

As Bees in Honey Drown Study Guide

As Bees in Honey Drown by Douglas Carter Beane

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Introduction

The play opened in New York City at the Drama Department (where playwright Douglas Carter Beane is the cofounder and artistic director) on June 19, 1997. But four weeks later, the play moved to the Lucille Lortel Theatre in the West Village, where it played for a year and earned Beane the prestigious Outer Critics Circle John Gassner playwriting award (1998) and a nomination for the Drama Desk Best Play. Most critics concur that *As Bees in Honey Drown* is Beane's best play to date. Audiences seem to agree, as the play continues to travel around the United States, playing in most major cities as well as on many college campuses.

According to Stefan Kanfer, for the *New Leader*, much has been written in literature about con artists. But most of the con artists previously depicted have been men. Beane, however, has concocted a female version, which Kanfer describes as a "postmodern lady no better than she has to be, in a world considerably worse than it ought to be." Her name is Alexa Vere de Vere. And although Evan Wyler, an author and the alter ego of the playwright, is the protagonist of this play, Alexa is the focal point. She is pretty, intelligent, and creative. But she is also very crooked. However, she would not be as successful as she is if so many people were not so willing to take the shortcut to fame and fortune that she offers them. And that is the hub around which this play revolves.



Author Biography

Douglas Carter Beane has stated that his first and foremost passion is theatre. He has written and directed numerous plays and is the co-founder and artistic director of an avant-guard theatre group in New York called the Drama Department. But, Beane has not limited his writing experiences to live performance plays. He is also a screenwriter, having written his first movie script while he was babysitting for some friends. Beane is also working on a script for a television series.

Beane has won many awards, but his *As Bees in Honey Drown* (1997) gathered the most praise. It was an off-Broadway hit that won the 1998 Outer Critics Circle John Gassner playwriting award and garnered a nomination for the Drama Desk Best Play. Most critics refer to *As Bees in Honey Drown* as Beane's best work.

Some of Beane's other plays include *The Country Club* (1999); *Advice from a Caterpillar* (1999), which was made into a movie the same year and won an award for the best film at the Aspen Comedy Festival; *Music from a Sparkling Planet* (2001); *Mondo Drama* (2003); and the musical comedies *The Big Time* (2004) and soon to be produced *Lysistrata Jones*.

In 1995, Beane took a break from theatre and wrote the screenplay *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar*, which starred Patrick Swayze and Wesley Snipes, who play drag queens. In the works is another movie written by Beane called *How Life Is* and a 2005 release called *Bewitched*.



Plot Summary

Act 1, Life

Beane's play *As Bees in Honey Drown* opens with the main character, Evan Wyler, in a photographer's studio, having his picture taken for a magazine promotion of his first novel. The photographer convinces Evan that the way to sell his novel is for Evan to remove his shirt. Although Evan hesitates, in the end, it is this half-nude photograph that is published. It is also this photograph that attracts the attention of Alexa Vere de Vere, who appears in the next scene, wining and dining Evan.

Alexa is not only beautiful to look at, she is also very flashy. She throws high profile names around almost as readily as she spends cash. She flatters Evan as they eat lunch and cajoles him into working with her, writing the story of her life. She also carefully choreographs an image of herself as being well endowed financially but in great need of assistance with almost every other aspect of her life. She also makes huge promises, which catches Evan, who dreams of money and fame. He is also taken in by her neediness.

Scene 3 opens inside the dressing room of a swanky department store. Evan is being assisted by a clerk named Ronald. Alexa whisks in and out of the room, bringing new accessories with her and stopping briefly to admire how good Evan looks in his new suit. As Evan is distracted, Alexa also shops for herself. When it comes time to pay, she asks Evan, as she had previously asked him in the restaurant, to pay for everything with his credit card. She will, she promises, repay him in cash, as she did in the restaurant. Only this time, in the confusion she has intentionally caused, she starts to hand Evan the money, then, while he is not looking, Alexa stuffs the money back into her own pocket. She does this, however, only after giving Ronald some of the loose bills. Ronald is part of Alexa's con. He promotes her while Evan is dressing, dropping tidbits of information about how much Alexa has helped other almost-famous personalities become bright and successful stars. Then, Alexa rushes Evan out of the department store before he has time to think or remember that he has not yet been reimbursed for the credit card charges that he just signed for.

In the next scene, Alexa tells Evan, while they drive in a limousine, that she has lived an extraordinary life that needs to be recorded. She believes that her life will make a great movie. She is too busy to write it because she is so involved in living it. So she asks Evan to write it for her. As she begins relating details, Evan struggles to make sense of it all. He even, at one point, questions the veracity of her story. She mentions events that could only have happened before she was born. Alexa slips away from this confrontation by stating that she is only adding dramatic effect.

The scene becomes very distracting again as more people enter. Swen, a male model, Skunk, a rock star, and his backup singers join the couple in the limousine as they head for a very hip nightclub. Alexa dominates the conversation and continually drops the



names of famous people. She consciously builds her image until she is seen as bigger than life. As they are sitting in the nightclub, a so-called friend of Alexa's, Carla, makes a brief appearance. Carla collaborates and reinforces Alexa's make-believe role as maker of rising stars. Carla pretends to be interested in promoting Evan herself. Alexa insists that Evan is her find, and she will take care of his future.

Scene 5 takes place on the Staten Island Ferry. Alexa and Evan are alone. Alexa further enhances the fantasy of Evan's future. "You're not the person you were born," Alexa tells Evan. "Who wonderful is? You're the person you were meant to be." Alexa asks about Evan's background in this scene and after he tells her about it, she has him throw his old clothes into the water, as he says good-bye to his old self.

Evan and Alexa are in a bedroom at the Hotel Royalton in scene 6. Evan is unsuccessfully attempting to write the story of Alexa's life. He tells her that he is not the kind of writer who can easily see into other people's heads and understand the motivations behind their actions. He asks Alexa more probing questions to help him understand her past. Alexa gives in and tells him about how her husband committed suicide. This draws Evan even closer to her, especially when Alexa states that she is nothing and is unworthy of love. Shortly after this, Evan, a homosexual, makes love to Alexa and tells her that he loves her.

Evan gets beaten up in scene 7 by Skunk, the rock star. Skunk has discovered that Alexa is not going to pay him money she has promised him. Skunk believes that Evan is in on the swindle and punches him mercilessly. He calls Evan a grifter, which is another word for a con man. In the following scene, Evan is on the phone. He is bleeding and confused and trying to get a hold of Morris Kaden, an executive at Delta Records, where Alexa has told Evan she is a manager. When Kaden's secretary hangs up on him, stating that she has never heard of Alexa, Evan calls the hotel where he was last with her. The hotel clerk tells Evan that Alexa has checked out. The clerk also informs Evan that there is an outstanding bill that Alexa has said Evan will pay. Act 1 ends with Evan crying out: "It isn't true. It isn't true, isn't true!"

Act 2, Art

Scene 1 is very brief. The audience watches Alexa begin her con with yet another victim. Then scene 2 quickly takes over, in which Evan, still bleeding, enters Morris Kaden's office. When Evan mentions Alexa's name, Kaden takes Evan into his private office, where he tells Evan everything he knows about her. Morris was once a victim of Alexa's too. He tells Evan to forget about the incident, to accept it as a very serious lesson. As Morris talks, a vision of Alexa from the past seeps through. She is using the same lines on Evan that she has used on everyone else, and Evan realizes how badly he has been taken by her.

"Doesn't anyone ever get her back?" Evan asks Morris. "Most people have lives," Morris answers. But Evan wants revenge. Morris provides a few leads as Evan hopes to track down Alexa.



In scene 3, Evan is on the phone talking to a dancer named Illya Mannon, who confesses she too was conned by Alexa. Illya gives Evan a few more names of victims, including Michael Stabinsky, whom Evan contacts and makes arrangements to meet.

The next scene takes place in Michael's studio/loft. The two men, in the course of their discussion about Alexa, discover they are both homosexual, and there is a bit of sexual tension displayed between them. As they talk, Michael fills out the true background of Alexa, including her real name, which is Brenda Gelb, and how she started her con game when she helped Michael, who is a painter, sell some of his work. The one piece that did not sell, Michael confides, is the one he calls *As Bees in Honey Drown*.

As Evan is about to leave Michael's loft, scene 5 bleeds into the present, and the audience watches a young violinist, Ginny Cameron, who is being persuaded by a photographer to pose half-naked for a shot that will be used in a magazine to promote her. Ginny is then seen talking to Alexa, who wants to meet with her. Next, Ginny is on the phone with Evan, who finds out that Ginny is scheduled to meet Alexa at the Four Seasons restaurant. Evan then plans his revenge. Evan calls Morris, Skunk, Illya, and several others, all of them Alexa's victims. He tells them to gather at the Four Seasons where he hopes Alexa will appear.

In scene 6, Evan returns to his apartment and listens to his telephone messages. He hears the voices of some of the people who plan to meet at the restaurant. The last voice he hears is that of Ginny, who tells Evan that she made a mistake and told Alexa about Evan's plan of revenge. As he turns, Evan sees that Alexa is standing in his apartment. She tells Evan that he is very much like her and he should join her in her escapades. They would make a great team. She tries to convince him that the life of a writer is really very boring. She kisses Evan. He tells her that he has talked to Michael and tells Alexa to leave. She says he is not a good writer. He tells her that he does not need her.

The revenge party at the Four Seasons went on even though Alexa was missing. In scene 7, Illya and Morris give an accounting of how great the get-together was.

Scene 8 takes place in Michael's loft. They talk about art. Evan feels lost. He has lost his muse. Michael is still very much involved in painting. Michael gives Evan the notebook Evan left at Michael's place the last time he visited. The book is filled with notes that Evan took throughout his encounters with Alexa.

Scene 9 begins with a dialog between unnamed muses. They mimic bits of conversation that took place between Evan and Alexa. Michael appears briefly, suggesting that Evan and he have developed a relationship and are living together. Evan is writing. As he continues to write, Alexa appears in Morris's office. She is angry about having just seen Evan's new book, in which Evan has recounted their affair. Alexa wants to sue Evan. Illya appears, reading Evan's book. She reads some of the lines out loud. Then, Evan joins her and so does Morris.



Act 1, Scene 1

Act 1, Scene 1 Summary

The story of *As Bees in Honey Drown* is summed up in one of the first lines from the play's central character: a young man gets caught up in a lifestyle that blurs the line between fantasy and reality. Faced with the prospect of fame and fortune, he falls under the spell of a scheming promoter, discovers he's been defrauded to the tune of several thousand dollars and concocts a scheme of his own to get revenge. This play is a comic satire on the lure of success, containing several pointed references to both gay sensibility and contemporary popular culture.

The first act is subtitled "Life." In a photographer's studio, Wyler, a young man in his twenties, is posing for publicity photos. Conversation between the Photographer and his bored assistant Amber (who speaks about herself in the third person) reveals that Wyler has just written his first novel about a young man in his twenties who becomes caught up in a conflict between fantasy and reality. The Photographer asks whether Wyler is related to two famous people with the last name of Wyler. Wyler's real last name is Wollenstein, and his real first name is Eric. He felt the name "Eric Wollenstein" wouldn't look good on a book cover. The Photographer tells Wyler to take off his shirt. Wyler says that a sexy image isn't what he wants to present, describing what he wants to look like. The Photographer immediately interprets this as the artistic sensitive personality. He says that pictures like that don't sell books and again tells Wyler to take off his shirt. Wyler admits that selling books is the whole point of photo shoots like this, and with Amber's help, he takes off his shirt. The Photographer tells him to make love to the camera.

Act 1, Scene 1 Analysis

The importance of the act's subtitle, "Life," becomes clear when it's considered together with the subtitle of Act 2, "Art." It seems there are deliberate echoes here of the well-known theory that art imitates life, a premise often reversed to suggest that life also imitates art. In the case of *As Bees in Honey Drown*, both versions apply.

