

## “A Certain Man Had Two [Kids]”: Tragic Parables, “The Prodigal Son,” and Edward Albee's *The Goat*

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Edward Albee's 2002 play, *The Goat or, Who is Sylvia?* (*Notes Toward a Definition of Tragedy*), centers around Martin—a very successful, 50-year-old Pritzker Prize-winning architect—and how his family (i.e., his wife of many years, Stevie, and his gay, teenage son, Billy) and his best friend, Ross, react to the fact that Martin has been having an affair with a goat named Sylvia. In short, Ross turns on and betrays the confidence of Martin, Billy is beyond embarrassed and angry, and the once-playful-and-witty Stevie, ultimately, kills Sylvia, dragging the dead, bloody goat across the stage at the end of the play in a scene befitting of Greek tragedy. With these three characters vying for Martin's attention, this play contemplates the fact that one cannot look in two different directions at once. Humans have stereoscopic vision: we have two eyes, but we can only see one image. Love is being seen, and that is why it is so significant that the moment, according to Martin, when Martin locks eyes with Sylvia is the moment that he knew he was in love with her. And the moment their eyes locked, nobody else (neither his wife, nor his son, nor the familial unit as a whole) could be seen. So, too, in Jesus's telling of the parable, “A Certain Man had Two Sons,” more commonly known as “The Prodigal Son,” the elder son does not feel seen. The elder son realizes that he is not being seen or heard not just in the moment when his father would not answer his question, but the elder son realizes then, too, the fact that he never was seen during all of his years of being a good son and responsible person. Unlike the other parables of Jesus (which are, largely, *didactic*), and unlike the other plays of Albee (which are, largely, *tragicomic*), I argue that both “A Certain Man had Two Sons” and *The Goat* are, ultimately, *tragic parables*, as love and attention can be focused on a single entity, with everyone and everything else left to fall, unloved and unseen, by the wayside.

The following four ideas open up Edward Albee's *The Goat* to a biblical reading: 1) the name “Jesus” and “Jesus Christ” are uttered numerous times in the play; 2) Martin's best friend, Ross, is called “Judas”; 3) John Kuhn suggests that there is a “*leitmotif* of religious imagery”<sup>[1]</sup> in this play; and 4) in his earlier play, *Tiny Alice* (1964), Albee critiques the illogical nature of the Catholic Church. Furthermore, Kuhn has called the baby-on-the-lap story in this play, a “parable.”<sup>[2]</sup> However, the baby-on-the-lap story is not just *a* parable; I argue that the play as a whole, is *the* parable. I am referring to the most complete and complex of Jesus's parables: “The Prodigal Son,” or as biblical scholars call it by its first line, “A Certain Man had Two Sons.” POOF! And then it hits you: Billy, the son, is not a reference, necessarily, to a “Billy goat,” but to the prodigal, “Billy the Kid.”

In Albee's retelling of the parable, all of the characters in the play vie for the father's (Martin's) love, a goat/kid is sacrificed, and the father has two “kids.” Albee's play, then, is a modern adaptation of “The Prodigal Son,” or, rather, Albee's play is *A Certain Man had Two “Kids,”* where the focus remains on the impossibility of loving two things at once. In short, both Albee's *The Goat* and Jesus's telling of “A Certain Man had Two Sons” are cautionary damned-if-you-do-damned-if-you-don't *tragic parables*,

where the only learning that occurs is to try to avoid that which cannot be avoided: both trying to love two things at once and loving just one thing, yields tragedy.

