The Au Pair Man Study Guide

The Au Pair Man by Hugh Leonard

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Introduction

The Au Pair Man, by the Irish author Hugh Leonard (John Keyes Byrne), was first produced and published in 1968. It is the first play in the collection *Selected Plays of Hugh Leonard*, which was published in 1992. The play is a reversed-gender *Pygmalion*, a 1912 play by George Bernard Shaw in which a professor makes a bet that he can turn a working-class flower girl into a lady. In *The Au Pair Man*, Eugene, a rough Irish bill collector, becomes a sexual slave to Mrs. Elizabeth Rogers, a wealthy English lady, who tries to turn him into a gentleman. The play is a satirical allegory regarding the battle between Britain and Ireland. It is also a witty comedy of Anglo-Irish manners, full of amusing observations reminiscent of the styles of George Bernard Shaw and Oscar Wilde.

Author Biography

Nationality 1: Irish

Birthdate: 1926

Hugh Leonard (the pseudonym of John Keyes Byrne) was born on November 9, 1926, in Dalkey, a small town near Dublin, Ireland, to an unmarried woman called Annie Byrne. His name was originally John Byrne, but he was adopted soon after birth by Nicholas Keyes, a gardener, and his wife Margaret, and later called himself John Keyes Byrne. In 1941, he won a scholarship to Presentation College, Glasthule, Co. Dublin. In 1945, he joined the Irish civil service, where he worked until 1959.

During his time as a civil servant in the Land Commission, Leonard became involved in amateur dramatics and began to write plays. The second play he submitted to the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, *The Big Birthday Suit*, was accepted for production in 1956. He submitted this play under the pseudonym Hugh Leonard, the name of a character in *The Italian Road* (1954), the play that the Abbey had earlier rejected. When the second play was accepted, he felt he had to keep the successful pseudonym.

Leonard moved to London in the 1960s but returned to Ireland to live in 1970, after a change in the tax laws. He was a prolific writer for the stage, films, and television in England and Ireland, and became known for his darkly humorous stories focusing on the less admirable aspects of human nature. His witty style has been compared with that of his fellow Irish authors, George Bernard Shaw and Oscar Wilde.

Leonard became known in the United States after the 1973 production of *The Au Pair Man* (first produced in 1968) in New York. However, his best-known play was *Da*, which was first produced at the Olney Theater, Olney, Maryland, in 1973. In 1977, that production was presented off-Broadway at the Hudson Guild Theater and then moved to Broadway and the Morosco Theater. In 1978, it was awarded the Drama Critics Circle Award for Best Play, the Drama Desk Award for Outstanding New Play, a Tony for Best Play of the 1977-1978 theater season, and the Outer Critics Circle Award as Best Play of that season.

Other plays by Leonard are *Stephen D* (1962), *The Patrick Pearse Motel* (1971), *A Life* (1979), and *Love in the Title* (1999). His best-known screenplays are for the film adaptation of *Da* (1988) and *Widow's Peak* (1986).

As of 2006, Leonard was the literary manager of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin and a reviewer for *Plays and Players* magazine, published in London. He lived in Dalkey, where he grew up. In 1999, Paule, his wife of forty-five years, died from an asthma attack. In an attempt to come to terms with his grief, Leonard wrote a series of letters to her and published them in a book, *Dear Paule* (2001).

Leonard has described his early life in a working-class Catholic family and his emergence as a writer in two volumes of autobiography, *Home before Night* (1979) and *Out after Dark* (1989). These books were reprinted in the Methuen Biography Series in 2002.

Leonard's work has attracted a host of awards. He received the Italia Prize, International Concourse for Radio and Television, and the Writers Guild of Great Britain Award of Merit, both in 1967, both for the television play *Silent Song* (1966); a Tony Award nomination, in 1974, for *The Au Pair Man*; and a Harvey Award for *A Life*.

Plot Summary

Act 1

The Au Pair Man opens in the London home of Mrs. Rogers. The doorbell rings, chiming the English national anthem. Mrs. Rogers answers the door. Her visitor is Eugene, an Irishman employed by the furniture company Weatherby and Fitch. He has come to collect payment on a wall unit that she bought some time before but never paid for. She is using it as a room divider, though it should be put against a wall. Mrs. Rogers explains that there was once a wall behind the unit, but it fell down. The wall unit is holding up what is left of the ceiling. Mrs. Rogers denies that she bought the unit, claiming it was a gift. Eugene says that Weatherby and Fitch have sent him, the newest employee, to collect Mrs. Rogers's debt as an initiative test.

Mrs. Rogers plies Eugene with whiskey. She admires his fountain pen and asks to borrow it. She says that she has no intention of paying for the wall unit but acknowledges that if he fails to collect on the bill, he will be fired. She reassures him that there are other jobs. In fact, she is advertising for an au pair man. Her husband is often away selling his collection of stamps from the British colonies and needs someone to keep his collection in order, write letters, and pay bills. She emphasizes that she needs an au pair, not a secretary, as a secretary is paid but an au pair is not. She adds that Eugene would not be suitable. Eugene at first says he does not want the post as he wants a job with prospects, but then he demands to know why he is not good enough. She lists his failings, including dirty fingernails, ungrammatical speech, and body odor. Eugene is irritated that she is discriminating against him on the grounds of class.

Eugene tells her that some time ago, a previous employee of Weatherby's called Wilson took all her records and went to her house to collect the money that she owes. He did not return for a long time. When he finally reappeared, he looked emaciated and worn out. He offered to return Mrs. Rogers's address to the firm in return for being reinstated in his job. Mrs. Rogers reveals that Wilson was her previous au pair man. Wilson had begged her to give him the job, but she had found him lazy, and his fountain pen defective. Two days earlier, he had left without saying goodbye. Though Wilson had told her that he had torn up her records, he was evidently lying.

Eugene says that he would never tell her that he had torn up the papers but would do so in front of her. He does so. Each time he makes a tear, Mrs. Rogers lets out a little groan. He asks her to make him her au pair man. Mrs. Rogers is evasive and vanishes into her bedroom. Eugene, thinking he will have to go back to Weatherby's, tries to piece together the torn papers. Mrs. Rogers's head appears through a hatch. She warns him that she is watching him. She asks him who he is. Eugene tells her a story of how he went to the cinema and was groped sexually by an unknown girl. He had reciprocated, but when the lights came on at the end of the film, the girl had looked at him and shouted, □You're not Charlie.□ Mrs. Rogers enters, wearing a negligee. Eugene tells her with some shame that he is not Charlie. She picks up the torn papers

and puts them in the waste bin. She says that Charlie was probably tiresome and fondles his hair. As he gazes at her legs, he wonders how Wilson became so emaciated.

Eugene reflects that he feels more cheerful than when he came in. Mrs. Rogers says that this is because she has cultivated the art of being feminine, and she always aims to please men. She promises that she is never jealous or possessive. She offers him the job of au pair man on a trial basis. Eugene agrees. Together, they set fire to the papers in the waste bin. He eagerly follows Mrs. Rogers into her bedroom.

