The Advertisment Study Guide

The Advertisment by Natalia Ginzburg

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BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Natalia Ginzburg, one of Italy's most admired playwrights of the post-World War II era, was granted the Marzotto Prize for European Drama for *The Advertisement* (1968). Originally written in Italian, its first translated performance was on the English stage.

The Advertisement centers around Teresa, a lonely woman separated from her husband, who rents out her spare room to Elena, a young woman attending university in Rome. From the moment Elena walks in the door, Teresa talks almost incessantly of her horrible childhood and her tumultuous marriage to Lorenzo, her estranged husband. After five years of marriage, Lorenzo left Teresa upon discovering her affair with his best friend. The play opens after she and Lorenzo have been separated a year. Teresa, however, is still obsessed with their relationship and is still in love with Lorenzo, although she broods resentfully over his treatment of her.

Elena moves into Teresa's spare room, and the two become friends. Elena enjoys Teresa's company, listening sympathetically to her long, sad monologues, although Teresa's demands on her attention prevent her from studying. When Elena meets Lorenzo, they are immediately attracted to one another and begin spending time together. After Elena admits to Teresa that she and Lorenzo are in love, Teresa at first seems to accept her pronouncement calmly and rationally. However, as soon as Elena turns her back, Teresa shoots and kills her and then calls Lorenzo to confess her crime.

As in many of her plays, Ginzburg is concerned with the experiences of women in modern marriage and modern relationships. In the character of Teresa, she also explores the theme of obsessive love.

Author Biography

Natalia Ginzburg was born Natalie Levi on July 14, 1916, in Palermo, Italy. Her father was Jewish and her mother was Catholic, but Ginzburg was raised in a non-religious environment. She grew up in Turin, where her father was an anatomy professor at the university.

World War II and the fascist Italian government that instituted severe restrictions on the rights of Jews had a profound effect on Ginzburg's life. In 1938, the year in which anti-Semitic laws were passed in Italy, she married Leone Ginzburg, a Jewish publisher and antifascist political activist. In 1940 Leone was sentenced to live in the countryside as a means of political isolation. Natalia and their three children lived in the rural town of Pissoli until Armistice Day in 1943. During this time, Natalia's first novel, *The Road to the City* (1942), was published under the pseudonym Alessandra Tornimparte to avoid legal restrictions that banned Jews from publishing. In 1943 she moved with her family to Rome, where her husband was arrested for editing an antifascist newspaper. He died in prison in 1944 as a result of excessive torture at the hands of the Gestapo. Her father and two brothers were also arrested by the fascists, although one brother escaped. During this time, Natalia and her children lived in hiding from the Nazis in various locations throughout Rome.

After the war, Ginzburg moved to Turin, where she worked as an editor and translator, coming into contact with many prominent Italian writers. In 1950, she married Gabriele Baldini, a professor of English literature. They moved to Rome in 1952, where she remained throughout the rest of her life. Ginzburg continued to publish novels, many of them translated into English, from the 1950s to the 1970s. Her second husband died in 1969. In 1983 Ginzburg was elected to the Italian Parliament as an independent Left politician.

Between 1964 and 1989, Ginzburg wrote ten plays. Her first volume of plays, *I Married You for Fun and Other Plays* (1966), is comprised of four plays. Included in this collection is the prize-winning *The Advertisement*. Her second volume of plays, *A Town by the Sea and Other Plays* (1973), also contains four plays. Her final two plays were *The Armchair* (1985) and *The Interview* (1989). Ginzburg's last publication, *Serena Cruz or True Justice* (1990), is a novel based on the true story of an Italian family's efforts to adopt a four-year-old Filipino girl. Ginzburg died of cancer in 1991.

Plot Summary

Act I

Teresa, a woman who is separated from her husband and living alone, has put an advertisement in the newspaper to rent a room in her house. Elena, a college student, comes to look at the room. Elena has been living in her aunt and uncle's house while going to college, but their children are too noisy and she can't study, which is why she wants to move. Elena is from the country and doesn't have much money, so she is willing to do light housework in exchange for the room.

Teresa soon begins talking incessantly about herself, explaining every detail of her marriage, while Elena listens politely, insisting that she is interested. Teresa explains that she had in fact put three different advertisements in the paper: one to rent out the room, one to sell an antique rosewood sideboard, and one to sell her house in the country. She says that she is married but that she and her husband are legally separated. She mentions that she had a terrible childhood because her father claimed that she was actually the child of his brother and so did not consider her to be his child. She was raised in her grandparents' house, where she lived with her parents and her brother, but her father and brother eventually moved to America. She couldn't stand living with her mother any more and ran away from home at the age of twenty to live in Rome. She soon found work as an extra in the movies at Cinecittà, the location of the Italian film industry. There she met Lorenzo, who happened to be on the set one day with a friend. Teresa and Lorenzo spent their first three days together in Teresa's apartment, doing nothing but sleeping and making love. But on the third day, Lorenzo went down to the store to buy cigarettes and didn't come back.

After Lorenzo disappeared, Teresa quit working for the film industry and got a job at a hair salon. One day, six months later, Lorenzo happened to walk into the salon. Teresa asked why he had never returned from going to the store for cigarettes, and he explained that he had run into a friend and forgotten all about her; then, by the time he remembered her, it was too late at night. The next day, his mother wanted him to visit her in the country; on the way back to Rome, he was in a car accident and injured his shoulder. Teresa assumed he was telling her "a pack of lies" but cried and begged him to stay with her anyway.

Teresa and Lorenzo soon moved in together. Before long, they got married because she thought she was pregnant, but it turned out that she wasn't. Teresa then learned that Lorenzo was actually very rich, although he lived like a poor university student. They began to spend his money thoughtlessly and recklessly, and he began collecting paintings, motorcycles, and cars.

Teresa goes on to describe a marriage in which Lorenzo continually criticized her, left her for days at a time, and forgot to come home any time he ran into a friend. Teresa also describes physical fights between them, in which he would hit her and she would

bite him. But she also insists that their marriage was the happiest time of her life. Finally, Teresa cheated on Lorenzo, sleeping with his friend Mario. Lorenzo left her after coming home to find her in bed with Mario.

Act 2

Elena is now living with Teresa. Lorenzo stops by while Teresa is out shopping, and Elena meets him for the first time. She tells him she is very happy living there and that she and Teresa have become best friends. Elena mentions that Teresa is always talking about him and stays home all of the time in hopes that he might stop by.

Teresa comes home, and she and Lorenzo immediately begin bickering while Elena goes in and out of the room, preparing lunch. Teresa and Lorenzo rehash various conflicts and resentments. Lorenzo insists that he left Teresa because he no longer loved her, not because he discovered that she was cheating on him with his best friend. He says that he had to leave her because they were destroying one another. He claims that he is perfectly happy without a woman in his life, although Teresa accuses him of going to prostitutes.

Lorenzo agrees to stay for lunch, and Teresa points out that he has never been there for longer than fifteen minutes at a time. Teresa and Lorenzo continue to bicker about their marriage and about Lorenzo's family. Teresa complains that he doesn't give her enough money to live on and that she has to sell a piece of furniture to support herself. Lorenzo and Elena discuss their love of the countryside, which Teresa hates. Lorenzo invites Elena to see their house in the country, and Elena invites him to see her parents' house in the country.

Act 3

Teresa and Elena sit together, drinking their morning coffee. Elena explains to Teresa that she is moving back to her uncle's home because she can't get any studying done at Teresa's house, as she and Teresa are always talking. She insists that she is very fond of Teresa but simply must live somewhere that allows her to study. Elena explains that she was late coming home the night before because she went out to the movies with Lorenzo and two of his friends, after which she and Lorenzo walked around the city together. Elena then admits that she and Lorenzo have fallen in love, which is the real reason she is moving out.

