

Albee in China: Revisit *The Goat, or Who is Sylvia?*

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Abstract:

This article offers a critical examination of Edward Albee's "The Goat, or Who is Sylvia?" in response to Professor Lianqiao Zhang's interpretations. Challenging conventional readings that perceive the play as a manifestation of ethical concerns, it argues these interpretations, especially Zhang's, are anthropocentric and overly simplistic. The play, known for its controversial exploration of human-animal relationships, is reinterpreted here as a platform for discussing broader themes like queer sexualities, marginalization, and societal norms. The article critiques the anthropocentric perspective prevalent in academic discourse, advocating for a more nuanced understanding of the play's symbolic elements, particularly the goat's representation. It aligns with post-humanist perspectives and underscores the play's performative nature, emphasizing its role in challenging and transforming audience perceptions. "The Goat" is presented not just as a moral discourse but as a medium for profound existential and societal reflection, echoing Albee's intent to provoke thought rather than dictate moral judgments. This reevaluation contributes to a deeper appreciation of the play's complexities and its enduring relevance in modern literature and society.

Keywords: Human-Animal Relationships; Anthropocentrism; Queer Sexualities; Post-Humanist Perspectives; Performative Literature

The Goat, or Who is Sylvia (hereinafter referred to as *The Goat*) is written by the American playwright Edward Albee in 2002. The idea of writing such a play can date back to several years before the work's publication as Albee was contriving a play that should test the modernity's limits and tolerance to the behaviors that are socially and morally unconventional, and if individuals are willing to imagine that they be such rule-breakers (2005, 188). The story centrally revolves around the tension between Martin, his new "lover" Sylvia the goat, and his wife. There are many sub-conflicts that render the play surprisingly comprehensive: friendship and selfishness (Martin and Ross), homosexuality (Billy), fornication between father and son (Martin and Billy), fatherly love and youth rebellion (Martin and Billy), marital relationships (Martin and Stevie), anthropocentric assumptions (Stevie and Sylvia), harmony between and bestiality of human and animal (Martin and Sylvia), city and the countryside (urban setting and the farm description), industrial alienation (the couple and

their peers), just to name a few. It can be easily imagined what great controversy the Broadway premier at the John Golden Theatre on March 10, 2002, had brought about. But anyways, *The Goat* gained Albee his second Tony Award for best play. Early critics put the work under fire in the name ethical concerns, claiming the work as unethical and disgusting. In 2004, Albee himself had clearly drawn the distinction between ethnic judgement and possible themes of the play:

“[...] the misleading information that the play (*The Goat*) is about bestiality—more con than pro. Well, bestiality is *discussed* during the play (as is flower arranging) but it is a generative matter rather than the ‘subject.’ The play is about love, and loss, the limits of our tolerance and who, indeed, we really are” (2005, 190).

Though Albee is always reluctant to give the public his “authoritative or authorial” comments on his play’s central concerns, we can see here he does have his inclinations, of which ethics, especially the human ethics, are not involved. Hence, we may argue that to say *The Goat* particularly “demonstrates its writer’s ethical concerns in order to calls for people’s action to maintain the ethical order between family, society, individual, and animal” is somewhat overinterpretation and forced interpretation (Zhang 2013, 99). Lianqiao Zhang did his doctoral dissertation on Albee’s drama with concentration on identity confusion and ethical choices that are born by the characters, for which Zhang devoted half a chapter to argue that *The Goat* embodies the identity confusion of Martin, to condemn Martin’s “bestiality,” and regards the play as the dirge of human ethics, calling for the maintenance and preservation of human ethical values. Zhang edited the second section of chapter four of his doctoral dissertation and published another article on *The Goat* in 2016, but his main arguments still fell into the delicate trap Albee creates and one of his conclusions, “disorder of human-animal relationship brings people themselves hurts along with brutal slaughter to the animals,” (75) is very anthropocentric. In addition, many of the few Chinese scholars who share interests with *The Goat* mainly or nearly only talk about the ethical challenges that the bestiality the work provides¹. As Gainor says, “we may still be forcefully struck by the number of writers reluctant to confront the awful...truth of Martin’s actions, their meaning, and their consequences” (2005, 205).

