals can be real, relational, authentic and (within animals’ abilities) reciprocal (Masters, Miletski, Weinberg, Beetz).

Contrary to popular belief, there is in fact significant popular or “latent” interest in zoophilia, either in fantasy, animal mating, or reality (Friday, Massen, Masters).

The distinction between zoophilia and zoosadism is highlighted by each of these studies, in whatever terms they use.

Masters (1962), Miletski (1999), and Weinberg (2003) each comment significantly on the social harm caused by these, and other misunderstandings: “This destroys the lives of many citizens.”
RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVES
Most organized religions take a critical or sometimes condemnatory view of zoophilia or zoosexuality, with some variation and exceptions.

Passages in Leviticus 18:23 (“And you shall not lie with any beast and defile yourself with it, neither shall any woman give herself to a beast to lie with it: it is a perversion.”) and 20:15–16 (“If a man lies with a beast, he shall be put to death; and you shall kill the beast. If a woman approaches any beast and lies with it, you shall kill the woman and the beast; they shall be put to death, their blood is upon them.”) are cited by Jewish, Christian, and Muslim theologians as categorical denunciation of zoosexuality. Although condemned in Islam, views of its seriousness seem to cover a wide spectrum. Some sources claim that sex with animals is abhorrent, others state that while condemned, it is treated with “relative indulgence” and in a similar category to masturbation and lesbianism.

There are several references in Hindu scriptures to religious figures engaging in sexual activity with animals (e.g., the god Brahma lusting after and having sex with a bear; a humanlike sage being born to a deer mother), and actual Vedic rituals involving zoophilia (see Ashvamedha). However, Hindu doctrine holds that sex should be restricted to married couples, thereby forbidding zoosexual acts. A greater punishment is attached to sexual relations with a sacred cow than with other animals. The Tantric sect of Hinduism makes use of ritual sexual practices, which could include sexual contact with animals.

Buddhism addresses sexual conduct primarily in terms of what brings harm to oneself or to others, and the admonition against sexual misconduct is generally interpreted in modern times to prohibit zoosexual acts, as well as pederasty, adultery, rape, or prostitution.

ANIMAL RIGHTS AND WELFARE CONCERNS
One of the primary critiques of zoophilia is the argument that zoosexuality is harmful to animals. Some state this categorically; that any sexual activity is necessarily abuse. Critics also point to examples in which animals were clearly abused, having been tied up, assaulted, or injured. Defenders of zoophilia argue that animal abuse is neither typical of nor commonplace within zoophilia, and that just as sexual activity with humans can be both abusive and not, so can sexual activity with animals.

CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES
Among the Masai, it was customary for older boys to have sexual relations with she-asses. Young Riffian boys also had sexual liaisons with female asses (Ford and Beach, 1951). Among the Tswana of Africa, boys assigned to the care of cattle frequently engaged in zoosexual activity. It was also common in the Gusti tribes and considered rather harmless, but
boys were reprimanded and warned against this activity. Miner and DeVos (1960) comment that amongst Arab tribal cultures, “Bestiality with goats, sheep, or camels provides another outlet. These practices are not approved but they are recognized as common among boys.”

ARGUMENTS ABOUT ZOOPHILIA OR ZOOSEXUALITY

Platonic love for animals is usually viewed positively, but most people express concern or disapproval of sexual interest. Criticisms come from a variety of sources, including moral, ethical, psychological, and social arguments. They include:

“Sexual activity between species is unnatural.”
“Animals are not sentient, and are therefore unable to consent” (similar to arguments against sex with human minors).
“Animals are incapable of relating to or forming relationships with humans.”
“Zoosexuality is simply for those unable/unwilling to find human partners.”
“Sexual acts with animals by humans constitute physical abuse.”
Zoosexuality is “profoundly disturbed behavior.”
“It offends human dignity or is forbidden by religious law.”

Defenders of zoophilia or zoosexuality counterargue that:

“‘Natural’ is debatable, and not necessarily relevant.”
“Animals are capable of sexual consent—and even initiation—in their own way.”
“Both male and female domestic animals of several species can experience the physical sensation of orgasm, and can strongly solicit and demonstrate appreciation for it in their body language, similarly to humans.”
“Animals do form mutual relationships with humans.”
“Most zoophiles appear to have human partners and relationships; equally many are simply not attracted to humans sexually.”
“It is inaccurate to state that zoosexual activity is inherently harmful/abusive.”
“The psychological profession consensus does not consider it intrinsically pathological and has tended on the whole to substantiate rather than rebut zoophiles’ claims.”
“Perspectives on human dignity and religious viewpoints differ and a large number of people do not consider them important factors.”

They also assert that some of these arguments rely on double standards, such as expecting informed consent from animals for sexual activity (and not accepting consent given in their own manner), but not for surgical procedures, aesthetic mutilation, castration, experimen-
tation, hazardous activities, euthanasia, and slaughter. Likewise if animals cannot give consent, then it follows that they must not have sex with each other (amongst themselves).