### Current Scholarship on *The Goat*

*The Goat* premiered on Broadway on March 10, 2002, directed by David Esbjornson and led, most notably, by Bill Pullman (Martin). The play immediately garnered a tremendously positive critical response, racking up major nominations (e.g., a finalist for the 2003 Pulitzer Prize) and receiving major awards (e.g., 2002 Tony Award for Best Play and 2002 Drama Desk Award for Outstanding New Play). European (Vienna's English Theatre, 2003) and UK (Almeida Theatre, 2004) premieres quickly followed, directed by such notable directors as Pam McKinnon and Anthony Page, respectively. While *The Goat* is over fifteen years old, the field has yet to fully coalesce around a single, central issue involving Albee's play. Although, in part, because of the title and subtitle (and its call to understand tragedy), scholarship has revolved around two general concerns: the relationship between animals and humans and the nature of different theatrical genres. Deborah Bailin examines the relationship between humans and animals in *Seascape* (1975) and *The Goat* to show that what is at stake in this ambiguous relationship is what it means to be human.[3] Brenda Murphy also discusses the relationship between humans and animals in relation to *Seascape* and *The Goat* to demonstrate the ways in which anthropomorphism allows *The Goat* to reverse generic expectations.[4] Tony Stafford deals with genre in invoking the American Pastoral tradition with a nod to the relationship between animals and humans.[5] In "Getting Albee's Goat: 'Notes toward a Definition of Tragedy,'" Kuhn argues that, with *The Goat*, "Albee's definition of tragedy reaches an intricate fullness." [6] I, too, make this argument, but Kuhn and I argue it in different ways.

Kuhn carefully shows how *The Goat* fits within the model of Aristotelian tragedy. Kuhn makes seven key points: 1) "Calamity couples with heroic achievement in a tragedy"; 2) Martin is a falling hero whose behavior threatens the heroic acts of a lifetime; 3) the play is a "double tragedy" for both Martin and Stevie; 4) Martin and Stevie's *hubris* was "blinding pride"; 5) the play has a classic structure; 6) Albee clearly had the ancient tragedies in mind as he references the "Eumenides" and includes phrases like "tragic farce" and "flaw," and Martin the hero is always onstage; and 7) "The play generates intellectual and moral insight." [7] Kuhn further argues that "Philosophically, the Absurd is that existential disconnect between cause and effect which both Stevie and Martin describe: 'nothing has anything to do with anything.'" [8] Elsewhere I have suggested that the plays of the so-called "Theatre of the Absurd" are ethical parables that guide the viewer to make meaning of his or her own life, which, I later call "absurd tragicomedy." [9] Kuhn and I have different takes on the absurd in Albee's early, "most substantial tragedies," as Kuhn calls them. [10] In *The Zoo Story*, even though it seems irrational to Peter, Jerry makes sense of his murder-suicide. In *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962) George and Martha are in an absurd situation: they want children, but the world will not give them children. But the play is not (solely) tragic as George and Martha, ultimately, make sense out of their situation and realize that they have each other and that that might be enough.

Here, I disagree with Kuhn and want to elaborate on my previous observations. I argue that *The Goat* is a *tragic parable* because Albee created a situation, *too absurd*, too hopeless, out of which *meaning cannot be made*, moving beyond contradictions that *can* be resolved, and, thus, the characters live with an unresolved tragic situation. Just like at the end of "The Prodigal Son"—when the father's answer to his elder son does not rectify the feelings of unequal treatment—in *The Goat*, the situation cannot be

resolved, even with the death of Sylvia. Albee's play is not only a commentary on social mores and contemporary views of sexuality and the limits of those views, but *The Goat* also forces us to re-evaluate the parable, which is possibly the most influential piece of short literature in the Western world. But while this article will spend some time re-interpreting this biblical parable, it does so to help us understand, not necessarily "The Prodigal Son," but to further illuminate Albee's tragic parable in *The Goat* and his conception of tragedy. Shedding light on how the parable is tragic reveals how Albee similarly sees the story as tragedy in *The Goat*.