This article has no intention to defend bestiality. But I argue that it is important that we put aside the moral lens of examination, by which I mean the conventional mores that society undertakes for all queered practices, for a while to ponder upon the queer sexualities represented by the queer martyr Martin in *The Goat* which should symbolizes and serve as the epitome of the marginalized communities and their sexual practices so as that modern societal tragedies can be prevented from happening. *The Goat* is just like *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocleous, which assumes the device of mother-child incest but consumes not the central concern of the incest. The vital conflict and dramatic movement are initiated by Martin’s human-animal incest, yet it is not what Albee truly wish to discuss therein. By engaging with present literature, I hope to attract more attention from Chinese academia to this splendid yet underestimated play of Albee. Since Professor Lianqiao Zhang is in the field of Albee studies in contemporary Chinese scholarship yet unfortunately his interpretation of

The Goat both in his doctoral dissertation and later publication share the same logical fallacies and misreading and misunderstandings to the script itself, I hope to respond the Zhang's comments on *The Goat* with my reading of the three titles of the play, namely, "The Goat," "Who is Sylvia," and "Notes Toward a Definition of Tragedy" (2005, 200). Therefore, by reading the three titles of the work, the central questions of this essay are the following: How important is the immoral elements in the narrative of *The Goat*? Do they serve better as blasting fuse to bigger themes? If so, what could be the bigger topics that Albee is likely to deal with here? And should issues indeed be so profound, how do they exercise influence on reality instead of being merely meaning referents in the realm of literature?

In western culture, the image of goat is associated with various symbolic meanings. For many from Christian world, the image of goat, black goat in particular, is usually used metaphorically to connect with Satan and devils as the synonym with "guilt" and "sin," ergo many if not most people read the word "goat" in the title as a hint that "something guilty and sinful is narrated in the story" and that Albee has a negative attitude toward Martin's bestiality. Aforementioned presumptions are understandable; however, the English word "goat" also has its etymology in the Germanic word "Geiß" which means "she-goat" and the Latin word "Haedus" meaning "kid" or "young goat." With the meaning of "kid" in its origin, it is reasonable for us to assume that the goat in the title might suggest some kind of purity and innocence. But what or who is pure and innocent in this play? Only the absent and dumb goat Sylvia herself. As a passive subject, Sylvia is absent from all discourses in the play, which throws two main issues under the spotlight: one is the absence and speechlessness of Sylvia and accordingly the way in which Martin treats her, and the other is the anthropocentric manners that humans exercise upon animals that are epitomized by how Ross and Stevie act when they protein the knowledge that Martin is having coitus with a goat and that he constantly refers to the goat as a "she" instead of a "it."

I am appalled to learn that of all citations Zhang quotes "You're the love of my life, the mother of my handsome and worrisome son, my playmate, my cook, my bottlewasher." (Albee 2008, 542) to illustrate that the marriage Martin and Stevie has is a loving and exemplary one (2013, 102). Clearly Zhang fails to notice the sexual reference under the utterance, that is, Martin regards his wife as his subject, if not a "sex toy", and his loyal housemaid. To be more specific, in Martin's subconsciousness, Stevie is or should be beholden to his domination and commands, performing the roles of mother to his child, of wife to him, but not of herself as an independent human being. Therefore, one cannot but wonder what is the moral presumption Zhang assumes here? Is he himself subject to heterosexual male chauvinism? Fortunately, in his 2016 article, Zhang changes his wording, noting "it (Martin's marriage) seems affectionate...Martin's male chauvinism runs deep" (72). But according to this specific script Zhang cited, in point of fact, we observe that the way Martin subconsciously treats his wife aligns with that by which he treats Sylvia. To state it in an alternate manner, the citation precisely exemplifies the male chauvinism that, as previously mentioned, displays various facets: unquestionably, he fulfills the role of a commendable husband as his public persona implies; nonetheless, he as a person living in his paranoia also aligns himself with patriarchal

