The Blue Room Study Guide

The Blue Room by David Hare

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Introduction

When David Hare's *The Blue Room* opened on Broadway in December, 1998, it became part of a record-setting year for the prolific playwright. In a twelve-month period, the British author managed to send *four* of his latest plays across the Atlantic to New York's stages. The others included *The Judas Kiss, Amy's View,* and Hare's one-man autobiographical staged memoir, *Via Dolorosa.*

The Blue Room is based on *Reigen,* a series of vignettes written by Dr. Arthur Schnitzler in 1896. *Reigen,* German for "round dance," was set in Schnitzler's own *fin de siecle* Vienna and depicted a number of characters in a continuous chain of sexual liaisons, suggesting that the meaningless physical relationships they shared, as well as venereal diseases they picked up along the way, were passed along in a mechanical, dehumanizing chain. When the work was actually performed in Vienna in 1921, it was closed by police for its scandalous sexual content. Actors in a Berlin production the same year were taken to court on obscenity charges. The film version, *La Ronde,* created by Max Ophuls in 1950, lifted some sense of the taboo surrounding the story and replaced it with a wistful nostalgia and only minor titillation.

In the introduction to his adaptation of the play, Hare claims he first learned about Schnitzler's clever story as a boy, when his father promised him he could one day watch "his favorite film of all time." More recently, it was director Sam Mendes who asked Hare to adapt Schnitzler's work for a modernized stage version. For Hare, who has written many times about deception and dissatisfaction in relationships, the story was a natural draw. "[Schnitzler's] essential subject is the gulf between what we imagine, what we remember, and what we actually experience," the playwright suggests.

In Hare's retelling, the story remains the same, ten characters fall in and out of bed with each other, never quite finding fulfillment but the setting and some of the ideas have changed. No longer Vienna, the backdrop for *The Blue Room* is described ambiguously as "one of the great cities of the world, in the present day." Although it is not a major issue in the play, AIDS has replaced less harmful venereal diseases as a communicable worry in the minds of some of Hare's characters, and the shock audiences may have experienced upon witnessing a staged sexual roundelay nearly a century ago has turned into curious titillation for New Yorkers interested in seeing a famous film star in the buff (a reference to star Nicole Kidman's nude scene). As critic Charles Isherwood noted in *Variety,* "At the last turn of the century, when the original was written, it was considered too dangerous to be published and later inspired police action; on the cusp of the next, the new text has become virtually insignificant, lost in the swirl of celebrity hype that has surrounded the production." Seemingly the more things change, the more they stay the same: audiences still flocked to both productions.

Author Biography

British playwright David Hare was born on June 5, 1947, in St. Leonard's-on-Sea in Sussex along the southeastern coast of England. Though he doesn't like "psychologizing," or over-emphasizing the importance of his early years to his current artistic output, in an interview with Mel Gussow published in the *New York Times Magazine,* Hare admitted his birth was "on the wave of postwar optimism. Everyone came home from the war and had children. Bang on the day I was born, the Marshall Plan was announced, and Europe became Europe." Accordingly, like many of his contemporaries, this Postwar period in British history has figured prominently in Hare's plays.

Hare began his career in the "Fringe Theatre" movement of London in the late-1960s and early 1970s. He was a literary manager at the Royal Court Theatre in 1969, where he earned about $15 a week plowing through dozens of hopeful manuscripts in search of produceable material. It was a time of artistic experimentation, revolutionary writing, and anti-establishment politics. Some of his earliest plays include *England's Ireland* (1972), a collaborative documentary play about political controversy and bloodshed caused by the English presence in Northern Ireland; *Fanshen* (1975), an adaptation of William Hinton' s novel about the Chinese Revolution; and *Plenty* (1978), an original work about the failure of Great Britain to live up to its post-World War II promise.

Hare has long since graduated from the Fringe movement to popular acclaim and public subsidy at the Royal National Theatre in London, where most of his plays have originated during the past twenty years. Throughout the 1980s and early-1990s, he was particularly known for criticizing the Conservative government of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in his plays. *The Secret Rapture* (1988) concerns three women struggling to thrive in the greed and excess of 1980s Thatcherite England. In an amazing feat of journalistic research and creative fiction writing in the early-1990s, Hare tackled the Church of England, Britain's legal system, and English politics in a trilogy of plays about British social institutions. Racing *Demon* (1990) earned Hare an Olivier Award for best play in London's West End as well as an Antoinette "Tony" Perry Award for best play on Broadway. *Murmuring Judges* (1991) and *The Absence of War* (1993) completed the series, which was presented in its nearly nine hour entirety at the National Theatre.

Since England's liberal Labour Party recaptured the goverment in the mid-1990s, some of the political fervency has left Hare's writing, and he has been drawn toward other forms of drama. His popularity, however, is as stong as ever, particularly in America. *Skylight* (1995) and *Amy's View* (1996) are intimate portrayals of individual relationships between a woman and her lover and a girl and her mother, respectively. *The Judas Kiss* (1998) is a biographical story about playwright Oscar Wilde *(The Importance of Being Earnest),* and *Via Dolorosa* (1998) is a one-man, staged autobiography that Hare himself performed in London and New York. When *The Blue Room,* an adaptation of Arthur Schnitzler's *Reigen,* appeared in New York in the fall of 1998, it joined *The Judas*

Kiss, Amy's View, and *Via Dolorosa* as one of four new Hare plays to appear on Broadway within a single year.