"Life" essentially tells the stories of two lives, how Wyler's is taken over by Alexa and what Alexa's to this point has been. The irony is that Wyler's life actually becomes art as created by Alexa. However, Alexa's life is almost nothing BUT art, fabrications shaped to create a particular impression or feeling, based on just enough truth to be believable. This definition of her life might be a passable definition of art in general. "Art," as in Act 2 of the play, takes the reverse tack and tells the story of how the created lives of both Wyler and Alexa fall apart, a situation that eventually leads to the revelation of what those lives really are. The irony here is that in the process of reclaiming his life and revealing the truth about Alexa's, Wyler uses his experience to create art.



All the aforementioned aspects of the relationship between life and art in this play make the general thematic point that for creators of art, life and art are indistinguishable. This idea is dramatized in the opening scene, in which Wyler's description of his book illustrates and foreshadows the journey he's about to go on as a character, and in which his conversation with the Photographer illustrates the secondary theme exploring the differences between image and reality. This theme, in turn, is further explored through Wyler's comments about his name, which illustrate his unhappiness with himself and indicate his willingness to reinvent his life in a more artful way. Most importantly, they provide an explanation of why he becomes so willing to accept, at least to a point, the increasingly outrageous character, claims and stories of Alexa.



Act 1, Scene 2

Act 1, Scene 2 Summary

Alexa sits at a table in an expensive hotel, breakfasting on coffee and pastries. Wyler arrives. Alexa greets him, and in the kind of overly extravagant, self-consciously clever language she almost always uses, she tells him that she wants him to write the screenplay of her life. She flatters him about his writing, drops the names of several famous people she says want to appear with her in the movie and says that she works in the music industry as an associate of Morris Kaden of Delta Records. Wyler makes a clever comment about the kind of tea she must be drinking to be talking so much, and Alexa comments on how clever writers are, how observant they are and how "no-one can pull the cashmere over [their] eyes."

Alexa asks how long it took Wyler to write his book, and Wyler says nine years, explaining that he's a slow writer and that he's not good at listening to people, figuring out what's going on in their minds and summing it up in short, clever sentences. Alexa says that doesn't matter. She adds that he's exactly the kind of writer she's looking for and that she's in conversations with several people to raise money to make the movie. Then, she starts giving him some of the details of her life. These include her being part Indian, her being put into an arranged marriage at fourteen and her husband dying shortly afterwards leaving her penniless. She says that that was when she developed her philosophy, but when Wyler asks what that philosophy is, she says that that's what he's there for - to define her, at a fee of a thousand dollars a week. She goes on to say that she's useless with money and then hands him a thousand dollars in cash. She urges him to not talk about their arrangement with his agent, saying that agents shouldn't get a percentage of any deals they had nothing to do with making. She then calls for the check, and as she's waiting, she asks Wyler whether the arrangement interests him. Wyler talks at length about how he's spent his whole life making sacrifices so he can complete his novel, saying that no one ever tells writers about the gap between critical success and financial success. He concludes by saying he's very interested.

As Alexa tells Wyler how happy she is that he's interested, she says that there's one thing she has to know before finalizing any business relationship. She asks, which of the Three Stooges he would sleep with? She goes into a long explanation of what each answer would mean, and as she does so, she says she needs a receipt for breakfast but doesn't have any credit cards because her big-name accountant won't let her have them. Wyler says he can put it on his credit card, and she can give him cash, which she agrees to and then gives him fifty dollars. As a waiter deals with the credit card and the check, Alexa says how much she's looking forward to working with Wyler. They can start work in two days, and she's wondering whether he loves men. Wyler says he sleeps with them, but he doesn't love them. She makes a witty comment about how enchanting "emotional cripple[s]" are, tells him to meet her in the men's wear department at a famous department store so she can get him a good suit before they have lunch



together and then disappears into an elevator. Wyler comments to himself that this is "excellent."

Act 1, Scene 2 Analysis

The primary purpose of this scene is to introduce the character of Alexa, who drives the action of the act with the same kind of forceful intensity as she drives the creation of Wyler's new life. Her way of speaking comes across as completely artificial. The people she names as acquaintances and colleagues seem quite unbelievable, and her idea of making a movie of her life is incredibly egocentric. Still, Wyler buys it. At first it might be difficult for us to understand why, but his reasons become clearer as the act progresses. Part of the reason is that he doesn't particularly like who he is, but as the action of the play suggests and Alexa herself comments, he also wants the kind of life she seems to have. She appears connected, exotic, exciting and fueled by apparently endless amounts of money. Alexa represents the opportunity to become a celebrity, or more importantly to become known, and as the play suggests there aren't a lot of people, particularly artists, who could resist that opportunity. The temptation is one that she herself experienced, as the story told in Act 2 reveals.

Another aspect to Alexa's character is that everything she says throughout this act foreshadows either later stories she tells or stories told about her in Act 2, when the truth of who she is and what she's all about is revealed. One of the names she drops, Morris Kaden, plays a key role in the revelation of that truth. Her job offer to Wyler, what happens with Wyler's credit card, the story of her arranged marriage and the reference to the Three Stooges are all part of that truth as well, the meaning of which also becomes clear in Act 2. Finally, the comment about the cashmere sweater is a particularly important piece of foreshadowing. This is also the closing line of the play. By that point, it has an entirely different meaning, the aspects of which will be discussed later.



Act 1, Scene 3

Act 1, Scene 3 Summary

In the fitting room at the department store, an effeminate clerk named Ronald helps Wyler out of his old clothes and into his new suit, talking about how wonderful Alexa is and how everyone she's ever helped has become extremely famous. As Wyler is getting down to his underwear, Alexa appears with a shirt for him to try on. Ronald and Alexa banter as Wyler puts it on, and then as Alexa hands him the pants from the suit, Ronald quotes jokingly from *Auntie Mame* and goes out to find a tie. As Wyler puts on the pants, he tells Alexa that he feels guilty that she's paying for the suit after offering him such a good salary. Alexa assures him that the purchase of his first real suit is a moment she needs to be part of and that he'll have a chance to buy all kinds of suits on his own. She then helps him into the jacket, kisses him for luck and runs out to look for shoes as Ronald comes in with a tie. Ronald talks about how Alexa reminds him of every woman he's ever loved in a movie. Wyler feels that in spite of her strength, she still seems vulnerable and needs to be taken care of. Alexa comes in with an armful of shoes and runs out again looking for cologne.

Wyler puts on a pair of shoes, looks at himself in the mirror and happily can't believe what he sees. Ronald goes out. Alexa comes in with colognes, a bundle of cash and a suit that she's bought for herself to compliment Wyler's. The cash spills to the floor. Wyler picks it up, and Alexa sprays cologne samples into the air. Ronald hands Wyler his receipt just as he's getting cologne accidentally sprayed in his face. Alexa asks for the time, and Ronald tells her. Alexa shouts that she's late. She grabs Wyler, takes the cash from him, puts it in her pocket and pulls him out as Ronald hands him a bag containing his old clothes.

Act 1, Scene 3 Analysis

In the midst of all the verbal and physical comedy of this scene, there are a couple of dramatically relevant situations. The first is Ronald's comment about *Auntie Mame*, a film made in the 1950s based on a young man's childhood memories of his eccentric, extravagant aunt. Both the novel and the movie tell the story of how the worldly Auntie Mame transformed the naive child into a wiser, experienced man, a transformation clearly echoed here in Alexa's efforts to transform Wyler. As well, both the book and the movie can be defined as camp, a genre of dramatic presentation in which style is just as important as substance if not more so, and in which such style is extravagant and exaggerated, often acerbically funny and defiantly individualistic. Camp is particularly appealing to gay men, making characters like Auntie Mame icons and their way of being, talking and living the pinnacle of success. Alexa is a campy character, meaning that her very personality is another reason that Wyler, a lonely gay man who has little sense of his own individuality, falls under her spell. References to *Auntie Mame* recur in Act 2 as the truth of where and how Alexa defined her personality becomes clear, a

moment foreshadowed in Ronald's comment about how she sounds like his favorite movie women.

The other dramatically relevant situation in this scene is the business with Alexa, the colognes, the money, the receipt and her purchase of a suit. All of these situations are again part of her pattern of behavior, creating distractions and manipulations to defraud her victims, all of which are defined by Kaden in Act 2.



Act 1, Scene 4

Act 1, Scene 4 Summary

This scene takes place in a series of locations as Wyler narrates his day with Alexa. Action moves between Wyler writing in his notebook and the scenes he describes. Wyler makes a note. In the limousine on the way to lunch, Alexa talks about her childhood in India. She comments on how charming it is that Wyler writes his notes in a book instead of on a laptop computer.

Wyler makes another note. In the limousine on the way back from lunch, Alexa and Wyler are joined by Swen, a hunky Swedish model who has just completed a photoshoot. Alexa says that she at first refused an arranged marriage and then met Michael, who - Just as she's about to go on, Swen turns the radio up, and she becomes distracted. Wyler asks where they're going, and Alexa tells him they're on their way to the airport to pick up a rock band she's signing.

Wyler makes another note. In the limousine on the way back from the airport, Alexa, Wyler and Swen are joined by Skunk, a punk rock musician, and two female Backup Singers. Alexa talks about her small wedding, attended by only five hundred people. She then opens the skylight in the limo, saying that the interior of the limo is far too noisy to talk in. She and Wyler stand up as Alexa continues talking, saying that the wedding was part Jewish owing to her husband's faith and part Hindu, owing to her family background. Skunk passes them up a bottle of champagne, and they drink.

Wyler makes another note, and he, Alexa, Swen, Skunk and the Backup Singers all sit down to dinner at a fancy restaurant. Alexa talks about her early, very successful days in the recording industry, talking about how Wyler and Skunk must both be feeling the same kind of excitement as her discovery in those days, Illya Mannon. Skunk asks whether the money changing from pounds to dollars went all right, and Alexa says that it did but she stupidly forgot the envelope with the cash at her office. She opens her purse to get out some cash, knocks over a drink, fusses about an equipment demand made by the band and says there's too much going on for her to remember. Wyler offers to take care of the restaurant bill and make the arrangements for the equipment, saying that the costs can go on his credit card and that he can get reimbursed later. As he comments that she would be lost without him, Alexa calls him a life-saver, saying that if she were only a boy they could have a lot of fun.

Wyler makes another note, saying that after the restaurant he and Alexa get into the private VIP room of a very upscale club. In the club, they sip cocktails as Alexa tells the end of a story about how she and her husband separated. Carla, well built and barely dressed, appears and greets Alexa, who introduces her to Wyler, saying that he's writing the movie of her life. Carla comments that she loved his book and tells Alexa that she should have taken out the film rights. She and Alexa try to come up with a date to have



drinks, and when they can't agree on a time, they decide to wait until Alexa gets back from France.

Carla leaves, and Alexa comments that that's the way deals are made. Executives hold meeting after meeting in any circumstance they can, trying to come up with more and more that's newer and newer to present to "fun-starved modern civilization." She describes people holding on to society even as they're struggling to recreate it. She uses the phrase "as bees in honey drown" to describe that struggle and suggests that this kind of life is what Wyler has always dreamed of - making deals and making money and being fabulous. Wyler says that everyone has that dream. Alexa comments that he's fulfilling it by working on her movie. Wyler makes another note, saying that after the club they get on the Staten Island Ferry at four in the morning, just because they can.

Act 1, Scene 4 Analysis

This scene illustrates how Wyler becomes more deeply involved with Alexa at the same time as Alexa's stories and schemes are also becoming more involved. Several elements of foreshadowing appear in this scene, including the reference to Wyler's notebook. The notebook plays an important role in his creation of art at the end of Act 2. The reference to Illya Mannon and the appearance of Skunk foreshadow their roles in the action later in the play. The repeated pattern of Alexa creating distractions any time questions of money comes up is also repeated in this scene, serving as another foreshadowing of Kaden's revelation of who she truly is and what she truly does.