### **"The Prodigal Son," or The Elder Brother: Notes toward a Definition of Tragedy**

In *Interpreting the Parables*, Craig L. Blomberg summarizes the three main approaches scholars have used in analyzing the parable of "The Prodigal Son" or "A Certain Man Had Two Sons." First, there are those—especially Wilcock and Arndt—that argue that there is one point coming out of the parable: sinners should repent regardless of the gravity of their sins. Second, scholars such as Danker and Talbert understand the end of the parable as an argument that one needs to celebrate the salvation of others. Third, in what Blomberg contends is the most common interpretation, Thielicke, Schweizer, and Marshall suggest that the parable speaks to the power of the father's love and patience for both sons. [11]

Brad H. Young, in *The Parables: Jewish Tradition and Christian Interpretation*, reads the parable as a "crisis of broken relationships":

By dramatizing a family tragedy the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) focuses on the crisis of broken relationships between a human being and God. A person living without God is like the younger son running away to a far country. But the elder brother living at home with his father is no better off. He is much like a religious person who misunderstands the divine nature and lacks a meaningful relationship with God. The elder son does not show love for his father and struggles, perhaps unsuccessfully, to forgive his brother. He cannot share the joy of his father over the return of the runaway.[12]

Young is right that this is indeed "a crisis of broken relationships," but he places the blame on the wrong family member. He assumes that it is the elder brother who "misunderstands the divine nature." However, is it not the father who grants the prodigal son his request, symbolically creating two "dead" beings? As David Wenham argues in *The Parables of Jesus: Their Art and Use*, since the son is "dead" and has lost his "sonship," the prodigal son's return is a rebirth: he is "born again," which accounts for the joy at the return of the prodigal son.[13] What neither Wenham nor Young consider is that the return of the son is also the return of the father.[14] Because the allocation of a person's belongings is usually saved for after his death—thus, the father commits a symbolic suicide[15]—the return of one's progeny re-establishes the father as a father. The father, to use Wenham's language, is symbolically "born again," as well.

The rebirth of the father solves the connective problem between the first and second parts of the parable and provides a cause and effect. The father symbolically declares himself "dead" when he gives away half of his goods and dies not just for his younger son, but for his elder son, as well. As the elder son explains, "Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment; and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends" (Luke 15:29). His father, in

other words, was no father to him. The play on words with “kid” furthers this idea. In other words, *thou never gavest me, not just a goat to eat, but you never gave me a brother to love and enjoy with my friends*. The elder son did not know love from his own father, so how, in turn, can the father expect the elder son to love his younger brother, a “dead” son? The elder son certainly did not bask in his father’s love, but in his father’s “commandments.” The rebirth of the father, with the return of the prodigal son, transformed the father from a law-abiding (or, rather, commandment-abiding) Pharisee to an open-armed and loving Christian.

The key to this lies in the father’s symbolic “death” and “rebirth.” One wonders what exactly transpired during the father’s “death.” The elder son suggests that the father set up a series of commandments to be obeyed (“thy commandments”). The death of the fatherly impulse—the impulse to nurture—resulted in the birth of a Pharisaic being. Diverging from Young, then, this would suggest that it *was* the father who “[misunderstood] the divine nature.” The elder son, then, merely mirrors what he had seen and experienced.

The parable raises the question of how one should rectify a bad situation. The standard interpretation of the parable’s answer to this question is through compassion and forgiveness.<sup>[16]</sup> However, the ending—the elder son’s silence—suggests that compassion and forgiveness do not solve all problems, and in cases such as this, create others. Forgiveness is not the be-all and end-all and responsibility is the foundation on which Christianity is built. In other words, forgiveness is a patch, but responsibility builds solid foundations. The younger son is irresponsible in kind with his youth. The father lacks foresight and, in turn, irresponsibly bestows enormous wealth upon a youth; he enables his son to become a profligate. Symbolically, both father and son become “dead” through the father’s bequeathment of his son’s inheritance. The prodigal son should have contrasted his father; instead, he mirrored him. When the younger son leaves, the father’s actions only confirm his own irresponsibility. If one chooses to be a father, he must accept the responsibility of nurturing his offspring, which the father never does. He never rewards the elder son for his good behavior.