Act 2

Some time has passed. Eugene is reading aloud from a book. He is dressed in expensive new clothes and his diction is improved. The book consists of points, written by Benjamin Franklin, explaining why older women are better sexual partners than young ones. Mrs. Rogers enters from the bedroom. She is educating Eugene in English history and tells him a story about Queen Elizabeth I. Eugene wonders how practical such knowledge will be; he would rather be instructed in the art of witty conversation. Mrs. Rogers reminds him how well he is being looked after and how comfortable his room is (the area behind the wall unit), with its canopy over the bed to catch the falling plaster. She cannot understand how he could be interested in the world outside her home, which has become a frightening place full of foreigners. Eugene is disturbed to discover that it is not part of Mrs. Rogers's plan to make him better equipped for the outside world, and that he is her prisoner. He wants a wealthy lifestyle, with fast cars and beautiful women. He also wants to go home dressed in a smart suit to impress his mother. Mrs. Rogers reminds him that she is not possessive and that he can go home one day. But when he mentions that he has been traveling on a bus, she interrogates him about where he went. Then she asks to borrow his fountain pen. He tells her to get her own, as she is wearing his out. She steals it, locks it in a box, and puts the key down her décolletage, challenging him to retrieve it. He refuses and breaks open her box. To his horror, many fountain pens fall out.

One night, Eugene comes in drunk. He has to go through Mrs. Rogers's bedroom to reach his own. He tries to creep into his room without waking her. She is heard calling him by the names of Queen Elizabeth I's favorites; she is, perhaps, asleep and dreaming that she is the queen. Eugene takes a shelf out of the wall unit and tries to dive headfirst through the hole, but gets stuck midway, his trousers round his ankles. Mrs. Rogers comes in and switches on the lights. She is angry, telling him that he could have broken the wall unit, and that walls are vital because they provide segregation. She quizzes Eugene about where he has been and with whom, and he admits that he went to a nightclub. He reminds her that she claimed never to be jealous or possessive. Mrs. Rogers says that if she seems possessive, it is because he is untrustworthy. She could not be jealous, as there is no emotional involvement between them. How could there be, she asks, as he is so □sadly underdeveloped□?

Mrs. Rogers adopts a conciliatory approach, saying that friends should have no secrets from one another. She asks him why he drank so much. He replies that when he is drunk, he can remember his homeland. He says that after getting drunk in the club, he picked up a woman and pinned her against a tree. Unfortunately, she turned out to be a policewoman. He stole her police whistle and walked away. He shows Mrs. Rogers the whistle. Jealous of his giving attention to another woman, she taunts and insults him. Furious, he goes to pack his things. She tells him he cannot leave, as □the streets are filled with Australians.□ She tries to charm him into staying by promising him his own coat of arms but cannot resist another insult. Eugene kicks the wall unit, and one of the legs flies off. She takes the whistle and blows it to summon the police.

Act 3

Time has passed. The wall unit is buckling from the pressure of the walls and ceiling. Eugene appears outside, dressed in a suit and bowler hat, and rings the doorbell. Mrs. Rogers, who has invited him, asks him in. She compliments him on his smart appearance. It becomes clear that Eugene has learned the English manners that she was trying to teach him.

Eugene warns her that her house is badly dilapidated and compares it to the *Titanic*, the British ship that sank in 1912. He reveals that he has a girlfriend called Rose, whose family owns several large houses. They do not work, as they have a rich relative who supports them. Rose does not approve of their idle lives. Mrs. Rogers suggests that marriage to Eugene might correct her attitude. Eugene says he is now working for the estate agent Loman and Selway, as Rose insisted that he have a job. Mrs. Rogers says he must get ahead quickly in his career and then throw it aside, as a gentleman only works as a hobby.

Eugene tells her that he is on another initiative test. He has been sent to evict Mrs. Rogers from her home. She protests that she owns it, but he replies that the land on which it is built belongs to a landlord for whom Loman and Selway acts as agent. He shows her a glossy brochure: the landlord is offering to move Mrs. Rogers to a new development called Runnymede. Mrs. Rogers reacts hysterically. Acting like Queen Elizabeth I under threat, she shouts for imaginary guards, seizes an old sword, attacks Eugene and threatens to behead him, and runs the brochure through. Finally, she plunges the sword into the wall, where it sticks. Eugene points out that the house is a wreck and even the electricity has been cut off because Mrs. Rogers refuses to spend any of her huge wealth on it. Mrs. Rogers tells him to leave. Eugene persists, saying that she has broken the lease by not doing repairs and the house is dragging down the neighborhood. He produces an ancient lease, which states that if she, the tenant, fails to keep the house in order, it will revert to the landlord. In any case, the local authority has slated the house for demolition on public health grounds. Mrs. Rogers reluctantly signs a document agreeing to go to Runnymede. Then she reveals that she is Rose's rich relative. Eugene, speechless, drops his papers.

Mrs. Rogers tells him that after he left her employ, she arranged for Rose to look after him. She predicts that in ten years' time, Rose will have lost her rebelliousness and be exactly like her. She has Eugene within her power: if she refuses to go to Runnymede, he will lose his job with Loman and Selway and his marriage prospects with Rose; if she goes to Runnymede, Rose will be angry that she has been dispossessed, and he will also lose her. She suggests that Eugene catch up with the work that needs to be done in her house. As she briefly steps out of the room, Eugene seizes the sword and seems ready to kill her. She comes in carrying the waste bin and orders him to tidy up his papers. He drops to his knees, picks them up, and puts them in the bin. The clock chimes, but the chimes sound like a record that is running down.

Characters

Eugene Hartigan

Eugene Hartigan is a rough Irish bill collector who calls on Mrs. Rogers to obtain her payment of a debt for the wall unit she keeps in her house. In the allegory of the play, he stands for Ireland, and, more specifically, for those Irish rebels who sought to drive the British out of their country. Far from extracting payment from Mrs. Rogers, he ends up being exploited by her as her unpaid au pair man and sexual slave. In part, he finds himself in this position because his sensitivity about being working-class and discriminated against makes him so eager for acceptance that he pushes his way into a job that can offer him nothing. Though Eugene is not unintelligent, he is naïve and always one step behind Mrs. Rogers. He is ambitious, but while at first he believes that working for her could be a route to advancement, he soon finds out that there is no reward in the job apart from acquiring some of the manners and diction of an Englishman. Though at the beginning of act 3 he believes he is forging a life for himself independently of Mrs. Rogers, her power over his fiancée, Rose, means that he cannot escape her clutches.

Mrs. Elizabeth Rogers

Mrs. Rogers is a wealthy English lady who lives in a crumbling house in London. In the allegory of the play, she stands for Britain, and her house is the declining British Empire. She is a lascivious middle-aged woman whose husband (if he really exists) is generally abroad selling his colonial stamp collection. She co-opts Eugene into her service as an unpaid au pair man, or, as it turns out, a sexual slave and general drudge. Alternately charming, cruel, insulting, and terrifying, she seduces, threatens, and coerces Eugene into doing her will. When crossed, she flies into a rage, calling in the police or attacking Eugene physically. Mrs. Rogers is a staunch monarchist whose doorbell chimes the English national anthem and who expects Eugene to toast the royal family when he drinks. Seemingly without scruples, she never has any intention of paying for the wall unit that holds up her house. Throughout, she pursues only her own interests, though she hypocritically claims that she is helping Eugene by teaching him refined English manners. To her, it is the veneer of civilization that matters; she is oblivious to the deeper humanitarian values.

Rose

Rose does not appear in the play in person. She is a young person whom Eugene meets and hopes to marry. Eugene is aware that she is a member of a wealthy family that owns several large houses and travels between them shooting game. What he does not know, until Mrs. Rogers informs him, is that Rose is her relative and that the

family receives its vast allowance from her. In the allegory of the play, Rose stands for Northern Ireland.

Matthew Wilson

Matthew Wilson does not appear in the play in person. He is a former employee of Weatherby and Fitch who disappears after being sent on an initiative test to collect on Mrs. Rogers's debt. He reappears some time later, looking emaciated and worn out, after having been co-opted as Mrs. Rogers's sexual slave. His successor in the post is Eugene.