**MYTHOLOGY AND FANTASY LITERATURE**

Zoophilia has been a recurring subject in art, literature, and fantasy. In Ugaritic mythology, the god Baal is said to have impregnated a heifer to sire a young bull god. In Greek mythology, Zeus (himself suckled as an infant by the divine goat Amaltheia, according to one version of the legend) appeared to Leda in the form of a swan, and her children Helen (of Troy), Clytemnestra, Castor, and Pollux (Polydeuces) hatched from eggs resulting from that sexual union. Leda's fate provided a popular motif for the visual arts into the 20th century, inspiring powerfully sensual works by Michelangelo, Da Vinci, Rubens, Veronese, Correggio, Tintoretto, Boucher, Moreau, Masson, and Botero, to name a few.

Zeus seduced the Phoenician princess Europa in the form of a bull, then carried her off to the island of Crete, where she bore three sons, including King Minos. Minos later offended the sea god Poseidon, who in punishment sent a white bull to seduce Minos's wife, Queen Pasiphaë, who gave birth to the half-human/half-bull Minotaur. Zeus also abducted the Trojan prince Ganymede in the form of an eagle. King Peleus continued to seduce the nymph Thetis despite her transforming into (among other forms) a lion, a bird, and a snake. The god Pan, often depicted with goatlike features, has also been frequently associated with animal sex. As with other subjects of classical mythology, many of these tales have been depicted over the centuries since, in western painting and sculpture.

Fantasy literature has included a variety of seemingly zoophilic examples, often involving human characters enchanted into animal forms: *Beauty and the Beast* (a young woman falls in love with a physically beastlike man), William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Queen Titania falls in love with a character transformed into a donkey), *The Book of One Thousand and One Nights* (a princess champions a man enchanted into ape form), the Roman Lucius Apuleius' *The Golden Ass* (explicit sexuality between a man transformed into a donkey and a woman), and Balzac's *A Passion in the Desert* (a love affair between a soldier and a panther). In more modern times, zoosexuality of a sort has been a theme in science fiction and horror fiction, with the giant ape King Kong fixating on a human woman, alien monsters groping human females in pulp novels and comics, and depictions of tentacle rape in Japanese manga and anime.

Excerpted and adapted from “Zoophilia,” Wikipedia.org; an extensive bibliography follows the article at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zoophilia#Legal_status.
“LEDAND THE SWAN”
BY WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS (1924)

A sudden blow: the great wings beating still
Above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed
By the dark webs, her nape caught in his bill,
He holds her helpless breast upon his breast.
How can those terrified vague fingers push
The feathered glory from her loosening thighs?
And how can body, laid in that white rush,
But feel the strange heart beating where it lies?
A shudder in the loins engenders there
The broken wall, the burning roof and tower
And Agamemnon dead.

Being so caught up,
So mastered by the brute blood of the air,
Did she put on his knowledge with his power
Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?

Leda and the Swan, after Michelangelo. © National Gallery Collection; by kind permission of the Trustees of the National Gallery, London/CORBIS.
HEAVY PETTING
A Review of Midas Dekkers’s Controversial Book, Dearest Pet: On Bestiality

BY PETER SINGER (2001)

Not so long ago, any form of sexuality not leading to the conception of children was seen as, at best, wanton lust, or worse, a perversion. One by one, the taboos have fallen. The idea that it could be wrong to use contraception in order to separate sex from reproduction is now merely quaint. If some religions still teach that masturbation is “self-abuse,” that just shows how out of touch they have become. Sodomy? That’s all part of the joy of sex, recommended for couples seeking erotic variety. In many of the world’s great cities, gays and lesbians can be open about their sexual preferences to an extent unimaginable a century ago. You can even do it in the U.S. Armed Forces, as long as you don’t talk about it. Oral sex? Some objected to President Clinton’s choice of place and partner, and others thought he should have been more honest about what he had done, but no one dared suggest that he was unfit to be president simply because he had taken part in a sexual activity that was, in many jurisdictions, a crime.

But not every taboo has crumbled. Heard anyone chatting at parties lately about how good it is having sex with their dog? Probably not. Sex with animals is still definitely taboo. If Midas Dekkers, author of Dearest Pet, has got it right, this is not because of its rarity. Dekkers, a Dutch biologist and popular naturalist, has assembled a substantial body of evidence to show that humans have often thought of “love for animals” in ways that go beyond a pat and a hug, or a proper concern for the welfare of members of other species. His book has a wide range of illustrations, going back to a Swedish rock drawing from the Bronze Age of a man fucking a large quadruped of indeterminate species. There is a Greek vase from 520 B.C.E. showing a male figure having sex with a stag; a 17th-century Indian miniature of a deer mounting a woman; an 18th-century European...
engraving of an ecstatic nun coupling with a donkey, while other nuns look on, smiling; a 19th-century Persian painting of a soldier, also with a donkey; and, from the same period, a Japanese drawing of a woman enveloped by a giant octopus who appears to be sucking her cunt, as well as caressing her body with its many limbs.