ideologies, leading him to perceive individuals as entities devoid of independent identities, instead assuming roles intricately tied to the nuclear family structure. If we recognize this as our premise, we should then find it justifiable that Martin should defend his bestiality in such manners that he thought the goat Sylvia loved him and willingly and voluntarily participated in sexual intercourses with him. We may be anthropocentric due to our own limits and feel confident to say that animals have feelings, but we are not sure to state that animals' feelings be so sublime as Martin sees. When Martin firsts meets Sylvia, he felt Sylvia and the atmosphere were something celestial, "it wasn't like anything I'd felt before; it was...so...amazing, so...extraordinary! There she was, just looking at me, with those *eyes* of hers, and..." (Albee 2008, 567) and "It was as if an alien came out of whatever it was, and it... took with it, and it was... an ecstasy and a purity, and a... love of a... (*Dogmatic*) un-i-mag-in-able kind" (Albee 2008, 598). And as Martin sees Stevie dragging the corpse of Sylvia to home, he exclaims and cries "What did she *do!*? What did she ever *do!*? (*To Stevie*) I ask you: what did she ever *do!*?" (Albee 2008, 622). In her role as a non-verbal creature devoid of the capacity to communicate in comprehensible human language or any form of language, Sylvia's actions effectively amount to a state of inaction and speechlessness. Maintaining her inherent purity and innocence, her sole transgression lies in her inability to take any action, a limitation which can be attributed to her nature. Sylvia remains detached from all conflicts, bereft of the opportunity to defend herself under any circumstances. Her involvement in sexual discourses alongside Martin is *made* voluntary and willing. It is not imperative to reference legal statutes or the principles of international criminal law adhering to human rights in order to assert that sexual activity conducted without the mutual verbal consent of both parties constitutes an instance of sexual assault. With Sylvia's speechlessness, despite the fact that Martin seems to see Sylvia as his soulmate and loves her so much, the undeniable reality is that Martin has been raping Sylvia for the time being. Aligning with his piratical paranoia toward his wife, he deludes that Sylvia's speechlessness is her tacitly consent and that she should be also in love with him. "No. And there she was, looking at me with those eyes [...] No. Yes; yes, it was love, but I didn't know it right then" (Albee 2008, 567) and "I love her... and she loves me, and ..." (Albee 2008, 603).

As the counterpart of Martin, Stevie's attitudes to the animals are quite simple that animals are inferior to human race. I acknowledge that Stevie's fury is caused by Martin's queer bestiality and the fact that she is cheated, but I argue that the main point here is not that Martin cheated there remain great possibility that she should be less irritated if Martin has been sexually active with a woman or even a man given her liberal stance. Stevie cannot accept that Martin should cheat on her with some inferior to her as she interrogates Martin, "How can you love me when you love so much less?" (Albee 2008, 575). The key beneath the phenomenon is Stevie's anthropocentrism. True, Martin's exclamation for equity between animals and humans— "what was wrong with... with... being in love... like that." (Albee 2008, 589)—might be the merely excuse for his non-normative sexual practice. This prompts an examination of the interplay between human and animal dynamics within the context of the play, giving rise to several pertinent inquiries. The first involves the rationale underlying the taboo surrounding interspecies sexual encounters: why do such relationships