Themes

The Battle between Britain and Ireland

The Au Pair Man is an allegory. An allegory is a work in which the characters, actions, and sometimes the setting, are contrived to make sense on the literal level and also to communicate a second level of meaning. On the literal level, the play is about an English lady hiring an Irish man as her au pair man. On the second level of meaning, the play comments satirically on the battle between Britain (or more specifically, England) and Ireland.

Britain has occupied Ireland for many centuries. Irish nationalists, who are mostly Catholic, have opposed the occupation, wanting a unified Ireland independent of Britain. This conflict is embodied in the only two characters in the play, the wealthy English lady, Mrs. Elizabeth Rogers, who represents Britain, and the rough Irish bill collector, Eugene Hartigan, who represents Ireland. Mrs. Rogers's dilapidated house is the crumbling British Empire, while Rose, whom Eugene hopes to marry, represents Northern Ireland, the area of Ireland that is unified with Britain (Irish people who support union with Britain, called unionists, are mostly Protestant and concentrated in Northern Ireland).

Eugene becomes Mrs. Rogers's sexual slave, underlining Leonard's view that the relationship between Britain and Ireland is an exploitative one. As well as being a relationship between occupier and occupied, it is also a relationship between the upper- and middle-class British people and the working-class Irish. It should be noted, however, that Leonard has stated that in his play, the exploitation runs both ways. S. F. Gallagher, in his introduction to *Selected Plays of Hugh Leonard*, writes:

Leonard . . . who has confessed his fascination with the class structure in Britain□□Class is about the only facet of English life which excites me or about which I care intensely□□says □*The Au Pair Man* is about an outsider despising this structure while using it for his own material good.□

Eugene is not paid for being Mrs. Rogers's au pair man, but he is provided with expensive clothes and food and an education in what she considers to be superior English manners. This is a satirical reference to the arguments often used by Irish unionists who want to maintain the union of Northern Ireland with Britain: Northern Ireland benefits economically and developmentally from alliance with the historically more prosperous Britain. Nevertheless, Leonard portrays the more powerful half of this relationship, Mrs. Rogers, with little sympathy. While remaining an amusing comic character, she comes across as dishonest, manipulative, cruel, contemptuous, vengeful, and possessive, leaving the audience in no doubt that she is not excused for her actions and has no claim to the moral high ground. Britain is to be viewed similarly.

The Arrogance of the Occupier

The Au Pair Man draws attention to the habit of Britain and other imperial powers of justifying their occupation of other nations by claiming that they are civilizing those countries. By the latter half of the twentieth century, the civilization claim was mostly based on material examples, such as the introduction of technological advancements and institutions for education and health care. In the nineteenth century, of which Mrs. Rogers is a relic, British justifications were more likely to focus on the alleged positive influence of British manners, learning, and customs. After World War II, awareness grew of various atrocities committed in the name of civilizing nations, and there was a corresponding change in the language of imperial powers. Talk of civilization (which carries an unacceptable implication of superiority of the occupying nation over the occupied) gave way to talk of bringing democracy. However, it could be argued that while the rhetoric changed, the underlying assumption□that the occupier is of superior intelligence and development to the occupied, who should therefore see the occupation of their nation as a boon□remains the same.

British Xenophobia

Leonard uses the character of Mrs. Rogers to highlight what he sees as British xenophobia (fear of foreigners) and ignorance of other cultures. The irony lies in the discrepancy between the fact that the British have a history of occupying foreign countries by force and the fact that the British are terrified of foreigners. Mrs. Rogers likes to stay in her house and responds with terror to the idea of leaving it because □foreign persons□ and □dusky gentlemen□ □infest□ the streets. When Eugene threatens to leave, she tells him he cannot as □the streets are filled with Australians.□ At the same time, she retains the delusion that the Indians whom her father □was obliged to crucify□ because they □behaved rather badly,□ □all adored him.□ (This is a reference to the British occupation of India. Indian resistance peaked in Mahatma Gandhi's Quit India movement of civil disobedience and ended with India's independence in 1947.) Mrs. Rogers assumes that the occupied nation can only be grateful to men like her father for their gift of civilization. Similarly, she expects gratitude from Eugene for her teaching him English manners, at the same time that she abuses and insults him.

In 1968, when the play was written, the type of xenophobia embodied by Mrs. Rogers was already seen as old-fashioned and redundant by much of an increasingly multicultural society. This is shown by Mrs. Rogers's increasing sense of alienation in a world where people who were once her friends now □pretend□ that □everyone is as good as everyone else.□ However, such xenophobia was perceived to persist in British policy in Ireland, which at that time retained laws discriminating against Catholics.

Style

Allegory of Character, Action, and Setting

Political allegory in *The Au Pair Man* extends beyond the two main characters to a character that does not physically appear. This is Wilson, Eugene's predecessor as Mrs. Rogers's au pair man. When Wilson emerges from his time with Mrs. Rogers, he is emaciated and worn out. On the literal level, this is a comic comment on Mrs. Rogers's sexual appetite. On the level of political satire, this probably refers to the Irish potato famine between 1845 and 1850. Britain is widely considered to have been partly responsible for the famine, because of British-imposed land ownership laws and changes in the rural economy brought in by British and Anglo-Irish landlords.

The play's setting also carries a great deal of allegorical significance. Mrs. Rogers's dilapidated house stands for the declining British Empire. The fact that Mrs. Rogers believes she owns it and later finds out that the land on which it is built belongs to someone else refers to the conviction of the British-occupying government that it has a right to be in Ireland. Eugene's attempt to evict her from the house symbolizes Irish resistance to British occupation; the fact that he is unsuccessful implies that Leonard does not believe that Ireland will achieve independence from Britain.

The allegory is carried into the internal layout of the house. The wall unit, which Mrs. Rogers uses as a partition and to brace the walls and ceiling, represents the partition of Ireland into the British-owned Northern Ireland and the independent Republic of Ireland. Mrs. Rogers sleeps on one side of the partition, and Eugene on the other. The atrocious state of the house behind the wall unit refers to the economic deprivation of the mainly Catholic Republic of Ireland at the time of writing. The collapse of the wall unit over time refers to the vulnerability and instability of the British system of partition.

Symbolism

Throughout the play, the fountain pen is a comic phallic symbol. Mrs. Rogers repeatedly borrows Eugene's fountain pen and becomes angry when he withholds it. She is delighted with its quality, though she is contemptuous of the fountain pen of his predecessor Wilson, which, in line with his lethargic and lazy character, always proved defective. Act 1 ends with the desperate Mrs. Rogers stealing Eugene's pen and locking it in her box. When he forces the box open, many fountain pens fall out. Eugene gives her a significant look, as he knows what this means: he is one in a long line of au pair men whose pens she has stolen.

The pen may also have a secondary symbolic meaning. Ireland has produced a disproportionately large number of great writers, who are revered in Britain. Mrs. Rogers's obsessive desire for Eugene's fountain pen may comment on the gap between British attitudes toward Irish literature and toward the nation of Ireland as a whole. In

addition, British policies in Ireland and a stigma attached to the Irish language have suppressed its use, meaning that most Irish writers before the 1990s wrote in English. In a sense, then, the Irish lost their writers to the British, just as the series of au pair men lose their pens to Mrs. Rogers.

Mrs. Rogers's taunting of Eugene as □Stripey□ is an insult that works on the literal and symbolic levels. On the literal level, it mocks the poverty of Eugene's family, as the term refers to the striped material used by his family to lengthen an ancient shirt that he had long since out grown. In Ireland, striped wool or cotton calico fabric was commonly used for shirts by poorer rural people. On the symbolic level, □Stripey□ is a reference to the tricolor, the triple-striped flag of the Irish Republic and the nationalists.