At the same time, Alexa's comments about the entertainment industry and society's never-ending quest for more amusement take the play's themes into the realm of satire. In this genre of comedy, foibles and failings of society or individuals are exaggerated to indicate how dangerous, or in this case empty, they truly are. To be specific, her speech about the nature of the entertainment business makes the secondary thematic point that the pursuit of fame and celebrity is both pointless and addictive. The play's action illustrates this theme by showing how Wyler, as a result of this pursuit, is left with nothing. He can only live a full and genuine life after he's abandoned it.

The phrase "as bees in honey drown" is quite possibly a quote from a film or a work of literature, given that Alexa tends to use words, phrases and images from various works of art to define herself and her ideas. It's an image that speaks of the way people, animals or individuals of any kind can be destroyed by a world of their own making, with the image of honey referring to a world of sweetness or happiness that feels safe and secure but is in fact dangerous. In this context, the phrase symbolizes the way that Wyler comes close to losing his own sense of identity as the result of entering into Alexa's undeniably appealing world.



Act 1, Scene 5

Act 1, Scene 5 Summary

Alexa and Wyler stand by the railing on the Staten Island Ferry, Wyler holding the bag containing his old clothes. Wyler expresses uncertainty about their work, and even though Alexa reassures him that soon enough they'll be heading to Hollywood, he still has doubts. He wonders about some of the details Alexa has mentioned about her life and about her name. She admits that she enhanced a few things but reminds Wyler that he's not going by his real name either, suggesting that he's doing the same thing he's accusing her of doing. She suggests that they are born as no one and that if they want success, they have to become who they were meant to be.

When Wyler begins to ask more questions, Alexa changes the subject and asks about his love life. After some insistent prodding, Wyler admits that he was in love with someone once who didn't love him back, and Alexa seems to understand how that feels. After Wyler tells her his story, Alexa talks about an acquaintance, an actress named Bethany, who was a masochist and whom Alexa asked about the psychology of wanting to be treated badly. Bethany told her that pain and love were often indistinguishable. Alexa adds that artists use their art to protect themselves, even if their greatest creation IS themselves, and then she grabs Wyler's bag of clothes. She convinces him to let go of his old self and throws the bag into the river. She then takes his hand. He describes her as "confection," and they kiss and kiss again ... Then Alexa suddenly stops, wondering whether Wyler took his keys and wallet out of his pants. They laugh and kiss some more.

Act 1, Scene 5 Analysis

A key aspect of the play's secondary theme appears in this scene in Alexa's comments. She says that people should be who they were meant to be, as opposed to being the person they were born as. This has an important personal resonance for her. She has applied this principle to her own life, becoming someone she thinks she was meant to be in the way detailed in Act 2.

When Alexa's statement is placed alongside what we know about Wyler's unhappiness with himself, however, the combination suggests that people often mistake who they think they were meant to be with who they WANT to be, or who they think they should be. This reinforces the thematic point that a life of celebrity and fame is an empty one, with the pursuit of it taking someone further away from who they truly are meant to be.

The irony is that the discussion of identity comes in the context of Wyler coming close to uncovering the truth about who Alexa really is, as he asks the questions about her age and her name. She manages again to deflect his questions, and he easily lets go of them. This illustrates in yet another way how willing he is to be distracted from the truth



by fabulousness. The problem is that that's not the only distraction. He's also distracted by love, which in spite of his earlier protestations, seems to be really important to him. Love proves to be just about the most powerful weapon in Alexa's arsenal of mass distraction.

Two important points appear almost in passing. One is the mention of the masochistic actress named Bethany, who plays a role in the action in Act 2. The other is Wyler's use of the word confection to describe Alexa. A confection is generally defined as something which is mixed from several different ingredients to create something entirely new, a description which will prove to be more apt than Wyler knows in Act 2 when he learns who Alexa truly is. A confection is also a sweet, and this resonates back to the honey in which Wyler may drown.



Act 1, Scene 6

Act 1, Scene 6 Summary

In a bedroom in an expensive hotel, Wyler works in his notebook as Alexa comes in, wearing a hotel bathrobe. She sits on the bed and puts on her makeup, saying she doesn't want him looking at her. She talks about heading out to Hollywood and starting to pitch the treatment for their film, but he tells her that his writing is going slowly. He repeats that he is not good at listening to people, figuring out what's going on in their minds and - Alexa finishes the statement, "summing it up in short, clever sentences." She says that it doesn't matter. He's sensitive and talented, and he'll write a great treatment. She adds that she's got them booked on a plane for Hollywood the following morning. She chatters about all the things that need to be done before they go, but Wyler stops her and says he can't finish the treatment until she tells him about Michael. She tells him again to not look at her, and then in a long dramatic speech, she tells the story of her marriage.

Alexa tells how she and Michael met when she was at a very low point in her life. He was physically unattractive, but their fathers made an arrangement. The marriage went ahead. She says that Michael introduced her to a way of life she never dreamed of, filled with wealth and easy fulfillment. She adds that they fell in love with each other and made vows of deep love and commitment in addition to the formal legal vows they made earlier. She talks about how Michael set her up in business as a music promoter and manager. She became extraordinarily successful, and he became jealous. He told her that he no longer felt like he was part of her life. She tells how she angrily told him to do something about it. As she tells Wyler repeatedly to not look at her, she also tells how she came home from a long hard day ready to relax in a hot bath and found him in the tub having slit his wrists.

Wyler looks at her. She tells him to turn away, but he doesn't. She talks about how awful she feels about herself and how she destroyed a good man. As Wyler joins her on the bed, she tells him again to not look at her. He sits beside her, moves her face to his, kisses her and in spite of her protests that he shouldn't, tells her he loves her. Alexa asks him to never leave her and tells him that she loves him. They kiss and begin to make love.

Act 1, Scene 6 Analysis

This scene contains an extremely effective visual representation of the nature of Alexa's existence. She appears without makeup and refuses to let Wyler look at her until she puts it on. Alexa is, essentially, all about makeup. She creates and enhances an appearance or an image in order to seem more attractive. Her movingly written story about her husband is an example of this. Like her entire existence, it's a complete fabrication. In other words, as she's putting on her face, she's putting on a character



that she hopes will create sympathy in Wyler and again distract him from the truth. As the end of the scene illustrates, her deception works. Their love-making illustrates how completely he's distracted, now not only from seeing what she's doing to him but also from his own identity, since the action has clearly established that he's gay. His making love with a woman therefore indicates how far he's come from who he truly is.



Act 1, Scenes 7 and 8

Act 1, Scenes 7 and 8 Summary

Scene 7 - Out on the street, Wyler approaches a newsstand and asks for a carton of cigarettes and a Los Angeles newspaper for Alexa. As the Attendant goes looking for them, Wyler leafs through a magazine and finds his picture. As he's smiling at himself, Skunk, the rock musician from the limo, comes up. Wyler shows him the picture, but Skunk angrily asks where his money is and starts beating him up. Wyler says he doesn't know what Skunk is talking about, but Skunk keeps hitting him. He accuses Wyler of working with Alexa and says that they left him stuck with all the bills for his trip from England, the studio rental, the hotel and everything. Now, Skunk can't get hold of Alexa. As Skunk continues to attack Wyler, the Attendant comes in, sees the violence and calls the police. Skunk accuses Wyler of being a con artist just like Alexa and demands to know his name. Wyler gives Skunk his pseudonym, and Skunk says that he doesn't believe that's his real name. He calls Wyler Alexa's assistant and punches him again. Wyler is bloody. The Attendant is screaming, and Wyler is shouting, "I am me!" Skunk says that he doesn't know who that is, hits him and shoves him. Wyler falls and is showered by falling magazines.

Scene 8 - Wyler, bloody and battered, calls from a pay phone to speak to Kaden. A Secretary answers the phone and says that Kaden doesn't speak to people from whom he's not expecting a call. When Wyler says he wants to talk about Alexa, the Secretary refuses to put him through and hangs up. Wyler calls the hotel where he and Alexa are staying and tries to connect to their room. The Clerk says that Alexa has checked out and left a bill of three thousand dollars, saying that Wyler would take care of it.

On another part of the stage, Alexa begins a conversation with Denise, an actress in a similar position to Wyler's at the beginning of the play. She is at the start of a successful career. As the Clerk tells Wyler that his credit cards are all at their limit, Alexa tells Denise that she saw the photographs of her in a magazine and decided immediately that she wanted Denise to star in a movie about her life. As the Clerk tells Wyler that Alexa left no note, Alexa tells Denise that they will go to Hollywood together. Wyler starts crying, saying, "It isn't true" over and over until he shouts it out loud.

Act 1, Scenes 7 and 8 Analysis

Wyler realizes that he has been completely taken in by Alexa and that everything he had happily and eagerly believed was both possible and true about his life was and is based on a lie. These two scenes dramatize this realization in three key ways. The first dramatization is the confrontation between Wyler and Skunk, who in this scene becomes the embodiment of the lies that Wyler has been told, physically attacking him in the same way that his integrity and sense of self have been spiritually attacked by Alexa. The second occurs in the climax of their confrontation, in which Wyler shouts "I



am me" but is then covered by magazines. The magazines represent the "me" he has become - artificial and created, as opposed to truly alive. The third comes at the end of the act, in which Wyler's shout of "It isn't true" can be seen as not only referring to Alexa's leaving but also to the life that Alexa has created for him which itself isn't true. It can also be seen as a reference to what Alexa is telling Denise, which isn't true either.

The revelation of how Alexa left Wyler with the hotel bill and the reference to Morris Kaden both foreshadow the scene at the beginning of Act 2. Kaden will tell Wyler that Alexa leaving him with the bill was part of her plan all along and is always part of her plan. This element is echoed in Alexa's conversation with Denise, which with the exception of a couple of details, is exactly the same conversation she had with Wyler at the beginning of the play to get him to fall under her spell.



Act 2, Scenes 1 and 2

Act 2, Scenes 1 and 2 Summary

This act is subtitled "Art."

Scene 1 - In a trendy restaurant, Alexa speaks with Denise about art, dropping several well-known names and commenting that in Hollywood, everyone has art in their lives but has no idea why.

Scene 2 - Kaden is at his desk, going over some papers with his Secretary. Wyler comes in, demanding to know what's going on with Alexa. As the Secretary runs out to call security, Kaden demands to know who Wyler is. Wyler tells him that Alexa is fucking him around. When Kaden hears her name, he tells the Secretary, who's just come back in, to hold his calls. When she's gone, Kaden asks Wyler how much Alexa took him for. Wyler doesn't seem to know what he's talking about, so when the Secretary returns, Kaden tells him to give her his credit card to check how many charges Alexa has rung up.

As the Secretary again goes out, Kaden reveals that what Alexa did to Wyler, she's done several times before. As he goes into detail, Alexa is seen playing out what Kaden describes. She goes through magazines to find a rising artist that an editor has called hot and makes contact in order to talk about a scheme to make money and create art together. She drops just enough well-known names and business details to sound real.

The Secretary returns, saying that the credit card company told her fifteen thousand in charges has been put on Wyler's card and that it should be cut up in front of him so he can't use it again. She says that he looks as though he's been through enough and goes out to cut the card.

Kaden adds more details to his story of how Alexa cons her victims, and Alexa continues to play them out with Denise. She creates trust by showing considerable amounts of cash and then manipulates the situation so her expenses are paid. As Kaden talks, quick excerpts from the scenes in the restaurant, at the department store and with Skunk are repeated, serving as examples of the tactics Kaden is describing. He concludes by saying that Alexa is so successful because she can tell the exact moment that an artist has experienced the right amount of success to be hungry for more, eager to be famous and above all desperate to not be who they once were.