between humans and animals evoke societal aversion? Furthermore, the moral underpinnings that validate these taboos warrant investigation. Another facet for exploration pertains to the notion of equivalency between animals and humans, both in terms of personality and inherent “animality.” The play unfolds in a manner that presents two distinct paradigms of coexisting with animals, exhibiting a stark juxtaposition. In this context, the character Martin presents an intriguing perspective when viewed through a temporary suspension of the moral judgments that stem from conventional practices. His approach seemingly offers an equitable and harmonious model for human-animal cohabitation, characterized by an acknowledgment of shared personalities and “animality.” In effect, according to Martin’s confession, he does not have this forbidden coitus with the goat as the consequence of his dark desire and bestiality, he endears this goat—and it actually makes sense—because he hears a calling that is “so...amazing, so...extraordinary!” (Albee 2008, 567) and “pure...and trusting and...and innocent; so...so guileless” (Albee 2008, 597) that it is actually an “epiphany” to him (Albee 2008, 599). This is not simply an action of deifying the goat but of juxtaposing animals to the same place with homo sapiens. In other words, Martin perceives an anti-anthropocentric view and regards the goat, or say animals, not as something that should be rendered subjects to humans; in his perception, animals are human’s company, and they are no different from humans as he asks that “I didn’t understand why they (others with love affairs with animals in the therapy place) were there—why they were all so...unhappy; what was wrong with...with...being in love...like that” (Albee 2008, 589) and “Don’t you see!? Don’t you see the...don’t you see the ‘thing’ that happened to me? Why nobody understands?” (Albee 2008, 598). On the other hand, Stevie, is an epitome of a more traditional practice, which is, however, unfortunately subject to anthropocentrism. Upon careful reading of the play, one should find the presence of Noël Coward repartee throughout the scripts, which attaches great importance to the words’ literary meanings. Therefore, we can see that Ross and Stevie, especially Stevie as a liberal, do not consider animals possess the same position of them as humans:

“Stevie: Stop calling it *her*!

Martin (*Defending*): *That* is what she *is*! It is a *she*! *She* is a *she*!”

[...]

Martin: I thought I was; I thought we *all* were...animals.

Stevie (*Cold rage*): We stay with our own kind!

(Albee 2008, 585;602)

What Stevie really cannot accept, I argue, is Martin’s juxtaposition her and Sylvia on the same level, or, in Stevie’s terms, is that Martin brings her down to the animal level, which embodies the thinking of Stevie that the status of species other than homo sapiens should be rightfully lower, that she should be equal with a goat. She says, “You have brought me down to *nothing*!” (Albee 2008, 605) and when she faces the question why she kills Sylvia, she simply answers, “She loved you...you say. As much as *I* do” (Albee 2008, 622).

Early critics have done intensive research in the origin of the title “Sylvia,” and it is acknowledged that Albee borrows the name of the heroine of William Shakespeare’s play *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*². The chorus sings of her:

“Who is Silvia, What is she,
That all our swains commend her?
Holy, fair, and wise is she;
The heaven such grace did lend her,
That she might admirèd be.
Is she kind as she is fair?
For beauty lives with kindness.
Love doth to her eyes repair,
To help him of his blindness,
And, being helped, 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” (Shakespeare 1964, 104, IV, II: 38-52)

Sylvia is so innocent that she “is too fair, too true, too holy To be corrupted with my (Proteus, Valentine’s friend) worthless gifts” (Shakespeare 1964, 102, IV, II: 5-6). This reinforces the point that I propose in the previous paragraph that the goat Sylvia is deliberately depicted by Albee as a pure and innocent creature in sharp contrast with the hypocrisy and viciousness of human race. If we should compare the following quotations which entail the contents of the letter written by Ross to Stevie to reveal Martin’s affair with the goat for Martin’s sake in Albee’s *The Goat* and the reasons why Proteus, a friend of Valentine, betrays his friend for Valentine’s own good in Shakespeare’s *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*.

Stevie (*Composed; cool; quoting*) “Because I love you, Stevie, as much as I love Martin, because I love you both—respect you, love you—I can’t stay silent at a time of crisis for you both, for Martin’s public image, and your own deeply devoted...” (Albee 2008, 573)

[...]

Stevie (*Back to business; quoting again*) “You will, of course, be shocked and greatly distressed...” No kidding! Uh... “shocked and greatly distressed to know of this, but I felt it my obligation to be the one to bear these tidings...” (Albee 2008, 574)

Proteus “My gracious lord, that which I would discover
The law of friendship bids me to conceal;
But when I call to mind your gracious favors

Done to me, underserving as I am,
My duty pricks me on to utter that
Which else no worldly good should draw from me.
Know, worthy prince, Sir Valentine, my friend,
This night intends to steal away your daughter.
Myself am one made privy to the plot.
I know you have determined to bestow her
On Thurio, whom your gentle daughter hates,
And should she thus be stol'n away from you,
It would be much vexation to your age.
Thus, for my duty's sake, I rather chose
To cross my friend in his intended drift
Than, by concealing it, heap on your head
A pack of sorrows which would press you down,
Being unprevented, to your timeless grave" (Shakespeare 1964, 82-83, III, I: 4-21)