Upon hearing this news, Teresa remains calm, cool, and rational. She says that she could tell they were in love and that she knows Lorenzo will never want her back, so it doesn't bother her. She insists that she and Elena will still be good friends and even offers to have her marriage annulled so that Elena and Lorenzo can get married. Yet, Teresa admits that she will always love Lorenzo and that she would be willing to take him back under any conditions. Then Teresa says that she's going to shoot herself one day so that Lorenzo will be a widower and will be able to marry Elena. She tells Elena

she bought a pistol, back when she and Lorenzo lived together, so that she could shoot him. Elena begs Teresa to get rid of the pistol, and Teresa says she will.

When Elena goes into her room to pack, Teresa gets the pistol from her own room, walks into Elena's room, and shoots her. Teresa hurriedly calls Lorenzo to say she has shot and killed Elena. Just then, the doorbell rings. It is Giovanna, a young woman who is answering Teresa's new advertisement to rent the spare room.

Characters

Boy

At the end of act 1, a boy, the son of the grocer, comes to Teresa's door to let her know that they are willing to sell her the stray Siamese cat who wandered into their shop.

Lorenzo Del Monte

Lorenzo Del Monte is Teresa's husband. They were married and lived together for five years and have been legally separated for one year. When he and Teresa first met, he was thirty years old. Lorenzo has a degree in engineering, but he does not have a job because he comes from a very wealthy family and does not need to work. However, when Teresa first met him, he was living like a poor university student, wearing the same old clothes every day. Their first three days together were spent in Teresa's apartment doing nothing but making love and sleeping. On the third day, Lorenzo told her he was going out to buy cigarettes but never returned.

Six months later, Lorenzo happened to walk into the hair salon where Teresa was working. He acted as if nothing had happened between them, and when Teresa asked why he never returned from the store, he told her a series of lies. Teresa nevertheless begged him to stay with her, and they eventually moved in together. Soon, they got married. At first they lived as if in poverty, but then they began a lifestyle of recklessly spending his money. He took to buying paintings, motorcycles, and cars. He also left Teresa alone for days at a time, claiming that he had gone to visit his mother, although it is not clear if he was telling the truth. He was very critical of Teresa and very controlling. They quarreled often, and he hit and punched her, although she also bit him and attacked him with a pair of scissors. When he found Teresa in bed with his best friend, he immediately left her. However, he insists that he did not leave because of the affair but simply because he did not love her anymore. In act 2, Lorenzo shows up at Teresa's house and meets Elena for the first time. He and Elena are immediately attracted to one another and share an interest in spending time in the country. In act 3, Elena tells Teresa that she and Lorenzo are in love. After Teresa shoots and kills Elena, she immediately calls Lorenzo to tell him what she has done.

Teresa Del Monte

Teresa Del Monte is a very lonely woman who talks incessantly to Elena, her young border, about her unhappy childhood and tumultuous marriage. Teresa has been separated from her husband, Lorenzo, for a year, but her life still revolves around him even though he only comes to visit her for fifteen minutes at a time. She is still in love with him and continually broods over both the good and bad elements of their relationship. She insists that, despite their violent quarrels and his cold treatment of her, she would take him back under any conditions.

Teresa continues to be supported by Lorenzo but is always putting ads in the newspaper in order to make more money. In act 1, she has placed three ads: one to rent out a spare room in her house, one to sell a piece of antique furniture, and one to sell their house in the country. When Lorenzo comes by to visit after a month's absence without explanation, he and Teresa immediately begin bickering about their marriage. Teresa expresses extreme resentment toward him about their relationship and about his family's treatment of her. Later, when Elena confesses to Teresa that she and Lorenzo are in love, Teresa appears to accept the situation in a calm, cool, and rational manner. She says she knows that Lorenzo will never want her back, so it shouldn't matter that he is now in love with Elena. She even offers to have her marriage annulled so that Elena and Lorenzo can get married. However, she also tells Elena that she may one day shoot herself, in which case Lorenzo would be a widower and could then marry Elena. Teresa explains that she bought herself a pistol when she was still with Lorenzo, thinking that one day she would shoot him. After Elena goes into her room, Teresa calmly gets her pistol and walks in after her. Teresa shoots and kills Elena, then immediately calls Lorenzo on the phone to tell him what she has done. She claims she did not intend to kill Elena, but it is unclear if this is true or not.

Giovanna Ricciardi

At the very end of act 3, just after Teresa has shot Elena, Giovanna Ricciardi rings her doorbell. When Teresa opens the door, Giovanna says she is answering the advertisement for the room and has come to look at it.

Elena Tesei

Elena Tesei is a twenty-year-old university student majoring in philosophy. She grew up in the country, where her parents run a small inn. Elena has little money and has been staying at her aunt and uncle's place in Rome while she attends college, but their children are too noisy, and she has trouble getting her work done. When the play opens, Elena has answered Teresa's add to rent out a room in exchange for light housework. Almost as soon as Elena comes in, Teresa begins talking incessantly about her unhappy childhood and her marriage. Elena listens politely and seems to be genuinely interested in what Teresa is saying.

In act 2, Elena has been living with Teresa for a while when she meets Lorenzo for the first time. Elena tells Lorenzo that she and Teresa have become best friends, that they have dinner together every night, and enjoy talking to each other. In act 3, Elena is about to move out of Teresa's house because, she claims, she cannot get any work done. She then admits to Teresa that she and Lorenzo are in love, which is the real reason she's moving out. She begs Teresa to remain her friend and is grateful when Teresa offers to have her marriage to Lorenzo annulled. Teresa tells Elena that she has a pistol and may shoot herself, but Elena begs her to get rid of it. When Elena goes into her room to pack, Teresa gets her pistol and shoots Elena, killing her.

Themes

Modern Relationships

In many of her plays, Ginzburg explores the experiences of women in modern relationships and modern marriage. In *The Advertisement*, Teresa describes the course of her relationship with Lorenzo, which develops in a very nontraditional way that is characteristic of the 1960s when Italian culture was becoming increasingly modernized and secularized. Soon after they meet, Teresa and Lorenzo go to bed together, and they stay in bed for three days straight. When they meet again six months later, they move in together, although they are not married.

Teresa and Lorenzo eventually marry but only because they think Teresa is pregnant. After they are married, however, it turns out that she is not pregnant. Although it is not mentioned directly, there is some implication that Teresa may have lied to Lorenzo about being pregnant to get him to marry her. However, *The Advertisement* was written three years before birth control became readily available in Italy, so it is believable that Teresa may genuinely have thought she was pregnant.

Though their lifestyle and their relationship are very nontraditional, Teresa and Lorenzo continue to harbor traditional expectations of marriage. They both accuse one another of not fulfilling their traditional marital roles. Teresa says that Lorenzo "was always telling me what I ought to have been like, how happy he'd have been if I'd been a wife," while she herself "did nothing but tell him how I'd have liked him to be a *husband.*"

After five years of marriage, they separate. Although Lorenzo has no intention of reconciling with Teresa, they are unable to get divorced because divorce was not legal in Italy until 1970. Their options are either to obtain a "legal separation" or to have the marriage annulled. Lorenzo's mother wants him to get a legal separation "with guilt" so that he will not have to pay her alimony. But Lorenzo opts for a separation "by mutual consent." He helps Teresa find a place to live and continues to provide her with financial support, although she claims he does not give her enough money.

When Elena tells Teresa that she is in love with Lorenzo, Teresa offers to have her marriage to Lorenzo annulled so that he and Elena can marry one another. Although there was no legal divorce in Italy at this time, the Roman Catholic Church had a provision for marital annulment, but the criteria for annulment was relatively strict. *The Advertisement* was written just a few years before many of the traditional marriage laws in Italy dictated by the Catholic Church were either liberalized or abolished in favor of laws more in keeping with modern secular lifestyles.

In *The Advertisement*, Ginzburg explores the themes of modern relationships and modern marriage at a pivotal moment in Italian history when women and men were caught between modern lifestyles and traditional expectations as well as traditional laws about marital relationships.