Speech Styles

The Au Pair Man's debt to Irish author George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion* has often been noted. In Shaw's play, a large part of the professor's success in passing the London flower girl off as a lady springs from the changes he teaches her to make in her speech. Shaw knew that in the England of his time, perhaps more than any other place in the world, accent and speech patterns defined class. He commented in the preface to *Pygmalion* (cited in *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*), □It is impossible for an Englishman to open his mouth, without making some other Englishman despise him.□ This point is illustrated in *The Au Pair Man*, as Mrs. Rogers constantly sneers at Eugene's Irish accent and dialect and tries to teach him to speak like an upper-class Englishman. When Eugene rebels against Mrs. Rogers's authority, he provokes her by returning to his Irish vernacular, such as saying □voilence□ instead of □violence.□ The historical British suppression of the Irish language (though suppression also came from Irish sources) is reflected in Mrs. Rogers's arrogant statement, □Your mind was a blank page and I wrote my name on it.□ To Mrs. Rogers, the Irish language is merely a blank.

Historical Context

The Troubles

During the twentieth century, there have been two periods of unrest in Ireland, which have become known as the Troubles. The first was the Irish War of Independence, a guerrilla campaign conducted by the Irish Republican Army (often called the Old IRA to distinguish it from the later IRA) against the British government in Ireland from 1919 until the truce in 1921. The peace talks led to the Anglo-Irish Treaty (1921), which allowed the mostly Protestant Northern Ireland to opt out of the mostly Catholic Irish Free State. Northern Ireland did so and became part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. The Irish Free State, that part of Ireland that declared itself independent from Britain, was named the Republic of Ireland, or simply Ireland.

The second period of Troubles centered on the violence involving paramilitary organizations such as the IRA, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC, the Northern Irish police), the British Army, and other groups in Northern Ireland from the late 1960s until the 1998 peace settlement known as the Good Friday Agreement. The conflict began when the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA), formed in 1967, campaigned for civil rights for Northern Ireland's Catholic minority. NICRA drew its inspiration from the civil rights movement in the United States. NICRA's demands included an end to the manipulation of voting regions, which gave unionists control over local government even in towns with nationalist majorities; an end to discrimination against Catholics in government employment and local authority housing; disbandment of the B Specials section of the RUC, which was viewed by many Catholics as a Protestant vigilante force; and repeal of the Special Powers Acts of 1922, 1933, and 1943. The Special Powers Acts allowed arrest without charge or warrant, internment without trial, flogging or execution of suspects, use of witness testimony as evidence without requiring the witnesses to be present for cross-examination or rebuttal, destruction of buildings, requisition of land or property, and banning of any organization, meeting, or publication. These measures were seen as being aimed against the nationalists.

In practice, the power to intern without trial under the Acts of 1922, 1933, and 1943 was only used immediately after the partition of Ireland (1921) and during World War II (1939-1945). The 1971 law reactivating internment without trial, passed in Northern Ireland, was a different matter. Though the British government claimed that the law was for the purpose of fighting terrorism from either side, Irish Catholics saw it in practice as another tool to repress them. Between 1971 and 1975, of 1,981 people who were detained, 1,874 were Catholic/nationalist, and only 107 were Protestant/unionist. The NICRA took up the issue in their campaigns. At a NICRA anti-internment march in the Northern Irish city of Derry on January 30, 1972, twenty-six unarmed demonstrators were shot by the British Army, of whom thirteen died immediately and a fourteenth died a few months later as a result of his injuries. The incident became known as Bloody Sunday. Following this, the NICRA lost support as many nationalists lost faith in

peaceful protest and turned to the Provisional IRA. The backlash against internment led to the 1972 decision of the British government under Prime Minister Edward Heath to suspend the Northern Ireland government and replace it with direct rule from London.

Potato Famine

Another historical event that may be reflected in the play in the sad tale of Wilson, the Weatherby and Fitch employee who becomes emaciated and worn out in Mrs. Rogers's service, is the Irish potato famine (1845-1850). The famine was caused by a blight that destroyed the potato crop, the staple food of Irish rural people. British policy in Ireland is widely considered to have been partly responsible for the devastation caused by the famine. First, British penal laws dating from the late 1500s meant that Catholics could face confiscation of their property. As a result, by the time of the potato famine, most Catholics held small amounts of land. Second, British penal laws forbade Irish Catholics to pass on family land to a single son. This prohibition led to subdivision of plots with every generation, meaning that by the time of the famine, most family plots were extremely small. Potatoes were the only crop that could be grown in sufficient quantity to feed a family on such plots, leading to a dangerous dependence on a single crop. Third, much of the best land was packaged into large estates owned by absentee British landlords, who, even while the famine was in progress, continued to use it to grow cash crops for export. This arrangement meant that Irish Catholics could not be self-sufficient in food, except for the potato crops grown on small plots of poor soil.

It should be noted that many landlords of large estates did try to help their starving tenant farmers. They organized soup kitchens and relief works such as building (mostly superfluous) roads and walls, for which they paid the farmers. Some estates bankrupted themselves in the process. As a result of the potato famine, around two million Irish people emigrated to Britain, the United States, Canada, and Australia.

Speech Characteristics as a Sign of Class

Mrs. Rogers's constant attempts to correct Eugene's Irish pronunciation and dialect to a more English style may refer to the historical suppression of the Irish language by the British. The language has traditionally been viewed as a tool of Irish nationalists, and in the twentieth century, it was perceived as indicating links to the IRA. Before 1871, the Irish language was banned in Ireland's primary schools, and only English was taught, by order of the British government. Not all suppression of the Irish language came from Britain, however. Many Irish-speaking parents discouraged their children from speaking Irish, as a strong stigma attached to the language. The Irish Catholic Church also discouraged the use of Irish in its schools until 1890, as economic opportunities were seen as being within English-speaking countries.

Critical Overview

The Au Pair Man was first produced to popular acclaim in Dublin, Ireland, at the Dublin Theatre Festival in 1968, before a mainly Irish audience. The following year, it was produced in London but received a less enthusiastic reception. The theater critic of the *Times*, Michael Billington, comments that while in the context of the Dublin Festival the play might seem □a joyously irreverent attack on Britain's fading Imperial grandeur,□ in Britain, □its analysis of the British malaise looks oddly insubstantial, and its satire infinitely less wounding than one had hoped.□ Billington finds the story contrived:

what makes the comic allegory unconvincing is that it never seems to grow out of a plausible realistic situation: instead one feels Mr. Leonard has decided on a thesis and then looked around for a way of illustrating it.

