

ABSTRACT

THE GOAT OR, WHO IS SYLVIA?:

A PERFORMANCE AT MIAMI UNIVERSITY

By Luis Fernando Midence Diaz

The Goat or, who is Sylvia? is a character-driven story about an architect whose life crumbles when he falls in love with a goat. The actual focus of the piece lies on where the boundaries of “love” within an allegedly “liberal” society are, and how incommunicable such inclinations are. The play also features many language games and grammatical arguments in the middle of catastrophes and existential disputes between the characters. As director of the play my production concept integrates two particular fields of my interest and knowledge: theatre and television production. The idea is to bring Albee’s absurdist story one step further by combining the live theatre experience with the live television element. Besides a dramaturgical analysis of Albee’s play, this thesis further investigates the influence of the classic Greek tradition of tragedy as well as a possible link between Albee’s tragic comedy and Shakespeare’s The Two Gentlemen of Verona, while also incorporating Bertolt Brecht’s theories on Epic Theatre into the analysis and actual performance.

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A PERFORMANCE AT MIAMI UNIVERSITY

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INTRODUCTION

Of the unimaginable number of plays and playwrights in the world, why choose Edward Albee? And why select The Goat or, Who is Sylvia? from all his writings? At the time I selected the play, I only had one answer: “I really liked it.” This is a very poor justification for anyone to select a play, a script, or anything for that matter. I believe that an artist has to look beyond him/herself and find ways to communicate something of value to an audience. “Liking” the play was only the first step in finding a real reason, a real purpose, for selecting The Goat as my thesis project.

For starters, I knew very little about the author of the play, and in doing my research I discovered a multi-talented, complex individual with much to say about contemporary American society and culture. Edward Albee’s early career was characterized by a long apprenticeship of trial-and-error experimentations, followed by an almost sudden rise to accomplishment and notoriety (Bottoms 2). At the age of 30, he wrote the one act play The Zoo Story (1958), which launched him into a theatrical career that has spanned over 40 years (LeeHorn 18). His plays also proved to be eye-opening in relation to the American theatre of the time, exemplifying onstage “the restless, youthful energy of a disenfranchised ... generation, as well as providing a homegrown response to the recent innovations of European ‘absurdist’ playwrights (Bottoms 3). In the 1960’s, Albee became one of the most critically acclaimed dramatists for his revitalization of the American theatre, with his use of language as the real achievement (LeeHorn 19).

His first Broadway production, Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf? (1962), attracted both hostility from critics and praise from the audience by fusing domestic realism with a cyclical verbal interplay, making it one of his most successful plays to date (Bottoms 4). The playwright was determined to keep experimenting with form and content, resisting the temptation to settle into a predictable dramatic style to satisfy critics and audiences alike. The arrival of Tiny Alice (1964) began a period of self-indulgence for Albee and the critical reception of the time encouraged him to be stubbornly defensive, which ultimately caused the plays that followed to be received with increasing disappointment (LeeHorn 19). From 1962 to 1968, Albee presented a new Broadway show every year for seven years, followed by a battle with alcoholism for some twenty-odd years and

occasional luke-warm receptions for most of his work. He was awarded Pulitzer Prizes for A Delicate Balance (1966) and Seascape (1975), but it was not until 1994's Three Tall Women that Albee's career was revitalized, triggering a "reevaluation of his works through revivals and new plays, and restoring his stature as a dean of American playwriting and an avid mentor of younger scribes" (19). The play also earned him his third Pulitzer Prize, in this case for his strangely affectionate portrait of an elderly, dying woman (modeled after his adoptive mother), written with the same kind of concise directness that characterized much of the playwright's work.

In 2002 Albee was still attracting controversy and praise for his work. The Goat or, Who is Sylvia? is a play that careers from "comedy-of-manners into titanic marital confrontation bloodier than anything in the Albee canon" (Bottoms 8). Much has been written about The Goat; Charles Isherwood from Variety called it "a remarkable play ... brave and fine and unflinching," while Elysa Gardner from USA Today thought it was a "self-indulgent mess, in which the cynical, disdainful view of family life that has informed some of Albee's most eloquent works reaches its nauseating nadir." This is, of course, not the first time Albee has received a mixed bag of comments from critics about his work. Dating all the way back to Virginia Woolf, controversy has followed him throughout his career. But with the three Pulitzer Prizes and a handful of theatre awards, including a Tony Award for Best Play for The Goat, there seems to be a noticeable regularity in the way in which Albee's "style imprints his sensibility on the plays with increasing concentration" (McCarthy 11).

If anything, I would say that Albee is a committed writer. His plays have the ability to challenge an audience and point at some connection with the dramatist's social and political understanding. This is, of course, not something that the playwright plans, but "an unavoidable condition of his writing" (McCarthy 16). He has consistently renounced a desire to move his audience on a conscious level, for he sees his compositions as a largely natural sub-conscious progression, where the power of the play in turn makes his audience feel uneasy (17). Where his plays tend to disturb or puzzle people, the ideas presented onstage then become embedded in the experience of the performance, thus leading the audience members to think and discuss them (or so the playwright would hope). The Goat is certainly a reflection of Albee's long-lasting

discomfort with the dysfunctional American family, but “the issues his characters face take them [and the audience] beyond their individual lives and into a more politicized exploration of some profound and far-reaching *questions* for the Western dramatic tradition and modern civilization itself” (Gainor 203). In other words, he likes to push the envelope in hopes of opening up the discussion on a particular theme or issue, such as, in this case, the boundaries of love. The play itself, which Albee depicts as being “about four human beings and a goat,” revolves around a renowned architect (Martin) at the height of his career, his understanding wife (Stevie), newly out gay son (Billy), and a noted television journalist (Ross). Martin reveals to his “best friend,” Ross, that he is in love with a goat (which he named Sylvia). Martin’s world, and that of his family, is turned upside down after Ross decides to mail Stevie a letter telling her about Martin’s affair. After a relatively tragic and comic marital confrontation, Martin is left to deal with his son’s confusion(s) and then with Ross again, until Stevie returns in the final moment, dragging dead Sylvia’s corpse onstage.

Back in February 2002, the eagerly awaited production of The Goat marked Albee’s first new work on Broadway since The Man Who Had Three Arms (1983). The first actors to depict Albee’s contemporary American family included Bill Pullman, who, along with actress Mercedes Ruehl, were cast as Martin and Stevie. The show ran for a total of 9 months at the John Golden Theatre, and gathered the 2002 Tony Award for Best Play and the 2002 Drama Desk Award for Outstanding New Play. In September, film actress Sally fields and commedia dell’arte specialist Bill Irwin took over the lead roles, each gathering significant acclaim for their off-beat performances. Despite the critical praise, the show ended up closing 4 months later, but that was not the last time Martin would proclaim his love for Sylvia.

Albee has never been one to incline towards spectacle on the stage. Thematically, he often leans towards “the midlife crises of heterosexual couples” (Harty 50), such as in A Delicate Balance, The Marriage Play, and Virginia Woolf. These plays are performed in numerous theatres because of their undemanding staging and impressive character development. It is, then, no surprise that in the last four years The Goat has been performed in regional theatres all across the United States, but most interesting has been the reception of the play across both oceans. Across the Atlantic, the London production

included actor Jonathan Pryce in the lead role. After only one month, the show was moved to the West End, where it ran for 16 weeks (more than had been expected). Across the Pacific, The Goat has been staged on two separate occasions: the play's Australian premiere was in Melbourne and, three years later, it was staged in Sydney. Regardless of the continent, the playwright and his work still get bombarded with positive and negative praise. Actors, on the other hand, usually fare better, with many of them receiving some kind of recognition for their time on the stage.

For now, The Goat is truly a dream come true for any auditorium. It presents the director, the cast, and the audience with a unique challenge: forcing them to look at society's dubious ethical codes, hypocrisies, and double standards. The following chapters will hopefully further illuminate my reasoning for selecting Albee's play as my thesis project. The first, titled "The 'tragic' Goat and its sources," dwells further into some of the research performed by scholars regarding the influence of classical Greek tragedy in the play, including in its structure and themes, alongside some of the more contemporary references presented by the playwright throughout the story. The second chapter, "Two Gentlemen and a Goat," takes a dramaturgical approach to The Goat and its almost parallel thematic similarities to William Shakespeare's The Two Gentlemen of Verona. This is followed in the third chapter by an analysis of Bertolt Brecht's Epic Theatre and the application of his theory to Albee's play ("The 'Brechtian' Goat"). The fourth and final chapter will concentrate on the staging of The Goat as an independent production at Miami University, incorporating the information gathered and learned from the previous chapters.