As Alexa disappears, Wyler asks how many people she's done this to, and Kaden tells him a great many, possibly hundreds. Wyler asks why nobody's tried to stop her, and Kaden tells him that for many people being screwed over by Alexa is actually a sign that they have indeed become successful. Wyler then asks whether anyone gets her back. Kaden says that most people get on with their lives, but Wyler vows that he's going to be different. He's going to get revenge and get his money back. Kaden tells him that she



won't have the cash to give back. Wyler tells him that it's more than just the money, saying that he told her he loved her and that he'd never done that before.

Kaden tells him to take comfort in the fact that Alexa has, and has always had, great taste in suits. He then feels the lapel of his own suit, and Wyler realizes that Kaden has also been screwed by Alexa. Wyler gets up to go, but Kaden tells him to leave her alone, saying that she's actually done her victims a favor, showing them the empty, facile life to avoid. Wyler asks if Kaden knows anyone who might know at least some of the truth about her. Kaden suggests that he contact Illya.

Act 2, Scenes 1 and 2 Analysis

This scene takes what could have been a straightforward piece of exposition, or explanation, and makes it both theatrically interesting and emotionally engaging, moving back and forth between realities as we simultaneously see and hear specifics about what Alexa does. Aside from the way it's played, the scene is important because the audience realizes that all the distractions and confusions, all the games with money, essentially everything about Alexa is calculated to gain control over the hopes and dreams of others in order to achieve her own selfish goals. Wyler's admission that he loved her and Kaden's surprising revelation that he was one of her victims illustrate just how far Alexa is prepared to take her manipulations. Kaden's equally surprising comment that she has done her victims a favor is another illustration of the play's thematic point about the emptiness of fame. At the same time, Wyler's insistence upon taking revenge foreshadows the action of the rest of the act, which essentially tells the story of how that revenge takes shape.



Act 2, Scene 3

Act 2, Scene 3 Summary

Kaden goes through his address book, listing a string of artists Alexa has victimized. At the same time, Wyler talks with Illya about Alexa, who appears and comments on their relationship. Looking through his book, Kaden refers to Bethany, the actress mentioned in Act 1 Scene 4. Illya and Alexa also refer to her, and Bethany appears. Wyler speaks with her over the phone. Alexa comments on how much of a masochist Bethany is, and then Bethany, Illya and Kaden take turns listing the famous people who have all been conned by Alexa. Finally, the multiple conversations turn to Michael, Alexa's husband. As Alexa repeats sections of the story of Michael's suicide, Bethany, Illya, Kaden and Wyler try to figure out whether Michael actually existed, whether he's still alive and where he might be living.

As Kaden, Bethany and Illya disappear, Wyler speaks on the phone with Michael (Mike). As Alexa comments briefly on her marriage, Wyler introduces himself and tells Mike his situation. Mike asks how he died "this time," indicating that Alexa has told several people he's dead. He died in different ways in each story, ways that echo great works of art. He also says that he hasn't heard from Alexa in years. Wyler asks whether they can talk about her and maybe discover the truth. A flash of light appears, and Mike and Wyler are now in Mike's loft apartment/studio.

Act 2, Scene 3 Analysis

The most important element of this transitional scene, aside from its introduction of Alexa's supposedly dead husband and the revelation that at least some of the people talked about in Act 1 are actually real, is again the manner in which the action plays out. Several different realities exist simultaneously, a particularly theatrical means of storytelling that, like the intercut scenes in Act 1 Scene 1, transform what might have been cumbersome exposition into something exciting to watch.



Act 2, Scene 4

Act 2, Scene 4 Summary

Mike gives Wyler a cup of coffee. Wyler shivers happily at the accidental touch of his hand and then sips the coffee, spitting it out because it's really bad. In a conversation that includes a lot of flirtatious banter, it's revealed that many of the things Alexa said about Mike were false, such as her reference to him as unattractive. Wyler says that this is untrue because he thinks Mike is cute. It also turns out that some of what she said was actually true. Among other things, he did create her. Wyler asks how that happened, but Mike tells him to forget Alexa completely, saying revenge is a huge waste of time. He asks Wyler what he does, and Wyler says he's a writer. Mike tells him to go write something and then seems surprised when Wyler says he can't. Wyler explains that the spirit that drove him to write, the part of him that was convinced he had something to say, has disappeared. Mike apologizes, saying he didn't realize that what Alexa did had affected him so much. He then says he'll tell Wyler everything, saying he's doing it because his painting is going slowly and because they each think the other is cute.

As Mike tells his story, the action flips back and forth between the past and the present. Mike appears in both periods, sometimes participating in the action and sometimes narrating it. Wyler watches and occasionally comments. Originally Alexa's name was Brenda. As Mike tells the story, the audience sees the Brenda of several years ago. Brenda is blonde, a lot less sophisticated and working in the same restaurant as Mike in a small town in Pennsylvania. We see them talk about their dreams of saving money, moving to New York and pursuing their artistic dreams of being a painter and a writer. As the action continues, they get to New York, find a loft apartment, work in a diner at night and create during the day. They have a great time until their restaurant decides to change its style and let go of all the staff who don't fit. They realize that they need money fast, but Brenda realizes that the selling of art is big business. She convinces Mike that they should put together a show and sale of his work, saying that a friend of a friend writes an art column and will be sure to attend the show's opening. She talks Mike into creating several more versions of a piece that he originally painted only as a color study and into transforming their loft into a gallery. As Brenda tries out several alternative names for the gallery, Mike tries to talk her out of it, but she doesn't seem to be listening.

Mike tells Wyler that he created the paintings, transformed the loft and sent out invitations to the opening of the show. Wyler asks when Brenda became Alexa, and Mike resumes his story. Brenda makes phone calls to try to get critics to come to the opening, but her manner on the phone is unenthusiastic and unimpressive. Mike convinces her to develop another persona, helping her devise a false name and an exotic, extravagant manner of speaking. Brenda studies movies like *Auntie Mame*, *Cabaret* and *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, all of which feature somewhat campy but undeniably strong, individualistic female characters who use showy language in witty, charming



ways. They also come up with the name Alexa Vere de Vere, which Brenda says will never work because it's so unbelievable. As Mike dials the phone, he explains that people will believe because they want to believe, and then he hands her the phone. Brenda speaks as Alexa to a critic, and using lines from some of the movies she's seen, she convinces him to attend Mike's opening.

Mike tells Wyler that Brenda found it easier and easier to become Alexa, commenting that she got out of control. Wyler says that they both became out of control, and Mike admits that's probably true. He then recounts what happened the night before the opening. Mike walks into the loft's bathroom, saying that he's so nervous he needs to throw up. Brenda has her head wrapped in a towel, and speaking as Alexa, she tries to talk him into being calm. She admits that yes, they did con the critics and buyers into coming but once they've arrived the art will speak for itself. In response to his comment that they've also conned themselves, Brenda says they both know exactly who they are and what they've done. As Michael says he's just nervous about the opening, Brenda removes the towel around her head, revealing that her hair is now Alexa's. She explains that she felt the need to look like Alexa as well as speak like her.

Mike narrates what happened at the opening, saying that it went incredibly well. Brenda/Alexa was "on fire," and even Andy Warhol was there and liked the art. He admits that he's nostalgic for the sense of success he found that night and would like to have it again, but then he remembers what happened after everyone went home.

Conversation between Mike and Alexa reveals that all the paintings sold except the one Mike says was actually finished. When he seems upset by that, Alexa angrily reminds him that they made enough money that night to support themselves for the rest of the year. They drink champagne, kiss and say "I love you" to each other, but then Mike pulls away and reminds Alexa that he's gay. Alexa tells him that they can be whatever they want and then tells him to take off her dress carefully because she has to return it. He suggests that they calm down and talk in the morning, but Alexa becomes angry, suggesting that he's ungrateful for everything she's done for him and accusing him of being afraid of success. She throws his half of the money at him and says their friendship is over, shouting that someday he'll realize what he's lost.

Mike picks up the money as he tells Wyler he never saw Brenda/Alexa again, but he heard from a mutual friend that Alexa had told everybody he hanged himself in a manner that sounds like a painting called "Suicide." Meanwhile, Wyler is looking at one of Mike's paintings, which turns out to be the one that didn't sell. Mike tells him it's called "as bees in honey drown," and Wyler tells him that's one of Alexa's favorite expressions. They flirt a little. Wyler says that he's got to go, and Mike suggests they go out for dinner. Wyler says he doesn't want to date anyone, saying what he really wants is to find Alexa. He asks Mike what he wants, and Mike says that he wants to find a place where he can be alone, to paint and to have friends he can talk about his day with. He talks about what he might like to drink while he's out with those friends, hinting what he might like to do with Wyler. Wyler says he's got things he needs to do, and Mike says he understands.



Ginny is heard, talking to someone she's urging to not cry. As she continues, Wyler and Mike say their goodbyes, and Wyler leaves. Mike realizes that Wyler has left his notebook behind and calls out to him, but Wyler doesn't come back. Ginny appears, and the action flows seamlessly into the next scene.

Act 2, Scene 4 Analysis

Once again basic exposition is given a theatrically engaging twist as we both see and hear the story of how Brenda becomes Alexa. One element of interest in this story is the reference to the movies Brenda studies to acquire her way of speaking, all of which have female characters who are, if not exactly camp as defined earlier, within a false eyelash of it. In other words, she decides she needed to be as fabulous, as individualistic and as determinedly eccentric as the women in the movies, so she will be memorable as an art dealer and perhaps even as a human being. The audience gets the sense that on some level, Brenda feels about herself the same way Wyler did at the beginning of the play. She is unhappy with who she is and how she is being treated, and she is desperate to create a new life.

This idea is supported not just by the ease and enthusiasm with which Mike says she took to the Alexa persona, but also by a moment in Act 1 Scene 5. The stage directions describe her reaction to Wyler's story of loving someone who didn't love him back, saying that she seems to understand what he's talking about. If looked at in relation to this scene, the stage direction indicates that Brenda/Alexa may in fact be in love with Mike. She creates a new persona as a result of that love, and when he rejects her sexual advances, she experiences it as a huge betrayal. This explains her extreme reaction to his completely understandable attempt to keep distance between them, and perhaps even the admittedly bizarre habit she has of "killing" him in different ways.

Meanwhile, the flirtatious banter between Mike and Wyler foreshadows the revelation at the end of the play that they're living together. At the same time, the fact that Mike has created a painting titled "As Bees in Honey Drown" foreshadows Wyler's creation of a book of the same title. Both works of creation represent the way that both artists have been able to move beyond what Alexa did to them.

Andy Warhol was a visual artist in the 1970s and 80s who became famous for creating "Pop Art," an artistic movement that turned aspects of popular culture into fine art. Among his most famous works are a painting of a Campbell's soup can and multi-colored portraits of film stars.



Act 2, Scene 5

Act 2, Scene 5 Summary

As Wyler and Mike disappear, Ginny comes on, topless and covering her breasts with her arms. She continues her conversation with Morelli, whom we understand to be a photographer who wants her to pose topless for publicity photos. In the same way that Wyler tried to convince the photographer he was working with in Act 1 Scene 1 that a sexy image isn't right, Ginny tries to convince Morelli to let her pose with clothes on. Also in the same way as Wyler, Ginny is convinced and drops her arms. Flashes appear of the photo shoot and the headline, "Hot Violinist."

Alexa appears, speaking on the phone with Ginny and telling her she has got to play the score for the film of Alexa's life. She disappears and so does the photographer. At the same time, Wyler appears, also speaking to Ginny, warning her that she's going to get a call from Alexa and asking when they're going to meet. As he tells her to not go to the meeting, Kaden, Bethany, Illya and Skunk appear. Various telephone conversations between them and Wyler reveal that Wyler is planning to gather all of Alexa's victims in one place so they can surprise and confront her.

Act 2, Scene 5 Analysis

In the first part of this scene, the conversations between Ginny and the Photographer and Ginny and Alexa have clear and deliberate echoes of what happened to Wyler at the beginning of the play. They also serve to illustrate again Alexa's point that anybody will do anything to have a chance at the kind of life she represents. The second part of the scene, in which Wyler puts his plan for revenge into action, foreshadows confrontations to come and whets our appetite to see what will happen when Alexa comes face to face with her past.