The play fared better with critics in the United States, when it was produced at the Lincoln Center's Vivian Beaumont Theater in New York in 1973. The performances of the two leads, Julie Harris and Charles Durning, were widely praised. One *Time* magazine critic found the audience □captivated, fascinated and pleasurably teased□ by the characters. This critic notes that while the narrative line occasionally meandered, □much of the evening consists of a fiendishly clever talkfest,□ reminiscent of the plays of George Bernard Shaw. *Los Angeles Times* critic William Glover remarks that □Leonard is out to uphold the Irish playwriting tradition for ironic mockery,□ drawing a comparison with the works of the Irish writer Oscar Wilde. Glover sums up the production as a □generally beguiling, brilliantly performed parable.□

The 1994 production of the play at the Irish Repertory Theater in New York drew a lukewarm review from David Richards, writing in the *New York Times*. Richards states, □Unfortunately, the characters are saddled with so much symbolic weight they aren't particularly believable as people.□ Richards notes that this production suffered in comparison with the Vivian Beaumont Theater's from the absence of Harris and Durning, who □lent their considerable personal charisma to the roles.□

As of 2006, the play seems less likely than previously to be taken up by theater producers because the political situation it portrays is specific to a certain time. Ireland is a different place, more engaged in looking to the future and to Europe than to its past relationship with Britain. Britain, too, has changed: the British Empire as portrayed in the play is all but gone, although Britain still occupies other countries by military force. This latter trend, however, has given rise to new forms of political satire more specific to the age.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2

Critical Essay #1

Robinson has a Master of Arts in English. She is a writer and editor and a former teacher of English literature and creative writing. In the following essay, Robinson examines the relationship between Britain and Ireland as it is enacted in Hugh Leonard's The Au Pair Man*.*

The Au Pair Man is a satirical allegory on the fraught relationship between Britain and Ireland, a country that Britain has occupied for centuries. Britain is represented by the ardent royalist, Mrs. Rogers. Her crumbling home, along with her stamp-collecting husband, who is abroad □selling his colonials,□ represents the declining British Empire. Ireland is represented by the rough Irish bill collector, Eugene. The evolving relationship between the two reflects Leonard's view as an Irishman on the dynamics of the Britain-Ireland conflict.

It is significant that both Eugene and his predecessor, Wilson, initially go to Mrs. Rogers's house in order to claim payment on a debt that she owes to their firm. Allegorically, they represent the Irish rebels who demand justice and freedom from British rule. In a rapid reversal, however, the men who want change end up shoring up the status quo. The British theater critic Irving Wardle, quoted by S. F. Gallagher in his introduction to *Selected Plays of Hugh Leonard*, calls *The Au Pair Man*□an object lesson (very pertinent to the 1960s) in how the establishment disarms plebian rebels.□ Both Eugene and Wilson fall victim to Mrs. Rogers's charm, threats, and domineering behavior. Both find themselves being exploited as her sexual slaves and unpaid laborers. At the beginning of act 3, Eugene turns up at Mrs. Rogers's house dressed in the uniform of the 1960s English businessman: suit, bowler hat, and umbrella. He drinks sherry now, the favored drink of the English upper- and middle-class, having abandoned the traditional Irish drink, whiskey. This metamorphosis reflects Leonard's view of the time-honored tactics of the occupying power, which, when faced with rebels, either terrorizes them into submission or co-opts them into its service. Eugene has become almost English. Historically, such assimilation was the pragmatic response to British rule of the majority of Northern Irish.

The character of Mrs. Rogers reflects Leonard's view of the class warfare between the British occupiers and the Irish. While exploiting Eugene as her sexual slave and for unpaid labor, she repeatedly tells him that he is of inferior intelligence, learning, and manners. She says:

We are separate islands. I am lush and crammed with amenities, a green and pleasant land; you have good fishing but are sadly underdeveloped. We aren't even in the same archipelago.

The reference to good fishing is to the fondness of upper-class British people for visiting their country estates in Ireland to fish or hunt. There is also a humorous allusion to the traditional symbolism of fish to mean the sexual organs, in the light of Eugene's role as sexual slave.

Mrs. Rogers is zealously pro-monarchy. The monarch of Britain is commonly viewed as a symbol of the British Empire and British rule. In Northern Ireland, the mostly unionist population tends to be pro-monarchy, whereas in the Republic of Ireland, the mostly nationalist population tends to be anti-monarchy or indifferent. Mrs. Rogers expects Eugene to toast the royal family and her doorbell plays the national anthem of the United Kingdom, "God Save the Queen." She has a bust of Queen Victoria (ruled 1837-1901) and in moments of stress, falls into the utterance of Queen Elizabeth I (ruled 1558-1603). Both these queens reigned during periods when England massively increased its power and influence abroad. Mrs. Rogers shares her initials, E. R., with Queen Elizabeth I and Queen Elizabeth II, who became queen in 1953. When applied to queens, E. R. is short for Elizabeth Regina, Latin for Elizabeth the Queen. In act 2, when Eugene enters the house drunk, she is heard calling, perhaps in her sleep, for "my lord Essex." The Earl of Essex was a favorite of Elizabeth I, and the queen sent him to Ireland to put down a rebellion against English rule. Mrs. Rogers's sporadic belief that she is Elizabeth I underlines her unshakeable assumption that she has an inborn right to supreme power over Eugene and her other au pair men.

One of the major themes of *The Au Pair Man* is the arrogance of the occupier, as typically an occupying nation justifies its occupation with the belief that it is doing a favor to the occupied nation by bringing it the gift of civilization. Not only is Mrs. Rogers convinced of her right to rule, but she believes that Eugene should be grateful to be her subject. This delusion underpins her account of her father in British India, twirling his moustache and making an "austere little speech" to a group of Indians who had "behaved rather badly," and whom he had been "obliged to crucify." Literally, as the nails were "hammered in," he lectured them. She claims: "They all adored him. That kind of gentleness isn't to be found any more." In this account, Leonard juxtaposes Mrs. Rogers's tone of genteel nostalgia with a horrific incident to make his satirical point about the brutality underlying the arrogance of empire.

The delusion that the occupier is doing a favor for the occupied nation is also at work in Mrs. Rogers's comparison of the crimes of rape and theft. While she considers theft, even of an object as trivial as a police whistle, to be a serious crime, rape is another matter: "even at its worst it is no more than pressing an unwanted gift upon another person." Leonard's satirical message is that Britain (Mrs. Rogers) is raping Ireland (Eugene) but persuades itself that it is doing nothing worse than bestowing an unwanted gift on the country. This is confirmed by Mrs. Rogers's repeated insistences that Eugene should be grateful to her for all that she does for him. Mrs. Rogers's lenient attitude toward rape also draws attention to Leonard's view of the difference in values between the two nations. The materialistic British, he implies, care more about crime against property (theft) than crime against people (rape).

There is an additional point that the whistle that Eugene steals is the property of the police, who, in the form of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), have traditionally been viewed by Irish nationalists as agents of the illegitimate British occupiers. This viewpoint is allegorically suggested at the end of act 2, when Eugene, maddened by Mrs. Rogers's possessiveness and insults, decides to leave. Mrs. Rogers's response is to

blow the whistle in order to summon the police, just as the British, in the opinion of many Irish people, called upon the RUC to enforce British government policy.

The tactics used by Mrs. Rogers to keep Eugene at her side comment on Leonard's view of the tactics used by Britain to keep Ireland in submission. The fact that Mrs. Rogers keeps Eugene a virtual prisoner reflects the hated British policy of internment without trial, which, in practice, was used far more often against Catholic nationalists (who opposed British rule) than unionist Protestants (who supported British rule). Her interrogation of Eugene whenever he goes out mirrors the deeply unpopular mass surveillance of Northern Ireland's population instituted by the British government. Ultimately, Leonard suggests, Britain's power over Ireland rested in its superior military force and its willingness to use it. Leonard never lets the audience lose sight of the violence underlying Mrs. Rogers's veneer of charm, suggested in her comment to Eugene, □I thought of sending a gunboat, but an invitation proved just as effective.□ Finally, the veneer cracks when Eugene tries to persuade her to vacate her house and move to Runnymede. In a scene in which she believes herself to be, first, Jesus Christ (she repeats the words he spoke on the cross) and then Queen Elizabeth I, her fury erupts in a full-blown physical attack on Eugene. Runnymede is the place where Magna Carta, a bill of rights limiting the power of the monarch, was signed in 1215, so Eugene's attempt to make her move to a development with that name represents Irish attempts to make Britain respect their civil rights.