So, why did I select The Goat or, Who is Sylvia? as my thesis project?

You're about to find out.

CHAPTER I

The “Tragic” Goat and its Sources

Among Edward Albee’s canon of plays, The Goat or, Who is Sylvia? is positioned with his later works exploring sexual fantasy, frustration, and domestic anguish. After almost fifty years of writing for the American Theatre, the playwright appears to be influenced by the classics of the theatrical spectrum, including the Greeks and Shakespeare. This chapter will highlight those foundations which appear to have some bearing on The Goat.

On the surface it would appear to be a play about bestiality, certainly about relationships, but while it was suggested that The Goat had been written to “test a few boundaries” (Horn 45), Albee added a program note in the Playbill for the opening on Broadway announcing that a second subtitle, “Notes Toward a Definition of Tragedy,” was coming for the printed script. Besides the obvious connection with the animal at the center of the story (for the original Greek meaning of tragedy is “goat song”), the structure of the play itself seems to be modeled after Aristotle’s fundamental concepts on tragic emotion. This third title then becomes a clear indicator of a “greater engagement with the traditions of comedy, tragedy, and [even] the pastoral, which resonate and overlap within the ... play” (Gainor 205).

The origin of the word “tragedy” is shrouded in historical obscurity, but it is believed it first emerged in Athens around 533 B.C. with the actor Thespis (Poole 4). Its most commonly known definition refers to the sacrifice of a goat in the vegetation and fertility rituals associated with the god Dionysus. It is also described as a “mimetic representation of the death, mourning, and restoration of a vegetation god” through the singing of a choral lyric, which was performed in a circular space by a group of men who may have impersonated satyrs by wearing masks and dressing in goat-skins (Ley 23). However, a more general definition of “tragedy” suggests that it was “an idea attached to a specific form of drama performed at special times and places” (Poole 4). Eventually, the content consisted of mythological or heroic stories, and an actor was introduced to answer questions posed by a choral group (Ley 24). It would depict the downfall of a noble hero or heroine, usually through some combination of excessive pride, fate, and the will of the gods. The tragic hero's powerful wish to achieve some goal inevitably

encounters limits, usually those of human frailty, the gods, or nature (Meyer 31). In the end, tragedies appear to have been written and performed for about a century, from which a handful of manuscripts have survived in their entirety, including works by Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides (Poole 4).

For Aristotle, the perfect example of a tragedy was Sophocles' Oedipus Tyrannus. He decided to analyze this play in order to illustrate what makes a great tragedy. Poetics is a part of the collection of writings by Aristotle that outlines what is now referred to as “the elements of drama.” According to some of his statements, a tragedy is defined as “an imitation of action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude ... concerning the fall of a man whose character is good ... whose misfortune is brought about not by vice or depravity but by some error or frailty ... with incidents arousing pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions” (Butcher 9).

Aristotle posits the six elements of a tragedy as plot, character, language or diction, thought, music or song, and spectacle, in that specific descending order. The plot involves the action of the play and consists of a rhythmic pattern and flow of arranged events that follow one after the other according to a plan of cause and effect (Butcher 9). In Greek drama the characters are primarily the functionaries of the plot and only perform that which is dictated by the necessities of the plot. The protagonist will mistakenly bring about his/her own downfall – not because he is sinful or morally weak, but because he/she is confronted with an irresolvable situation – thus confining a character in ethical and moral decisions (10). It is only around Shakespeare’s time that characters begin to be well-rounded personalities with lives of their own. Emphasis on language and diction corresponds to the idea that plays have always been written to be heard, not just seen. Since a tragedy deals with heightened ideas and characters, it is not surprising that it often utilizes heightened language. As for the element of thought, the central theme of a play expresses some perceived universal truth about the human condition (10). Ideally, a play serves both to instruct and to entertain. Often the play’s theme is not readily apparent and emerges only after study and thought. Although less common in contemporary times, in ancient Greece the tragedies were always accompanied by music (often flute and drums), and the chorus sang and danced their passages and the dialogue was chanted rather than spoken (10). And finally, Aristotle considered spectacle to be the

least important element, observing that it should contribute to the action and never exist as simply decoration or merely for its own sake (11).

Terry Eagleton's book, Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic, pays close attention to the numerous interpretations the term "tragedy" has had throughout history: from a matter of fate and catastrophe, a calamitous reversal of fortunes, of flawed, high-born heroes and vindictive gods, pollution and purgation, or of cosmic order and its transgressions (1). All of these characteristics seem embedded in the definition, but the truth appears to be that no description of tragedy more elaborate than "very sad" has ever worked, for the essential tragic experience is that of irreparable human loss (4). According to Eagleton, there is plenty of room to be emotional, but a tragedy is also "supposed to have something fearful about it too ... which shocks and stuns [an audience]" (1). His research also includes a close analysis of Aristotle's Poetics, and how in the Greek literary and philosophical traditions, its meaning outlines two important conditions of human existence: death and kinship (Simon 13).

According to scholar Bennett Simon's Tragic Drama and the Family, the awareness of death and its inevitability is among the most insistent feelings that shape and move some of the Greek epic stories, such as Homer's Iliad and Odyssey, where "the characters have to live with the ever-present realization that immortality is for the gods," and "men must seek consolation for the pain of their own mortality" (14). In a Greek tragedy, such as Sophocles's Antigone or Aeschylus's Agamemnon, the emphasis is shifted from "warfare outside the family" to "warfare within the family," plus the addition of the themes of sacrifice and guilt (26). In other words, a tragedy deals with conflicts among members of the same family – husband and wife, or parent and child – incorporating the idea of kinship, which is a loose translation of the Greek word "philia," and in fact has no equivalent in our current civilization, but could also be understood as "friendship" or "love" (Belfiore 44). The quarrel within the kindred also helps explain why in Greek tragedy different versions of familiar stories are told. For example, in Homer's Iliad we hear of Iphigenia as a daughter of Agamemnon and Clytaemestra, but there is no tale of her sacrifice. However, early in Aeschylus' Agamemnon we find that the story of Iphigenia's sacrifice is central to the plot, and it remains so throughout the

entire play (17). Ultimately, death and kinship are integral to the concept of tragedy as presented through the familial conflict.

Furthermore, Bennett's exploration of tragedy and family also indicates that in recent years there have been a number of investigations of the relationship between ritual sacrifice and tragedy (22), particularly its concern with sacrifice within the family. Under these circumstances, the tragic hero might be defined as the one character who is willing to sacrifice what is most precious in order to save and perpetuate the house or family. However, his or her behavior in doing so also risks destroying that same house or family. Ultimately, the aggression and ambivalence toward the victim implicit in sacrifice and the ideal in the name of which the sacrifice is made can lead to great dramatic tension and guilt, but can also lead to an "unstable equilibrium" (Simon 25). The sense of unsteadiness within the play can be viewed as the reaction of the audience to the sacrifice, with some reading the sacrificial solution as viable and satisfying. Others might consider the idea that the sacrifice of one member of a family (or society) is enough to preserve the group and establish a new equilibrium. This exposure to an unstable equilibrium is regarded as "the important part of tragic knowledge" (24-25).

Audiences who have sat through Albee's The Goat can easily understand the notion of an "unstable equilibrium," particularly with the graphic verbal depictions of the sexual union between a man and a goat, which implicate the aforementioned theories surrounding the definition of a tragedy. Case in point: Stevie's slaughter of the goat at the end of the play can be interpreted as a sacrifice to restore her dignity as a woman and position as wife within the ruptured family structure in the play:

MARTIN. (Crying) What did she do!? What did she ever do!? (To

STEVIE) I ask you: what did she ever do!?

STEVIE. (Pause; quietly) She loved you... you say. As much as I do.