According to his own confession, it is evident that Albee must have extensively studied Shakespeare's plays. Albee states, "I was reading plays—Shakespeare, Chekhov—long before I began writing them; indeed, long before I saw my first serious play in performance" (Albee 2005, 185-186). Although Albee does not explicitly confirm the extent to which Shakespeare influenced him or how much Shakespearean content he incorporated, a striking resemblance can be observed in terms of narrative and story framework between the two plays. Should Albee, as the literary ethnicism critics assert, be trying to concern the issue with ethics, I would argue that he is inviting us to contemplate on the matter of loyalty and friendship than the matter of human-animal sexual practices. No matter how righteous and just Ross seems to be, it does not change the nature of Ross's action as being disloyal and traitorous to Martin's trust. Ross's action does not win him auctorial praise. "I *tell* you about it; I shared it with you, the... the... whole... awful thing, because you're... what!?... you're my best friend in the whole world? Because I needed to tell *somebody* [...] I *tell* you, and you fucking turn around and..." (Albee 2008, 618). Rather than saying Ross did this for the sake of Martin's public image, it's more accurate to say he did it for his own career considerations. As Martin's best friend, as long as Martin's public image remains positive, he can leverage his status as a friend to gain advice that is more advantageous for his career as a talk show host. Martin might have found the solution and tackle the situation as he says, but the accident of Ross's writing the letter to Stevie without hesitation and consultation with Martin and the misfortune to the family thus follows adds to the tragedy of the play.

Of course, Albee does not write his tragedies in compliance with Aristotelian doctrines. The style and pattern of his plays is more incline to Nietzsche's definition of tragedy. Nietzsche belauds the Dionysian sprits and asserts that instead of Aristotelian concept, that tragedy originates from chorus, tragedy has its roots in Dionysius, which, however, still is within the Greek mythology framework, suggesting the close relationship tragedy shares with the values of Olympian gods. But

the peculiarity of Nietzschean tragic definition distinguishes itself by its emphasis on Dionysian revelry and hilarity, which tries to transgress the conventionalities of dramatic traditions, and warns us modern readers and audience that “Nothing here reminds us of asceticism (*Askese*), of spirituality and duty; everything here speaks only of over brimming, indeed triumphant existence, where everything that exists has been deified, regardless of whether it is good or evil” (Nietzsche 2007, 22). In his framework, Nietzsche believes that the core of tragedy relies in that whether the play (performance) could successfully lead its readers (audience) into a state of ecstasy wherein “the usual barriers and limits of existence are destroyed” and “all personal experiences from the past are submerged” (2007, 40). If the play should be tragic enough to arise its spectators into such an ecstatic mode, it draws a “gulf of oblivion” that serves as the dividing line between the realms of everyday life and the realm of Dionysian experience (ibid.). Then once the observers descend from this state back to their everyday consciousness, they reassess it with disgust and revulsion: “the fruit of those states is an ascetic, will-negotiating mood” (ibid.). Yet the tragic heroes or other characters reside in such works, they are “the dithyrambic chorus...who have completely forgotten their civic past and their social position; they have become timeless servants of their god, living outside every social sphere” (2007, 43-44), which renders “Greek tragedy as a Dionysian chorus which discharges itself over and over again in an Apolline world of images” (ibid.). By placing his audience and readers in a performance with bestiality and other queerness, Albee successfully infuses and shocks them with the ecstasy wherein the perceivers experience some kind of catharsis, to use Aristotle’s terms, which constitutes the excellence of *The Goat* as both phenomenal dramatic script and theatrical performance. As Richard Hornby suggests, “[...] because great playwrights usually take it as their responsibility to alter the norms and standards by which audience observe the world, therefore, the playwrights will more aggressively attack those norms” (qtd. in He 2004, 80; Hornby 1986, 32). What then happens or is likely to happen after the attacks toward the norms that have been taken for granted by playreaders and theatregoers? Event emerges. To be more precise, being performative, literature as a conduct and event claims its functionality.