“The Prodigal Son” is a cautionary and tragic parable. The father’s irresponsibility causes two deaths: the prodigal son is reborn as a profligate and the father is reborn as a Pharisee. It took the younger son’s “rebirth” to jolt the father into responsibility. It is the younger son who first acts responsibly when he finds himself out of options and goes home and repent. The father simultaneously 1) greets the rebirth of his younger son through repentance and 2) is reborn himself by changing from a Pharisee to a loving Christian. The tale is cautionary in that because the father was not always ready to greet God (or the second coming—the rebirth—of his “son”), his elder son is affected by the father’s Pharisaic ways and may never be able to forgive first and experience the same rebirth that his younger brother and father experienced. Though both prodigal son and father are “born again,” the elder brother remains the parable’s lingering casualty because he has yet to be reborn.

### **From Absurdity to Tragedy: Billy Goats, or Martin’s Two kids, or “Getting one’s goat”**

There are a number of possible allegorical readings of *The Goat*: one such possible reading being that, like Judas, Ross betrays of Martin’s confidence and friendship; Sylvia represents Jesus, as she dies for man’s (Martin’s) sins at the end of the play; and Stevie, similar to Pontius Pilate, crucifies Sylvia (Jesus). Of course, there is also a potential non-biblical allegorical reading which equates the forbidden love of a goat with a man’s once forbidden love of another man. As *interesting* as these allegorical readings are,

they do little to help us better understand the play and, more specifically, understand tragedy, which is invoked in the subtitle of Albee's play (i.e., *Who is Sylvia?* or *[Notes Toward a Definition of Tragedy]*). Instead, I suggest that the intellectual thrust of *The Goat* and "A Certain Man had Two Sons" are similar, and that the nature of these plays is tragic.

*The Goat* starts out, in typical Albee fashion, with a series of relatively mundane questions which are only answered by a roundabout and circuitous dialogue. And, of course, much like many of his plays, it takes place in "A living room."<sup>[17]</sup> Why is the living room significant here? I have recently argued that Albee comes from a line of great American living room tragedians (e.g., Hellmann, O'Neill, Miller, Williams, etc.), with Albee's innovation being that he introduced the tragicomic worldview to this classic living room tragedy particularly in his 1962 play, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*<sup>[18]</sup> If we think back to this play, the talk and ethos of the living room in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is clearly tragicomic, much like the dialogue and ethos of this living room in *The Goat*. *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is sort of a reversal of the Oedipal complex, where the "son" is killed off by the father, in order for him to sleep with/love the mother. This death of the "son" allows George and Martha to produce happiness, or at the very least, a new world that is based on reality.

In Albee's plays, sacrifice—especially with religious overtones—is prominent, which produces an effect of *absurd tragicomedy*. In *The Zoo Story* (1958) Jerry is a Jesus-like savior who runs into the knife, killing himself to wake Peter up from his bourgeois illusion of comfort, hoping to yield enough knowledge and awareness in Peter for him to live a better and more meaningful life. In *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* the "son," or the "kid"—like Jesus—is sacrificed and dies for the sins of George and Martha, allowing for the rebirth, not of the son, but their marriage and life together. While there is pain from the sacrifice, it is for their souls, as there is now hope for salvation, or at least, for saving and/or salva(ging) their marriage. The end is painful, and Martha is scared and experiences emotional pain, but the sun is also rising, and it is both literally and figuratively a new day for George and Martha. The tragicomic ethos that has produces both laughter and pain throughout the night appropriately produces a bittersweet ending: sad, uncertain, but also filled with new possibilities.

In contrast, in having sexual intercourse with Sylvia, it is not Martin who dies—his wife, Stevie, mentions numerous times how she is going to kill him—but his *sexual death* is accompanied by Sylvia's actual death at the hands of Stevie. The bloody stage at the end of the play is more typical of a Greek tragedy. Here, Stevie kills off the "kid" to attempt to save/salvage her own marriage, but with this animal sacrifice, everyone involved loses innocence, and all are irrevocably changed, but unlike George and Martha and Nick and Honey in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* and Peter in *The Story*, without any redemption or hope of a better future.