Obsessive Love

The character of Teresa in *The Advertisement* is a case study in obsessive love. Teresa knows early on that her love for Lorenzo is irrational, and yet she feels she cannot help loving him. After they first meet, they go to bed together almost immediately. Although she has been with many men before and is quite popular, Teresa is in love for the first time in her life. Lorenzo then completely disappears without explanation. When he runs into her again by chance, six months later, he acts as if nothing unusual had happened between them. Although she knows that Lorenzo is lying to her about why he disappeared, Teresa begs him to become involved with her once again.

Throughout five years of unstable and tempestuous marriage, Teresa is so completely consumed by her love for Lorenzo that she believes herself to be happy in a relationship that sounds intolerable. Lorenzo is extremely critical and controlling of Teresa. Yet she always does what he wants her to do because, as she tells Elena, "he was able to bully me because I loved him." Teresa adds that she lost her sense of self in submitting to his will, explaining that she obeyed him because "I no longer had a will of my own left." In addition, Lorenzo was often cold and indifferent toward her, forgetting to come home any time he ran into a friend and often leaving her alone for days at a time, supposedly to go visit his mother. Eventually, they engage in violent quarrels. It is unclear from Teresa's description if Lorenzo was the primary aggressor in these fights, although it seems as if he may have been. Teresa describes fights in which he would slap and punch her and she would bite and scratch him, even injuring him with a pair of scissors on one occasion.

After five years of marriage, Teresa has an affair with Lorenzo's dearest childhood friend, Mario. Upon discovering them in bed together, Lorenzo immediately leaves Teresa. He later claims that he left her, not because of the affair, but because he no longer loved her. In fact, he says that he had stopped loving her long before this. After this incident, Teresa begs Lorenzo to come back to her, but he refuses. Even after Elena informs her that she and Lorenzo are in love, Teresa admits that she will always love him and that she would be willing to take him back under any conditions whatsoever.

Teresa's obsessive love for Lorenzo is so extreme and irrational that she even bought herself a pistol before they were separated, thinking that she would kill him one day. Her obsessive love culminates in the irrational decision to shoot and kill Elena out of jealousy. Teresa even states beforehand that she knows Lorenzo will never want her back, and yet Lorenzo is the first person she calls after killing Elena, as if she believes that somehow this act of violence will bring him back to her.

Style

Simile

Throughout *The Advertisement*, Ginzburg makes use of recurring similes in order to describe and characterize the relationship between Teresa and Lorenzo. A simile is a figure of speech in which one thing is described as being like something else in order to illustrate a particular quality or set of qualities.

Teresa and Lorenzo both describe their marriage in disparaging terms, using several recurring similes to portray the negative qualities of their relationship. At one point, their marriage is described as a monster. Teresa says that they would sometimes quarrel over a single word she might have used unthinkingly, upon which, she says, "he'd drag out all the possible hidden meanings, so that word would grow and grow till it was like a monster." Likewise the negative elements of their marriage grow and grow to the point that the relationship becomes like a monster—an evil, violent, destructive thing that is out of their control.

Imagery

Lorenzo and Teresa both discuss their marriage using imagery of dirt and cleanliness in combination with similes comparing their relationship to the experience of drowning or suffocating.

Lorenzo compares his marriage to Teresa to the experience of drowning in order to express the feeling that the relationship is threatening to stifle his sense of individuality. According to Teresa, Lorenzo says that, with her, he "always felt he was sinking into a well full of black, muddy, stinking water; he was gradually losing himself, bit by bit." Lorenzo's image of sinking into a well is repeated when he meets Elena and tells her that his marriage to Teresa made him feel like he was "sinking into a black, muddy well." The comparison of their relationship to the experience of drowning is echoed in Lorenzo's repeated assertion that being married to Teresa was a stifling, smothering experience. He tells her, "I can't breathe in your world!"

The image of dirty well water is contrasted with Lorenzo's description of his friendship with Mario as "extremely delicate and pure and deep." The "pure" deep well of his feelings for Mario is thus contrasted favorably to his "muddy" feelings for Teresa. He claims that he refuses to let the fact that Mario slept with his wife "poison" their friendship, an image that continues the idea of well water as something pure that could potentially be poisoned.

Teresa picks up on Lorenzo's use of the terms "pure" and "muddy" to complain that he views his relationship with her as dirty, whereas his friendship with Mario is considered clean. She asks him:

What about me? I betrayed you, too. Your friendship with Mario has been washed and cleaned and rinsed, and now it's just as good as new. That's what you said. Your feelings about me can't be washed and cleaned, and rinsed, I suppose? Those feelings were dirtied forever, I suppose, and you've chucked them away? . . . I suppose your feelings for me weren't delicate and deep.

Symbolism

In addition to the figurative language of simile, Ginzburg makes use of symbolic imagery to characterize the relationship between Teresa and Lorenzo.

They first meet on a movie set, where Teresa worked as an extra. She comments that, working at the film studio, she was "never more than an extra." Her status as an extra in the movies is symbolic of her status in Lorenzo's life: she remains on the periphery of his world, an insignificant "extra," who never captures his full attention.

When they first met, a strong gust of wind blew up the sand from the set, a desert, into an artificial sandstorm. The tumult and violence of a sandstorm becomes a symbol of their marriage; Teresa comments, "Lorenzo says with me it was always like living in a sandstorm."

Further, the movie set on which they met depicted the ruins of the ancient city of Troy. This symbolizes what is to become of their relationship and Teresa's place in it. Just as Teresa sits among the ruins of an ancient city on the movie set, so she also dwells in the past throughout the play, ruminating endlessly over the remains of a relationship long since fallen into ruin. At one point, when she argues with him over an incident that occurred earlier in their marriage, Lorenzo tells her to "stop digging up ancient history."

Historical Context

Mussolini and Fascism in Italy

Ginzburg's life and works were profoundly affected by Italian history, particularly the era of fascism. Italy's fascist era began with the rise to power of Benito Mussolini. Mussolini, who had been an ardent socialist journalist, broke away from socialism and formed the Fighting Leagues brigade in 1919. His squads of militant Blackshirts, as his followers were called, soon began taking over cities and provinces in Italy. In 1921 Mussolini organized his followers to form a political party known as the National Fascist Party. In 1922 he held a fascist convention in Naples in order to concentrate his Blackshirt brigades for an armed march into Rome, known historically as the famous March on Rome. King Victor Emmanuel III was asked to declare a state of siege and call in military troops to put down the threat of armed insurrection. The King, however, refused to order any resistance to the advance of Mussolini's troops. Instead, the King invited Mussolini to become Prime Minister of Italy. Thus, before the fascist brigades even reached Rome, Mussolini had triumphantly taken over the Italian government, without violence and without resistance.

For the next five years, Mussolini worked at consolidating his power as the head of state and leader of the fascist party. He took on the title of the *duce*, which means leader. In 1932 he publicly declared his intention to make Italy a world power through imperialist expansion. He began to see Nazi Germany under Hitler as a useful ally and made an official visit to Berlin in 1936 to meet with Hitler. In 1938 Hitler visited Mussolini in Italy, thus securing their alliance. Influenced by the policies of Nazi Germany, Mussolini instituted severe restrictions on the Jews of Italy in 1938. These anti-Semitic laws declared Jews to be "unpatriotic" and banned them from holding government jobs, teaching, and publishing. This last ruling profoundly affected Ginzburg's life, as her husband was a publisher and she a writer. In 1939 the Italian-German military alliance was formalized by the signing of the Pact of Steel between Hitler and Mussolini.

