



A Playgoer's Guide

"No one appreciates the very special genius of your conversation as the dog does."

—Christopher Morley

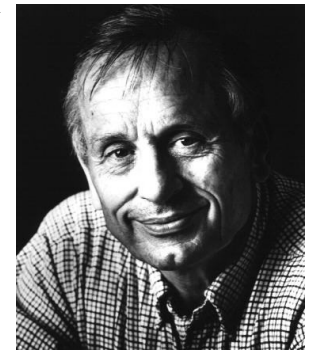
"If dogs could talk, perhaps we would find it as hard to get along with them as we do people."

—Karel Capek

The author

Albert Ramsdell Gurney, less formally known as "Pete," is one of the most prolific and produced playwrights in America. His work focuses primarily on the issues and realities of middle-class American life and has been produced on international theatre stages for more than 30 years. Gurney is the recipient of many awards, notably a Drama Desk Award in 1971, a Rockefeller Award in 1977 and two Lucille Lortel Awards in 1989 and 1994.

Gurney was born on November 1, 1930, the second of three children born to Albert and Marion Spaulding Gurney, two pillars of Buffalo's society. After attending boarding school at St. Paul's in New Hampshire and receiving a B.A. degree from Williams College in 1952, Gurney joined the US Navy during the Korean War and wrote shows to entertain military personnel. Following his discharge in 1955, he enrolled in the Yale School of Drama. Later he joined the faculty at M.I.T. in Cambridge. After several extended sabbaticals, he remains on the M.I.T. faculty to this day, though he hasn't taught there for a number of years.



"Dogs feel very strongly that they should always go with you in the car, in case the need arises for them to bark violently right in your ear."

—Dave Barry

The story

"Set in Manhattan, *Sylvia* follows the travails of Greg and Kate, a middle-aged couple who have returned to the city after years of raising children in the suburbs. Greg's career is winding down but his wife Kate's is winding up when along comes Sylvia. Lovely and street-smart, she offers Greg an escape from the frustrations of his job and the uncertainties of middle age. However, to Kate, Sylvia is a rival for affection, a major bone of contention -- oh, and a dog, to boot!"

Some history

Sylvia opened in 1995 at the Manhattan Theater Club, starring Sarah Jessica Parker as Sylvia. Gurney dedicated the play to her "with love and amazement." HBO's Web site says, "A successful actress on stage, Parker performed a successful six month run in the Tony nominated Broadway production of *Once Upon a Mattress*. This followed her critically acclaimed performance with Matthew Broderick in *How To Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*. Prior to these productions, she dazzled audiences in A.R. Gurney's *Sylvia*, which had a sold out run in New York's Manhattan Theater Club."

*"The dog has got more fun out of man than man has
got out of the dog, for man is
the more laughable of the two animals."
—James Thurber*

The original venue

The Manhattan Theatre Club, according to its Web site, "has grown in three decades from a prolific Off-Off Broadway showcase into one of the country's most acclaimed theatre organizations . . . one of the only institutions in the U.S. solely dedicated to producing new plays and musicals. . . . MTC develops and presents works of the highest quality by both established and emerging American and international playwrights.

"Founded in 1970, MTC now includes a subscriber base of 20,000 and produces seven plays a year in its current home, the historic City Center complex on West 55th Street. Each season is distinguished by the variety of the repertoire."

After a successful run at the MTC, *Sylvia* moved to the John Houseman Theatre, and went on to become the most produced play of the 1996-1997 season. As of 2001, there had been 108 professional productions all over the world.

*"If dogs could talk it would take a lot
of the fun out of owning one."
—Andy Rooney*

Some reviewers' comments

The New York *Times*:

"Dramatic literature is stuffed with memorable love scenes, but none is as immediately delicious and dizzy as the one that begins the redeeming affair in A. R. Gurney's new comedy, *Sylvia*. . . . a hysterical comedy for anyone who's ever owned a dog, loved a dog, or wanted to wring a dog's neck . . ."

The Houston *Chronicle*:

"*Sylvia* quite credibly represents the sudden midlife passion -- whether it be an affair, a pet or an obsessively pursued hobby -- that leaves the love-struck person's longtime mate baffled."

*"Don't accept your dog's admiration as conclusive
evidence that you are truly wonderful."
—Ann Landers*

This guide was produced by the
***Sylvia* Task Force**

<http://people.stthomasu.ca/~sylvia.student.stu/mainpage.htm>

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