### **Martin's Death and Rebirth**

Martin first becomes a father through a sexual death with Stevie. Billy is the resulting son, the kid, who is at the pivotal age of seventeen—the last year before adulthood and, presumably, leaving for college. Billy, his kid, is not "prodigal" in the traditional sense of the word as defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary*: he is neither "extravagant; recklessly wasteful of one's property or means" nor a "reckless or wayward person; a returned wanderer." But Martin, and certainly Ross, approach Billy's homosexuality with a mindset from another era, believing that he may grow out of his sexuality:

ROSS: Passing phase. Have you had the old serious talk?

MARTIN: The “You’ll get over it once you meet the right girl” lecture? Nah, I’m too smart for that, so’s he, so’s Billy. I told him to be sure. Says he’s sure; love it, he says.[\[19\]](#)

There is an implication here that Billy is having sex, and *a lot* of it. Here, Billy is at fault for the two maxims—“nothing to excess” and “surety brings ruin”—that follow the famous inscription, “Know thyself” at the Temple of Apollo at Delphi. But, here, Billy *does* know himself.

Apollo is the judge and features prominently in the *Eumenides* and within one page of the first mention of “Eumenides,” Albee riffs on the famous inscription at the Temple of Apollo at Delphi, “Know thyself”:

ROSS: OK? Ready? Ready Martin; here we go; just...be yourself.

MARTIN: Really?

ROSS (*A tiny bit testy*): Well, no; maybe not. Put on your public face.[\[20\]](#)

This has the same tenor as a famous Jewish joke: A man goes to a psychiatrist and says, “Doctor, I am so unhappy, I just do not know what to do. Can you give me some advice?” The doctor replies: “Just be yourself. Unless you’re a schmuck, though, then be someone else.”

In the *Eumenides*, Orestes is being driven mad and wants the agony to stop: “I sing this song over the sacrificial victim, a frenzied, wild, song, injurious to the *phrên*, the hymn of the Furies [Erinyes], a spell to bind the *phrenes*, a song not tuned to the lyre, a song that withers mortals. Relentless destiny spun out our fate...”[\[21\]](#) Unlike Orestes, though, Martin does not want it to stop, and in many ways, the agony only really starts for Martin at the end of the play when Sylvia becomes the “sacrificial victim.” But with the death of the “kid,” Billy, the other kid in the play, no longer has competition and Martin is, in a sense, reborn as a father who can focus his attention on his single son. But the tragedy is two-fold: Martin appears to be a broken man and there needs to be a “sacrificial victim” for Martin to become a better father.

In *The Goat*, the murder of Sylvia is tragic, and the tragedy of the act breeds further unhappiness for everyone. Nothing is going to improve, and every character is worse off. Unlike the deaths of the other so-called children in Albee’s plays, namely the “son” in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and “the baby” in *The Play About the Baby* (2000) which bring an end to illusions that obscure reality, Sylvia’s death in *The Goat* does not accomplish anything but death. There are loose ends, though: how will Martin, Stevie, and Billy function afterwards? But unlike in *The Zoo Story*, *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, or *The Play About the Baby*, neither the characters nor the audience learn anything from the death of Sylvia, and, thus, Sylvia’s death is meaningless. To Albee, it seems as though suffering can make sense, but only if it yields a newfound rationality to approaching life and the world.