Italy in World War II

Germany began World War II in 1939 and was joined by Italy in 1940. But Italy did not fare well in the war due to inferior military resources, and Mussolini soon became subordinate to Hitler's military command. In 1942 the Allied troops invaded Sicily, signaling the beginning of the end of Italy's partnership with Germany and Mussolini's stranglehold over Italian politics. In 1943 his own fascist followers held a meeting of the Fascist Grand Council, at which they voted to ask the king to remove Mussolini from office. The king obliged, and Mussolini was arrested the following day when he showed up at his office in defiance of this decision. Mussolini was in prison less than two months before a German military operation successfully carried out his escape. The Germans allowed him to set up a puppet government, although he remained completely under their command. Meanwhile, the Allies were advancing through Italy defeating German

forces. Mussolini was caught by Italian Communist supporters while trying to escape to Switzerland, and was shot and killed.

Italy in the Postwar Years

In 1944 Allied troops successfully liberated Rome from German control. World War II ended in 1945. By 1946 public sentiment in Italy leaned toward the dissolution of the monarchy in favor of a republic. King Emmanuel III had remained in power since the ousting of Mussolini but now abdicated the throne, naming his son, Umberto II, the new monarch. However, the monarchy was voted down, and both father and son were sent into exile. For the first time in Italian history, universal suffrage was instituted, allowing for women, as well as men, to vote on a Constituent Assembly. The result was the formation of a Constitution of the Republic of Italy, with a parliamentary system of government. The Italian constitution was set up in response to fascism, allowing for a weak central government and extensive civil liberties. The first parliamentary elections were held in 1948.

Italy enjoyed outstanding economic growth in the postwar years, adopting the phrase "economic miracle" to describe this postwar boom. By the mid-1960s, however, the economy began to slow down, resulting in the so-called "hot autumn" of 1969, during which labor unrest and general strikes were widespread.

Reproductive Rights and Marriage Laws in Italy

Ginzburg's play addresses concerns over the status of women in marital relationships during the 1960s. Although some changes in the status of women in Italy took place during the postwar years, significant changes did not occur until the period soon after *The Advertisement* was first produced. Women in Italy were granted the right to vote with the first elections of the new Italian Republic in 1948. However, most girls in Italy did not have the opportunity to receive a secondary (high school) education until the 1960s. Major changes in reproductive rights and divorce laws were instituted during the 1970s. Divorce became legal in Italy for the first time in 1970. Contraception became readily available after 1971. Many other traditional laws regarding marriage and family were abolished or liberalized in 1975. A referendum in 1978 legalized abortion by almost 68 percent of the Italian vote. The practices of both civil (non-religious) marriage and couples living together without being married became more common throughout the 1970s.

Critical Overview

Ginzburg's achievement in writing *The Advertisement* was honored with the international Marzotto Prize, which she was awarded in 1968. However, Ginzburg has been more widely recognized for her fiction, autobiographical novel, and nonfiction essays than for her dramatic writings. Only one of her ten plays has been translated into English.

Critics of *The Advertisement* focus on its feminist perspective, exploring the experiences of women in marriage and family in the historical context of a rapidly changing modern society. In the introduction to *Plays by and about Women*, in which *The Advertisement* is published in English translation, Victoria Sullivan and James Hatch focus on the character of Teresa as an example of the plight of women in modern society. They describe *The Advertisement* as a "frightening portrait of female limitation," for "her long-winded, egocentric monologues say something about the female state." Sullivan and Hatch comment that, "Having been brought up with no particular goal except to catch a man, she cannot support herself economically or emotionally." Teresa's compulsive speech is interpreted as a function of her feelings of powerlessness as a woman; as Sullivan and Hatch observe, "Teresa is a woman who has been reduced to talk as her only form of action."

Giuseppe Faustini, in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, has characterized the central theme of Ginzburg's plays as the dissolution of traditional family roles in modern Italian culture. Faustini observes:

Ginzburg's plays offer a microcosm of Italian society in transition. Her characters reflect the grief and anxiety that result from the disintegration of traditional social structures such as the institutions of marriage and family. She uses drama to examine the changing roles of marital and familial relationships and the effects of the political and social reforms that took place primarily in the 1960s and 1970s.

Faustini further points out Ginzburg's concern with the experiences of women in a changing society. In her plays, in particular, "she attempts to liberate female characters who are often controlled by their male partners." The characters of Elena and Teresa in *The Advertisement* "struggle within a male-dominated world as they seek to assert themselves within the changing roles of wife and mother." Faustini notes that the struggle of women to effectively communicate their experiences is highlighted in *The Advertisement*, as Teresa and Elena "try to adjust to marriage and divorce as they attempt to make sense of their chaotic emotions resulting from their inability to communicate." In her plays more so than her novels, Faustini asserts, "Ginzburg is able to express her preoccupation with women's dependence on men as fathers, husbands, or lovers. She shows deep concerns about the disintegration of family life and about what she regards as parasitic male behavior."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Brent has a Ph.D. in American culture, specializing in film studies, from the University of Michigan. She is a freelance writer and teaches courses in the history of American cinema. In the following essay, Brent discusses the psychology of Teresa in Ginzburg's play.

Through her development of the character of Teresa, Ginzburg demonstrates the ways in which childhood experiences affect adult psychology. Teresa's character is clearly rooted in her childhood circumstances, which she describes as horrible. In her relationship with Lorenzo, in particular, Teresa reproduces the traumatic, unhappy experiences of her relationship with her father and her uncle Giacomo (who may or may not have been her real father). Lorenzo's treatment of Teresa in many ways mirrors the way men treated her when she was a child. Teresa is thus drawn to Lorenzo, even though he makes her miserable, because he represents to her the father(s) who ignored her throughout her childhood.

Teresa explains to Elena that her father always claimed that she was the child of his brother, Giacomo. In other words, Teresa's mother was suspected of having had an affair with her husband's brother. Teresa doesn't know for sure if Giacomo was her real father, but it was understood by everyone that he might have been. Since her father did not consider her to be his, he ignored her and was cruel to her. When she was playing in the house, he would pick her up by one arm and throw her outside, claiming that she was not his child. He always said that he couldn't stand the sight of her and that he was going to move to America so he would never have to see her again.

Teresa always wondered why her uncle Giacomo did not come and claim her if she was really his child. Her only contact with him was when he would pass her on the street, and he would guiltily stop to give her some candies and then move on without a word. But Teresa always wondered, "Why doesn't he come and fetch me if I'm his?"

Eventually, Teresa was completely abandoned both by the man she knew as her father and by her uncle Giacomo. Her father moved to America and then sent for her brother to join him but left Teresa and her mother behind. After this, her uncle Giacomo no longer even stopped when he saw her on the street, but simply looked at her and moved on. Teresa thus grew up feeling cast aside by both her legal father and the man who may have been her biological father. This childhood experience has everything to do with her relationship with her husband, a man who ignores her and casts her aside throughout their marriage. Lorenzo regularly disappears without explanation and claims to have completely forgotten about her. Throughout their relationship, Teresa fears that he will never return from his frequent absences. This fear resonates with her childhood experience of having been ignored, forgotten, and abandoned by her father and uncle. The occasional moments of warmth Lorenzo offers Teresa resonate with her experience of being given scraps of attention by her uncle, in the form of a few sweets from his pocket when he passed her in the street. Likewise, Lorenzo symbolically hands her a

few morsels of affection during the course of their relationship but never really gives her his full attention or genuine love.

Teresa's fixation on Lorenzo as her object of affection develops in a manner that indicates that it is his careless treatment of her that resonates with her childhood experience of rejection by men. Lorenzo has physical features in common with Teresa's uncle: like Giacomo, Lorenzo is a small, short man. Although Teresa claims her first impression of Lorenzo was that "he was too small" and she remarks that she "never liked small men," she is unconsciously drawn to him, perhaps because his small frame reminds her of her uncle Giacomo. Throughout their marriage, Teresa continues to hope for that which is hopeless: that Lorenzo will truly love her and pay attention to her. Just as she experienced with her father and her uncle, Teresa wants more than anything to be loved by a man who will never love her. She tells Elena she would have liked "a bit of attention" from Lorenzo but "got no attention." In fact, she says, when he was out with his friends, he "never thought of me."