Recently, with Amanda Anderson, Rita Felski, and Toril Moi’s advocacy, literary criticism is undergoing a paradigmatic shift to post-humanism perspectives, with more emphasis on the consumer side, that is, they “are all interested, for example, in how fiction connects to ordinary life and the responses of lay as well as academic audiences” (He 2022, 2). It aligns with the performativity of literature: literary texts as event affect both the textual reality and real reality. In comparison to other literary genres, drama holds a distinctive advantage in fostering literary performativity. When readers engage with a dramatic work, they are acutely aware of its fictional and theatrical nature, even if certain realistic dramas bear resemblance to aspects of reality. Whether witnessed in a live performance in theaters or experienced through reading, the participation in a dramatic or theatrical activity inherently involves the audience in a ritual-like performance given that the play is well-written, or the performance is skillfully executed. In this dramatic or theatrical ritual, readers or audience are stationed in a liminal space wherein their immediate identities and cognitions are

suspended pending to be catharized. To put it differently, literary performativity operates on two dimensions: one that is related to the text and another that has an impact on reality.

The recognized pioneer of literary performativity is J. L. Austin, for whom language can be formative. J. L. Austin criticizes the prevalent philosophy of language that the essence of language is constative, aiming to describe or constate the dichotomy between the true and false (He 2022, 6). He puts forward the notions of locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary utterance, proposing that language can be performative. Austin distinguishes the utterance that is felicitous and happy, and utterance that is infelicitous. Should the utterances be felicitous and happy, they can be as functional as the “wedding” and “naming a ship” examples that are widely cited among critics. However, it is important to note the subjects concerned by J. L. Austin are limited to daily language. In other words, language usages from literary and theatrical situations are excluded because they “are parasitic uses of language, which are ‘not serious’, not the ‘full normal use’” (He 2022, 104). In his opinion, Austin acknowledges that literary and theatrical language can be performative, but not serious at the same times, and therefore, his theory cannot be applied to these utterances: literary language is expressed in the textual reality, which is highly contextualized and of course imagined, and performatives in this reality cast no influence on real reality. On the textual level and Austin’s conception of performativity, Andrew Sofer invigorates Albee studies, correctly and insightfully noting that “the play hinges less on Martin’s offstage affair than on the devastating effects of particular speech acts in the theatrical now, which by turns produce and undo a reality they seem only to label” (Sofer 2017, 501) and that the play demonstrates Albee’s “queerly deperformative poetics” (Sofer 2017, 522). However insightful Sofer’s scholarship might be, it has a vital defect in that though the performative utterances in *The Goat* can be deperformative in the sense that they deconstruct the current actuality within the fictional context, they are also on the other hand very performative, to use professor Chengzhou He’s definition of performativity in western dramatology “the core content of performativity is its interactivity, generativity, creativity, interventionality” (2022, 11). In other words, along the process of unmaking the theatrical now, the play intervenes the audience’s immediate conception of marital relationships, love, sexuality, and violence. In his event theory, Gilles Deleuze notes three features of event: uncertainty, immateriality, and neutrality. Event is “a fleeing line” (He 2022, 17), it flows from its fillings, and it is in a liminal state. Event bears infinite possibilities of outcomes because certainty is suspended therein. There is breakage from what is assumed to be common whence an event constitutes. “The surprising emergence of something new (event) which undermines every stable scheme” (He 2022, 15). Chengzhou He suggests that event implies the destruction of normal forms and foretells renovation and turbulent changes. The core is that since breakages in textual discourse can bring about events, these events can influence readers. Namely the mere reading and watching live performance constitutes an event on the aesthetic level. Yet how is it possible for a play to achieve such impacts? The answer seems simple: the theatrical performance which resembles a ritual.