(110)

Death is then represented on two spectrums in The Goat: physical and emotional. The first is through the actual slaughter of Sylvia by Stevie, and the latter by the seemingly irreparable destruction of Martin's marriage to Stevie and his friendship with Ross. Kinship in the play is embodied in Martin's relationships: with Stevie as husband and wife; with Ross as his supposed best friend; with Billy, not only as father and son but also

as potential lovers (as some would argue); and finally, with Sylvia. This last coupling thus leads to the notions of sacrifice and guilt inherent in a tragedy, with the slaying of Sylvia restoring some kind of normalcy and Martin finally acknowledging how his actions have led to the demise of his family and asking for forgiveness. The play itself suggests that even the most flawed and confused human being deserves compassionate understanding, and “the failure to proffer it is a species of bestiality far more abhorrent than the sexual kind” (LeeHorn 46).

Albee’s view of theatre, as inferred through The Goat, appears to be the natural extension of his highly intelligent sensibility, which in practice is noticeable in the verbal sharpness of the encounters in his plays and occasional questioning of language and self-parody which marks his writing (McCarthy 20). Albee uses the conceit of interspecies coupling to both comic and political ends, deploying logic to examine the highly charged fight around sexuality in contemporary American culture. On a much more personal level, he uses bestiality on purpose as an anomaly to make homosexuality appear normal by comparison, for Albee himself is gay. These artistic preferences represent a spectrum in human sexuality that overlap with a larger range of social and private behaviors.

The Goat, as do many other plays by the author, tries to “interrogate contemporary culture and humanity” (Gainor 200). For example, in Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, the tragic protagonists (George and Martha) are determined at every point in the story by their ruthless individual desires, which divide them so radically from themselves that, in the end, one of them ends up looking on helplessly as their passion carries them to their ruin. A side-by-side comparison of both plays, The Goat and Virginia Woolf, reveals the following similarities: Stevie’s sacrifice of the goat in The Goat and George’s “revelation” of the dead fantasy-son in Woolf can be interpreted as the fateful turn of each character “into the image of those they hunt down, growing less and less distinguishable from them” (Eagleton 151). Both plays conclude with each couple pondering on how to rebuild their shattered marriages. Set forty years apart, each play encompasses the necessity to attack the fundamental beliefs and tensions of its specific period, and end up shaping and leaving particular marks in the culture. That is exactly what The Agamemnon did back in its day by introducing audiences to what would become a continuation of Homer’s Iliad represented in Aeschylus’ The Orestia:

death and kinship, friendship and sacrifice, desire and revenge – all basic themes that support humanity's need for tragedy.

It might be of interest to point out Albee's use of the classical unities of action, time, and place in The Goat. During the Neo-Classic era, many critics and playwrights insisted on observing that an action should be one whole and take place in one day and in one place. The play stays truthful to these unities by utilizing only one location for the action (the living-room), relying on a time-span (less than 36 hours between the first scene and the last), and focusing on one action only (Martin's reversal of fortune caused by his affair with the goat).

Aside from the structure of a Greek tragedy, Albee incorporates all six elements discussed by Aristotle in The Goat. As mentioned before, he makes a point in highlighting this fact in the second subtitle of the play, "Notes towards a definition of tragedy." He even includes a song in the play, too. More specifically, the referencing of a Shakespeare song is mentioned by one of the characters in the play (63). The song comes from the comedy The Two Gentlemen of Verona, which will be further addressed in the next chapter. Of course, Shakespeare is not the only reference presented in the play. For the most part, many of the references used by Albee in The Goat are for comedic effect, and, on a more profound and intellectual level, as hints of where the playwright is taking the story and the characters' development. Martin is a world-famous, 50-year-old architect and family man, who has been chosen to design a multi-billion-dollar dream city in the American mid-west. As the play starts, we meet Martin and his wife Stevie, as he gets ready to be interviewed by his old friend, Ross, for a TV program. But there is only one problem: Martin reveals to Ross that he is helplessly, obsessively and physically in love with a goat called Sylvia.

In this first of three scenes in the play, Albee makes allusion to Aeschylus' Furies in The Eumenides. They are brought up by the main character to indicate his unrest and possible guilt for having committed a crime (22). The Furies are ancient goddesses, who vengefully pursue Orestes after he murders his mother. This allusion appears in the middle of the first scene in The Goat. By and large, this scene is inundated with numerous references, including allusions to the playwright's own past work. Another instant involves Ross and Martin's reminiscence of their college reunion and the two

escorts they hired. While Ross has problems remembering the name of the woman he slept with, Martin recalls his: Large Alice (36), an obvious reference to Albee's own Tiny Alice. Even Martin's final cry for Sylvia at the end of the scene could be compared to Julian's final soliloquy about his martyrdom in Tiny Alice (Kuhn 7). These references add a comedic touch to the unfolding tragedy, and also provide hints to the audience about the upcoming turn of events waiting for them as the performance progresses.

In the same scene, before best friend Ross picks up on Martin's anxiety and Martin reveals that he is sleeping with a goat, Martin and Stevie have an exchange in which Martin tells her about the affair with Sylvia, a goat. In this first instance, Stevie thinks that Martin is only making a joke. As in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, when George and Martha are awaiting company and lash out into their "Doom time of the door chime" dialogue (Kuhn 6), Martin and Stevie have a similar amplified exchange regarding Martin's affair (16-17). This is later referenced by the couple as their "Noel Coward bit" (58). Noel Coward was a well-known British actor, playwright, and composer, particularly remembered for his parodies and comedies, both on stage and on the small screen during the 1920s and 1950s (Day 3). Most of the exchanges between Martin and Stevie carry that over-the-top characteristic, particularly in the second scene of the play. There, Ross has mailed Stevie a letter revealing Martin's affair with the goat, which leads to a marital confrontation and ends with Stevie storming out of the house.

Scene three then brings about Martin's realization of the destructive dimensions of his affair with Sylvia through the agony of his teenage gay son, Billy. Before embracing his father – both emotionally and physically – Billy makes reference in his monologue to Shirley Temple's "On the Good Ship Lollipop" song from the 1934 movie Bright Eyes (101-102). With lyrics such as "On the good ship lollipop, it's a sweet trip to a candy shop, where bon-bons play on the sunny beach of Peppermint Bay," the song is then a reflection of young Billy's immaturity and inability to understand the current familial dilemma.

It's not a big revelation to the viewers when Martin discloses the fact that he's having sex with a goat. They've seen it coming thanks in part to Albee's windy exposition, teasing repetition, corny jokes, and weirdly self-referential lines. Even the title creates a kind of expectation: the play has to bring up something about a goat or a

Sylvia, and it does so at the end of the first scene, with the lead character crying out for Sylvia and his friend reacting in disgust to the wallet-size picture of a goat (43). Martin can be viewed as a contemporary version of Oedipus: a hero of great proportion who has fallen out of high status into misery. It's not really about sleeping with your mother or going googly-eyed over a goat, but Albee's play suggests that the human experience of tragedy is the arrival of something unacceptable that forces us to face the essential mystery of life and death.

Tragedies raise painful questions about human behavior, not least the matter of whom and what is rightly to be judged 'good' or 'bad.' They revel in revealing the poverty of any ethical categories, as if it were meaningful to contemplate whether Martin or Oedipus were or were not 'good.' Tragedy is more concerned with the intricacies and possibilities of truth and reconciliation without turning to simple answers, and Albee's The Goat is a perfect example by staging an assessment of the way individuals are destroyed with no regard to whether they deserve it or not.

CHAPTER II

Two Gentlemen and a Goat: Observations on Shakespeare's Influence in the Play

However original The Goat or, Who is Sylvia? might be perceived to be, there are clear sources of influence in Albee's contemporary tragedy. Most research on this play tends to focus on two specific items: bestiality and the title of the play. Bestiality has been read as a strange, destructive, and socially unacceptable form of love, which in turn makes this a serious and disquieting play about the vagaries of human passion. Albee's tragedy is an accumulation of violations from the revelation of the lead character's actions with a goat named Sylvia through his incomprehension and refusal to acknowledge the wrongness of his act and his resultant destruction of his wife (Kuhn 17). The second most mentioned topic is the wordplay presented in the title and subtitles of the play: The Goat, or Who is Sylvia: Notes towards a definition of tragedy. The analysis that follows here will briefly recapitulate Albee's use of the Greek tradition of tragedy, but will concentrate on the play's thematic association to William Shakespeare's comedy, The Two Gentlemen of Verona.