She first met Lorenzo by chance, and they spent two days and nights of passion together in her apartment. But on the third day he claimed he was going out to the store to buy cigarettes and never came back. When they run into each other six months later, he claims that he had met a friend at the store and had forgotten all about Teresa. He then tells her a "pack of lies," making up excuses for why he ran out on her. Even though she knows he is lying, Teresa feels she still wants him. When they run into one another by chance the second time, Lorenzo callously states that she shouldn't be upset about his walking out on her because she was never really a "person" to him anyway, as he doesn't really know her. Teresa's plea in response to this comment expresses the hope she harbored as a child, about how she wanted the men in her life to treat her: "I want you to realize that I'm a person. I want you to be considerate to me, and treat me with respect." Lorenzo's response to this plea is to walk out of the restaurant where they are talking and get into his car, prepared to leave her for good. But Teresa runs out after him, gets into his car, and begs him not to leave her. Lorenzo suggests she find a man who wants her and can give her what she wants and make her happy, but Teresa begs him to stay with her.

Teresa's pathetic display of sentiment for Lorenzo, a man who has abandoned her, lied to her, and essentially told her to get lost, resonates with her childhood feelings of wishing more than anything that the men who cast her aside (her father and uncle) would love her and welcome her into their homes, rather than throwing her outside as her father did, or disowning her as her uncle did. After Lorenzo leaves her, Teresa repeatedly writes and phones him to beg him to come back, but she gets no response. When Lorenzo stops by to visit Teresa, after they have been separated a year, she accuses him of not remembering anything she says to him or anything about her. She then brings up the time he went out to buy cigarettes and never came back, saying, "you'd forgotten I existed." Teresa's perpetual brooding over Lorenzo's disregard for her indicates the extent to which their relationship reproduces the trauma of her childhood, the trauma of being cast out by her father and her uncle, both of whom seemed to forget she existed.

Lorenzo's violent behavior toward Teresa also mirrors her father's rough treatment of her and his violent treatment of her mother. She says that she was frightened of her father, who "used to wake up in the middle of the night, and hit my mother, and make her nose and mouth bleed." When they're married, Lorenzo begins to hit and punch her during their arguments, which are often at night. Although Teresa doesn't mention if her mother ever fought back against her father, Teresa fights back against Lorenzo by biting him, and she even attacks him with a pair of scissors one time. Lorenzo claims that he left Teresa in part because he was afraid either he was going to kill her or she was going to kill him. And Teresa even bought herself a pistol, thinking that one day she might kill Lorenzo.

Teresa's traumatic childhood experiences have a significant effect on her adult experiences of the world. She tells Elena that, living alone after her separation from Lorenzo, she feels frightened at night and has a recurring nightmare. Her nightmare is clearly symbolic of her relationships with her father and her uncle, both of whom she wanted more than anything to pay attention to her and to love her. She describes her nightmare as:

A wall, a courtyard, old furniture . . . rags and broken glass. I'm wandering about the place, rummaging among the rags. Then I beat on the wall, and try to call out. I try to shout out, but I haven't any voice. I know that on the other side of the wall, there's something dreadful. . . . Someone. A person very dear to me. And I can't reach whoever it is, because of the wall.

Teresa's childhood was characterized by the vain hope of reaching, of having positive contact with someone very dear to her: her father (whether he be Uncle Giacomo or the man she knew as her father). But the men in her life, including Lorenzo, have always put a wall between their feelings and Teresa, never allowing her into their hearts. No matter how hard she begs or pleads, they are deaf to her cry for love and attention, as if she hadn't a voice to call out with. Her irritating habit, as an adult, of talking incessantly is an outward expression of her feeling from childhood that she was being ignored by the man who should have been a father to her, as if he were deaf to her needs. As a result, she is left alone, cut off from all love by an impenetrable wall; she is left with nothing but the ruins of old relationships, the rags and broken glass that symbolize the meager scraps of attention or affection she received from her father, her uncle, and from Lorenzo.

Teresa reproduces the symbolic experience of the nightmare even in her efforts to obtain work as an extra in the film industry. She says, "I was always at Cinecittà, waiting at the gates in case they wanted me." This symbolizes her experience of her relationships with her uncle Giacomo and with Lorenzo, waiting and waiting for them to want her but always locked outside the gates of their affections. Despite being discouraged, Teresa remains full of hope that she will be "wanted." She says that, at the Cinecittà, she "hardly earned a penny" but was "always full of hope" that she would be hired as an extra or even become a star. Likewise as a child, she always wondered why her uncle Giacomo didn't claim her and take her home with him. Though he never even

came close to treating her like she was his, Teresa remained full of hope throughout her childhood that he would one day want her.

Teresa's unconditional love for Lorenzo, despite his neglect, ill treatment, and downright rejection of her, indicates that, unconsciously, she regards him as a child regards a parent—in the sense that children generally want nothing but love and attention from their parents, no matter how badly they are treated by them. Toward the end of the play, she tells Elena:

I do still love him. I shall always love him. That's the trouble. If he were halfway across the world, and just lifted a finger, I'd run to him. I'd run to him on all fours. I'd always take him back, even if he was old, and lost, and starving; even if he was flea-ridden, and syphilitic, with holes in his trousers. That's the truth. Living with him was hell, but I'd give my life, my whole life, to have the time back when we were together.

Source: Liz Brent, Critical Essay on *The Advertisement*, in *Drama for Students*, The Gale Group, 2002.

Critical Essay #2

France is a librarian and teaches history and interdisciplinary studies at University Liggett School and basic writing at Macomb Community College near Detroit, Michigan. In the following essay, he discusses the theme of dysfunctional families and how they shape adult relationships in Ginzburg's play.

The Advertisement tells a tragic story about the destructive effects of dysfunctional families. The inability of Teresa and Lorenzo to find a clear way of breaking family patterns keeps them from becoming healthy and complete adults. Their lingering co-dependent behavior, combined with Teresa's obsessive and desperately jealous clinging to something clearly unrealistic and unattainable (a happy and mutually respectful marriage with Lorenzo) leads, in fact, to Elena's death. Though Elena plays an active role in the situation that leads to her death, it is the failure of both Teresa and Lorenzo to fully let go of their disastrous relationship that sets the trap for Elena. If Lorenzo did not continue to drop by Teresa's flat from time to time, Elena would not have fallen in love with him, or vice versa - at least not in front of Teresa. The jealous and frustrated Teresa detects their mutual chemistry immediately, and when Elena later confesses that she and Lorenzo intend to be together, Teresa shoots and kills her. The play is filled with a litany of clues about how and why this happened. Even though Teresa and Lorenzo recognize most of the sources and symptoms of their psychological and emotional problems, tragically they never completely address them or recover from them. Elena quickly finds herself enmeshed in their unresolved problems, places herself in mortal danger, and is murdered in act 3.

The audience learns about Teresa's past because she tells her life story to Elena in act 1. Only minutes after first meeting her, Teresa tells Elena: "I had a horrible childhood." Based on what she says about her family background, she is certainly telling the truth. This background is the primary key to understanding her personality and adult actions. As Robert J. Ackerman and Susan E. Pickering write in *Abused No More: Recovery from Abusive or Co-Dependent Relationships*, "A woman builds her repertoire of behaviors around the structural models her parents provide. It is through these models that she first learns how men and women act towards each other." In Teresa's case, the odds were stacked against her from earliest childhood. Her father physically beat her mother and claimed that his brother, Giacomo, fathered Teresa. As a child, Teresa was frightened of her father and confused because no one would confirm or disprove the accusation. Her father was cold to her and favored her brother. "He said my brother was his, but I wasn't," Teresa says. He cruelly said he couldn't stand looking at her and that he would abandon the family just so he wouldn't have to see her ever again. Eventually he did, moving to the United States.

