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THEATER BY SHARLEEN NELSON

Disturbingly Outside the Norm

The Goat; or Who is Sylvia?
raises more questions than answers.

In its 13th year, Lord Leebrick boldly opens its 2004/2005 theater season with Edward Albee's disturbing *The Goat; or Who is Sylvia?* A study in cultural values, Albee pushes the envelope of tolerance with the odd premise of an intelligent, affluent man involved in an affair with a farm animal. Yet, unsettling as it appears, Albee's use of a taboo that dares not bleat its name is essentially nothing more than a clever plot device designed to bring humor to an otherwise tragic story of love and betrayal. If society dictates morality, how far can one push the boundaries before they shatter like pottery?

The play opens on the contemporary upscale and tastefully decorated home of Martin and Stevie, a happily married, liberal, open-minded couple and their 17-year-old son Billy, who has recently come out of the closet. On this day, Martin seems distant, distracted, but Stevie attributes this to jitters. Martin has recently won the prestigious Pritzker Prize for architecture and is preparing for an interview with his friend Ross for an upcoming TV segment titled "People Who Matter."

During the interview, however, Martin is so utterly unfocused Ross halts filming to inquire about his state of mind. Reluctantly, Martin tells Ross about meeting Sylvia six months ago on a house-hunting trip to the country. Ross is understanding, that is, until he realizes precisely what species Sylvia is. He implores Martin to get help, but Martin is smitten. A few days later, Stevie confronts Martin with a letter that she has received from Ross outlining the details of his "affair." She is, of course, mortified. After all, bestiality doesn't often occur in a marriage.

Stevie feels deeply betrayed. Martin has overstepped the boundaries and ventured outside the realm of her capacity for forgiveness or understanding. Martin, how-

ever, views his affair with Sylvia, not as betrayal, but as an extraneous part of his life. It is not until later that he realizes the ramifications of his actions — that true betrayal cannot be undone.

A study in cultural values, Albee pushes the envelope of tolerance with the odd premise of an intelligent, affluent man involved in an affair with a farm animal.

Kim Donahey and Dan Pegoda put in solid performances as Stevie and Martin, respectively. Donahey's depth of emotion is both impressive and heart wrenching as she teeters between understandably violent outbursts and restrained pensiveness. Pegoda brings a level of warmth and understanding to an inarguably unsympathetic character. Likewise, Bary Shaw is terrific as Ross, and Casey Marks-Fife is earnest and tender as sensitive son Billy. Don't let the disturbing subject matter fool you, *The Goat; or Who is Sylvia* is an engaging, thought-provoking dramatic piece.

What if Sylvia hadn't been a goat? What if Martin was having an affair with a man, his sister, a child, or a corpse? Inserting any of those alternatives into the equation would dramatically alter the dynamics of the situation. Would Martin's betrayal have been nearly as devastating to Stevie had Sylvia been another woman? Is it OK as long as no one gets hurt? Anticipating that this play will raise more questions than it answers, Lord Leebrick is hosting post-play discussion on Oct. 14, 16 and 21. Additionally, Prof. Emeritus Grant McKernie will give a brief lecture and discussion on the topic of the play's relationship to Greek drama following the matinee on Sunday, Oct. 17. The production runs through Oct. 23. **EW**

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