How much of this is fantasy, the King Kong-ish archetypes of an earlier age? In the 1940s, Kinsey asked 20,000 Americans about their sexual behavior, and found that 8 percent of males and 3.5 percent of females stated that they had, at some time, had a sexual encounter with an animal. Among men living in rural areas, the figure shot up to 50 percent. Dekkers suggests that for young male farm hands, animals provided an outlet for sexual desires that could not be satisfied when girls were less willing to have sex before marriage. Based on 20th-century court records in Austria where bestiality was regularly prosecuted, rural men are most likely to have vaginal intercourse with cows and calves, less frequently with mares, foals, and goats and only rarely with sheep or pigs. They may also take advantage of the sucking reflex of calves to get them to do a blowjob.

Women having sex with bulls or rams, on the other hand, seems to be more a matter of myth than reality. For three-quarters of the women who told Kinsey that they had had sexual contact with an animal, the animal involved was a dog, and actual sexual intercourse was rare. More commonly the woman limited themselves to touching and masturbating the animal, or having their genitals licked by it.

Much depends, of course, on how the notion of a sexual relationship is defined. Zoologist Desmond Morris has carried out research confirming the commonplace observation that girls are far more likely to be attracted to horses than boys, and he has suggested that “sitting with legs astride a rhythmically moving horse undoubtedly has a sexual undertone.” Dekkers agrees, adding that “the horse is the ideal consolation for the great injustice done to girls by nature, of awakening sexually years before the boys in their class, who are still playing with their train sets . . .”

It may be this love is a debt I am paying, due to the destiny of my line, and that Aphrodite is exacting a tribute of me for all my race. Europa—this is the first beginning of our line—was loved of Zeus; a bull’s form disguised the god, Pasiphaë, my mother, a victim of the deluded bull, brought forth in travail her reproach and burden.

—Ovid, Heroides
The existence of sexual contact between humans and animals, and the potency of the taboo against it, displays the ambivalence of our relationship with animals. On the one hand, especially in the Judeo-Christian tradition—less so in the East—we have always seen ourselves as distinct from animals, and imagined that a wide, unbridgeable gulf separates us from them. Humans alone are made in the image of God. Only human beings have an immortal soul. In Genesis, God gives humans dominion over the animals. In the Renaissance idea of the Great Chain of Being, humans are halfway between the beasts and the angels. We are spiritual beings as well as physical beings. For Kant, humans have an inherent dignity that makes them ends in themselves, whereas animals are mere means to our ends. Today the language of human rights—rights that we attribute to all human beings but deny to all nonhuman animals—maintains this separation.

On the other hand there are many ways in which we cannot help behaving just as animals do—or mammals, anyway—and sex is one of the most obvious ones. We copulate, as they do. They have penises and vaginas, as we do, and the fact that the vagina of a calf can be sexually satisfying to a man shows how similar these organs are. The taboo on sex with animals may, as I have already suggested, have originated as part of a broader rejection of nonreproductive sex. But the vehemence with which this prohibition continues to be held, its persistence while other nonreproductive sexual acts have become acceptable, suggests that there is another powerful force at work: our desire to differentiate ourselves, erotically and in every other way, from animals. Almost a century ago, when Freud had just published his groundbreaking *Three Essays on Sexuality*, the Viennese writer Otto Soyka published a fiery little volume called *Beyond the Boundary of Morals*. Never widely known, and now entirely forgotten, it was a polemic directed against the prohibition of “unnatural” sex like bestiality, homosexuality, fetishism, and other nonreproductive acts. Soyka saw these prohibitions as futile and misguided attempts to limit the inexhaustible variety of human sexual desire. Only bestiality, he argued, should be illegal, and even then, only in so far as it shows cruelty towards an animal. Soyka’s suggestion indicates one good reason why some of the acts described in Dekkers book are clearly wrong, and should remain crimes. Some men use hens as a sexual object, inserting their penis into the cloaca, an all-purpose channel for wastes and for the passage of the egg. This is usually fatal to the hen, and in some cases she will be deliberately decapitated just before ejaculation in order to intensify the convulsions of its sphincter. This is cruelty, clear and simple. (But is it worse for the hen than living for a year or more crowded with four or five other hens in barren wire cage so small that they can never stretch their wings, and then being stuffed into crates to be taken to the slaughterhouse, strung upside down on a conveyor belt and killed? If not, then it is no worse than what egg producers do to their hens all the time.)
But sex with animals does not always involve cruelty. Who has not been at a social occasion disrupted by the household dog gripping the legs of a visitor and vigorously rubbing its penis against them? The host usually discourages such activities, but in private not everyone objects to being used by her or his dog in this way, and occasionally mutually satisfying activities may develop. Soyka would presumably have thought this within the range of human sexual variety.