It is important to pay close attention to the title of the play. The Goat can be immediately read as coming from the ancient Greek tradition of theatre. As previously explained, the word "tragedy" in Greek translates to "goat song," and one theory holds that the winner of the best play was awarded with a goat to be sacrificed in honor of the patron god, Dionysus. Interestingly enough, Dionysus was usually accompanied by satyrs – half men, half goat creatures – that roamed the woods and mountains. In Greek mythology, the satyr was usually associated with the male sex drive and portrayed in sculptures with erections. Sex and goats are coupled together in Greek tradition, hence the multiple meanings that can be associated with the first title of Albee's play. Of the two subtitles incorporated in the title, "Notes Towards a Definition of Tragedy" further supports the idea of Albee's incorporation of the Greek tradition of theatre and thus explains the reasoning behind the structure of the play itself: a contemporized version of Greek tragedy. However, the first subtitle usually receives only a couple of lines of explanation in most essays, suggesting its source of origin (Shakespeare's The Two Gentlemen of Verona) and that the character of Sylvia is to be read as "a real object of

love and desire and as part of a contemporary rural and agricultural idyll” (Gainor 208). John Kuhn’s analysis of Albee’s play leans in the direction of suggesting that Sylvia is a deification of Nature (14). The name Sylvia derives from the word “sylvan,” which refers to something/someone “pertaining to or inhabiting the woods.” This argument is supported by the parallel use of the word “crest” by Stevie and Ross when correcting Martin about his first encounter with Sylvia on a hill (41, 79). Furthermore, there seems to be an undertone, a longing, in the play to return to nature; Martin was looking for a “country place” for his family and that is how he met Sylvia. Martin is the architect designated to design a multi-billion dollar city to be erected in the middle of the American wheat-fields, a sharp contrast to his quest for a “country place” for his family (14).

Still, most authors don’t look past Stevie’s rhetorical musing on the origin of Martin’s name for the goat, a subtly revised version of Proteus’s song in act IV, scene 2 of Two Gentlemen:

Who is Silvia? what is she,
That all our swains commend her?
Holy, fair and wise is she;
The heavens 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. (IV, ii, 41-55)

The song represents Proteus’s failed attempt to gain Silvia’s affection over that of her banished Valentine. It is also a clear betrayal of his friendship to Valentine, for

Proteus has sworn he will give Silvia all of Valentine's letters during his time in exile. In The Goat, Stevie's inquiry as to the origin of the goat's name makes reference to Proteus's song, suggesting both a wooing and a betrayal. The wooing is denoted by Martin's sexual relationship with Sylvia, while Stevie's perception of having been demoted to be loved as much as an animal stands for the betrayal. Aside from supporting the comical back-and-forth of Albee's tragic figures, they continue to reference Proteus's song throughout their argument, with Martin constantly referring to the goat as female ("What is she") and describing their connection as "holy" ("Holy, fair and wise is she"), while Stevie questions why he keeps referring to an animal as "she" ("Who is Silvia"). Aside from the song reference, the final scene of Shakespeare's play could also be perceived as an obvious inspiration for The Goat's tragic plotline and structure. Act V, scene 4 includes the attempted rape of one of its heroines, her rescue by her male lover, and his forgiveness of the rapist, who also happens to be his best friend. The correct interpretation of these elements could further complicate, yet also illuminate, Albee's modern take on Greek tragedy:

PROTEUS. My shame and guilt confounds me.

Forgive me, Valentine: if hearty sorrow

Be a sufficient ransom for offence,

I tender 't here; I do as truly suffer

As e'er I did commit. (V, iv, 78-82)

Before Proteus's plea for forgiveness from Valentine, he had wrestled Silvia away from outlaws, which Valentine observed. Once Proteus demands that Silvia give him a sign of her favor for rescuing her, she refuses. Proteus then attempts to rape her, but Valentine jumps out to stop him. Proteus apologizes to Valentine (he does not apologize to Silvia) and the shocking response from his friend (offering him back the woman he almost raped) is the main focus in Jeffrey Masten's essay titled "The Two Gentlemen of Verona: A Modern Perspective," which claims that the play's "use of the same rhetoric, the same terminology, for same-sex 'friendship' and cross-sex 'love'" (200) is interchangeable and thus becomes the central conflict of the play. According to this essay, Aristotle's own definition of "friendship" is that of "one soul in two bodies," where the relationship is of "equal men in age, social class and all other attributes" (203).

Cicero's essay "De Amicitia," which later would be translated into English on at least three occasions before 1600, established the basic tenets of the definition of friendship: "true friendship completes or perfects the individual" (Carroll 5). The possibility of establishing such a relationship with a woman was unthinkable and without any precedent. Any such relation was normally associated only as coexistent with marriage (8); nevertheless, even a female-female relation could not really be true friendship, nor could a male-female relation (10). In other words, friendship between two men was understood to be more powerful than the love between a woman and a man.

Shakespeare's play hints in the opening scene at these two kinds of bonds and constantly puts them in competition throughout the development of the plot. Nevertheless, the tables are turned when Proteus falls for Valentine's beloved Silvia (Masten 207). The inability to differentiate male friendship and male-female love resonates with Stevie's dilemma in The Goat:

MARTIN. (Hopeless) I love you. (Pause) And I love her. (Pause)

And there it is. (Stevie bawls three times, slowly, deliberately) (82)

As Martin tries to explain how he came to fall for a goat, he keeps constantly reminding Stevie that he loves her, too. Martin argues his love for his wife and the goat is equally strong, but Stevie is unable to comprehend how he can love an animal as much as he claims to love her. Stevie's conflicting emotions during the scene appear to be an attempt to sort out the newly revealed information about her husband: a) he's having an affair, b) he is having an affair with an animal, and c) he claims to love that specific animal as much as he loves Stevie. During their marital discussion, Martin's dealings with the goat are construed by Stevie as the equivalent of rape, for she doesn't believe that Sylvia had any choice in it; their affair was not an agreement between consenting adults. Although Proteus did not rape Silvia, his actions were enough to make Valentine vow never to trust him again, just as Stevie appears to be unable to forgive Martin before storming out at the end of the second scene:

STEVIE. You have brought me down, and, Christ!,

I'll bring you down with me! (89)

Martin's relationship with Stevie and Sylvia is that of "cross-sex love" (male-female), and as mentioned before, this type of bond is not as strong as "the idealization of male

friendship as superior to male-female love” (Carroll 15), according to Aristotle, Cicero, and Shakespeare’s Two Gentlemen. Stevie’s inability to understand the difference in these types of relationships makes her equate Martin’s sex with the goat as rape and thus feel betrayed. By the end of the play, however, Stevie brings Martin the dead corpse of the goat, justifying her actions by only saying:

STEVIE. “She loved you... you say. As much as I do” (110).

In the end, Stevie’s decision to kill Sylvia had little to do with the fact that her husband was having an affair, or that her husband was having an affair with an animal, but rather that Martin claimed to love the goat as much as he loved his wife. Stevie’s position as the only female in Martin’s life was being threatened and by destroying “the competition” she felt vindicated. Martin, on the other hand, appears to consider cross-sex relationships interchangeable, even with female members of other species.

If the idolization of the power and virtue of male-male friendship supposedly lies at the heart of the male friendship tradition (Carroll 11), then the characters of Ross, a television journalist and Martin’s best friend in Albee’s play, does not hold true to the practice. Ross’s inquisition of Martin’s love affair and his writing of a tell-all letter about it to Stevie carries the “too-obvious dramaturgical weight of representing the vox populi and of the setting the wheels of tragedy in motion” (Gainor 211), which leaves little room for comparison with the male friendships such as that of Valentine and Proteus.

Nevertheless, there are two key moments in The Goat which support Masten’s proposed male friendship theory: the first happens early on in their conversation in scene one, before Martin’s affair with the goat is revealed. Ross’s need to know what is wrong with his friend leads him constantly to remind Martin that he is his “oldest” and “best friend,” and even dismisses family as less important than a friend:

ROSS. (close to giving up) No; she’s a relative; relatives are not friends!

(28)

The conversation later reveals an incident during a college reunion, where they “decided to call that service they’d told us about” (36), an escort service, and they invited the women up to the room they were sharing together (“two beds, two hookers” (39)). The act of two men having sex, each with another partner, in the same room can be viewed in contemporary culture as the ultimate representation of trust – similar or equivalent to that

“closeness, intensity, and devotion of male friendship” (203) described in Masten’s essay. But the second key moment supporting this thesis appears in Ross’s return in the final scene. Martin’s inability to communicate his feelings to his friend, and Ross’s unwillingness to hear him, leads Albee’s “Proteus” (Martin) to repent and to ask for forgiveness:

MARTIN. Oh God! I’m sorry. (To Ross) Yes; all right, it was sick, and yes, it was compulsive, and...