By any standards, Teresa's father was clearly abusive and sadistic to her and her mother. To make matters worse, he would send Teresa's brother fine clothes, and eventually he sent money to her brother to join him overseas. By itself, the abusive pattern set by her father would have damaged Teresa's ability to have healthy adult relationships. But she had to endure even more abusive treatment at the hands of her

paternal grandparents, with whom she and her mother were forced to live because they were apparently too destitute to live on their own.

Teresa's terrible childhood lumbered on, damaging her (and her mother) further. Her possible biological father, Uncle Giacomo, might have helped them, but he had made a permanent break with his parents, the very people with whom she was living, over disputed land. When Teresa was small, he occasionally gave her sweets, but ultimately even this small contact ceased and he abandoned her, too. Moving in with Teresa's grandparents presented more grief. They both scolded her, even though she did most of the housework and fieldwork, like a combination peasant and servant; they blamed her for their son's departure for America. After they died, Teresa and her mother moved to another relative's house, Aunt Amata's, and there her mother became a full-time servant. Her mother had worked herself so hard that one of her legs became lame. Determined to escape her mother's fate, Teresa fled for Rome when she turned twenty. Assuming that Ackerman and Pickering's theories are correct, Teresa - who had horrible role models to follow, little love, and much abuse and neglect of all kinds - would not have been equipped to create a healthy relationship. Denied physical affection, she craved it; denied financial security, she sought it; denied a loving father or loving male of any sort, she was ever on the lookout for one. All of these needs set her on a collision course toward Lorenzo, who came from a dysfunctional family of a different sort. Though they met by chance, it was not by chance that they became enmeshed with each other in a very unhealthy, mutually destructive adult relationship.

Lorenzo's childhood was vastly different from Teresa's. His father was dead, but his mother owned substantial property and agricultural resources, some of which were earmarked for Lorenzo upon her death. He lived in wealth and never wanted for material comforts, but these came at a price: his mother tried to control him through her purse strings, and, to an extent, she succeeded. Furthermore, he idealized his sister, who married, had nine children, and lived in comfort. But as an adult, Lorenzo acts out against the confines set by his mother. He hates being controlled and rebels constantly. Still, his mother never cuts him off financially, so his behavior is reinforced by her indulgence. By the time he and Teresa meet, he has finished an engineering degree but does not work. He is rich, spoiled, aimless, dilettantish, self-indulgent, and easily distracted. He has a pattern of staying with Teresa for a short time, running away, and then eventually returning, much like the pattern he has with his mother. However, Teresa's poverty makes her financially dependent on him and, indirectly, on his mother's financial dispensations. He never loves Teresa in a traditional way; rather, he feels sorry for her, and she provides a way to act out against his mother. Lorenzo tells Elena in act 2, "I came to live with her because I wanted to annoy my mother . . . I *wanted* to live with a girl who was crazy and disorganized and confused." Given their dysfunctional family patterns and their inability to overcome them, the relationship between Lorenzo and Teresa was doomed from the start.

Dysfunctional family patterns spill over into Lorenzo and Teresa's marriage. They become codependent, a condition that reinforces negative attitudes and actions between them yet prevents them from coming to a healthy solution. There were many problems right from the beginning, and neither seemed able to stop them. Even on their

honeymoon, which Teresa insisted on having in her old hometown, she is bedeviled by old family forms of abuse. Her Aunt Amata told her, "You never deserved such a husband! Mind you hold on to him, you might easily go and lose him, a stupid crazy girl like you." And later, whenever they visited his mother, Lorenzo and his mother fought constantly. When Lorenzo and Teresa lived in Rome, they acted like crazy, spoiled children, wildly spending his money. He collected pictures, motorcycles, cars, and speeding tickets. He left her for days at a time, sometimes going back to see his mother, leaving Teresa anxious. They built a house in the country and then left it unoccupied, moving back to a Roman flat after only one night. "He was disorganized," Teresa tells Elena, "and *I* was disorganized, and the disorganization we managed to get into between us was unbelievable." Eventually, they began to fight whenever they were together. "We used to have frightful scenes," Teresa says; "he'd slap me, and I'd bite him and scratch him . . . and at five in the morning he'd go off on his motor-cycle, and I'd stay in bed crying." Hoping for Lorenzo to give her the unconditional love denied her in childhood, Teresa instead finds the same physical and emotional abuse committed by her father. Unlike her mother, though, Teresa fights back. And Lorenzo does not entirely abandon her, for he continues to give her money after they separate. But when they are together, they bicker constantly, even long after formally separating.

When the play begins, Teresa and Lorenzo have been separated for a year. Teresa has resorted to placing advertisements to try and control her life. But her life is actually out of control. She suffers from depression, insomnia, nightmares, and anxieties. She has aversions to old people and the countryside because they remind her of her childhood. She has no friends and hopes only for Lorenzo's permanent return, even though on a rational level she knows he will not live with her ever again. But he tortures her by returning occasionally, and he alleviates his guilt by giving her money. She lacks perspective and role models, people who could give her useful advice, and has no impulse control, she remains virtually paralyzed in an emotional sense. Her boarder, Elena, becomes her friend for a while, but upon meeting Lorenzo, Elena does the worst thing possible for their friendship by opting to leave with Lorenzo after she falls in love with him. Teresa, with her lack of impulse control and through murderous jealousy, shoots her. Interestingly, Elena is attracted to Lorenzo because he is like her own father, whom she dislikes on a conscious level because he lets her mother do most of the work at their country *pension* while he speaks English and plays games with guests. She seems to be acting out against her own somewhat dysfunctional family, for with Lorenzo she probably feels that she can correct the sins of her father and do a better job as his wife than Teresa has done. In any case, she will never have the chance to try.

By the end of the play, there is little hope for recovery because unattended dysfunctional family patterns have led to Elena's death and have permanently damaged the lives of the survivors. Though Lorenzo has attained a greater degree of self-knowledge, he remains enmeshed with his mother and Teresa. To get on with his life in a healthier manner, he needs to recover from family abuse as much as Teresa does.

Source: Erik France, Critical Essay on *The Advertisement*, in *Drama for Students*, The Gale Group, 2002.

Critical Essay #3

Guyette has a bachelor of arts degree in English writing from the University of Pittsburgh. In the following essay, he examines the roles of fate and free will in the lives of the characters portrayed in Ginzburg's play.

In the play *The Advertisement*, by Italian author Natalia Ginzburg, a lonely woman separated from her husband places a newspaper advertisement seeking a student to share her apartment. From that simple beginning unfolds a story that ultimately ends in tragedy. Although there are three main characters, one - the woman named Teresa - holds center stage throughout. As in life, the vagaries of chance and irony play a key role in this drama. Fate plays a role in every existence, but everyone must make life choices, and with those choices come consequences.

The story of Teresa's troubled life is unveiled when a twenty-year-old philosophy student named Elena answers Teresa's ad seeking a roommate. The woman Elena meets is a compulsive talker still obsessed with the man she separated from a year ago, even though their five-year marriage was chaotic and mutually self-destructive. In the first act, Teresa reels off her life's story in a series of lengthy monologues. The speeches, however, aren't just a way for Ginzburg to move the story along quickly. The playwright's technique is used as a way to shed light on the psychological underpinnings of the drama's central character, who considers herself a victim of unfortunate circumstance. "Teresa is a woman who has been reduced to talk as her only form of action," editors Victoria Sullivan and James Hatch observe in the introduction to their 1973 collection *Plays by and about Women*. The portrait that emerges is a disturbing one. Teresa "reveals herself as the self-indulgent victim of her own desperately chaotic personality," note Sullivan and Hatch. The editors continue the description, writing:

Her long-winded, egocentric monologues say something about the female state. Having been brought up with no particular goal except to catch a man, she cannot support herself economically or emotionally. Yet because of her demanding dependence and compulsive need to talk, no man can stand to live with her.