At a conference on great apes a few years ago, I spoke to a woman who had visited Camp Leakey, a rehabilitation center for captured orangutans in Borneo run by Birute Galdikas, sometimes referred to as “the Jane Goodall of orangutans” and the world’s foremost authority on these great apes. At Camp Leakey, the orangutans are gradually acclimatised to the jungle, and as they get closer to complete independence, they are able to come and go as they please. While walking through the camp with Galdikas, my informant was suddenly seized by a large male orangutan, his intentions made obvious by his erect penis. Fighting off so powerful an animal was not an option, but Galdikas called to her companion not to be concerned, because the orangutan would not harm her, and adding, as further reassurance, that “they have a very small penis.” As it happened, the orangutan lost interest before penetration took place, but the aspect of the story that struck me most forcefully was that in the eyes of someone who has lived much of her life with orangutans, to be seen by one of them as an object of sexual interest is not a cause for shock or horror. The potential violence of the orangutan’s come-on may have been disturbing, but the fact that it was an orangutan making the advances was not. That may be because Galdikas understands very well that we are animals, indeed more specifically, we are great apes. This does not make sex across the species barrier normal, or natural, whatever those much-misused words may mean, but it does imply that it ceases to be an offence to our status and dignity as human beings.
THE BALLAD OF THE SAD CAFÉ
Excerpted from Edward Albee’s stage adaptation of the novella by Carson McCullers

The narrator: The time has come to speak about love. Now consider three people who were subject to that condition. Miss Amelia, Cousin Lymon, and Marvin Macy.

But what sort of thing is love? First of all, it is a joint experience between two persons, but that fact does not mean that it is a similar experience to the two people involved. There are the lover and the beloved, but these two come from different countries. Often the beloved is only the stimulus for all the stored-up love which has lain quiet within the lover for a long time hitherto. And somehow every lover knows this. He feels in his soul that his love is a solitary thing. He comes to know a new, strange loneliness.

Now, the beloved can also be of any description: the most outlandish people can be stimulus for love. Yes, and the lover may see this as clearly as anyone else—but that does not affect the evolution of his love one whit. Therefore, the quality and value of any love is determined solely by the lover himself.

It is for this reason that most of us would rather love than be loved; and the curt truth is that, in a deep secret way, the state of being beloved is intolerable to many; for the lover craves any possible relation with the beloved, even if this experience can cause them both only pain.

But though the outward faces of love are often sad and ridiculous, it must be remembered that no one can know what really takes place in the soul of the lover himself. So, who but God can be the final judge of any love? But one thing can be said about these three people—all of whom, Miss Amelia, Cousin Lymon, and Marvin Macy, all of whom were subject to the condition of love. The thing that can be said is this: No good will come of it.

Excerpted from The Ballad of the Sad Café: Carson McCullers’ Novella Adapted for the Stage (Scribner, 2001).
A GOAT GLOSSARY

BY MARGOT MELCON

“NOTES TOWARD A DEFINITION OF TRAGEDY”

Albee added this subtitle to the published version of The Goat or, Who is Sylvia? Tragedy is traditionally defined as a form of drama characterized by seriousness and dignity, usually involving a conflict between a character and some higher power, such as the law, the gods, fate, or society. Its origins are obscure, but it is certainly derived from the rich poetic and religious traditions of ancient Greece. According to Aristotle, tragedy’s roots may be traced specifically to dithyrambs, chants and dances that honored the Greek god Dionysus. These drunken, ecstatic performances were said to have been created by satyrs, half-goat beings who surrounded Dionysus in his revelry; the Greek words tragos, meaning “goat,” and aei-dein, “to sing,” were combined in the word tragoidia, “goat-songs,” from which the word “tragedy” is derived. The term may have also referred originally to the sacrifice of a goat in the vegetation and fertility rituals associated with Dionysus.

Greek literature boasts three great writers of tragedy whose works are extant: Sophocles, Euripides, and Aeschylus. The largest festival for Greek tragedy was the Dionysia, for which competition prominent playwrights usually submitted three tragedies and one satyr play (an early form of comedy) each.

Aristotle theorized in his Poetics (350 B.C.E.) that tragedy results in catharsis (emotional cleansing) for the audience and that this explains why humans enjoy seeing dramatized pain. The starkly universal themes of tragedy, the problems and conditions of life lived under the shadow of death and disaster, may be connected with the seasonal rhythms of life, decay, death, and rebirth. To begin with, it seems, these mysteries were celebrated in movement and song by a chorus. Later an individual emerged from the chorus to engage in dialogue with it. Aeschylus is credited with the innovation of isolating a second speaker so that dialogue between characters became possible. By the time of Sophocles and Euripides it had become customary for up to three characters to appear onstage at once.

A favorite theatrical device of many ancient Greek tragedians was the ekkyklêma, a cart hidden behind the scenery which could be rolled out to display the aftermath of some event which had happened out of sight of the audience. This event was frequently a brutal murder of some sort, an act of violence which could not be effectively portrayed visually, but an action of which the other characters must see the effects in order for it to have meaning and emotional resonance. A prime example of the use of the ekkyklêma is after the murder of Agamemnon in the
first play of Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*, when the king’s butchered body is wheeled out in a grand display for all to see. Variations on the *ekkyklêma* are used in tragedies and other forms to this day, as writers still find it a useful and often powerful device for showing the consequences of extreme human actions. (Excerpted and adapted from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tragedy and http://www.britannica.com/eb/article?tocId=9073148.)

“REAL CUTE KID, BILLY, BRIGHT AS YOU’D EVER WANT, GAY AS THE NINETIES.”
Martin is referring to his homosexual son, Billy, using a play on the phrase “Gay Nineties,” typically used to describe the 1890s, a period in American history marked by unprecedented prosperity and economic expansion, as well as a rise in industry and the boom of the “social classes.” (Under then-current usage, the word “gay” referred simply to merriment and frivolity, with no connotation of homosexuality.)