ROSS. IS! Not was! IS!

MARTIN. (Stopped in his tracks) I... I...

ROSS. IS!

MARTIN. (Gathering himself) Is. All right. Is. Is sick; Is compulsive.
(107)

During his confrontation with Stevie in scene 2, not once did he apologize or admit that his actions were wrong. Martin fully confesses to Ross, his friend, about his affair with the goat and asks him for forgiveness. He does not ask his wife first, the person he claims to “love.” But Ross cannot be Shakespeare’s Valentine, for he does not forgive him or offer Silvia back to him at the end of the play. Instead we have to look at the unlikely pairing of Martin and his own son, Billy, who actually becomes the carrier of the discourse of male friendships.

As unlikely as this coupling is, it is important to pay attention to the play’s gradual progression. The first scene centers on information: who these characters are and the big revelation of Martin’s secret at the end. The second scene focuses on the marriage and the issue of bestiality, leaving the last scene to deal with the resolution of the conflict. However, Albee decided to further complicate the plot by adding a second conflict in the last scene, just as Shakespeare did with Two Gentlemen:

- After Valentine pronounces himself satisfied with Proteus’s remorse for Silvia’s sexual assault, he goes on to give his beloved back to the repentant rapist as a token of their friendship / Billy acknowledges his perplexity about the familial situation, but forgives his father and ends up kissing him full on the mouth

- Julia, disguised as Sebastian, is shocked at Valentine's offering of Silvia to Proteus / Ross is disgusted at catching both father and son passionately kissing
- Julia faints and her true identity is revealed / Ross interrupts the kiss and makes his presence and repulsion known

After Julia faints, her disguise is revealed, making Proteus realize that he loves her instead of Silvia. The very end concludes with Proteus and Valentine talking about marriage. Both of them have a respective partner; however, the women are not involved in the conversation. In similar fashion, the scene between Martin and Billy plays out as a scene of forgiveness, as Billy launches into his monologue, confessing how his father brought the entire family down by copulating with a goat, and yet he still cares for him:

BILLY. I love that man who has been down there digging...! I love this man! I love him! (102)

Martin is overwhelmed with that love and vulnerability, Billy then embraces him, and starts to kiss his hands, neck, and finally kisses his father fully on the mouth ("a deep, sobbing, sexual kiss"(102)). Billy's uncertainty of the meaning of "love" and "sex" is the equivalent of Proteus's fluctuations in "love" and "friendship." Neither male-male relationship is conventional within social standards: Martin and Billy are father and son engaged in a passionate kiss, Valentine and Proteus are two men getting married "together." In both instances, same-sex relationships are elevated over female-male relationships (Masten 200). Furthermore, Julia's fainting is a result of Valentine's offering of Silvia to Proteus, just as is Ross's disgust in catching both father and son kissing. Both of these reactions are signs of disapproval by the characters, and in both instances, these are the moments in each play that get the biggest response from an audience. In Two Gentlemen, after Julia's disguise is revealed, Proteus regains his interest in her without responding to Valentine's offer. In The Goat, there is also no time for a response. Instead Martin makes himself the scapegoat (with pun intended) to protect Billy from his "best friend." Ross makes Billy's homosexuality another strike against Martin, who then moves to console his confused son by telling him a parable about a man who got an erection from carrying a baby on his lap. Such a moment does not exist in Two Gentlemen. That play's ending, according to Masten, presents a "decidedly different

configuration of sexual and social relationships – a world in which same-sex and cross-sex relationships coexist” (218). Martin’s sexual multiplicity (bestiality, incest) is far too complex and taboo for Ross to even begin to grasp, and thus drains him of any kind of forgiveness.

The nature of male-male relationships in both plays can be described as platonic, enough to “cause a man to renounce his own life to save his friend” (Carroll 12), as in the case of Valentine and Proteus. The actual conclusion of The Goat is purposely left unresolved by the playwright, leaving the audience and the characters to wonder “whether salvation of Martin’s career and the accompanying destruction of the family’s life together will be permanent” (Gainor 214). No marriage proposals or reclaiming of friendships, just a play of rhetorics of love and friendship.

CHAPTER III

A Brechtian Goat: Epic theatre and Albee's tragedy

In its very short history, Albee's The Goat or, Who is Sylvia? has been performed much as the playwright intended: simple set, intense performances, uncomfortable audience. The playwright himself is not a big fan of the spectacles presented on the Great White Way, which comes as quite a surprise, especially since The Goat had its opening at the John Golden Theatre on Broadway. Albee prefers a scale and style of performance in which the audience can attend to the detail of language, undistracted by the auditorium (McCarthy 26), and he also feels the need to provide theatergoers with something other than show tunes and flashy costumes. Gerry McCarthy's book on Albee includes an interesting fact about the playwright: his great admiration for fellow playwright and director Bertolt Brecht, whom he considers "a unique artist" (15). He asserts that, in the case of great plays such as Mother Courage or The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui, Brecht goes much further than his own theories in creating experiences which involve the audience, and this "experience" becomes a key word in Albee's understanding of theatre and its effects (15).

Albee's perception of Brecht's work is also shared by many other artists in the world of theatre. Although Brecht's theories arise primarily from a Marxist notion of drama as a vehicle for rational didacticism, his theories were only partly realized in his own work, suggesting that Brecht's practical sense of what works in the theatre overruled the more extreme political applications of his theories. This chapter intends to look at Brecht's most influential theories of theatre and discuss their application to a production of Albee's The Goat that I directed as part of my graduate research.

Brecht is one of the most influential German dramatists, stage directors, and poets of the 20th century. Born in 1898, his work is a reflection of his generation's deep disappointment in the civilization that had come crashing down at the end of World War I, from which he also developed a violently anti-bourgeois attitude. There are four major creative periods in Brecht's life: the largely apolitical period (1918-28); the pro-Marxist period (1928-38); the period of aesthetic and political complexity (1938-48); and the last years of his life (1948-56) (Fuegi 2). During the course of his lifetime he elaborated

numerous theories of theatre, which he constantly revised and which have led to numerous bewildering misinterpretations of some of them. His Gesammelte Werke includes no fewer than seven volumes of his theoretical writings (Grimm 36). One of the most discussed of his theories is “episches Theater” (Epic theatre), the process through which a play does not cause the spectators to identify emotionally with the action before them, but instead provokes a rational self-reflection and a critical view of the actions on the stage. But before engaging even further in this concept it is important to understand how it was developed.

Strictly speaking, “epic” is an Aristotelian term for a form of narrative that is not tied to time, unlike a “tragedy,” which is bound by the unities of place and time (Willett 168). In other words, where most people use the term “epic” to convey heroic scale, its primary meaning for Brecht is that of a particular narrative form. For the playwright, the facts presented to an audience are not to be “dramatized,” instead they should be “allowed to speak for themselves, to address the audience directly, to narrate their own complex history and fate without an artist standing between them ... polishing these ‘raw’ materials beyond recognition” (Fuegi 16). The term “epic” then refers to a “sequence of incidents or events, narrated without artificial restrictions as to time, place or relevance to a formal plot” (Willett 169). As analyzed in a previous chapter, Aristotle’s Poetics makes a specific point in highlighting the six principle elements of drama and their expected effect on the audience. As a response, Brecht developed the concept of “nichtaristotelisches Drama” (non-Aristotelian drama), a threefold rejection of Aristotle’s work. Brecht believed that the experience of a climactic catharsis of emotion left an audience complacent. Instead, he wanted his audiences to use a more critical perspective to identify social ills at work in the world and be moved to go forth from the theatre and effect change (Grimm 38). These rejections included the dismissal of organic unity, the elimination of a precept of a tight tectonic structure, and, most importantly, the denunciation of the Aristotelian catharsis. Scholars have noted only one instant in which Brecht avowed to an Aristotelian principle, and that is the predominance of plot over character portrayal (Grimm 39). The purpose of a character in the play, according to Brecht, was only to move the story forward and participate in the use of techniques that

remind the spectator that the play is a representation of reality and not reality itself, which he called the “Verfremdungseffekt” (alienation effect).