As a girl, Teresa's father accused her mother of cheating on him. He suspects that Teresa is not really his child, at first ignoring her and eventually abandoning both of them. The mother and daughter, left in dire financial straits, are forced to live with relatives. For a while, they reside with Teresa's aunt, who owns a small drapery shop. But as soon as she turns twenty, Teresa, determined not to spend her life "selling buttons," runs off to the adventure and uncertainty of life in Rome.

The Advertisement made its world premiere in 1968, a time when the women's movement was fast gaining momentum. It is not surprising that Teresa is sexually liberated. Young and beautiful, she finds occasional bit parts in films that require her to strip down to bra and slip. In one, she eats grapes while the director encourages her to "waggle" her hips erotically. It is while filming one of these movies that she has a chance

encounter with Lorenzo, a young engineer. They go out to dinner and then return to her apartment where they spend the next three days eating, sleeping, and making love.

Then Lorenzo leaves, saying he is going out briefly to get some cigarettes and doesn't come back. The abandonment is traumatic for Teresa, who gives up her attempts to become a movie star and finds work in a beauty shop. Six months later, again quite by chance, Lorenzo walks in to the beauty shop with a beautiful woman wearing a fur coat. Even though Lorenzo tells Teresa that he viewed her not as a person but as an object (with the revelation reducing her to tears), she pursues him and takes him to her bed once more.

Although Teresa didn't realize it when she first chased after Lorenzo, she soon discovers that he is quite wealthy. Instead of being a blessing, however, his riches are a kind of curse. After marrying, they become spendthrifts and live without purpose. Both are irresponsible. He buys and discards motorcycles and cars and piles up countless speeding tickets. Then they build a country villa, fill it with expensive paintings and antiques, but never move in.

Like the idle rich in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, the lack of struggle that defines daily life for the poor and working class leaves Lorenzo and Teresa free to pursue any sort of life they choose. But instead of putting that freedom to positive effect, they waste it on empty frivolity and spend far too much time focusing on their relationship of self-indulgence, which quickly becomes destructive.

Unlike the thoughtful and studious Elena, Teresa is no intellectual. Her husband goes so far as to describe her as "ignorant as a cook." Lorenzo is an intellectual, with a variety of interests from architecture to art but with a special passion for "pure physics." At his urging, Teresa tries to read books but can retain nothing. All of her attention is focused on her husband, and he finds that stifling. At first Lorenzo, a flawed character himself, attempts to help Teresa with what he describes as her "troubles and anxieties." What initially seemed to be love turns out to have been only pity. But her neuroses are so overpowering that they quickly begin to consume him. As he tells Elena, after making his entrance in the second act: "Instead of curing her anxiety I felt myself involved in it; I felt I was gradually sinking into a black, muddy well. I was losing my breath, my reason . . . a horrible sensation."

As a result, their marriage quickly dissolves into one of extreme dysfunction, marked by violent outbreaks. She'd bite and scratch him, and he would slap and punch her. "It was hell," Teresa tells Elena. Even so, she could not move beyond their relationship even after a year of separation. She'd sit alone in her flat, pining away for Lorenzo and yearning for a reconciliation that will never occur.

Through it all, she remains deeply disturbed. Hinting that more trouble is in the offing, Ginzburg ends the first act with a literary technique known as foreshadowing. By having Teresa allude to the terrible nightmares she experiences, the reader senses that something ominous awaits.

At the beginning of the second act, when Elena meets Lorenzo, she tells him how happy she is and what good friends she and Teresa have become. The fact that it all came about because of a stroke of good fortune is emphasized. "And to think," she says, "I came here just by chance, because of an advertisement!"

Lorenzo seems kinder than the man depicted by Teresa. He expresses concern for her well-being, is pleased that she has found a companion to ease her loneliness, and is continuing to support her financially even though Lorenzo knew she cheated on him by sleeping with his best friend. Despite his kindness, Teresa continues to berate Lorenzo and dredges up pieces of the past that he would rather forget. Having escaped the depressing whirlwind that was life with Teresa, he is trying to move on and find happiness. And, the author hints, a brighter future just might include Elena.

The brief third act opens with Elena describing her date the previous night with Lorenzo. Their relationship has progressed quickly. She's decided to move out of Teresa's apartment, telling her at first that the two spend so much time talking that she is having difficulty keeping up with her studies. But Teresa has already divined the real reason Elena is leaving. When Elena confesses that she and Lorenzo are in love, Teresa responds calmly that she knows. In fact, Teresa has already placed a new advertisement seeking another student to move into the room. Elena is taken aback by the display of equanimity. She expected Teresa to be upset, perhaps even irrational. After all, Teresa freely admits to being still in love with Lorenzo. But instead of anger, she summons up generosity, offering to obtain an annulment so that Elena and Lorenzo can marry.

As events reach their climax, both women philosophize about the unexpected twists of fate that have brought them to this junction. Elena says:

What a strange thing fate is! To think I came here by chance, by the merest chance, answering an advertisement! I might easily never have looked in the paper that day, and never have come here at all! And I'd never have known either of you.

Teresa, understandably, is less enthralled by the same train of events:

When people are happy, they never stop marveling at the great intelligence of chance; because it's made them happy. And when they're unhappy, they're not at all surprised to discover how stupid chance is. Stupid and blind.

Listening to her friend speak, Elena is struck by how out of character she seems, sensing how odd it is that she seems so calm, cold, and rational. Teresa continues on, ruminating further about the role fate has played in what has turned out to be a terribly unhappy life:

I could have married someone else, if I hadn't met him that day. I was so young and pretty. There were lots of men after me. I could have picked a nice, quiet, simple man, and had a settled, orderly life. Instead, I fall in love with him. That's my luck! He ruins me. Destroys me.

Life, however, isn't simply dictated by strokes of luck or misfortune. Fate plays a role in every existence, to be sure, but what defines the individual is how he or she reacts to the unexpected hand that each is dealt. Teresa's great flaw is her failure to realize that she is something much more than the victim of bad luck. In her mind, it is as if she bears no responsibility for the disaster that her relationship with Lorenzo became. After all, he seemed to thrive once they'd separated. Pursuing his passion for physics, he became productive and wrote a book about atoms. Had Teresa acted differently toward him, things might well have worked out for the better.

Even with their marriage in a shambles, she still has the opportunity to direct her life in a happier direction if she so chooses. She can do as Lorenzo did, sweeping away the pieces of a broken relationship to move on in search of contentment. Instead, she chooses to dwell on the past, sinking ever further into a pit of despair. It is a decision that leads to tragedy.

As the play builds to its climax, Teresa announces that she has a pistol in her purse and that she intends to use it, first on Lorenzo and then on herself. Elena begs her to throw the weapon away, and Teresa agrees. Relieved, Elena promises her distraught friend that she and Lorenzo will always be there for her. A few moments later - while both women are offstage - there is a gunshot. Teresa has killed Elena. The audience can't know for certain whether it was murder or an accident, but in either event, that newspaper ad that Elena read by pure chance has led her to an early grave.

Then the doorbell rings. It is another young woman who's come to see about the room she read about in a newspaper advertisement. 'And there you have it,' Ginzburg seems to be saying as the curtain falls. Life, with all its strange twists is, in the end, ironic.

Source: Curt Guyette, Critical Essay on *The Advertisement*, in *Drama for Students*, The Gale Group, 2002.

Adaptations

The Advertisement was performed via radio broadcast in 1968 by the British Broadcasting Company.

Topics for Further Study

Ginzburg grew up during the years of Mussolini's rise to power in Italy. Learn more about Mussolini and the fascist era in Italy. What was the course of Mussolini's political career leading up to his position as a fascist dictator? What was the response of the Italian people to fascism? What changes did Mussolini effect in Italian politics, society, and economy during the 1920s and 1930s? Are any of these changes evident today?