“I HEAR A KIND OF . . . RUSHING SOUND, LIKE A . . . WOOOOSH!, OR . . . WINGS, OR SOMETHING.” / “IT’S PROBABLY THE EUMENIDES.” / “MORE LIKE THE DISHWASHER. THERE; IT STOPPED.” / “THEN IT PROBABLY WASN’T THE EUMENIDES: THEY DON’T STOP.”

The three daughters of Gaia, created from the blood of Uranus when he was castrated by Cronus, the Erinyes (or Furies) of Greek myth were the female personifications of conscience, punishment, and retribution. They are often represented as winged goddesses of vengeance with serpent hair and eyes dripping blood, their appearance terrible and appalling. The Eumenides relentlessly pursue their victims until the guilty die in a furor of madness and remorse. They generally stand for the rightness of things within the standard order; for the most part they are understood as the persecutors of mortal men and women who break “natural” laws. In particular, those who broke ties of kinship through patricide, murdering a brother (parricide), or other such familial killings brought special attention from the Erinyes. In *The Eumenides*, the third part of Aeschylus’ trilogy *The Oresteia*, a chorus of Eumenides relentlessly pursues and tortures Orestes for the crime of matricide. Athena intervened and the Erinyes turned into the Eumenides (“kindly ones”). Many scholars believe, however, that they were originally referred to as the Eumenides not to reference their good sides but as a euphemism to avoid their wrath by calling them by their true name. (See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eumenides.)

“You BECAME THE YOUNGEST PERSON EVER TO WIN THE PRITZKER PRIZE.”
Sponsored by the Hyatt Foundation of Los Angeles, the Pritzker Architecture Prize is considered architecture’s most prestigious award, a kind of Nobel for architecture (one of
the art forms not recognized by the Nobel Prize). The annual prize was established in 1979 to honor a living architect who has produced a consistent and significant body of work that demonstrates talent, vision, and commitment and contributes to “humanity and the built environment” through the art of architecture. Winners have included such internationally renowned figures as I.M. Pei (1983), Frank Gehry (1989), Aldo Rossi (1990), Robert Venturi (1995), Tadao Ando (1995), Rem Koolhaas (2000), and Zaha Hadid (2004), the first female recipient. This year’s winner is maverick Los Angeles–based architect Thom Mayne, the first American to win the award in 14 years.

“What were their names?” / “Mine was Alice.” / “Big girl. / “Large Alice.”

This is a playful reference to Edward Albee’s play Tiny Alice, which first opened to New York audiences in 1964. Following on the heels of the enormous success of Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, the play immediately spurred intense controversy. A.C.T. Founding Artistic Director Bill Ball directed Tiny Alice in 1975, infamously re-ordering some scenes and re-imagining the ending of the play, much to Albee’s chagrin. Ball’s production sparked a dramatic controversy, played out in the press, over the scope of a director’s artistic license to interpret a playwright’s vision. The Goat is the first Albee play to be seen on A.C.T.’s mainstage since that production.

Tiny Alice concerns the world’s richest woman, whose two billion dollar donation to the Catholic Church is contingent on the seduction and murder of the lay brother whom she invites to pick up the money. In this play, characters are symbols, words and actions have multiple dimensions, and religious expression mixes with sexual fantasy. Audiences continue to find the play baffling, and critics are divided concerning its merits.

“Daisy Mae! Blonde hair to her shoulders, big tits in the calico blouse, bare midriff, blonde down at the navel, piece of straw in her teeth”

Beautiful Daisy Mae Scragg was hopelessly in love with Li’l Abner through the entire course of the 43-year run of Al Capp’s popular comic strip. Abner generally took Daisy for granted, however, and exhibited little romantic interest in her voluptuous charms. In 1952 Abner reluctantly proposed to Daisy Mae to emulate the wedding of his comic-strip ideal, Fearless Fosdick. Fosdick’s wedding turned out to be fake, but Abner and Daisy’s was real. Once married, Abner became relatively domesticated and the two produced their only child, Honest Abe, in 1953. Like Abner’s Mammy Yokum and other “wimmenfolk” in Dogpatch, Daisy Mae did all the work while the men generally did nothing whatsoever. Despite this slavish role, Daisy Mae seldom complained, one of her countless virtues. Her
kin, on the other hand, were as evil as could be. Wild plot twists often took Daisy Mae to exotic locales, and she was frequently wooed by rich and handsome men, but she always returned to Dogpatch and her true, if worthless, love.

“AS I’M SURE YOU’D RATHER HEAR IT ALL FROM A DEAR FRIEND” / “AS OPPOSED TO WHAT! THE ASPCA?!”
The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) is a nonprofit organization “committed to alleviating pain, fear, and suffering in all animals.” The oldest humane organization in America, it was founded by Henry Bergh on April 10, 1866. Today more than 300 ASPCA employees in seven offices nationwide help further the cause of animal welfare. Encouraging the public to recognize and report instances of animal cruelty is a fundamental element of the ASPCA’s campaign. See http://www.aspca.org.