While the ending of *The Goat* provides no way to grow or learn from the tragedy—which makes the play is a tragic parable—for much of the play, Martin is simultaneously the most logical and most illogical

character. Architecture happens, initially, by imagining the immaterial in one's head, before transforming the immaterial to a material reality; builders and construction workers deal in the material, but Martin deals in the immaterial. Martin's status as the youngest Pritzker Prize winner ever, indicates that Martin is something of a precocious genius. Martin's youth (i.e., for a Pritzker Prize winner and for someone who thinks they may have Alzheimer's), and his naiveté about his situation with Sylvia suggest that Martin is immature for his age. An immature male who deals in immaterial realities, however, describes most teenage boys, like Martin's son, Billy, and Ross's son, Todd, but does not often describe a 50-year-old man at the height of his career.

Prior to the unraveling of the familial unit, Martin appears able to logically compartmentalize and understand all of the love and affection that he can dole out. This ability to bracket one's emotions in a logical manner is a sign of nuanced thinking and maturity. Martin sees no contradiction in loving both Stevie and Sylvia. For Martin Stevie and Sylvia are not mutually exclusive lovers, not because he is polyamorous, but because Stevie and Sylvia are not in competition with one another. Each of his two lovers provides entirely different sorts of affection and worth. Stevie is a traditional spouse in that she is Martin's best friend and lover. As Martin quips in a backhand compliment, Martin does not *replace* Stevie with someone else:

STEVIE (*Quite matter-of-fact*): If you are seeing that woman, I think we'd better talk about it.

MARTIN: (*Stops. Long pause; matter-of-fact*) If I *were*...we *would*.

STEVIE (*As offhand as possible*): If not the dominatrix, then some blonde half your age, some...chippie, as they used to call them...

MARTIN: ...or, worst of all, someone just like you? As bright; as resourceful; as intrepid; ...merely...new?[\[22\]](#)

Sylvia is not a replacement; she *supplements* what Stevie does provide. Stevie gives Martin all the love, support, and intellectual stimulation that Martin needs. Sylvia, however, satisfies Martin's love of female goats. Stevie will never be able to offer Martin what Sylvia provides; as Stevie rightfully observes later, "But I'm a human being; I have only two breasts; I walk upright; I give milk only on special occasions; I use the toilet."[\[23\]](#) And the tragedy is Stevie is right.

Though Martin believes that he and Sylvia fell in love with one another when they first locked eyes ("...and there she was, looking at me with those eyes..."[\[24\]](#)), Martin and Sylvia are unable to lock eyes during their intimate acts. Martin is oddly correct when he says to Ross, "I'm *seeing* her."[\[25\]](#) Sylvia, however, does not see Martin or any of this intimacy; Martin only sees the intimacy and not Sylvia.[\[26\]](#) While Martin believes that he and Sylvia are consensual partners—because Sylvia supposedly backs up into him, and not vice versa—during sexual intercourse, Martin (literally) can see only Sylvia's backside, as she faces the opposite direction. The tragedy is that while everyone is jealous of Sylvia, Sylvia cannot even appreciate the love; she has no idea what *love* even is. This only adds insult to injury. Everyone is jealous of a goat, a being that cannot even process (or see) what she has.

## Conclusion

In “A Certain Man had Two Sons,” Jesus tells a parable of the ultimate display of forgiveness through a father’s deep love of his son. Albee creates a parable that displays the capacity to immensely love, not just humans but any two beings who feel mutually *seen* by one another. But Martin misreads or, like a Greek tragic hero, blind himself to the situation: Martin never considers the base and simple emotion of jealousy. It is important that Billy is an only child, as until now, he has been the sole object of parental attention. But now there is another “kid” in the house, and everyone is jealous. Stevie is jealous of Sylvia. Billy is jealous of Sylvia. Even Ross may be jealous of Sylvia (since he loses his best friend because of her).