Probably Brecht’s most famous and notorious theory, Verfremdungseffekt is actually a consequence derived from episches Theater. The term itself has been misinterpreted on many occasions: “Verfremdung” does not mean “alienating” in the sense of making the spectator hostile towards the play, but rather it is a matter of detachment and reorientation (Willett 177). Here, an actor would address the audience directly, transpose text to the third person or past tense, or speak the stage direction out loud; the production would incorporate exaggerated, unnatural stage lighting, or use music, song, and explanatory placards (Grimm 40). Verfremdungseffekt can also be comprehended as “a wide open space which allows free movement on all levels and in all directions” (40). In other words, the entire production serves to reveal a loosely woven story instead of centering on a few tightly knit events. Episches Theater was to be a narrative theatre where a narrative voice is constantly heard mediating between the events of the play and the audience. The intention was to show to the audience “everything in a fresh and unfamiliar light, so that the spectator is brought to look critically even at what he has so far taken for granted” (Willett 177). By highlighting the constructed nature of the theatrical event, Brecht intended to communicate to the audience that their reality was, in fact, a construction and a changeable one at that. Nevertheless, Brecht’s attention to both the emotional quality of the performance for the audience and a sense of objectivity generated by the performance has usually been misunderstood in practice by other directors (Eddershaw 10). The point which he attempts to make clear is not that an audience should not feel, but instead intends to make them feel “different” emotions from those being experienced by the characters on the stage (16). His writing and directing styles are to be read as reactions against the prevalent style of his time, from which he developed a theoretical base to explain and analyze his practice.

When it comes to applying Brecht’s theories to Albee’s The Goat, the first of Brecht’s theories has to be put aside: non-Aristotelian structure. This is not to say Brecht discarded Aristotle’s work all together, but instead criticized the way it was being applied to theatre. As noted in a previous chapter, Albee makes it a point to structure his play using the six elements of Aristotelian drama. The importance of writing a modern day

Greek tragedy, of course, had less to do with the playwright's concern with the dramaturgical creation and structure than with the meaning of a tragedy. There is an element of Aristotelian catharsis in Albee's play, but it is presented in a very Brechtian fashion. The term 'catharsis' has been read in drama as a sudden emotional breakdown or climax that is made up of any extreme change in emotion that later results in the renewal, restoration, and revitalization for living. In Albee's play, the catharsis lies in the moment the audience's empathy for Stevie is turned to shock and disapproval of her slaughtering of the goat, and, through sympathetic identification with the tragic protagonist (Martin), they gain insight and their outlook at the larger picture/idea is enlarged. Albee's protagonist in The Goat gets criticized by his friend and family for carrying out an affair with a goat, painting his wife, Stevie, as the suffering victim. By the end of the play, Martin realizes the consequences of his actions and repents for it, but instead of forgiveness his wife drags the corpse of the goat on to the stage, and all empathy gathered for the victim disappears, alienating the audience emotionally from the play.

The intermingling of tragedy and comedy in Brecht's plays contributes, in large part, to their satirical stance, a common view shared with Albee. However, Albee did not intentionally write a Brechtian play, yet there are many instances in The Goat that allow for the incorporation of his theories. Nevertheless, it is necessary to address a possible contradiction in bringing the work of both artists together. Albee's greatest skill is possibly the ability to manipulate words, his detail of language, which is what he wants the audience to pay the most attention to. Working with an Aristotelian structure of tragedy would subject them to emotive suggestion, thus presenting a contradiction with the theory of episches Theater. Nonetheless, Brecht found himself having to defend his own theory, for episches Theater is allowed to subject an audience to emotive suggestion in the "process of communication" before granting them their freedom to reason and criticize what is being presented to them (Speirs 30). However, reason and feeling are not mutually exclusive opposites; it is the mediating presence of the narrative voice, conveying things of which the characters are unaware, which actually shapes the awareness of the audience (32). Ultimately, sympathy is acceptable for Brecht, but not empathy. The former is legitimate because it stops short of total identification; however, when the spectator's feelings turn into empathy, the character as an object is lost and the

audience is disempowered from analyzing the social and political content (Eddershaw 16).

In approaching *The Goat* as a director, there seemed to be several opportunities to use Brecht's alienation theory in a productive way:

- 1) The character of Ross works in television; he is visiting Martin to do a follow-up interview after Martin recently won the Pritzker Prize and a commission to design a two-hundred-billion-dollar city. For the interview, Ross uses a handheld camera to tape Martin's answers to be later aired on television (20). The use of the camera provides the first possibility of incorporating Brecht's concept of *episches Theater* by displaying on television screens to the audience what Ross is recording through the camera. Television then becomes the narrative voice through which the events then have the status of illustrative material and present an argument about what is happening in the play to the audience. For those audience members who were engaged "emotionally," the incorporation of the televised element should bring them out of the reality created onstage into a more conscious one.
- 2) The end of scene one reveals to the audience that Martin is sleeping with a goat and Ross does not approve of this. The transition to scene two, which takes place the morning after, is usually a blackout. The scene takes place in the dining room area where the family sits to discuss Ross's letter to Stevie about the goat. Instead of a blackout, this transition could be used to create a more concrete distance between the audience and the illusion created on the stage for them, thus supporting Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*. A loud alarm (like the one's used in a movie set after a scene has been shot), bright house lights and a storming of people with television equipment could be used to make the audience adopt a critical attitude toward the events.
- 3) The entire second scene of *The Goat* could be captured by the television crew and their cameras live on large monitors on the side of the stage for the audience to watch. In the end, the performance becomes a show within a show, representing an Aristotelian reality on the stage and a Brechtian one on the monitors. The audience would then be aware of the constructed nature of the theatrical event and the tension between mediums (stage performance vs. televised performance).

Billy, Martin's gay son, appears on and off during the second scene; he is sent to his room by both parents during their heated argument about the affair with the goat. His presence in this scene could contribute by emerging on stage holding a small television monitor with the very same images the audience is watching on their monitors on the side of the stage. The absurdity of the idea of a show within a show is then added a new layer, thus making it apparent to the spectators that they are not witnessing real events and further encouraging their critical detachment. Both actors playing the couple can also participate: during the development of this scene, Martin tells Stevie to shut her "tragic mouth" (81) to which she responds by doing a sharp intake of breath and putting her fingers over her mouth. After Martin is done speaking, he can glance over at her, then at the monitors on the side and finally deliver his line "what are you doing?" Once again, by having the characters become aware of the constructed reality, the audience is estranged from the action.

- 4) The transition between scene two and three presents another opportunity to continue elaborating on Brecht's theories. During their heated discussion, Stevie has destroyed pieces of furniture and decorations throughout the dining- and living-room areas. After she storms out off stage, Martin would be left alone with the camera crew video-graphing him. Another loud alarm sound again and a call from one of the camera operators to "wrap it up" highlights the end of that particular moment and allows for the retrieval of the equipment off the stage, leaving only the actor and the devastation of the set visible to the audience. Once again, there should be a full awareness of the performer's and the audience's presence by both parties.
- 5) The final scene of The Goat would reincorporate the televised element at the end of the scene, in a way book-ending the play through the view of the monitors, the narrative voice in the show. After Ross reemerges and catches both father and son in a passionate kiss, Stevie then storms in again, this time carrying the dead body of the goat. Before the final tableau, Martin asks his family for forgiveness and young Billy is shocked and confused (110). The scene is written in a way to suggest him reaching out to both his parents and neither being able to respond to

him. For this production, Billy can become the only character aware that the whole scene was televised, without the other characters knowing it. His final lines (“Mom? Dad?”) in the play are supposed to infer confusion and maybe even the idea of being scared at not knowing what is to become of his now decimated family. For this production, the lines will be a call to his parents to realize that they are still on television. At some point during Martin’s apology the image of what is happening on stage will come up again on the monitors, only this time the camera will not be on stage as it was during the second scene.