Act 2, Scenes 6 and 7

Act 2, Scenes 6 and 7 Summary

Scene 6 - Wyler comes home and turns on his answering machine. As he listens to messages from Kaden and Illya congratulating him on his plot, he tries on the jacket of the suit Alexa bought him. He looks at himself in the mirror on the open closet door as a third message plays. It is Ginny, saying that she talked to Alexa on the phone and accidentally revealed his plan. The closet door closes, revealing Alexa where Wyler's reflection used to be.

Wyler demands his money back, but Alexa says it's long gone. She doesn't have it to give. She adds that she imagines Wyler already knew that and therefore has another reason for trying to find her. She tries to imagine what that might be, rejecting the idea that he's in love with her since he's gay. She also rejects the idea that because he knows the truth about her he's planning to use it against her, saying that he has no idea what to do with his information. She tells him what she thinks is the reason, that he's the only one of all her victims to pursue her because he's the only one who knows and understands that all the things she represents, fame and hype and celebrity, matter far more than actual artistic creation. She adds that's the reason that she came to find him, saying that because he understands that, she wants him to join her. When Wyler says he's still a writer, Alexa reminds him that he's not writing now. She suggests that the next time he feels an artistic impulse he should suppress it and that if he joins her he'd never have to talk to boring people, eat a bad meal or doubt himself again. She goes on to say that they're a perfect match. They could make a real fortune out in Hollywood, and she says she loves him and has ever since she saw his picture. She kisses him. He kisses her back. They begin to undress each other, and Alexa says she hasn't missed anyone so much since Mike died.

Wyler stops as he and Alexa both realize what she just said. Wyler tells her to get out, but Alexa tries to convince him to let her stay, reminding him that without her he's nothing but a suit, soon out of fashion. Before long, he'll be wishing he'd accepted her offer. Kaden and Illya are heard offstage, commenting on what an amazing party is taking place with all of Alexa's victims. Meanwhile, Alexa tells Wyler he needs her and quotes what he said earlier about not being good at listening to people, figuring out what's going on in their minds and summing it up in short, clever sentences. When Wyler doesn't change his mind, she goes out, and Wyler shouts that he doesn't need her. The action blends into the next scene.

Scene 7 - Kaden and Illya appear, continuing their conversation about the party. They talk about how great it was to see so many famous people in one room. There were hundreds of them, all Alexa's victims, and all realized that fame was empty and meant nothing. They all realized that they knew how to use and enjoy fame in the way Alexa taught them.



Act 2, Scenes 6 and 7 Analysis

A key visual representation of the play's action appears in the stage directions early in this scene. Alexa is described as standing exactly where Wyler's suit was just reflected. This represents the way that Wyler has in effect become a mirror image of Alexa. He has no identity separate from what she has transformed him into. This image foreshadows her request to him later in this scene that he join her and become as much of a con artist as she is.

The action of this scene dramatizes Alexa's earlier points that Wyler really does want the kind of fame she represents. This is indicated by the fact that he kisses her and almost joins her, which also suggests that he's not quite free of the self-dislike that led him to fall under her spell in the first place. When she makes her slip of the tongue in referring to Mike, however, Wyler realizes how everything she says, and therefore everything she represents, is a lie. She probably only wanted him to join her so she could take advantage of him again. Her response to him has clear echoes of her response when Mike rejects her, which means that if we accept the premise that her reaction at that time was so strong because she truly cared for Mike, there is some possibility that she also truly cares for Wyler. In any case, her final pleas come too late. His shout that he doesn't need her is really a shout that he doesn't need fame, the final step he needs to take on his journey of transformation into someone who is content with his life and doesn't need to be someone else.

The brief conversation between Kaden and Illya in Scene 7 is an ironic counterpoint to Wyler's final shout. It makes the satirical point that while Wyler seems to have escaped from his Alexa-inspired pursuit of fame, there are hundreds of people who haven't, can't and won't, and they are more than okay with it.



Act 2, Scenes 8, 9, and 10

Act 2, Scenes 8, 9, and 10 Summary

Scene 8 - This scene is set in Mike's loft. As he works on a canvas, Wyler comes in. He first says that he came by because he just happened to be in the neighborhood, and then he admits that he came by on purpose because he feels lost. He talks about just wanting to connect with people through his work but he has also realized that ultimately people are alone. Wyler asks why it's so wrong to want to try to cure that in some way. Mike hints that he knows how difficult that is and then says that what else is difficult is painting ears, with all their little pockets of light and shadow. He says he keeps working on them, and he is getting better. Wyler asks why he keeps trying. Mike says if he gets it right, the ear could be "really tremendous." Wyler apologizes for barging in and starts to go. Mike tells him he left his notebook behind. Wyler looks through it ...

Scene 9 - ... and as he does, Illya, Bethany and one of the Backup Singers all appear, quoting sentences and phrases spoken by Alexa. After each line, Wyler tears a page out of his book. As the lines become faster and faster, overlapping and piling on one another, Wyler tears out more and more pages. Finally the others all speak together a line Alexa said earlier about becoming the person Wyler was meant to be. This phrase takes his interest, and he starts to write. After a moment, Mike asks what he is working on. Kaden and the Secretary appear as Wyler says "nothing," and Mike disappears.

As Wyler realizes that he's actually writing "everything," the Secretary tells Kaden that Alexa is on the phone. As Alexa and Kaden talk, their conversation reveals that Wyler has turned everything that happened between him and Alexa, as well as between Alexa and all her other victims, into a book titled *As Bees in Honey Drown*. Wyler, Illya and Mike interject comments during their conversation, revealing that Wyler has written the book under his real name and that he's moved in with Mike. Meanwhile, the Secretary comments that Wyler has become good at listening to people, figuring out what's going on in their minds and summing it up in short, clever sentences. Alexa starts crying. Kaden starts laughing, and all the characters watch as Wyler goes to Alexa and they replay a section of their first scene together. Line by line the other characters join in, but Alexa alone has the last line, a repeat of her earlier line that "no one pulls the cashmere over the eyes of a writer." Wyler looks at the audience and smiles.

Act 2, Scenes 8, 9, and 10 Analysis

Mike's explanation of why he continues to work towards the perfect ear is a metaphor for an aspect of all creative artists. It suggests that the process of striving to find a truth in creative work is just as important, if not more so, as the creation of an actual piece. His comments also suggest that once that truth has been found, even if it's as relatively insignificant as the shadows in an ear, the result is genuine art with the capacity to connect with people in the way Wyler describes. Wyler's determination to re-connect



with that part of himself, the part that seeks the truth and writes about it, is represented by the way in which he tears out the pages of the notebook on which are written Alexa's lies. However, he doesn't rip out the page in which she talks about his becoming the person he was meant to be. This suggests that that is a truth and that finally, in spite of everything Alexa did to him, or maybe because of it, he has in fact become that person. This idea is reinforced by the way he actually sits down and writes. He also gives the resulting book the same name as Mike gave the painting that he truly considers art. Both of these facts, as previously discussed, combine with the passing mention of their living together to suggest that they've both avoided drowning in the honey poured over them by Alexa and are moving on with their full, creative, emotionally fulfilled lives. This concludes the play's thematic statement about the emptiness of fame.

The play's final moments contain two deliberate re-dramatizations of key statements in the play. The first is the Secretary's comment that Wyler does in fact know how to get into people's minds, etc. Its appearance at this point reinforces the idea that both Wyler's self-doubt and Alexa's manipulations of him were artificial and that now he's come to accept himself for who he is. He is now able to do the things he needs to do better and more effectively. This is also illustrated by the play's final lines, the second re-dramatization. Word for word, they repeat comments Alexa made earlier. Instead of a manipulation, they are a revelation that as a result of his experience Wyler has in fact become wiser, more genuine and truly much more himself than he ever was. In other words, the bee has managed to avoid getting stuck in the honey and is now buzzing around happily with his new boyfriend, a new book and the new life he had in him all along.

Bibliography

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Characters

Ginny Cameron

A young violinist, Ginny is first seen in a photographer's studio, similar to the first scene of the play in which Evan is being photographed. Ginny is naked from the waist up (also similar to Evan's scene), and the photographer convinces her that her photograph in a magazine will bring her recognition. Shortly afterwards, Alexa calls Ginny because she has seen her picture. Evan uses Ginny to help set up his revenge, but Ginny warns Alexa before the damage is done.

Carla

Carla makes a very brief appearance in act 1, while Alexa and Evan visit a posh nightclub. Carla comes across as an old friend of Alexa's and substantiates Alexa's contrived background, making Evan believe Alexa's story more fully. Obviously, Carla is in cahoots with Alexa's scheme.

Brenda Gelb

See Alexa Vere de Vere

Morris Kaden

Alexa claims to work for Morris Kaden, an executive at Delta Records. But later, when Evan goes to Kaden to see if he can help track down Alexa, Evan learns that Morris too has been one of Alexa's victims. Morris tells Evan to let go of the experience. He suggests that Evan consider the money he has lost as tuition in the school of life.

Illya Mannon

A dancer and also a victim of Alexa's, Illya provides Evan with yet another possible lead in how to find Alexa.

Ronald

Ronald is a clerk in a department store. He helps Evan try on a suit, as Alexa picks out ties, shoes, and perfume for Evan. Ronald is in on Alexa's con job. He promotes her, offering an authentic-sounding background for Alexa in which he alludes to other up-and-coming stars whom she has helped.



Skunk

Skunk is a rock singer from London. Like Evan, Skunk is duped by Alexa. Unfortunately for Evan, Skunk believes that Evan is Alexa's accomplice and beats him up.

Michael Stabinsky

Michael is a painter and the only person in the play who knew Alexa Vere de Vere when she was still Brenda Gelb. Although Michael benefited from an artist showing that Brenda/Alexa put together for his benefit, Michael did not appreciate how she conned everyone into coming to the show and buying his paintings. When Evan hunts down Michael in order to find out about Alexa, Michael flirts with Evan and suggests that they try out a relationship between themselves. The character of Michael is used to clear up the mystery of Alexa as well as to provide the antithesis of Alexa for Evan's sake. As Evan wonders about his sexuality, he is presented with the choice of a heterosexual relationship with Alexa or a homosexual one with Michael. Michael also contrasts with Alexa in his open-faced honesty and sincerity.

Swen

While Alexa dictates the story of her life to Evan in a limousine, they stop and pick up Swen, a male model who barely speaks English.

Bethany Vance

Alexa refers to Bethany as an alleged actress who was also a masochist. Alexa uses the story of Bethany to suggest that love is painful. Bethany was also conned by Alexa, and she provides Evan with some background information that helps his investigation of Alexa.

Alexa Vere de Vere

Alexa is a beautiful con artist (here real name is Brenda Gelb) and is the antagonist of this play. She appears in the beginning of the drama as a well-to-do promoter of artists. She throws a lot of money around and claims that money has no hold on her. She promises great things to people who want to believe in her vision. Unfortunately, except for her ability to inspire, Alexa is a fraud. She is like an angler who baits her hook and tempts a hungry fish with a free meal only to snatch the eager creature out of the water and leave it gasping for oxygen. Her first successful con involves her friend Michael Stabinsky, a painter. And from there, she cons several musical artists and eventually the protagonist Evan Wyler. One positive thing that can be said of Alexa is that she is good at what she does. Her visions are filled with grandeur and passion, and it is through these gifts that she inspires the people around her. She provides the dream but not the



means to the dream. And the cost of her vision for her victims is fairly steep. Part of her scheme to entrance her targeted victims is that she pretends to be helpless about many things in her life, a victim herself.