“OH, DAD!” / “POOR DAD?” / “WHAT?” / “NOTHING.”
Martin makes reference to Arthur Kopit’s 1960 absurdist comedy Oh, Dad, Poor Dad, Momma’s Hung You in the Closet and I’m Feeling So Sad. Subtitled “a pseudoclassical tragi-farce in a bastard French tradition,” the play parodies the Theater of the Absurd, the Oedipus complex, and the conventions of avant-garde drama.

“BUT IF THERE’S ONE THING YOU DON’T PUT ON YOUR PLATE, NO MATTER HOW EXOTIC YOUR TASTES MAY BE IT’S . . . BESTIALITY.”
Bestiality is defined as sexual relations between a human and a lower animal. The 17th-century English word “bestiality” derives from the Latin bestialitas, referring to primitive behavior, to human-animal sexual intercourse, and to the way in which animals copulate. Until the mid-19th century, the term referred broadly to the beastlike, earthy, and savage qualities allegedly inhering in nonhuman animals. Modern usage tends exclusively to denote sexual relations between humans and animals. Though bestiality is the more common term in mainstream usage, the term “zoophilia” is also used, with specific distinctions. Zoophilia (from the Greek zoon, “animal,” and philia, “friendship or love”) is a paraphilia, defined as an affinity or sexual attraction by a human to nonhuman animals.

NO, THAT’S ONE THING YOU HAVEN’T THOUGHT ABOUT, ONE THING YOU’VE OVERLOOKED AS A BYWAY ON THE ROAD OF LIFE, AS THE OLD SOAP HAS IT.
“The Road of Life” was a short-lived Procter and Gamble TV soap opera, broadcast on the CBS network 1954–55. It was based on the very successful radio series of the same name, which aired on NBC and CBS 1937–59. Don McLaughlin and Virginia Dwyer played the
same roles on both versions of the show. Virginia Dwyer, lead actress of the series, and Walter Gorman, one of the directors, were married to each other in real life. Both the radio drama and the television show were produced and written by Irna Phillips, one of the original creators of the genre of daytime drama.

“WHY DO YOU CALL HER SYLVIA, BY THE WAY? DID SHE HAVE A TAG, OR SOMETHING? OR, WAS IT MORE: ‘WHO IS SYLVIA, FAIR IS SHE THAT ALL OUR GOATS COMMEND HER’”

From Shakespeare’s *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Act iv: ii, a song in which Proteus professes his love for Silvia, to the dismay of his promised Julia:

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 admired 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.

“GOAT-FUCKERS ANONYMOUS?”

Stevie sarcastically refers to such rehabilitation organizations as Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Gamblers Anonymous, etc., which seek to cure addictions by engaging the subject in a supportive group therapy environment. Although no equivalent organization exists for zoophiles, therapy groups have formed via postings in Internet chat rooms and anonymous bulletin boards in an effort to connect people with similar situations. Psychiatrists and psychologists specializing in paraphilia (nonnormative sexual
behavior) have documented varying levels of success in treating such persons, in both individual and group sessions. (See http://www.drmiletski.com/prolog.html.)

“AND THERE WAS A CONNECTION THERE— A COMMUNICATION— THAT, WELL . . . AN EPIPHANY, I GUESS COMES CLOSEST, AND I KNEW WHAT WAS GOING TO HAPPEN.

From the Greek epiphaneia, for “manifestation” or the appearance of a miraculous phenomenon. An epiphany is a sudden intuitive realization or comprehension of the essence or meaning of something or a revelatory manifestation, especially of a divine being.

“RIGHT! NOW SHUT THE FUCK UP! . . . SEMANTICIST!”

In general, semantics (from the Greek semantikos, or “significant meaning,” derived from sema, “sign”) is the study of meaning, in some sense of that term. Semantics is often opposed to syntax, in which case the former pertains to what something means while the latter pertains to the formal structure/patterns in which something is expressed (for example written or spoken). Semantics is distinguished from ontology (knowledge of existence) in being about the use of a word more than the nature of the entity referenced by the word. This is reflected in the argument, “That’s only semantics” when someone tries to draw conclusions about what is true about the world based on what is true about a word.

“IS THERE ANYTHING ANYONE DOESN’T GET OFF ON, WHETHER WE ADMIT IT OR NOT— WHETHER WE KNOW IT OR NOT? REMEMBER SAINT SEBASTIAN WITH ALL THE ARROWS SHOT INTO HIM? HE PROBABLY CAME! GOD KNOWS THE FAITHFUL DID!

Saint Sebastian was a Christian saint and martyr who died in the third century C.E., a victim of the persecution of Christians by Roman Emperor Diocletian. An officer in the imperial Roman army who was discovered showing kindness to Christians in jail, Saint Sebastian was sentenced by Diocletian to execution. He was tied to a tree and shot with numerous arrows. Though he was left for dead, not a single arrow pierced his vital organs and he survived and later returned to the emperor to reproach him for the continued persecution of Christians. Saint Sebastian was then stoned to death. He remains a popular subject for artists for his youth and reputed beauty, as well as for his passionate faith and willingness to die for his beliefs.
TRAGEDY: DEFINITION AND ANALYSIS
From Aristotle's Poetics (350 B.C.E.)

Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions.