Long before Edward Albee, Eugene O’Neill has proposed his scheme for literary performance, that is, “to align modern drama with the kind of divinity of ancient Greek and Elizabethan dramas...

to make theatres the temples that purifies souls...to make performances rituals” (Hua 1997, 107). To put it bluntly, O’Neill is demanding the pragmatic, or say “utilitarian,” aspects of dramatic literature and its sibling the theatrical performances. In effect, we should regard the process of performances as the legitimization of ritual, which renders literary performances similar to *rites of passages*, to use Victor Turner’s theory, who summarizes and furthers Arnold Van Gennep’s concepts of separation, margin, and aggregation (1991, 94). Liminality is a key concept for understanding the potential effects of theatricality on audiences and performers. Liminality refers to a state of “in-between” where the individual’s identity, psychology, culture, and other signs are not fixed, but can change in any direction. Turner describes liminality as a process of transformation where subjects “are being reduced or ground down to a uniform condition to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to enable them to cope with their new station in life” (Turner 1991, 95). Schechner argues that everyday life is also a form of performance that restores previous behaviors and identities. He states that “The habits, rituals, and routines of everyday life are restored behaviors” (Schechner 2020, 10). Therefore, theatricality can be seen as a way of creating liminal spaces and experiences that challenge and change the performer’s and especially the audience’s sense of self and reality since “Performances mark identities, bend time, reshape and adorn the body, and tell stories” (ibid.). *The Goat* is successful in both senses which should be easily proven by the malicious comments on both the play itself and the theatrical performances that follow. If *The Goat* successfully ignited the attacks from some critiques by its contents and raised the alleged literary ethnics research in scholarship, Albee then triumphs in make his readers, audience, and even professionals astonished thus inspecting their reality in different scopes. Nevertheless, certain researchers recognized that the primary concerns addressed by *The Goat* pertain to matters beyond mere moral discourse. As a result, they are able to delve more profoundly into the depths, whereas others are limited to merely scratching the surface of its immorality. Therefore, in the sense of literature as an actant in the network of literature-reader-society, *The Goat* is also highly performative since it enthusiastically invites us to imagine the new limits and boundary of love, sexuality, human-animal relationships, industrial alienation and so forth, permanently changing what we used to believe are the only acceptable behaviors and opinions.

The immoral elements are of vital importance in the narrative of *The Goat*. In fact, they do not only serve as the decorations to the play, but they also constitute the very essence of this tragedy. However, Albee is not inviting us to consider the immoral and unethical matters on the surface, that is, in the case of *The Goat*, the bestiality that Martin pursues. Mores serve merely as the blasting fuse to bigger themes. But if this play is not about ethnical downfalls, what is it about? Albee gives us a Nietzschean solution for modern tragedies, “That play isn’t about goat-fucking. What I wanted people to do is not just sit there being judges of the characters. I wanted people to go to that play, and imagine themselves in the situation, and really think hard about how they would respond if it was happening to them. That’s really what I’m after. Put yourself there. “How the fuck would I react? Why am I making this judgment about those people? Because I probably wouldn’t make it if it was happening to me” (Albee 2005, 205). As Albee himself has already revealed, perhaps there’s no main

issue concerned with the work. The mission of the play is to stir the stagnant pool of accepted mores and daily experience so that people could be in the ecstasy to be “catharized” by reading the play and watching the theatrical performances while the content may not be holy and sublime.

Endnotes:

1. See Lin Zhang and Jide Guo (2009) “Edward Albee’s Ideas of Ecological Ethics in *Seascape* and *The Goat*,” Xiang Yang (2016) “The Boundary of Ethics: Analysis on Ethical Value of *The Goat*,” Shuhua Zhu and Chang Yu (2017) “An Ecological Literary Criticism to Martin’s Identity Crisis in *The Goat or, Who is Sylvia?*,” Xiaojun Fan (2020) “Seriousness and Irony: Ethical Taboo Narrative Criticism in *The Goat or, Who is Sylvia?*,” Li Lin (2022) “Ethical Transgression in *The Goat or, Who is Sylvia?*.” In addition, some of the few M.A. theses on Albee studies discuss the ethical issues of his plays including *The Goat*, about which I will not go into details here.
2. For references to scholarly discussions about the relationship of the two plays on the matter of the name Sylvia, see Jiali Yuan’s doctoral dissertation.

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