Eric Wollenstein

See Evan Wyler

Evan Wyler

Evan (who changed his name from Eric Wollenstein) is a novelist who acts as the protagonist in this drama. He is looking for fame and fortune at the time he meets Alexa Vere de Vere. Evan enjoys the lavish attention and convincing hype that Alexa pours on him. Eventually, although homosexual, Evan makes love to Alexa and surprises himself when his heart opens up to her. But Alexa is not sincere, and Evan falls hard when he discovers that Alexa is a fraud. He loses a lot of money because he believes in Alexa and her dreams. But he is especially affected by his emotional connection to her. The second part of the play deals with Evan's attempts at finding the truth about Alexa, if there is any. Although it appears that Evan seeks to avenge the wrath that Alexa has caused, Evan's real motive is to fit together all the pieces of the puzzle in order to figure out not only the enigma of Alexa but also to discover the truth about himself. Is he an artist? Is he homosexual? Can he love? In the end he discovers that not matter what happens to him, he can turn it into something creative and worthwhile.



Themes

Art

The topic of art is discussed rather obliquely and on many different levels in this play. Evan mentions his need to create his art when Alexa tries to lure him into joining her in her con game. Evan also describes the challenges he faces in his specific art form when he is with Michael. Because of what Alexa has done to him, Evan says he has lost the "arrogance" he needs to write. This arrogance is what he needs to believe that he could write something that someone else would be interested in reading. This is a possible allusion, readers can assume, to the playwright's own challenges. Beane might be implying that unless an artist is creating only to satisfy some inner need to express himself or herself, that level of arrogance has to be rather high. It takes a lot of arrogance, or confidence, to expose the inner workings of one's mind (as represented by a book, a painting, a play, or a musical performance) to a critical audience made up of mostly strangers.

Art looked at through the eyes of the character Alexa, however, takes on a different image. Alexa sees the production of art as drudgery, with little excitement and a lot of work involved in it. The thrill lasts for but a brief time—at the very beginning of the work and at the ending. And every time artists produce new works, they put their previously earned reputation on the line. They have to prove themselves and their skills over and over again.

Art, through Evan's eyes, is difficult. He produces his art in an attempt to connect with other people. But he knows that there are people out there who want to criticize what he has written or want to take advantage of his skills, but he does it anyway. Michael, in another version of the artist, wants to be left alone to paint. He works diligently to perfect the small details of his work, e.g., his intense focus on creating an image of a human ear. These men are driven by their art. They would like to be able to make a living from it, but that is not why they do it.

And then, in contrast but also in some comparison, there is the con artist, as represented by Alexa. This is a totally different form of art. It is illegitimate and sometimes illegal. But conning takes special skills and a great deal of arrogance, as does any musical or dramatic performance. And it is a performance. The con artist is an actor whose stage is the public arena. His or her audience is the victim. One would think it was not as fulfilling as creating a work of art, but the con artist might not agree. Alexa believes that art is boring; whereas her con games are thrilling and charged with the pizzazz that every artist craves.



Fame and Fortune

Fame like honey, according to Beane's play, can give one a rush of sweet pleasure or it can drown one. It is as alluring as a Greek siren, promising allusive treasures. But like the sirens, the voice of fame also can cause disaster. Con artists like Alexa would not exist if people were not so vulnerable to the lure of fame and fortune. How quickly Alexa is able to turn heads in her direction by floating a few loose dollar bills. How easily she is able to blind people with their own desires to be important. And how painfully her victims are burned when they are finally able to see through their own folly. Fame and fortune, Beane seems to be saying, must be earned with hard work and a honing of one's skills. There are no fairy godmothers out there with magic wands, waiting to grant wishes. One must be focused and be willing to sacrifice. The painter Michael appears to be Beane's example of the perfected artist. He allows Alexa to promote him somewhat insincerely, but he is the least affected by her claims of fame. Michael works hard at his art. He works alone. His name is not splashed all over the magazines. He is content to work out the details of his art, earn a modest wage, suffer through the disappointments, and celebrate when he is able to express his creativity fully. In contrast, Evan falls for Alexa's promise of fame. He wants it before he earns it. He pays a heavy price when he discovers how foolish he has been. The price is not just monetary. He nearly sacrifices his art in the ordeal, as he is unable to write for a long time. Beane's message seems to be that fame and fortune either should be ignored or, in the least, kept in their place. They are not the gods of the arts but rather they are the devils.

Love

Love threads its way through Beane's play in a number of ways. There is the love of art. There is the love of money. There is the love of fame. But there is also an underlying theme of the love found in a relationship. Evan is at the center of this theme of love. He retells the story of unrequited love with a man in his youth, a love that left him feeling very vulnerable. In the aftermath of that experience, Evan decided not to love again. He had occasional affairs but would not open his heart fully to anyone. But then he falls in love with Alexa, who turns him on his head. He never thought he would love again and surely not a woman. And yet, there he is professing love to her. He is confused by it. And so might be the audience. Does he really love Alexa or does he love what she represents? He wants to be like her in some ways, but is that love? He loves her lifestyle, albeit a phony façade. He loves the way she makes him feel important and special. But that love is short-lived. It is superficial and does not stand the test of time or reality.

In the end, Beane seems to suggest, there might still be a love for Evan. It might come in the person of Michael, a fellow artist, an honest man, someone who understands the challenges that Evan faces. Michael is someone who could be a true friend. It is from this sincere relationship, Beane implies, that true love has a chance of blooming.



Pop Culture

Beane portrays some not-too-attractive pictures of pop culture. For instance, in the scene in Michael's apartment, Evan admires a painting. It is the painting Michael calls *As Bees in Honey Drown*. It was the only painting that did not sell when Alexa arranged Michael's first showing. It was also, according to Michael, the only painting that was finished. In other words, the other paintings he had rushed through and had not completely finished his thoughts on those pieces. They were surface sketches. And yet because of the hype that Alexa created around them, people bought them. Alexa also makes references to a similar misunderstanding of paintings by the general public. She says that there are great works of art being bought by people who live in Hollywood. But the people who buy them have no understanding of them. The inference is that pop culture is very shallow. Alexa says that people want to be entertained; and the leading artists of one moment die quickly only to be replaced by the next hot artist. People want the flash, but they do not take the time to sit down and allow a work of art to penetrate them.



Style

Flashbacks

Flashbacks are a construction that is often used in movies, novels, and short stories. It is a technique that allows the author to fill in the background of the characters, which ultimately makes the present moment more complex and more detailed. This gives the audience information they had not been previously aware of. In a play, this construction of flashbacks is a lot more difficult to pull off as the players are in the same present moment as is the audience. So how does a playwright provide background information? Often this is offered in the dialog of the characters, but supplying these details can considerably slow down the pace of the play, which can, in turn, bore the audience. So in *As Bees in Honey Drown*, Beane employs a different technique to fill in the gaps, to provide clues in order that the audience might solve the mysteries, and to make the audience privilege to some of the characters' inner thoughts. The technique he uses is flashbacks.

The first time Beane uses flashback is in act 2, scene 2, while Evan is talking to Morris, the executive from Delta Records. Morris begins exposing to Evan the way Alexa cons people, and, rather than having Morris recite these lines, Beane brings Alexa into the scene. Although all three actors are present on the stage at the same time, Evan and Morris are in Morris's office and Alexa is at the Hotel Paramount. As Morris relates his knowledge of Alexa to Evan, Alexa is playing out a scene she and Evan had previously shared. And some of the lines that Alexa voices are also being stated by Morris, simultaneously. The effect is that of Morris telling Evan about Alexa as Evan recalls those same lines being said to him by Alexa. Since the audience has already heard these lines, it would not be as dramatic if Morris reiterated them to Evan. But with Alexa reading them at the same time as Morris (but off to the side), the words have a more profound emotional impact because the audience can relate to what Evan is going through as he realizes how ignorant he was to have fallen for those lines.

The double reading of the lines not only exposes to Evan the fact that he has been duped but also how he has been conned by Alexa. As Morris and Alexa re-act the various situations that Alexa and Evan had recently shared, Evan (and thus the audience) more explicitly understands how Alexa worked her con. For instance, in flashing back to the scene in the department dressing room, the one in which Alexa is supposedly buying Evan a suit, Evan sees more clearly that the so-called accidental spraying of perfume in his face was actually a ploy to distract him from the fact that Alexa had not given him money to reimburse him for the credit card charges he had placed. The flashbacks are seen in the present, a time when Evan's mind is clearer. He hears Alexa say things that he had not heard before. Evan had been so involved in the presumed gift giving that he does not pay attention to what Alexa is buying for herself. Only through flashback does he see everything clearly.



Beane uses this technique throughout the play. Another time is in act 2, scene 3, when Evan is searching through the notes he has taken while he was with Alexa. He is looking for clues. But instead of rereading to the audience what he has written in his book, Beane has Evan on the telephone talking to people whom Alexa has mentioned. The audience knows this because there is another flashback of Alexa rereading part of the dialog that she and Evan had previously shared.

There is also an extended flashback, which occurs in act 2, scene 4, when Evan goes to Michael's loft to talk to him about Alexa. Instead of using a dialog between Michael and Evan to disclose what Michael knows about Alexa, Beane has the actress who plays Alexa play out the scene with Michael. Alexa is made to look like a younger version of herself, a woman who was then going by the name of Brenda Gelb. Michael and Brenda/Alexa act out scenes for Evan and the audience's benefit, again filling in background material so everyone understands how Brenda became Alexa.

Point of Attack

The point of attack is the place in the play where the real action begins, the action surrounding the conflict. In Beane's *As Bees in Honey Drown*, this point is very visible because it occurs at the time when Evan is punched in the face by Skunk. It is, in other words, a physical point of attack, with dramatic flair. Up until the moment when Skunk delivers his punch, the audience is not fully aware that Alexa is a fraud who is duping Evan. The audience is privy to a few hints but is not told in an obvious way that she is conning Evan. When Skunk hits Evan in the face and demands his money, accusing Evan of being in cahoots with Alexa, then the audience's eyes are opened to the truth.

Most plays begin in a neutral position. In *As Bees in Honey Drown*, the audience is shown that Evan is eager to find the fame and fortune that he expected would follow the publication of his first novel. Alexa arrives on the scene to help Evan find what he is looking for, or at least that is what Evan and the audience first believe: Evan is a legitimate writer and Alexa is a legitimate maker of dreams. The play from the opening scene until Skunk's punch is fairly well balanced. Alexa appears to have more power in the realm of the financial world, but Evan has the creative talent that Alexa needs to promote. Each character brings something to each scene in equal measure. But at the point of attack in the play, that balance changes. The tension rises as Evan hunts down Alexa, determined to find out the truth about her life, to expose her faults, to avenge himself, and to return to his art. The point of attack is the beginning of the tension; and the climax is the peak of it. Between these two elements lies the gist of the action of the play.



Historical Context

Off Broadway

Down the middle of the section of New York City where most of the major theatre productions are made runs the street called Broadway. This street is so filled with major theatres that the name Broadway has become synonymous with theatre productions. But Broadway is not the only street in New York where theater-goers enjoy plays and musicals.

In the first half of the twentieth century, small budget plays and musicals could not afford the high costs of these big Broadway theatres, and so the producers looked for smaller, lower-cost places that were located off Broadway. Soon, the theaters in the so-called off-Broadway sections of New York City became home for plays that were considered experimental and therefore not potential big moneymakers. In the 1950s, many avant-garde playwrights like Edward Albee and Sam Shepard had their plays produced off Broadway, as did Eugene Ionesco, Samuel Beckett, and Harold Pinter. By the 1990s, when Beane's production of *As Bees in Honey Drown* was put on stage, many producers were investing in the off-Broadway districts, and a construction boom of small theaters that held under 500 seats was the result. Today, the difference in cost can be drastic, with an off-Broadway musical costing under \$500,000, while a similar musical produced on Broadway might cost more than \$1.5 million. Off-Broadway productions even have their own awards. The most significant are the Obies, sponsored by the *Village Voice*. Today, with the growth and popularity of off-Broadway theater, smaller, cheaper, and more experimental plays have been pushed even further away, with productions housed in districts referred to as off-off-Broadway.