Eugene is not, however, an entirely innocent victim. He wants to better himself. He has dreams of a luxurious lifestyle, with fast cars and beautiful women, and at first hopes that working for Mrs. Rogers will provide the means to advancement. He is disturbed to discover that it is no part of her plan to teach him skills that will be useful in the wider world. Instead, she tells him stories about Queen Elizabeth I, corrects his pronunciation, and advises him not to work except as a hobby, making him into her idea of an English gentleman. He finds that working for Mrs. Rogers leads to one destination only, and that is working for Mrs. Rogers. Finally, Eugene stays with her because he has nowhere else to go. This is a situation which Mrs. Rogers herself engineers by refusing to pay for her wall unit, thus ruining his chances of continued employment.

At the beginning of act 3, Eugene believes he has slipped out of Mrs. Rogers's clutches and has found an independent route to success and happiness by marrying Rose. (Rose stands for Northern Ireland, with a reference to the rose as a traditional symbol of England.) What is more, he looks likely to achieve justice for his firm of estate agents and evict Mrs. Rogers from her house. But there is no escape for Eugene, or for Ireland. In a cruel twist, Mrs. Rogers reveals that Rose is her relative and financially dependent upon her. If he evicts Mrs. Rogers, Rose will be angry and refuse to marry him, and if he does not, he will lose his job and Rose will reject him. This means that Eugene remains in Mrs. Rogers's power as surely as Northern Ireland remains in Britain's power. Eugene and Mrs. Rogers are inextricably bound together, suggesting that the conflict between Britain and Ireland will endure forever.

Source: Claire Robinson, Critical Essay on *The Au Pair Man*, in *Drama for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2007.

Critical Essay #2

Hart is a freelance writer and published author. In the following essay, she studies the personality flaws of the characters of this play and the characters' symbiotic relationship.

Hugh Leonard's play *The Au Pair Man* is about two weak people, Mrs. Rodgers and Eugene Hartigan, who find one another through a series of coincidences and discover that two vulnerable people can better protect themselves if they band together. Theirs is not a healthy relationship, but it is in their coming together that they find they are better equipped to deal with life. Like the piece of furniture□the wall unit that Mrs. Rodgers bought but forgot to pay for□that holds up the ceiling and walls of Mrs. Rodgers's dilapidated house, the two characters lean upon one another in order to keep their lives from collapsing in on them. Although the play begins with the characters exploring their differences, as the play continues, it becomes obvious, if not to the characters at least to the audience, that Mrs. Rodgers and Eugene are very much alike and that they need each other.

Though Mrs. Rodgers and Eugene would much rather see only how they are different from one another, it is easy to see their similarities and their disparities as soon as the play begins. Mrs. Rodgers loves to look down on Eugene, subtly (and not so subtly) claiming higher social status and appreciation of the finer things in life than Eugene knows. However, it is obvious from the way Mrs. Rodgers speaks to Eugene that both of them are afraid, insecure, and very much on edge when dealing with everyday occurrences as simple as a conversation between strangers. For example, Eugene stands outside Mrs. Rodgers's door, nervous about confronting the woman about her overdue bill for the oak wall unit that sits inside her living room. On her part, Mrs. Rodgers opens the door and, without any attempt at offering even the simplest salutation to the stranger who stands on the other side, goes on the attack. □What do you want of me?□ she asks in the first line of the play. This assault is not provoked from anything that Eugene has done other than his ringing her door bell. From this, one can surmise that the irritation that Mrs. Rogers feels comes not from anything Eugene has done but rather it comes from inside herself. She is as nervous as Eugene is in confronting a stranger. On the surface, Mrs. Rogers may convince herself that she is aggravated because Eugene has invaded her privacy, but deep down, as the audience soon finds out, Mrs. Rogers is really irritated with herself. She is lonesome, which makes her defensive when someone reminds her of her isolation. Eugene, once he becomes more comfortable in his encounter with Mrs. Rogers, also exposes his own loneliness, another of the many traits that the two characters share.

Because of her insecurities, Mrs. Rogers continually attempts to keep Eugene on unstable ground. She needs to have the upper hand in her relationship with the world. If she expresses any vulnerability, she is afraid she will fall to pieces. Her false bravado is the prop she uses to present the fragile image she has built up around herself, an image that has little to do with reality. So whenever Eugene makes even the simplest and most obvious statement, Mrs. Rogers questions it. First, Eugene asks that she confirm her

name. □Mrs. Rogers?□ Eugene asks. Mrs. Rogers responds: □Well, that depends.□ A little later, when Eugene steps into the house and notices the wall unit, he says: □I see you still have it.□ Mrs. Rogers's response is: □Have I?□ Then when Eugene points out that she is using the wall unit as a room divider, Mrs. Rogers asks: □Am I?□ All of these exchanges seem absurd. What does Mrs. Rogers believe she is hiding? Everything is out there in front of her staring her in the face. But the fact that she questions it makes Eugene stand a little off kilter, makes him second-guess his own assumptions. Maybe he has stated something that is not true. So he has to explain himself further. When he tries to offer a statement that might clarify what he sees, Mrs. Rogers tells Eugene that he is being rude. What a great game Mrs. Rogers is playing. Of course, if Eugene were stronger in himself, he would have nothing to do with this game. He would see that Mrs. Rogers is strange and mentally frail. Instead, Eugene goes on the defensive. He apologizes to her. He turns his statements around so he can agree with her. This play can be easily likened to a boxing match, a competition that will first go one way and then another as the two anxious characters try, not to find strength in themselves, but to zap any strength that they might happen upon in their opponent. Eugene should definitely have the upper hand, as he is there to shame Mrs. Rogers into paying her debt. Eugene has the law on his side if nothing else, and yet Mrs. Rogers makes Eugene feel ill at ease. Mrs. Rogers has won, at least, the first round.

The playwright Leonard offers a deeper reflection on Mrs. Rogers's character when he has her explain why she is using the wall unit as a room divider. When Eugene suggests that the piece of furniture looks odd, sticking out into the room as it does, □it must look odd from the other side,□ Mrs. Rogers replies, □I don't look at it from the other side.□ The room on the other side of the wall unit has totally collapsed, and Mrs. Rogers does not want to see it. Here, the playwright is offering two insights. First, Mrs. Rogers does not want to look at reality. She does not want to see the damage and ruin that is corrupting her life. She does not want to deal with facts, such as the one about not having paid her debts or the one that confirms that her life is falling apart. The other insight that Leonard proposes is that Mrs. Rogers is rigid in her views. She believes what she sees is truth. Anyone who sees otherwise is wrong in their assumptions. In her statement that she does not look at things from the other side she implies that she does not consider other people's perceptions; she will not accept another person's point of view. She wants to control her life at all costs, which, the audience soon learns, includes her never stepping outside her home. Eugene wants control, too. He has not yet stated this and may not even be aware of it yet, but he craves status. He wants people to notice him because of his clothes or the way he carries himself. He is excited when someone refers to him respectfully, calling him, sir. He wants to control other people's perceptions of him, those people who do not dismiss him or make him invisible by ignoring him. Although Eugene wants recognition from the outside world and Mrs. Rogers wants parameters set around her inner world, they both need that sense of control of their surroundings.

Although these two people eventually find a relationship by which each of them becomes a little stronger, it is at the expense of the other that they make the relationship work. Mrs. Rogers must convince Eugene that he is inferior to her and that he needs her in order to advance. She proves this by bringing up French and German phrases,

for instance, that Eugene often does not understand. When he asks her to explain, she makes statements such as □I don't mean to be patronizing, but if you have to ask, you can't possibly afford to know.□ Of course, she means to be patronizing. She has to belittle him to maintain her own superiority.