By “language embellished,” I mean language into which rhythm, “harmony,” and song enter. By “the several kinds in separate parts,” I mean, that some parts are rendered through the medium of verse alone, others again with the aid of song.

Now as tragic imitation implies persons acting, it necessarily follows in the first place, that spectacular equipment will be a part of tragedy. Next, song and diction, for these are the media of imitation. By “diction” I mean the mere metrical arrangement of the words; as for “song,” it is a term whose sense everyone understands.

Again, tragedy is the imitation of an action; and an action implies personal agents, who necessarily possess certain distinctive qualities both of character and thought; for it is by these that we qualify actions themselves, and these—thought and character—are the two natural causes from which actions spring, and on actions again all success or failure depends. Hence, the plot is the imitation of the action—for by “plot” I here mean the arrangement of the incidents. By character I mean that in virtue of which we ascribe certain qualities to the agents. Thought is required wherever a statement is proved, or, it may be, a general truth enunciated. Every tragedy, therefore, must have six parts, which parts determine its quality—namely, plot, character, diction, thought, spectacle, song. Two of the parts constitute the medium of imitation, one the manner, and three the objects of imitation. And these complete the list.

These elements have been employed, we may say, by the poets to a man; in fact, every play contains spectacular elements as well as character, plot, diction, song, and thought. But most important of all is the structure of the incidents. For tragedy is an imitation, not of men, but of an action and of life, and life consists in action, and its end is a mode of action, not a quality. Now character determines men’s qualities, but it is by their actions that they are happy or the reverse. Dramatic action, therefore, is not with a view to the representation of character: character comes in as subsidiary to the actions. Hence the incidents and the plot are the end of a tragedy; and the end is the chief thing of all.

Again, without action there cannot be a tragedy; there may be without character. The tragedies of most of our modern poets fail in the rendering of character; and of poets in
general this is often true. It is the same in painting; and here lies the difference between Zeuxis and Polygnotus. Polygnotus delineates character well; the style of Zeuxis is devoid of ethical quality.

Again, if you string together a set of speeches expressive of character, and well finished in point of diction and thought, you will not produce the essential tragic effect nearly so well as with a play which, however deficient in these respects, yet has a plot and artistically constructed incidents. Besides which, the most powerful elements of emotional interest in tragedy—reversal and recognition scenes—are parts of the plot. A further proof is, that novices in the art attain to finish of diction and precision of portraiture before they can construct the plot. It is the same with almost all the early poets.

The plot, then, is the first principle, and, as it were, the soul of a tragedy; character holds the second place. A similar fact is seen in painting. The most beautiful colors, laid on confusedly, will not give as much pleasure as the chalk outline of a portrait. Thus tragedy is the imitation of an action, and of the agents mainly with a view to the action.

Third in order is thought—that is, the faculty of saying what is possible and pertinent in given circumstances. In the case of oratory, this is the function of the political art and of the art of rhetoric: and so indeed the older poets make their characters speak the language of civic life; the poets of our time, the language of the rhetoricians. Character is that which reveals moral purpose, showing what kind of things a man chooses or avoids. Speeches, therefore, which do not make this manifest, or in which the speaker does not choose or avoid anything whatever, are not expressive of character. Thought, on the other hand, is found where something is proved to be or not to be, or a general maxim is enunciated.

Fourth among the elements enumerated comes diction; by which I mean, as has been already said, the expression of the meaning in words; and its essence is the same both in verse and prose.

Of the remaining elements song holds the chief place among the embellishments.

The spectacle has, indeed, an emotional attraction of its own, but, of all the parts, it is the least artistic, and connected least with the art of poetry. For the power of tragedy, we may be sure, is felt even apart from representation and actors. Besides, the production of spectacular effects depends more on the art of the stage machinist than on that of the poet.

RITUAL AND TRANSCENDENCE IN THE OEDIPUS TRILOGY

BY CHARLES AND REGINA HIGGINS

In the great amphitheater of Athens, curious tourists can see an inscription on each of the marble seats of honor near the stage: Reserved for the priest of Dionysus. The carved letters, still readable after 2,500 years, attest to the religious significance of the theater in the culture of ancient Greece.

For the Greeks of the fifth century b.c.e., the theater represented a sacramental place, where the actors and audience joined together to worship. The drama—whatever its subject—was an offering to the gods, a ritual that might bring blessing to the city.

The stage itself, actually a dancing area in the style of a threshing floor, recalled the most ancient forms of communal worship. At harvest, people traditionally celebrated the culmination of the growing season by worshiping the god of vegetation in wild, frenzied dances. At the festival of Dionysus, the stage became a more sophisticated platform for a similar experience—the masked actors' loss of self in music and art for the creation of an emotional closeness with divine power. And the chorus, while chanting their poetry, maintained the simplicity of the older tradition in their obligatory dancing.

Sophocles underscores the connections between drama and the traditions of the fertility god in Oedipus the King. Evidence of the trouble in Thebes emerges as a plague, a blight on the land that ruins crops and causes women to miscarry. The close association of human and vegetative fertility—and the connection of both to the capability of the king—represents one of the earliest forms of religious belief. In Sophocles' time, the mysterious but vital union of humans and nature still informed the culture. Accordingly, Oedipus' immorality—however unconscious—pollutes the land, and only his removal and punishment will bring back life to Thebes. In this context, Sophocles offers a ritual of death and rebirth, as well as a formal tragedy in Oedipus the King.