Cultural Icons

In Beane's play *As Bees in Honey Drown*, the con artist Alexa constantly drops names of cultural icons. She does this to impress the people around her. In order to understand some of the allusions she makes, the reader needs to know what these names stand for.

David Bowie is a name that Alexa mentions often. Bowie is one of the most influential pop music writers of his time. He struggled through the 1960s with occasional hits, and then in the 1970s enjoyed success not only in his homeland of England but in the United States as well. One of his biggest hits was *Fame*, a favorite theme of Alexa's and a topic discussed throughout Beane's play. Bowie also starred in movies with some success and is presently married to Iman, a supermodel and another name that Alexa mentions.

Theodore Geisel is another name that Alexa refers to. This author of many popular books for children is better known as Dr. Seuss. Most American children from the 1960s



onward grew up reading Dr. Seuss's enjoyable and silly rhymes. His fame and fortune are a dream come true for many authors. Another author that Alexa refers to is Gore Vidal, who has written novels, screenplays, and dramatic pieces for the stage. He has gained some respect in the literary world but was hurt by some scathing reviews when he wrote openly about homosexuality in the 1950s. Christopher Isherwood was also an author and homosexual. He wrote a collection of stories about life in Berlin, which was later turned into the stage production of *Cabaret* (1966); its main character, Sally Bowles, another name that Alexa drops. Sally Bowles personified the decadence that was occurring in Berlin while Isherwood lived there. In a similar allusion, Alexa mentions Holly Golightly, the main character in Truman Capote's *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, a novel published in 1958. The novel was later turned into a movie starring Audrey Hepburn. An interesting point to note is that like Vidal and Isherwood, Capote was also homosexual.



Critical Overview

Since it was first produced, *As Bees in Honey Drown* has enjoyed almost continuous production in small theatres and on college campuses across the nation from New England to Hawaii and Las Vegas to New Orleans. Most critics believe this play is Beane's best, and audiences tend to agree as they giggle their way through the two acts of this modern comedy.

Jay Reiner, writing for the *Hollywood Reporter*, finds Beane's play only "mildly amusing," but he knows why the theme of Beane's play works. "A society," Reiner writes, "that makes a fetish of fame and celebrity is made to order for a con man to exploit." The fact that Beane uses a woman as the exploiter amuses Reiner even more. Reiner says of the fact that Beane's con artist is a woman, "so much the better."

Beane's play began in New York City in a small theatre off Broadway where it played for a little over a year. Since then, the play has been produced numerous times by different production companies all over the states. Joel Hirschhorn reviews the play for *Variety* after seeing it performed on the West Coast in Pasadena. Hirschhorn writes, "Beane's indictment of the 15-minute fame and hunger for applause has resonance, and the enterprise is worth watching."

Often, in reviewing some of Beane's more recent plays, critics refer back to Beane's *As Bees in Honey Drown*, commenting on the brilliance of this earlier work. For example, Ben Brantley of the *New York Times* in a review of Beane's *Mondo Drama* refers to *As Bees in Honey Drown* as "one of the liveliest satiric romps of the last decade." In this same article, Brantley also mentions Beane's theatrical group, the Drama Department, who first produced *As Bees in Honey Drown* as "the inventive, star-studded troupe that has become the last word in downtown theatrical savvy."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2



Critical Essay #1

Hart is a freelance writer and author of several books. In this essay, Hart explores the complexities of protagonist Alexa Vere de Vere, finding personality traits in Alexa that mirror those of her so-called victims.

Beane's play *As Bees in Honey Drown* has a female villain who could almost outrank Cruella DeVil from the classic *101 Dalmatians*. Although similarly coldhearted, Alexa Vere de Vere, however, is not quite as flat a character as Cruella. The *101 Dalmatians* villain is a stereotypical character who represents evil personified. She has, in other words, no saving graces. Beane's Alexa Vere de Vere, in contrast, is more real, more complex, or to put it more simply, she is more human. And when looked at even more closely, she is not very different from her fellow characters in the play, her so-called victims.

One of the first things about Alexa that stands out is that she is hungry for money and fame. She waves cash in front of her victims' faces and drops names of the rich and famous as if she knew all of them on an intimate basis. This illusion is just that—a fantasy—but it is an image that her victims want to see. They want to believe in her because they are, after all, just as hungry for money and fame as she is. How else could they be so easily duped? They all either want to be her closest friend and best ally or they dream of being just like her. They desire the life she portrays. They want to have so much money they can be as careless as she is with it. They would like to go to ridiculously fancy department stores and buy clothes that make them look better; clothes that shout out: this person has made it to the top; this person is "in"; this person is someone everyone else wants to know. And in this way, Alexa's victims are not so different from her. Their dreams mirror one another. They are all fascinated with the same superficial image.

But then, one could counter this statement by demonstrating that Alexa's victims are not like her at all. They are imaginative artists who dig down deep into themselves in order to create something new and marvelous. They are managers of corporations who stay at the office until late at night, sorting through complex negotiations. They are hard-working business people who sweat over their books and struggle to make a decent profit. They are musicians who practice their instruments until their bodies ache. Alexa's life, on the other hand, is easy. But is it? Is it so easy to pull off the image that Alexa has created? Isn't she playing a role like any actress on stage? And isn't she doing such a good job of it that she convinces her victims that she is sweet and innocent and in need of help and protection? She is, by looking at her in a completely objective and non-judgmental way, doing so well at her art, she should be awarded a prize. And in many ways she is. Her victims' give her money. But that is dishonest, right? That makes her a liar and a fake, which is in stark contrast to her victims, who practice complete honesty.

Honesty? What honesty? Is it honest to try to sell books by attracting readers through a photograph of your half-naked body as Evan did? And in an attempt to sell her CDs, Ginny, the violinist, also bared her chest. Alexa changed her name from Brenda Gelb to



the more exotic Alexa Vere de Vere. And therefore, this name, in some ways, is fraudulent, right? But Evan changed his name too. He wanted to mask his Jewish heritage by changing his last name from Wollenstein to Wyler. Then, for some whimsical linguistic reason, he changed his first name too. And in another bit of dishonesty, Michael Stabinsky, Alexa's former live-in friend, allowed Alexa to create a grand illusion around him that persuaded potential customers that he was a soon-to-be famous artist. He permitted this illusion in order to sell his paintings. One could say that Alexa duped Michael's customers. But don't forget that Michael agreed to let her to do so; and he reaped the benefits. So who is really being honest? Or, at least, who is more honest than Alexa? Does honesty come in degrees? Granted, Alexa goes overboard in her debauchery. She has no sense of remorse. And there is little social worth in the art she creates. But she is not the only dishonest character in this play.

There are other traits of Alexa's that reverberate in some of the other characters, especially Evan. Take Alexa's neediness. In act 1, scene 4, while Alexa, Evan, Skunk, and Swen are in the restaurant, Alexa claims she is about to have a nervous breakdown. She becomes distracted and jittery. Granted, her so-called breakdown is an overstatement that is precipitated by Alexa's need to feign helplessness. Part of her ploy is to appear needy so that her victims want to come to her rescue and do whatever she asks of them—like pay for her dinners, clothes, rooms, etc. But her need is nonetheless real. She, like her victims, feels needy. She needs the people she cons in order for her work to exist; and later an even deeper need is demonstrated when she exposes her feelings to Evan. For instance, in act 2, scene 6, she confronts Evan with the statement: "You know that I am not a mirage, I am an oasis." With this, Alexa faces her deepest need. She wants to claim legitimacy, weight, and meaning. She is all but crying out for it. In the midst of all her deceitfulness, she desires to be real.

In a similar way, Evan demonstrates his own sense of neediness at the end of act 1 when he shows up all bloody in Morris's office. Evan has been physically beaten up by Skunk. In this fight between the two men, the only one who throws the punches is Skunk. Evan never defends himself. After this encounter, Evan walks into Morris's office with all the marks of the fight still on his face. Without saying a word, Evan cries out for help. Just by looking at him, Morris knows this young man is in trouble. Morris comes to Evan's aid, just as Evan had previously come to Alexa's when he told her to calm down and that everything would be all right. Similarly, Morris tries to calm Evan, telling him to let go of the feelings of pain and revenge that are building up inside of him. But Evan is unwilling to do this. He needs to seek out Alexa. He craves to avenge his hurt pride. He cannot accept his experience with Alexa as a lesson, as Morris suggests. Evan has an emptiness inside of him, and he wants to fill it up. He feels that Alexa has depleted him. He cannot think. He cannot write. He cannot focus on anything but getting something either from Alexa or at Alexa's expense.

Beane brings these two characters together in another way too. At one point, Alexa asks Evan about his background, specifically whether or not he was ever in love. Evan tells her his story, a sad one, which Alexa relates to. Evan once fell in love with someone who did not return his love. Alexa, upon hearing this story, tells Evan that she had an acquaintance who was a masochist—someone who seemed to love pain. This friend



stated that the line between pleasure and pain was a thin one. Alexa takes that a step further. She tells Evan, after having heard his tale of unrequited love, that the line between love and pain is also a thin one. At the moment they share this information, the two characters discover they are commiserating with one another. This moment in the play feels especially real because Beane, in his stage directions, intensifies this exchange by having the two of them, instead of looking at one another, look away at the city skyline. They are feeling too self-conscious, the playwright suggests, to look into one another's eyes. This action promotes the idea of raw emotion, of a moment of honest feelings between Evan and Alexa. Perhaps this is meant to suggest that they have both been hurt in the past. And as tough as Alexa pretends to be, it is during this exchange between her and Evan that she is at her most vulnerable. "But we're not like that, are we?" she asks Evan. "We're not the ones people hurt," she continues. She is not sure, but she is hoping this is true. Or at least she is hoping that Evan will think this is true. And thus, Beane binds these two characters together through their emotions, these characters who appear, on the surface, to be so dissimilar.

Possibly even more purposefully, Beane draws other comparisons between Alexa and Evan. In scene 5 in the first act, while Alexa and Evan are on the Staten Island Ferry, Evan tells Alexa that the story of her life that she is offering him sounds fictitious. Alexa responds that she adds flair to fact for dramatic effect. Since Evan is a writer of fiction, in his art he does the same. The retelling of life's events in exactly the same way and with exactly the same timing as they occurred—spread out and unfocused as life unfolds—does not necessarily make a good novel. So Evan, like Alexa, gathers information, then sorts it according to his central theme to create a dramatic affect. The difference is that Evan portrays his art for what it is—a work of fiction—while Alexa offers it as the truths of her life. They are both gifted storytellers who see the drama in life and have a need to offer their versions of reality not as a collection of facts but as a linkage of ideas. Despite the fact that Evan's art is considered legitimate, his and Alexa's means of making a living are really not that far apart. They both try to sell fiction. "We are the creative people," Alexa tells him at the end of the play, suggesting that she and Evan are alike. The context around this statement implies this shared art of theirs will protect them from the challenges of life. It is with this buffer of fictitious lives, she believes, that she and Evan will survive life unhurt.

At the end of the play, Alexa is so convinced that she and Evan are alike that she asks him to join her in her art of swindling. "The hum, the buzz, the hype, the flash, the fame," she tells him as she tries to persuade him. "This is the only thing that matters." What she does not understand is that although they share similar personality traits, certain needs, and particular gifts of creating fiction, they travel down different roads. Alexa and Evan may both be artists, but their definitions of art are as different as night and day. It is Alexa who craves the constant buzz of excitement, the stimulation of living on the edge. Evan may have craved it, but it was a passing hunger. "What if I have the desire to express myself artistically?" Evan wants to know. Alexa responds: "Suppress it." And Evan almost does. He almost falls into her pot of honey. But Alexa lies to him one time too many. And Evan catches himself before he drowns. He and Alexa may be alike, but he has his limits. So he throws Alexa out of his life and then makes his fortune by selling his fictional interpretation of hers.