Martin may be the smartest guy in the room, but he misses the most basic things (e.g., he forgets the name of his best friend’s son; he never even sat in the chair sitting right in his living room, etc.). So, too, our “certain man” justifies giving his younger son his inheritance and shows mercy is mercy by forgiving his son and welcoming him with open arms, but just like Martin, he never accounts for jealousy. The “certain man” of the parable cannot seem to fathom why his elder son is not excited by his brother’s return despite his failure to address the concerns of his elder. And the elder brother cannot imagine why the father does not understand his feelings because he twice asks why he has not been rewarded. And this is the tragedy of both parables: a display of love and attention begets jealousy. The greatest joy on earth, love, cannot exist without enacting pain on someone else, and this is the greatest tragedy of all: free love is never free.

## NOTES

[1] John Kuhn, “Getting Albee’s Goat: ‘Notes toward a Definition of Tragedy,’” *American Drama* 13, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 5.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Deborah Bailin, “Our Kind: Albee’s Animals in *Seascape* and *The Goat: Or, Who is Sylvia?*,” *Journal of American Drama and Theatre* 18, no. 1 (Winter 2006): 5.

[4] Brenda Murphy, “Who is Sylvia?: Anthropomorphism and Genre Expectation,” in *Edward Albee and Absurdism*, ed. Michael Y. Bennett (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 174-185.

[5] Tony Jason Stafford “Edward Albee and the American Pastoral Tradition,” in *Edward Albee and Absurdism*, ed. Michael Y. Bennett (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 95-110.

[6] Kuhn, “Getting Albee’s Goat,” 2.

[7] Ibid., 3-29.

[8] Ibid., 25.

[9] See Michael Y. Bennett, *Reassessing the Theatre of the Absurd: Camus, Beckett, Ionesco, Genet, and Pinter* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) and Michael Y. Bennett, *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre and Literature of the Absurd* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[10] Kuhn, "Getting Albee's Goat," 1.

[11] Michael Wilcock, *The Savior of the World: The Message of Luke's Gospel* (Leicester and Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 149-57; William F. Arndt, *The Gospel According to St. Luke* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1956), 350. Craig L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables* (WestPoint, InterVarsity Press, 2012), 172; Frederick W. Danker, *Jesus and the New Age: A Commentary on St. Luke's Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 275; Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Luke* (New York: Crossroads, 1982), 147; Blomberg 172-3; Helmut Thielicke, *The Waiting Father* (London: J. Clarke; New York: Harper & Bros., 1959), 17-40; Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News According to Luke* (Atlanta: John Knox; London: SPCK, 1984), 247-8; Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (Exeter: Paternoster; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 604; Blomberg 173.

Working from the scholarship of Cadoux (A. T. Cadoux, *The Parables of Jesus: their Art and Use* [London: J. Clarke, 1930; New York: Macmillan, 1931], 123.) and Stock (Alex Stock, "Das Gleichnis vom verlorenen Sohn," *Ethische Predigt und Alltagverhalten*, ed. Franz Kamphaus and Rolf Zerfass (München: Kaiser; Mainz: Grünewald, 1977), 82-6.), Blomberg argues that the parable makes a separate point with each character: 1) With the "prodigal son," one can always return home and repent one's sins, 2) The father is like God in that he forgives anyone as long as they are willing to accept it, 3) The older brother should have rejoiced in his brother's "reinstatement." Those "who claim to be God's people" should take joy in the fact that God extends his grace to the "undeserving" (174). As Blomberg argues, parables, and this one in particular, have allegorical meanings. The characters are allegorical in that "each character clearly stands for someone other than himself" (Blomberg 175).

[12] Brad H. Young, *The Parables: Jewish Tradition and Christian Interpretation* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, LLC, 1998), 130.

[13] David Wenham, *The Parables of Jesus* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 111.

[14] This surface-level reading which poses the question: "Should children be given their inheritance when they are young?"—opens the story and leads us to deeper meanings. First, this question works as extended metaphor: it is a question of what a parent owes a child, when a parent owes a child, what a child deserves from a parent, and when a child deserves something from a parent. With this request, a practically impossible situation arises for both the son and the father. The exchange of money is possible. What is impossible is that the father can no longer give his son something when he dies. This is also a reversal of expectations and a paradox, at least in our culture. Fathers usually give to their sons (money, wisdom, love, etc., which is not to say that the sons do not return love to their parents); there is an implied hierarchy. Therefore, when the father gives half of what he has to his son, part of him will no longer exist after that he gives the money away. The balance of capital changes the balance of power. It also changes the burden of responsibility. The father can no longer be financially responsible for his son. This practical quandary raises an ontological quandary.