The total effect achieved by the juxtaposing of live theatre and live television creates isolated episodes in the play, which even if taken out of context, continue to make sense as a whole, but have to be worked out in the spectator’s mind (Speirs 34). Brecht’s theatre, nevertheless, does not dispense with audience identification with the introduction of a narrative voice or *Verfremdungseffekt*; rather, these devices only shift focus away from the protagonist and onto the various themes and ideas the playwright intends to put forth. The “boundaries of love,” as discussed earlier in this thesis, is Albee’s main topic of investigation through the weaving of information in the storyline in often comic and nuanced levels. All three scenes rely on laughter, drawn on by the intelligence and eloquence of the dialogue. The application of Brecht’s theories would allow a sympathetic (not empathetic) engagement with the characters while facilitating a recognition of the themes by creating a sometimes uneasy or startled recognition by the audience at the audacity of the conversation and images presented on the stage. Although The Goat never really suffered from a lack of attention to its themes, the use of Brecht’s work not only helps underline them, it also helps bring about other ideas – for example, the perception of the family structure through television – which hopefully the spectators will contemplate, too.

CHAPTER IV

Directing The Goat: Incorporating the research to the performance

From the program notes written by Ara G. Beal:

In today's world where not only anyone can share his or her most intimate experiences, but these things are also encouraged by media monsters such as reality television and YouTube, we must ask ourselves an important question. While the eras before us, the Victorians, the 1960s, etc., tackled the question "What is acceptable behavior?" we are faced with the question "What is acceptable entertainment?" And while we are not the first to deal with this question, it has a new immediacy.

This outbreak of shameless self-promotion also raises questions of voyeurism. These new media provide a sense of distance. These people become removed images on a screen, not people we know intimately. And certainly they agree, in some form, for their lives to be broadcast, so certainly it's okay to derive pleasure from their exploits and exploitation. Isn't it?

This distance we feel from stars of reality television is in some ways similar to Brecht's "Verfremdungseffekt," conventionally translated "alienation effect." Brecht attempted to remove his audiences' emotional attachment to characters, hoping they would instead rationally reflect on the issues raised. And certainly reality TV strives for some of the same distancing; how else could we laugh at those who send videos of their own pain to America's Funniest Home Videos?

Edward Albee's The Goat or, Who is Sylvia? requires some distancing from the audience as well. We can't think too much about Martin's relationship with Sylvia or we would need to leave the theatre. Nor can we think too much about how much he hurts Stevie in the process or we would feel the need to strangle him. And Albee knows this. That's why he provides us with witty dialogue and intelligent characters. We, as an audience, never really have to concentrate on the issue at hand.

But Albee does force us to think about what is appropriate by his simple choice of such a taboo issue. Why is it wrong? Is it always wrong? While the show might not dwell on these questions, they will certainly cross our minds as we watch. And if we are able to distance ourselves even further, shouldn't we, according to Brecht's philosophy, be able to ponder these questions to a greater extent?

Therefore, this production has elected to use the framework of reality TV to provide more distance and to relocate the focus slightly. Drawing on our current fascination with the publicizing of intimate interactions as well as the theories of Brecht, the Grays blight becomes a broadcast. As we are consistently reminded we are "viewing" this tragedy, we are then left with the question: Which is more appropriate? Performing taboo acts or watching others?

Brecht didn't merely impose his theories on alienation onto any text; he would actually re-write the play or come up with an entirely original work on his own. Granted that the few well-known shows he modified were already in public domain, like Sophocles' Antigone or John Gay's The Beggar's Opera. In selecting Albee's The Goat as my directing project, there was absolutely no chance of getting the playwright to allow for any sort of revisions made to his play, nor would it be necessary. Instead of making the mistake of forcing Brecht's theories into the production, the text actually presented some unique qualities which supported the incorporation of an "alienation Effect" into the show.

The character of Ross Tuttle in Albee's The Goat is a television journalist with his own interview show, "People Who Matter." Written into the script is Ross's taping of an interview with Martin at his house, with Ross setting up the equipment, checking for noises, and actually rolling tape on Martin's answers. There is, however, no indication in the script that the audience gets to see what Ross is actually videotaping. After Martin sabotages his own interview, the camera fades from the script and it is never seen or heard from again, until the very last scene, where Martin makes a comment about Ross bringing his television crew to videotape the disintegration of his family.

The incorporation of a live camera into the interview scene and actually showing the audience what Ross is taping worked twofold when taking Brecht's theory into account: First, it prepared the audience for the future incorporation of television images and equipment in the later scenes of the show, while it also took the audience away from the reality created up to that point on the stage. The use of the camera on Martin also showed the audience with humorous detail the daze and confusion the character is experiencing, and the image projected on a screen, as mentioned in the program note above, caused the audience to distance themselves from what was happening in front of them.

With this first introduction of live television images into the show, it was possible to push the alienation theory further in the second scene of the play, where the married protagonists, alongside with their son, Billy, have a confrontation after Ross mailed Stevie a letter regarding Martin's affair with the goat. By having two cameras videotape the entire proceedings of the family dispute from the beginning of the scene to end, it caused the audiences to distance themselves further from the action on the stage. The distancing is triggered mostly by the subject matter being discussed by the characters on the stage (bestiality). This style of staging allowed the audience to retrieve and return to the actual live action whenever they felt comfortable or curious enough to continue without relying on the television images.

To further examine the alienation practice, there were two clear instances where the actors on stage acknowledged the presence of the cameras and interacted with them, in some shape or form. Seldom do reality shows allow their participants to speak directly into the camera, for their intent is to act more like flies on the wall than actively interfere with the "reality" being videotaped. Nevertheless, those instances do exist and are usually correlated with a fight. During the second scene of The Goat, Stevie asked Martin if "goats cry," which prompted Martin to respond inadequately, sending Stevie on a verbal tirade. Instead of directing her words at Martin, in the script she uses the third person ("he can't even make a goat cry," "what kind of a man is he?"). This proved to be an excellent opportunity to alienate those audience members caught up in the safety of the television images. Stevie talked directly into the camera, thus addressing the audience directly. As a

result, they are reminded of the constructed reality being presented to them, by breaking the fourth wall, and forced to think critically of what is happening on the stage.

As for the second actor interaction with the cameras, Martin demanded that Stevie shut her “tragic mouth,” to which Stevie responded by taking a big breath of air and placing her fingers to cover her mouth. As Martin explained his “epiphany,” the camera stayed on Stevie and her exaggerated expression, only to have Martin turn to the screen moments later and see what the audiences are seeing. This resulted in the realization that characters are not only aware of the presence of the cameras, but also of the screen behind them, consequently turning this instance of absurdity into the alienation of those watching the stage and the screen simultaneously. The inclusion of cameras during this scene proved to have a powerful dramatic impact particularly during Stevie’s final speech. For it, the camera stayed on a close up of her face the entire time, allowing the spectators to read the hurt and pain of the character. Immediately after she finished and left, the video turns to black and the loud bell of the scene change is heard, taking the viewers out of the moment and into their reality (sitting in an auditorium watching a show).

The third scene presented the biggest challenge when trying to incorporate the now established television element into the show. By taking a note from the current reality television craze, all those who participate in any type of show seem to enjoy their fifteen minutes in the spotlight, whether they won or lost. After the interest in them fades, they find it necessary to return to the medium that “created them,” brought them notoriety, hence the emergence of special shows and competitions exclusively for former (and the most notorious) reality TV stars. Even though the character of Ross returns near the end of the final scene in the show, only a reference to his crew is made by Martin. The audience is reminded that was Ross who brought cameras into the Gray household and exposed their tragedy to the world. Consequently, when Stevie returned dragging the corpse of the dead goat inside a blood-covered sack, the screen behind them gradually faded up to reveal what is happening on the stage. The only difference this time was the fact that the characters were not aware of the presence of the camera, that they were being videotaped from afar. The only character to become aware of the screen is Billy, whose final lines were delivered as an attempt to get his parents to realize that they were,

once again, being observed. This was the only instance where the original intent of the playwright was altered by the integration of Brecht's alienation theory into the play. It changed the original meaning of Billy's confusion as to the future of his family to one of becoming victims of un-welcome voyeurism. Billy also had a chance to alienate the audience by talking to them directly. After he tells Martin about a speech he had to prepare for school, the character moved center stage and spoke to the audience as if they were his classmates. As it is a custom with Brecht in plays such as The Good Person of Setzuan, the actors would address the audience directly, causing the fourth wall to be broken and have them think critically of what they were watching on the stage. In the case of The Goat, this was the only instant where television cameras were not involved in the alienation process, making this the purest Brechtian moment in the whole show.