Source: Joyce Hart, Critical Essay on *As Bees in Honey Drown*, in *Drama for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2005.



Critical Essay #2

Holm is a fiction and nonfiction writer and editor. In this essay, Holm looks at how this play gives a glimpse into the dark side of being an artist.

A person without the craving, drive, or compulsion to work in the creative arts might well have difficulty understanding the challenges that creative artists face as they try to mesh their visions into the commercial marketplace. *As Bees in Honey Drown* gives the reader an experiential taste of the ramifications of being a modern-day artist or writer in the United States. Many of the reviews of this play focus on the charisma of Alexa, the amazing con artist who robs hopeful artists of their hard-earned dollars. In a larger sense, this is the story of the artist's role in this society and the factors that can either cripple these artists or propel them to success.

Artists long to bring their unique message to the world through their media. Alexa understands this need in an artist. While convincing Wyler to get rid of his agent (thus making it easier for her to begin conning him), Alexa taps into the strange dichotomy that artists deal with when they bring their art to the marketplace.

Alexa: And agents, though I don't believe in agents, do you?

Wyler: Mine is □

Alexa: Let's not deal with them. I find that agents have no imagination. No taste for . . . possibilities.

Wyler: Actually, I agree.

Ironically, Alexa will intentionally put herself in the agent-like role, taking a far greater cut of Wyler's cash than an agent ever would. She zeros in on the thing that speaks to Wyler's heart. Agents have no imagination or taste for possibilities. How can they possibly understand the artist's creative endeavors?

The starving artist becomes more real for the reader, early in the play. Wyler talks of scrounging for subway fare. He lives in a dump while peers his age own cars and homes. He is forced to do temp work to pay the rent. He is stuck in the "little breather period between critical success and financial success." Alexa plays upon the imbalance of power that exists between the marketplace for art and the creators of art. This imbalance is one big reason why many artists give up or lead difficult lives. In view of Wyler's living conditions and this power struggle, readers can see why Wyler falls for Alexa's con. Alexa's offerings seem to Wyler like a rare gift from heaven and an unimaginable stroke of luck.

Alexa knows about that important moment in time when the artist first stands at the "brink of success." Alexa understands the psyche of an artist as if she is one herself. In



an amazing back-and-forth dialog with Kaden, she defines the crucial "brink of success" moment, that time when victims such as Wyler are lured into her con.

Alexa: All of us creative people□

Kaden: Brink of success, they call it.

Alexa: Tearing about trying□

Kaden: The artist wants to be□

Alexa: To feed a nation's insatiable appetite for entertainment.

Kaden: Ready to abandon all morals and logic.

Alexa: So that we can discover something new and vivid□

Kaden: Ready to be famous and, so it would follow, fulfilled.

Alexa: All holding on for dear life as we create fresher and fresher possibilities.

Kaden: Anything not to have to be you, anymore.

Alexa: As bees in honey drown.

Kaden clearly stresses the desire to do anything not to have to live in poverty and obscurity anymore. The artist may be running from himself or herself. She or he may be sick of the struggle. Alexa understands the artist though she creates nothing except the adventure of each new con. Her creativity is fed by outmaneuvering each unlucky artist who is at that brink of success. Kaden cynically admits that there may actually be some value to getting conned by Alexa. Assuming that the artist will only run into more difficulties in the future, Kaden says that Alexa's work is "the screw that toughens the skin for all the future screw attempts." It is a fatalistic statement about the world that aspiring artists face in this culture.

Kaden's dialog carries a more ominous suggestion. As artists reach for success, they may be required to lose themselves. Kaden explains why none of Alexa's victims have ever gone after her for revenge.

We all let her go on because in an odd way, she reminds us what we were foolish enough to think of giving up. To have her life. Her sad, empty life. We all actually considered giving up ourselves.

The last sentence in Kaden's speech is crucial. If a creative artist "gives up" their self, they will be unable to create and have nothing to draw upon. Wyler reaches this point. He is no longer able to write. He gave himself to Alexa and gave her his "arrogance" too.

Mike: Why don't you go off and write something. Forget about Alexa.



Wyler: I can't write.

Mike: Yeah yeah, you can't write.

Wyler: I mean I can't write.

Mike: Are you serious?

Wyler: It isn't just the money that Alexa stole from me. She stole my arrogance. The arrogance it takes to just shamelessly write something and assume someone, anyone might read it. The gall to think I might be a success. I'm blocked. I can not write.

Undoubtedly, Alexa understands that artists have their own oddly functioning internal dichotomy. To produce powerful and compelling work, the artist must know himself or herself well, even if this means mining their unique insecurities and vision of the world. The artist must also, as Wyler points out, be able to draw on a reserve of audacity. The artist must be able to call forth enough ego to produce the work and take the risk of bringing it into the world and withstand the potential criticism and rejection that the world will offer. The artist's dichotomy is precarious, and necessary, and the artist cannot function without both extremes.

Mike's art is also affected by his relationship with Alexa. After Alexa manages to con influential people into attending Mike's art opening, Mike wonders if he has not prostituted himself.

Mike: These people, the ones coming tonight are all□they're the people I hope to one day impress with my real work. And they're here because we've . . . conned them.

Mike creates "fake art"□paintings that are meaningless compared to what he is truly capable of. His real work remains unfinished. Ironically, the paintings that mean the least to Mike□the paintings that he creates in a hurry and without passion□are the ones that sell at the mocked up art opening. Alexa leaves Mike because she is angry, freeing him up to create art that comes to him truly, regardless of market distractions or temptations. When Wyler departs from his conversation with Mike, Mike sounds as if he has achieved real clarity about his artistic vision.

Mike: I want a place to go and paint. To be left alone for a while. And when I'm done painting, I want to get together with some friends, have a beer and talk about stuff. And we'll commiserate if my painting went poorly. And celebrate if my painting went well.

Mike goes on to create art that means something to him. This foreshadows what might be possible for Wyler.

Still, Wyler is tempted one more time during his last long encounter with Alexa. Here, the choices that the artist faces are never more obvious. The artist can remain true to his or her artistic vision and take with this choice the risks found in the precarious world of art and entertainment. Or, Wyler can opt for what Alexa offers. She states what may be Wyler's deepest fears if he falls for her persuasion. Alexa stands for "the hum, the



buzz, the hype, the flash, the flame." Writers do not last long in American society, according to Alexa. The attention span of the populace will not allow for it. "Stay with me and always be popular. Fame without achievement, it is the safest bet I know."

The question of fame without achievement is a turning point for Wyler. Many creative artists face a similar crucial choice. Should one remain true to one's own internal vision even if the marketplace does not call for it? It is a difficult question and one that is at the heart of this play.

Alexa tries to convince Wyler that writing is drudgery, that the only good thing about writing a piece of work is beginning it and ending it. It is in the following dialog that Wyler's crucial choice is so apparent:

Wyler: And what if I have the desire to express myself artistically?

Alexa: Suppress it. It is every time you create that you run the risk of proving or chiseling at your reputation. Come with me. . . . Never, ever be hungry, or thirsty, or doubt yourself. Or wait in line. Or talk to bores.

Presented this way, it becomes clear just why artists need such internal fortitude to stay true to their vision. Alexa is about appearances. Wyler chooses internal truth and his own artistic vision. It is not necessarily an easy choice. Wyler still struggles with it, even after he leaves Alexa. Wyler is "kind of lost, at sea." Wyler almost gives up writing for good.

Wyler: It's just so incredibly difficult, you know? You try to create something. And to know there are so many people waiting to criticize or capitalize and all you want to do is make something that will connect with other people so that we all won't feel so profoundly alone. And we are all so profoundly alone. Why does it have to be so hard to try to cure that in some way. It . . . is . . . so . . . difficult.

Ultimately, Wyler makes the difficult choice, turns his back on the buzz, and returns to writing. Creative artists will recognize themselves in this play, as well as the decisions that get made about remaining true to or not remaining true to artistic vision.

Source: Catherine Dybiec Holm, Critical Essay on *As Bees in Honey Drown*, in *Drama for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2005.



Topics for Further Study

There are many movies that have been made about con artists, such as *The Flim Flam Man* (1967), *The Sting* (1973), *The Paper Moon* (1973), *The Grifters* (1991), and the *Matchstick Men* (2003). Watch two or more of these movies and then write a report on the different techniques that the con artists used. What were their goals? Did they succeed or were they caught? How did they dupe their victims?

Research the energy company Enron. Would you call what they did a con game? Layout the details of the company's crime as vividly as you can. Then present an argument either for or against the company executives and their actions.

Victor Lustig has been called one of the greatest con artists of all times. Research this man's history. How did he con people? Do you think he would get away with his tricks today? Why or why not?

Highlight the few times in this play that the phrase "as bees in honey drown" is mentioned. Study the context in which they are stated. Then write a paper discussing your interpretation of this phrase in terms of art, culture, and entertainment in the United States.

What Do I Read Next?

One of two other Beane plays that have gained the attention of critics is his *The Country Club* (2000), a comedy about a group of party-goers in a small country town and their small-town prejudices and undying promises to cling to the status quo for as long as they possibly can. The other play is Beane's *Music from a Sparkling Planet* (2002), also a comedy. This one focuses on three men and their search for hope, which they seem to have lost as they edge toward their thirties.

David Lindsay-Abaire's name is often linked to Beane's in that they both are contemporary playwrights who like comedy. Lindsay-Abaire has won many awards for his work, which includes *A Devil Inside* (2000), a comedy of revenge, and *Fuddy Meers* (1999), a funny but harrowing tale of an amnesia victim.

Kenneth Lonergan is an award-winning playwright with such hits as *This Is Our Youth* (1999) and *The Waverly Gallery* (2000). In his play *Lobby Hero* (2002), Lonergan has written a humorous account of a young security guard who tries to hide from the world after being thrown out of the navy. The young man unfortunately discovers that the lobby of a busy hotel is the last place he should have tried. Life drags him into some very bizarre stories in which he must deal with people he never would have dreamed he would ever know.

A Tony Award - winning playwright, Richard Greenberg has written the play *Take Me Out*, which was produced in 2002 to critical acclaim. Through humor, the play looks at the serious topic of homophobia, as portrayed in one baseball team when one of the players makes it known that he is gay and then must deal with the consequences.



Further Study

Biggsby, Christopher, *Contemporary American Playwrights*, Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Biggsby has put together an interesting study of some of the most controversial plays and the award-winning playwrights who have enjoyed success on the American stage.

Crespy, David A., *Off-Off-Broadway Explosion: How Provocative Playwrights of the 1960s Ignited a New American Theater*, Backstage Books, 2003.

For an in-depth look into the history of the American theater through the production of innovative plays by beat playwrights of the 1960s, Crespy's book is the place to go. Crespy's account is filled with interviews and anecdotes about such profound thinkers and artists as Edward Albee, Sam Shephard, and Amiri Baraka, playwrights who altered the course of American theater.

Hischak, Thomas S., *American Theatre: A Chronicle of Comedy and Drama, 1969—2000*, Oxford University Press, 2000.

This book provides a comprehensive history of the last half of twentieth-century theater in New York. *As Bees in Honey Drown* is briefly mentioned.

Maurer, David W., *The Big Con: The Story of the Confidence Man*, Anchor Books/Doubleday, 1999.

Maurer was a professor of linguistics who became fascinated with the rash of con artists that traveled along America's highways, conning people out of their cash. Maurer has studied these people and the tricks of their trade, providing an interesting read on how the con artist's mind works.

Sinfield, Alan, *Out on Stage: Lesbian and Gay Theatre in the Twentieth Century*, Yale University Press, 1999.

This book chronicles the history of gay and lesbian characters as portrayed on the stage from Oscar Wilde's writing to the plays produced at the end of the twentieth century. Sinfield contends that whereas gay culture was only obliquely alluded to in the past, in the last quarter of the twentieth century there has been a clearer and more honest depiction of homosexual life in theater.



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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.

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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.

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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:

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