Learn more about the role of Italy in World War II. How did Italy come to be allied with Nazi Germany? What was the relationship between Hitler and Mussolini? How did the Italian-German alliance change and develop over the course of the war? What part did Italy play in the events of World War II? How was Italy affected by the Allied invasion of Sicily and the final years of the war?

Important Italian playwrights of the twentieth century include Luigi Pirandello and Dario Fo, both of whom were awarded Nobel Prizes in literature. Pick one of these authors and learn more about his life, career, and major plays. What central themes does he explore in his plays? What social or political issues does he address? How were his plays innovative and experimental in form? How did the Italian public, Italian government, and international audiences receive his plays?

In The Advertisement, Teresa works briefly as an extra in the Italian film industry, which was concentrated in the Cinecittà during the period in which this play was written. Learn more about the Italian film industry in the post-World War II era. What developments took place in Italian cinema during this period? Who were some of the major directors and actors? What were some of the important films of the postwar era?

Compare and Contrast

1960s and 1970s: During the early 1960s, Italy continues to enjoy the postwar era "economic miracle" of unprecedented growth and prosperity. By the mid-1960s, however, the Italian economy suffers a downturn. With the economy in decline, Italy, during the 1970s, is in the throes of political instability. The years 1969-1982 are characterized by acts of domestic terrorism.

1980s and 1990s: By the mid-1980s, economic conditions in the north of Italy have greatly improved, whereas in the south the economy is still weak. Mafia business practices and clandestine dealings with government officials dominate Italian politics and economy. Italian politics during the 1990s is characterized by scandal and turmoil. Widespread government corruption, particularly regarding the use of bribery, is brought to light in 1992. "Operation Clean Hands" results in the arrest and conviction of thousands of politicians, businessmen, and public officials for corruption and bribery, some in association with the Mafia. Many political parties are dissolved amidst the scandal, and new parties include a strong showing of neo-fascists in positions of power.

1960s and 1970s: In the 1960s, the second Vatican Council meeting of 1962-1965 inaugurates the era of the Roman Catholic Church known as Vatican II, characterized by the liberalizing of many Church policies. In the 1970s, Italian society becomes increasingly secularized. In opposition to the dictates of the Catholic Church, divorce is made legal in 1970, and abortion is made legal in 1978. Civil marriage, unsanctioned by the Catholic Church, becomes increasingly common. In 1976, television and radio broadcasting is no longer a state monopoly regulated according to the values of the Catholic Church, and the new, privatized broadcasting companies air programs critical of traditional values.

1980s and 1990s: By the mid-1980s, only 30 percent of Italian citizens regularly attend church (as compared to 70 percent in the 1950s). Pope John Paul II describes Italian society as "de-Christianized." The Concordat of 1985, agreed upon between the Vatican and the Italian government, rules that Roman Catholicism is no longer the state religion of Italy. Religious education is no longer compulsory in Italian schools. In the 1990s, the secularization of Italian culture and society as a result of the 1985 concordat and the liberalization of laws regarding marriage and reproductive rights continue to characterize Italian culture.

What Do I Read Next?

Ginzburg's plays have often been compared to the plays of the nineteenth-century Russian realist writer Anton Chekhov. *Chekhov: Four Plays* (1996) includes translations of his most celebrated plays: *The Seagull, Uncle Vanya, The Three Sisters*, and *The Cherry Orchard.*

Luigi Pirandello, the most celebrated Italian playwright of the twentieth century, received the Nobel Prize for literature in 1934. *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921), his most widely acclaimed work, is an experimental play in which characters who have been rejected by the author appear on stage to interrupt the dialogue of the legitimate characters.

The Italian writer Giorgio Bassani, born in the same year as Ginzburg, is notable for his works depicting the lives of Jews in fascist Italy. His *Five Stories of Ferrara* (1956) includes five novellas tracing the growth of fascism and anti-Semitism in Italy from the 1920s through the 1940s. His celebrated autobiographical novel *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis* (1962) describes the once-aristocratic lifestyle of a privileged Jewish family decimated by the Holocaust.

The Little Virtues (1962) is Ginzburg's collection of essays, based on her experiences in fascist Italy.

Family Sayings (1963), also translated as *The Things We Used to Say*, is Ginzburg's autobiographical novel about her childhood and writing career.

Dario Fo, one of the most celebrated Italian playwrights of the late twentieth century, was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1997. His many plays became both popular and controversial as avant-garde political comedies. Fo's major plays are collected in two volumes: *Plays, 1* (1992) and *Plays, 2* (1994). *Plays, 1* includes *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* (1974), perhaps his best-known play, which is based on true events surrounding the arrest and imprisonment of an Italian anarchist who, in Fo's account, is thrown from a fifth-story window during a police interrogation.

Further Study

Bullock, Alan, *Natalia Ginzburg: Human Relationships in a Changing World*, St. Martin's Press, 1991.

Bullock provides critical discussion of the works of Ginzburg in terms of her thematic focus on the experiences of women in modern relationships and the modern family.

Burke, Frank, *Fellini's Films: From Postwar to Postmodern*, Prentice Hall International, 1996.

Burke offers an historical account and critical analysis of the films of the celebrated Italian director Frederico Fellini, whose works were popular during the period in which Ginzburg's play was written.

Jeannet, Angela M., and Giuliana Sanguinetti Katz, eds., *Natalia Ginzburg: A Voice of the Twentieth Century*, University of Toronto Press, 2000.

Jeannet and Katz introduce a collection of critical essays on the works of Ginzburg in terms of her representations of modern life.

Ridley, Jasper Godwin, *Mussolini*, St. Martin's Press, 1998.

Ridley provides a biographical account of the life and career of Benito Mussolini in the context of twentieth century Italian history.

Stille, Alexander, *Benevolence and Betrayal: Five Italian Jewish Families Under Fascism*, Summit Books, 1991.

Stille provides accounts of the experiences of five Jewish families in fascist Italy.

Zuccotti, Susan, *Under His Very Windows: The Vatican and the Holocaust in Italy*, Yale University Press, 2000.

Zuccotti offers a critical historical account of the role of the Roman Catholic Church in the persecution of Italian Jews during the Holocaust.

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Ackerman, Robert J., and Susan E. Pickering, *Abused No More: Recovery for Women from Abusive or Co-Dependent Relationships*, TAB Books, 1989.

Faustini, Giuseppe, "Natalia Ginzburg," in *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, Volume 177: *Italian Novelists Since World War II*, edited by Augustus Pallotta, Gale Research, 1997, pp. 141-49.

Ginzburg, Natalia, *The Advertisement*, translated by Henry Reed, in Plays By and About Women: An Anthology, edited by Victoria Sullivan and James Hatch, Random House, 1973, pp. 295-344.

Sullivan, Victoria, and James Hatch, "Introduction," in *Plays By and About Women: An Anthology*, edited by Victoria Sullivan and James Hatch, Vintage Books, 1973, p. xii.

BOOKRAGS

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Project Editor
David Galens

Editorial
Sara Constantakis, Elizabeth A. Cranston, Kristen A. Dorsch, Anne Marie Hacht, Madeline S. Harris, Arlene Johnson, Michelle Kazensky, Ira Mark Milne, Polly Rapp, Pam Revitzer, Mary Ruby, Kathy Sauer, Jennifer Smith, Daniel Toronto, Carol Ullmann

Research
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Data Capture
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Imaging and Multimedia
Randy Bassett, Dean Dauphinais, Robert Duncan, Leitha Etheridge-Sims, Mary Grimes, Lezlie Light, Jeffrey Matlock, Dan Newell, Dave Oblender, Christine O'Bryan, Kelly A. Quin, Luke Rademacher, Robyn V. Young

Product Design
Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

For more information, contact
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535
Or you can visit our Internet site at
http://www.gale.com

Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

Editor, Drama for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535