In Oedipus at Colonus and Antigone, Sophocles refers to a particular ritual that inspired and uplifted many of his contemporaries, the Eleusinian Mysteries, a rite that offered its initiates the assurance of eternal life. In Antigone, when Creon decides to honor the gods' laws by burying Polynices and freeing Antigone, the chorus rejoices with a triumphal paean (joyful song) to Dionysus, calling him "King of the Mysteries!" The evocation of the god and the mention of the rites at Eleusis underscore Antigone's premature burial and the expected joy of her return to life, the promise offered to the initiates of the Mysteries themselves. . . .
Of the Eleusinian Mysteries itself, modern readers know very little, since those who celebrated were sworn to secrecy. But the ritual represented a powerful, transforming experience for many, including the great Roman orator and philosopher, Marcus Tullius Cicero (104–43 B.C.E.), who praised the Eleusinian Mysteries as the source of civilization itself.

The Mysteries recreated in imagination the search of the goddess Demeter for her daughter Persephone (also called Kore), and so demanded a form of personal identification with a divine figure, culminating in an intense religious (and dramatic) experience. The rite began with a procession from Athens to Eleusis, where initiates fasted, sacrificed offerings, and drank a special potion made from barley. At some later time, the initiates were blindfolded and led in darkness to an underground cave where—in some unknown manner—they experienced a kind of death, terrifying beyond words.

Afterwards, standing together in the darkness of an underground chamber, the initiates saw a vision of Kore herself, rising glorious from the depths of the underworld. As fires illuminated the chamber, the ritual celebrant held up a single stalk of wheat, proof of the gods’ blessings and the regeneration of life. The initiates rejoiced ecstatically, purged of fear, and confident, as they attested, that eternal life was theirs.

Sophocles himself, in a fragment from *Triptolemus*, wrote of the blessings of life after death granted to those who had experienced the transforming dread and glory of the Eleusinian Mysteries. And in his plays, as Aristotle explains, Sophocles proved to be a master in evoking the pity and terror and producing the emotional catharsis that defines tragedy. Like the Eleusinian Mysteries, Sophocles’ tragedies create a powerful emotional—even religious—experience: The terror of a heroic self crumbling under the blows of Fate, followed by the purging of fear and the coming of wisdom.

Sophocles’ continued references to the Eleusinian Mysteries indicate his high regard for their power. It may be that in his drama, Sophocles was striving to capture a comparable intense experience of dread relieved by hope and wisdom in an open, public context. For the original audience and centuries of readers, the experience of the tragedies of the Oedipus trilogy, like a mystical ritual, gives a new birth to the human spirit and, perhaps, makes possible civilization itself.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. With which of the four characters do you find you identify the most? Why do you find that character particularly appealing? How do your feelings for that character affect your feelings for the other characters in the play?

2. What kind of husband is Martin? What kind of father is he? What kind of friend? How do your answers to these questions change over the course of the play?

3. What was the family’s life like before the beginning of the play? How do you think it will be different after the end of the play?

4. Is Martin’s infidelity a greater betrayal in this circumstance than if he were having an affair with another woman? Another man? Why? Why not?

5. Does Ross do the right thing in writing the letter to Stevie revealing Martin’s affair with Sylvia? Would it have been the right thing to do if Martin’s lover were a woman? If it were a man? What would you do if you were in Ross’s position? Is his intervention a betrayal or an act of true friendship?

6. What do you think of Stevie’s reaction to the letter? How would you react?

7. Why does Martin feel that he does not belong in the support group for zoophiles? How does he consider himself different from the other members of the group?

8. Stevie accuses Martin of having “broken something and it can’t be fixed.” What does she mean by that?

9. Martin insists that his relationship with Sylvia is based on love, not sex. Does that make his actions more forgivable, or less? What is more objectionable to Stevie (and to you): that Martin is in love with an animal, or that he is having sex with an animal?

10. What is Billy’s role in this play? How does he react to the revelation of his father’s affair? How do you think you would react if you were Billy? How does his relationship to his father change?

11. In Greek tragedy, only the gods can reinstate order and administer justice after a crime has been committed. Often, a sacrifice must be made to regain balance between earth and the heavens. Do you think Stevie’s action at the end of the play will restore balance to their world? What other dramatic heroines can you think of who have taken similar action?

12. How does The Goat fulfill Aristotle’s requirements for tragedy? What is the “moral” of its story? Is there one?
13. Edward Albee has said that *The Goat* is the most political play he has ever written. What do you think he means by that? How is *The Goat* political?

14. The definition of acceptable behavior varies among cultures, and the limits of what is tolerated, and even embraced, change and evolve over time. Attitudes toward sex, particularly homosexuality, have grown increasingly accepting over the last half century. Do you think Martin’s behavior might be viewed with greater tolerance in the future? Why or why not?
FOR FURTHER INFORMATION . . .

ON AND BY EDWARD ALBEE


ON PARAPHILIA