The incorporation of television into the play was very much dependent not only on the text, but also on the locations where the shows was to be performed. Unlike most theatrical productions, my staging of The Goat took place in three different classroom auditoriums, providing both advantages and disadvantages to the cast, crew, and the show itself. The reasons behind the selection of multiple venues had more to do with the lack of performing spaces available at Miami University than with what we managed to achieve: accommodating and reaching a diverse student population. As a traveling independent student production, relocating the show to different stages forced us to develop a general blocking scheme for both the performers and the camera operators. In some instances the performance space was wider to the sides and narrower to the back wall, while two others had steps to walk on to an actual stage area. The screens were located in different areas of the stages and the lighting instruments (lights and switches) were also different in each space. The adjustment that both cast and crew had to accomplish for each different show proved to be a good learning experience for everyone involved, and in all three locations the incorporation of video into the performances was very successful.

The overall rehearsal process with the actors proved to be quite interesting. Throughout the four-week long development of the play, I introduced some of the different television elements we were going to incorporate into the show. Most interesting for them was an introduction video designed specifically for the play. If the

inclusion of television into The Goat was to be understood by the audience, they had to be prepared from the very beginning. The opening montage presented video clips of music, movies, and documentaries with the speed in which they were changed gradually increasing. This was done to create the feeling of someone watching television and switching the channels. The very last image the audience saw was that of color bars, which is commonly associated with television broadcasting, with the title of the show fading in. After a few seconds the video image was removed and the play started.

In similar fashion, the scene changes of the show were designed to take the audience out of the constructed reality of the Gray family on the stage and into that of reality television. At the very end of the first scene, a loud bell is heard and people with camera equipment and actors rush to the stage, at the same time as a video title telling the audience to “stand by for live broadcast” shows up on the screen. Once the actors and crew were in position a ten second countdown lead up to the very first image of the television show: Billy asking his father whether he was fucking a goat. As with the first scene change, the second scene change involved the very same loud bell and a video title, this time informing the spectators it was the “end of broadcast.” All the crew members left the stage with the equipment and the audience was left with the actor playing Martin all alone on the stage. These modifications were to indicate that we have left the constructed world of reality television and are back into the ‘reality’ of the stage.

The addition of the scene changes with video titles and bells, plus the introductory video at the beginning of the show, helped delineate an order or pattern which allowed for the audience to follow along easily. The theme of The Goat is overwhelming enough; adding the television cameras and video screen could have completely alienated the viewers if a proper structure was not placed ahead of time. The scene changes also allowed for an adjustment of pace and breathing room for the audience after such heavy climatic moments (“you’re fucking a goat!” and “Christ, I’ll bring you down with me”). To the benefit of the production, the introduction and scene changes did not slow the show down, for all performances clock in under 90 minutes. I believe that the moment you start adding more to a script it only makes it longer, but instead, the add-ons only supported my original intentions.

Personally I would have liked to measure how successful we were in generating different realities for the audience (that of the actual text, television, and the one the audience is in). Of course, that was not the point of this project nor could it be done. What's interesting about Epic Theatre and alienation effects is that the viewer doesn't necessarily process the information on the spot. It can take a couple of days to have a reaction, aside from the immediate one in the auditorium. Maybe there is no reaction whatsoever. If I did my research correctly, then the next time they watch a reality television show they will view it in a whole different light, reminded of the tragedy that was "broadcast" live to them. That is when they should ask themselves the question mentioned in the program note: Which is more appropriate? Performing taboo acts or watching other perform them?

CONCLUSIONS

Limited resources always force an artist to find creative solutions. Producing and directing a full theatrical performance of Albee's The Goat or, Who is Sylvia? proved to hold true to the idea of finding different ways of accomplishing my goals. It was an exhausting experience, yet very rewarding in the end. Something that really helped me in understanding what I was executing, incorporating Brechtian theory into the otherwise Greek influenced play by a contemporary writer, exposed me to much of the history and discourses in storytelling and theatre-making going all the way back to Aristotle and his Poetics.

The structure of this thesis is a reflection of the process in which I attempted to bring the story to the stage. I had to start by looking at the past and how Albee integrated Aristotelian dramatic elements to his story. Like its ancestors before it, The Goat attempts to represent the downfall of a man from good fortune to bad, consequently offering the audience an emotional cleansing (catharsis) through their experience in response to the suffering of the character in the story. The subject matter of the play, bestiality, is something the Greeks, or any other society for that matter, never truly addressed in their theatrical productions. In my opinion, Albee is attempting to blend social drama and tragedy together, and I would argue that he's not very successful at it. His tragic hero, Martin Gray, is a victim of circumstance, very much dependent upon the society he lives in, instead upon the inevitable inner forces in Greek tragedy, which determine his evolution towards self-knowledge and death. Nevertheless, it could be argued that Albee's intentions go further than Greek catharsis. His "Notes toward a definition of tragedy" sub-title is probably an attempt to set up his personal take on the idea of tragedy, but in the end it is shock-value that overcomes the story.

I will admit to my inclination to the shock-value The Goat offered. Particularly in such a conservative environment where I was going to stage the play, I felt the necessity to ruffle some feathers, if you will. But shocking an audience is easy; getting them to take something with them after experiencing a show is what is the hardest. This is probably where my dramaturgical comparison with Shakespeare's Two Gentlemen of Verona found its influence. Most research on the title of Albee's play mentioned Proteus's song

as the source of the goat's name, Sylvia. In reading the play I found the ending to be problematic, with Valentine offering Silvia back to Proteus, which made me curious about the audience reaction during Shakespeare's time. In our current society, rape is not something that is taken lightly, just as bestiality is abhorred and outlawed in almost every region of the world. What are the intentions of the playwrights, and why do they surround these incidents with witty dialogue? In my opinion it goes beyond shock-value. It could be they were both trying to address an issue, bring forth an idea, but it just didn't come through in the writing. Aside from the male-female dichotomy discussed in that chapter, the ending of both plays always brings about interesting (or frustrating) conversation within an audience.

Needless to say, incorporating "alienation theory" into the performance of an already controversial play wouldn't seem like a smart idea. Brecht and *Verfremdungseffekt* have been discussed and dissected by numerous scholars throughout the years, with Brecht rewriting and revising some of his work as time went by. Personally, the idea of integrating television into the show arose from my previous research on the director, and I discovered it added a new layer to Albee's play. There is a slight shift of focus on Martin's demise when a camera and video screen are attached to the performance, especially when framed in the context of reality television. The program note given to the audience certainly hit the nail on the head, explaining how it is not about what Martin is doing with the goat, but about what the audience is doing by watching it. The performance is then no longer measuring the tolerance of the audience towards the act of bestiality, but instead forcing them to question their personal viewing habits. Again, my personal opinion got mixed into the performance, with my increasing dislike for the medium of reality television framing Albee's commentary on society, which I would like to think blended almost perfectly. Only the final moment of the show, when a camera begins to videotape the family again, proved to be as problematic as the author's ending. My objective was to show how reality television never truly disappears after the show is done. The idea was probably not clear to the audience, which is no surprise. The text was not written for this purpose, and even though I was re-interpreting Albee's work, I tried to remain as true to his original intention (including dialogue and

stage directions). The end result might not have been very successful, but I was satisfied with the attempt.

The accumulation of research, history, production, and rehearsal time during the three months it took to make the show a reality was the best experience any aspiring theatre-maker could get. With very limited financial resources and time constraints I was able to gather a crew and a cast devoted to bringing this interpretation of Albee's The Goat to an audience. In reality, the success of any project depends on the amount of press, publicity, word-of-mouth and, ultimately, attendance at the performances. I don't think the marketing strategy was necessarily effective in stimulating people's curiosity, whether we did it too early or too late. Our target audience is one that is very difficult to pin down, even though the overall student population at Miami University appears to be homogeneous. The subject matter of the play, even though it was not fully revealed in the marketing, is not one that will easily "sell tickets." It brings about some interesting conversations, but it won't necessarily make people rush to the box-office. There is something to be learned from doing independent theatre AND doing an off-beat story. They go hand in hand and there is an audience for it. There is just no guarantee that many people will come to see it.

ILLUSTRATIONS



Fig. 1. Dereck Garner and Emily Giant



Fig. 2. Jake Carr and Dereck Garner



Fig. 3. Logan Ping and Dereck Garner



Fig. 4. Emily Giant, Dereck Garner, Logan Ping, and Jake Carr



Fig. 5. Preview monitors



Fig. 6 Performance with video



Fig. 7. The cast and director (final rehearsal)

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