In addition to her demeaning comments, Mrs. Rogers also dangles things in front of Eugene, teasing him. Sometimes the teasing is sexual in nature. She makes tantalizing insinuations, for example, concerning his fountain pen, which she describes as large, burly, and serviceable. She wants to hold the pen at first. Then when Eugene asks for it back, Mrs. Rogers tells him that he should not wear it on the outside but rather should hide it so that not everyone knows he has such a great instrument. This exchange, like many others in the play, is Mrs. Rogers' way of testing Eugene's sexual interest in her. The pen is a phallic symbol. It represents something private, something that only Eugene uses. It is also something that Mrs. Rogers does not want anyone else, but her, to share. It is not clear if the two of them ever have an intimate relationship, but the sexual overtones are often present in their conversations. Sex is used as a form of control by both of them, either by tantalizing one another or by rousing jealousy.

In addition to the sexual insinuations, Mrs. Rogers also dangles the au pair job in front of Eugene, first telling him about it then stating that he is not worthy of the position. The dialogue that occurs over this topic is indicative of the push and pull of their relationship. When the subject of the au pair job is first broached, Mrs. Rogers refers to it as □Mother's help.□ Then she quickly adds: □No, I'm being naughty. Father's help, really.□ This statement is very telling. Why would she consider her statement naughty? It is not an obviously mischievous comment. A mother's helper might insinuate helping around the house with food or cleaning or children. However, with Mrs. Rogers's bent of mind, her thoughts might have once again slipped to the bedroom, exposing her desires for sex. She attempts to cover this up, telling Eugene that the job would really be taking care of her husband's business affairs. What is interesting to note is that Mrs. Rogers only mentions her husband in order to provide Eugene with missing information, namely that her husband (if there really is a husband) is seldom home. Mrs. Rogers is setting the scene in this part of the dialogue. She is adding color to the offer of the au pair position that she is going to describe and then take away, removing it from Eugene's grasp but hoping that in doing so, Eugene will just want it more. She describes herself as helpless and housebound, needing someone to help her fill in the gaps in her life. Then she turns back, emphasizing yet another time that her husband is □incurably and inescapably absent from home.□ When Eugene takes the bait, asking for a deeper explanation of the position of au pair, Mrs. Rogers defines it as a position that gives □a mutual service, without payment.□ At this, Eugene prepares to leave. He puts the papers back into his briefcase and sets down his glass. Of course, Mrs. Rogers notices this and immediately tries to manipulate him another way. □But I'm afraid you wouldn't be in the least bit suitable,□ she says, challenging Eugene to react again.

Eugene does not take the bait, to Mrs. Rogers's dismay; at least he does not bite right away. He looks like he is going to make a run for it. He wants a job with a future, and an au pair does not sound like it will lead to anything. But before he walks out the door, a thought strikes him. He becomes curious. At first he might have thought that the job was

beneath him. But then he wonders if Mrs. Rogers might have insulted him in some way. □*Why* wouldn't I be suitable?□ he needs to know. When he questions her further, he realizes that Mrs. Rogers has been critical of him, and his feelings are hurt.

Eugene now becomes defensive. He explains how he has been victimized because of his heritage and lack of education. By the time he is finished defending himself, he has not bettered the situation but rather has made it worse. He has also made a sexual suggestion. His is more vulgar or at least less subtle than Mrs. Rogers's, and he believes this is his downfall. He tries to make a joke by referring to □pubic□ school rather than to □public□ school, but the joke falls flat. Mrs. Rogers pretends to be offended and begins to suggest that it is time for Eugene to leave. At this point in the play the playwright exposes Eugene's biggest flaw. Eugene is very class conscious and believes that he is low class. It is while □in the presence of a gold-embossed accent,□ or □in a room with a bit of décor in it□ that Eugene says that he falls apart. Mrs. Rogers makes him nervous, in other words. Mrs. Rogers also appears to have won another round. She has made herself seem to be of higher stature than Eugene by pointing out all of Eugene's faults and opening the wounds of his childhood insecurities. She has set him up nicely, and all he wants to do is submit. He will take her nonpaying au pair job no matter what she says. By the time Mrs. Rogers offers Eugene the job, he believes he has won something. After all, he has proven he is worthy of this go-nowhere position.

The next round also appears to be won by Eugene, when he makes Mrs. Rogers feel insecure about her sexuality and her age. After Eugene has worked for her for awhile, he goes out at night looking for younger women. He is unfaithful to Mrs. Rogers, in other words, in that he is looking beyond what she has to offer. Mrs. Rogers can no longer hold Eugene back. She has taught him enough for him to go out in society with confidence. Even though Eugene successfully leaves, there is still one more round to go.

In the final act, Eugene returns after a long absence. From all appearances, he is thriving. By contrast, Mrs. Rogers's house is in an even worse state of disrepair. Her dwelling is only one step from the wrecker ball. The wall unit is barely keeping the house standing. Eugene comes back this time, not with an unpaid bill but rather with money in hand. He offers her a brand new house in exchange for her leaving this one. The suggestion is unthinkable for Mrs. Rogers. She has not stepped outside her house in a long time, and she is against doing so now. Just as she refuses to look at the room on the other side of the wall unit, she will not step outside to look at her house from the outside. If she does so, her whole make-believe reality might collapse. Mrs. Rogers believes that she is one of the last few dignified people on Earth. She believes she has a traveling husband. She also believes that she is sexually attractive to younger men. All of these beliefs are based on the flimsy fabric of her imagination. Should she admit any one of these is a delusion, it would be like removing the wall unit from her living room. Everything would come down on her head. So Eugene's offer is unacceptable. Mrs. Rogers cannot leave her imaginary existence and face being the old, lonely woman that she is. So she allows Eugene to talk. While she listens, she conceives another story, one that will turn to her advantage.

Eugene is defeated when he discovers that his new love, Rose, is Mrs. Rogers's niece, that Mrs. Rogers is behind his new relationship with Rose, and that if he does not do as Mrs. Rogers tells him (or maybe even if he does), he will probably lose Rose. Mrs. Rogers regains the upper hand. Eugene, in the meantime, is on the floor picking up the trash of his grand scheme to get Mrs. Rogers out of his life.

In the end, there are no real winners in this play. There are just two losers who keep telling themselves the same story in hopes that they will eventually convince each other that there is a way to win even if it exists only in their imaginations.

Source: Joyce Hart, Critical Essay on *The Au Pair Man*, in *Drama for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2007.

Topics for Further Study

Research and write a report on the history of the Troubles in Northern Ireland. Bring your report up to date with a summary of the current situation in Northern Ireland.

Write an essay comparing one or more plays by Hugh Leonard with one or more plays by one of the following Irish writers: George Bernard Shaw, W. B. Yeats, Oscar Wilde, or John Millington Synge. In your opinion, what, if anything, distinguishes both writers as identifiably Irish?

Read about the military occupation of one country by another at any time between 1960 and the present and about any country that formed part of the British Empire from the nineteenth century to the first half of the twentieth century. Write a report comparing the more recent occupation with the older British occupation. Consider such factors as the reasons given for the occupation by the occupying nation; the reasons given for the occupation by independent analysts; tactics used by the occupier to maintain or extend power; responses by the occupied nation; and reasons why the occupier left. In your answer, include sources from among the occupiers and the occupied.

Write a poem, play, or short story either from the point of view of the British occupiers of Ireland or from the point of view of the occupied Irish. You may use any period in history when occupation was current.