In the end, the father decides to throw a feast for his returned son. This is when his other son gets angry: "Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment; and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends" (Luke 15:29). The father has been thrown into an impossible situation; how do you please one son while not offending the other, or how do you shower one child with affection when there is another child waiting to receive an equal amount of

affection? How can a father be a loving parent and please two children at once? This question, like in many parables, is never answered. We are left with the moral injunction to forgive those who have sinned, but the question of how to love is still left up to the reader. The reader must decide how the father should act in this case, or how they should act with their children.

[15] Bernard Brandon Scott argues that “The son’s division of the property kills the father” (*Hear then the Parable: A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989], 111). Again, I see it more as a suicide since, although the idea was planted in his head by the son, it was the father who carried out and executed the plan.

[16] In suggesting that “A Certain Man had Two Sons” is a tragic parable, I am not arguing the parable does not praise forgiveness: one only has to look to “The Unmerciful Servant” (Matthew 18:21-35) and “The Two Debtors” (Luke 7:41-43). What I am arguing is that in “The Prodigal Son,” Jesus says that forgiveness is necessary, but that responsibility is mandatory. If the father was responsible, neither son nor father would have been “dead.” And, maybe more importantly, the elder son would not have adopted the Pharisaic nature of the father. Though, of course, “The Prodigal Son” is closely aligned, thematically, with “The Unmerciful Servant” and “The Two Debtors,” this new reading also aligns “The Prodigal Son” with “The Ten Virgins” (Matthew 25:1-13), “The Faithful and Unfaithful Steward” (Luke 12:42-48; Matthew 24:45-51), and “The Householder and the Thief” (Matthew 24:43-44; Luke 12:39-40). These three parables focus on how one must be ready and responsible, so that one will be able to be judged well when God comes at his unexpected hour.

[17] Edward Albee, “The Goat: or, Who is Sylvia? (Notes Toward a Definition of Tragedy)” in *The Collected Plays of Edward Albee: 1978-2003* (New York: Overlook Duckworth, 2005), 538.

[18] Michael Y. Bennett, *Edward Albee’s Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (London: Routledge, 2018).

[19] Albee, “The Goat,” 551.

[20] Albee, “The Goat,” 552.

[21] Aeschylus, *Eumenides*, trans. Hebert Weir, rev. Cynthia Bannon, rev. Gregory Nagy, n.d., <https://uh.edu/~cldue/texts/eumenides.html>.

[22] Albee, “The Goat,” 546.

[23] Albee, “The Goat,” 575.

[24] Albee, “The Goat,” 568.

[25] Albee, “The Goat,” 568.

[26] This does raise the question of whether or not Martin rapes Sylvia, as consent, for numerous reasons, is impossible to obtain from a goat. While it may be pertinent to some readings of the play, this question is beyond the scope of this essay.

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**Table of Contents:**

- “The Mysterious Murder of Mrs. Shakespeare: Transgressive Performance in Nineteenth-Century New York” by Mia Levenson and Heather S. Nathans
- “‘What Will Be Changed?’: Maxwell Anderson and the Literary Legacy of Sacco and Vanzetti” by Dan Colson
- “Theatre of Isolation: America, 1970s” by Madeline Pages
- “‘A Certain Man Had Two [Kids]’: Tragic Parables, ‘The Prodigal Son’ and Albee’s *The Goat*” by Michael Y. Bennett
- “‘Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells [Her] Story’: An Intersectional Analysis of the Women in *Hamilton*” by Leticia L. Ridley

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