Study a literary or artistic work that was created by a writer or artist at a time when his or her country was at war with, or occupied by, a foreign power. Give a presentation on what the work says about the war or occupation and associated issues. Include in your presentation your view of what is lost or gained by saying these things through art or literature instead of through factual means as in a documentary report.

At some periods in history in some places, certain languages or dialects have been banned by the ruling or occupying government. The Irish language, suppressed by the British, is one example. Research one such ban and write a report on your findings. Include in your answer reasons given for the ban by the perpetrators; reasons given for the ban by its victims; effects of the ban; resistance to the ban; and the fate of the banned language.

Compare and Contrast

1960s: The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) is formed in 1967 to campaign for civil rights for Northern Ireland's Catholic minority. NICRA activities culminate in an anti-internment march in 1972, which ends with the British Army's shooting of unarmed demonstrators, an event which comes to be known as Bloody Sunday.

Today: The Northern Ireland Assembly, a home rule legislature established in Northern Ireland under the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, is under suspension as of 2002. The assembly is designed to ensure that both unionist and nationalist communities in Northern Ireland participate in governing the region. The suspension occurs because of unionist impatience at perceived remaining links between nationalist party Sinn Féin and the IRA. The Police Service of Northern Ireland, successor to the RUC, alleges that Sinn Féin employed spies at the assembly.

1960s: The Republic of Ireland is predominantly an agricultural economy and continues to struggle with poverty, high unemployment, and emigration. The situation is exacerbated by the Troubles in Northern Ireland.

Today: Economic growth in the Republic of Ireland averages an exceptional 10 percent from 1995-2000, and 7 percent from 2001-2004. The phenomenon leads to the country being called the Celtic Tiger. Industry replaces agriculture as the country's leading sector, and Ireland is a leading exporter of computer hardware, software, and pharmaceuticals. One of the factors cited in the Republic of Ireland's success is the peace process in Northern Ireland.

1960s: The geographical, political, and economic isolation of both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland make them largely dependent on past and present British policies in Ireland.

Today: After Britain (including Northern Ireland) and the Republic of Ireland join the European Union in 1973, the political and economic center of power increasingly shifts from London towards the wider trading bloc. Both Irish economies improve thereafter.

What Do I Read Next?

Six of Hugh Leonard's plays are collected in *Selected Plays of Hugh Leonard* (1992). The collection includes *The Au Pair Man* (1968), *The Patrick Pearse Motel* (1971), and Leonard's most famous play, *Da* (1973).

Hugh Leonard's first novel, *Parnell and the Englishwoman* (1991), is based on the life of Charles Stewart Parnell, who led the struggle for Irish home rule in the nineteenth century, and his romance with an English married woman, Kitty O'Shea.

George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion* (1912) is one of his most popular. Its story of how a professor tries to pass off a flower girl as a lady is mirrored in *The Au Pair Man*. Leonard's style is also frequently likened to Shaw's, with both writers favoring brilliantly witty aphorisms that subvert the reader's expectations. The play is available in a 1994 Dover publication.

William Butler Yeats is widely considered to be Ireland's greatest poet. Many of his most memorable poems and four plays are collected in *Selected Poems and Four Plays* (1996), edited by M. I. Rosenthal. Subjects are the big ones, ranging from love, wisdom, and death to Ireland's landscape and the passions ignited by Irish nationalism. Yeats's use of language is often musical and incantatory and sometimes classically spare, but always powerful.

Further Study

Delaney, Frank, *Ireland*, Avon, 2006.

This novel is a fictionalized history of Ireland, told in a series of tales of kings, warriors, and supernatural beings by a wandering storyteller to a young boy. When the boy's mother banishes the storyteller for blasphemy, the boy sets off in a quest to find him.

Glassie, Henry, *The Stars of Ballymenone*, Indiana University Press, 2006.

In 1972, during the height of the Troubles, Henry Glassie traveled to the farming village of Ballymenone in Northern Ireland. He listened to people talk and collected the stories and songs that make up an oral history of the region from the sixth century to the 1970s. This book provides a unique record of a vanished world and comes with a CD, so that the people's voices can once again be heard.

Leonard, Hugh, *Home before Night*, Andre Deutsch, 1979.

This book is the first part of Leonard's autobiography, giving his vivid, moving, and often funny recollections of growing up in Dalkey, Dublin, in the 1930s and 1940s. It was reprinted, along with the second part, *Out after Dark*, by Methuen in 2002.

□□□, *Out after Dark*, Andre Deutsch, 1989.

This book forms the second part of Leonard's autobiography, covering his later years, living in Dalkey, Dublin. It was reprinted, along with the first part, *Home before Night*, by Methuen in 2002.

McKittrick, David, and David McVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles: The Story of the Conflict in Northern Ireland*, Penguin, 2001.

This book provides a clear, balanced, and accessible overview of the Troubles during the twentieth century.

Bibliography

Billington, Michael, "Satire with Little Bite," in *Times* (London), April 24, 1969, p. 15.

"Fiendishly Clever Frolic," in *Time*, January 7, 1974, http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,910978,00.html (accessed September 20, 2006).

Gallagher, S. F., "Introduction," in *Selected Plays of Hugh Leonard*, Colin Smythe, 1992, p. 7.

Glover, William, "Leonard Offering in Irish Tradition," in *Los Angeles Times*, December 31, 1973, p. B11.

Leonard, Hugh, *The Au Pair Man*, in *Selected Plays of Hugh Leonard*, chosen and with an introduction by S. F. Gallagher, Colin Smythe, 1992, pp. 13-86.

The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations, edited by Geoffrey Cumberlege, Oxford University Press, 1954, p. 490.

Richards, David, Review of *The Au Pair Man*, in *New York Times*, February 16, 1994, http://theater2.nytimes.com/mem/theater/treview.html?_r=1&res=9C03E2DB163BF935A25751C0A962958260&oref=slogin (accessed September 20, 2006).

Copyright Information

This Premium Study Guide is an offprint from *Drama for Students*.

Project Editor
David Galens

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

Research
Michelle Campbell, Nicodemus Ford, Sarah Genik, Tamara C. Nott, Tracie Richardson

Data Capture
Beverly Jendrowski

Permissions
Mary Ann Bahr, Margaret Chamberlain, Kim Davis, Debra Freitas, Lori Hines, Jackie Jones, Jacqueline Key, Shalice Shah-Caldwell

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

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

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

©1997-2002; ©2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc.

Gale and Design® and Thomson Learning™ are trademarks used herein under license.

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

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.
No part of this work covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or used in any

form or by any means—graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, Web distribution or information storage retrieval systems—without the written permission of the publisher.

For permission to use material from this product, submit your request via Web at http://www.gale-edit.com/permissions, or you may download our Permissions Request form and submit your request by fax or mail to:

Permissions Department
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535

Permissions Hotline:
248-699-8006 or 800-877-4253, ext. 8006
Fax: 248-699-8074 or 800-762-4058

Since this page cannot legibly accommodate all copyright notices, the acknowledgments constitute an extension of the copyright notice.

While every effort has been made to secure permission to reprint material and to ensure the reliability of the information presented in this publication, The Gale Group, Inc. does not guarantee the accuracy of the data contained herein. The Gale Group, Inc. accepts no payment for listing; and inclusion in the publication of any organization, agency, institution, publication, service, or individual does not imply endorsement of the editors or publisher. Errors brought to the attention of the publisher and verified to the satisfaction of the publisher will be corrected in future editions.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". © 1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". © 1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

Introduction

Purpose of the Book

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

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

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

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

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

Selection Criteria

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

How Each Entry Is Organized

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

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

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

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

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

Other Features

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

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

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

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

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

Citing Drama for Students

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We Welcome Your Suggestions

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

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