Plot Summary

Scene One: The Girl and The Cab Driver

The first scene of *The Blue Room* is an encounter between The Girl and The Cab Driver. The Girl is a prostitute, young, amateurish, and new to the work. She is waiting in a park, dressed in a short, black leather skirt, trying to catch the eye of a potential customer when The Cab Driver walks past her, twice. Taking the initiative, The Girl invites The Cab Driver home with her. The savvy driver knows her game and tells her he doesn't have any money. She persists, telling him she doesn't care about money, and they end up walking down to the nearby river in order to have sex off the main pathway in the park.

The lights darken, and a projected slide reads "THREE MINUTES," the time it takes for The Cab Driver to finish and pull his pants back up. When the lights return, the driver brushes himself off, pulls The Girl up off the ground, and heads off to go back to work. In spite of her earlier claim, The Girl asks The Cab Driver for some money. He refuses and leaves, while she promises, "I' ll be here tomorrow."

Scene Two: The Cab Driver and The Au Pair

With the sound of an Elvis Presley ballad echoing at a dance in the outside ballroom, The Cab Driver and The Au Pair duck into a darkened storage closet. The Au Pair, whose name is Marie, is foreign, and her job is caring for a family and their children. She has just met The Cab Driver, who now introduces himself as Fred. He has brought her into the storage room, he says, to escape the dance. His real motive is to seduce the young lady.

Before The Au Pair will agree to have sex with The Cab Driver, she tells him he must reassure her that "it means something." Parroting her request, Fred tells Marie, "It means something. I promise." The lights go out and the slide projection reads "NINE MINUTES." As a dim light slowly reveals the two of them atop some crushed cardboard boxes, The Au Pair asks her Cab Driver what he feels. Fred stammers that he doesn't know. "Feel's a big word," he complains. But the experience seems to have had a greater effect on him than his encounter with The Girl in the park. He admits he feels confused and is in no hurry to leave this girl. Instead, he asks her to stay a bit while he goes to get them both a beer. He heads off on his mission while The Au Pair sits alone and the lights go out.

Scene Three: The Au Pair and The Student

The third scene takes place in the fancy modern kitchen of the lavish home where The Au Pair works. She is seated at a table in the middle of the room writing a letter to The Cab Driver, who she recently met at the dance, when The Student comes downstairs

from his studies for a glass of water. He asks about a phone call he has been expecting, then takes his water back up to his room. A moment later, the phone rings. Apparently it is The Student again, asking for another drink. The Au Pair hangs up the phone, and just as she finishes pouring a fresh glass The Student reappears. It is obvious he has manufactured the need for more water as an excuse to see her again.

This time down The Student wastes no time. He begins flirting with The Au Pair, complementing her shirt and shoes, before kissing her and unbuttoning her clothes. For modesty's sake, or perhaps to preserve her job, The Au Pair asks The Student to at least close the blinds before they continue, which he does. As he pushes her up onto the table, she warns him they may be interrupted by the door, or by the phone call he is expecting from his friend, but The Student pretends not care. The lights blacken momentarily and a slide projection reads "FORTY-FIVE SECONDS," before the doorbell begins ringing. The mood is broken. The Student panics. He asks The Au Pair to check the door while he quickly dresses himself. When she returns his manner is changed. He is once again the son of the family in charge and announces he is leaving for the cafe. Instead of kind words or tenderness, he leaves The Au Pair with a directive to tell his friend where he has gone, should he finally call.

Scene Four: The Student and The Married Woman

The "friend" The Student was anticipating in the previous scene was apparently The Married Woman, Emma, who appears in Scene Four. Up in his bedroom, The Student, whose name is now revealed as Anton, has been preparing for her visit. He has assembled a collection of hors d'oeuvres wrapped in an aluminum container and a bottle of cognac. Offstage, the doorbell rings, and The Married Woman is greeted by The Au Pair. When Emma makes it upstairs, she is obviously a public figure the wife of a prominent politician who is trying to keep her tryst with The Student a secret. She has worn a scarf and dark glasses and complains to her soon-to-be lover that she must not be discovered, because the press have no values or respect and would make her life miserable.

To make matters worse, or at least more dangerous, The Married Woman is a friend of The Student's parents. The two briefly discuss her marital woes (she is unhappy in her husband's world of deception and lies), and The Student actually admits he is in love with her. Then they fall into bed together. The lights are only out briefly, long enough for a slide projection to read "0 MINUTES," before the room is bright again and The Student sits on the edge of the bed, frustrated and nervously impotent. While he tries to find excuses for his condition and berates himself, she tells jokes and tries to make light of the situation. Finally, The Married Woman solves the problem. She tells The Student to simply lie very still on the bed. She stands over him and the lights fade to black. The slide projection now reads "THIRTY-TWO MINUTES" and, in the darkness, she murmurs in a satisfied voice, "Oh my beautiful boy."

Quickly, however, The Married Woman realizes she must get back home to her husband. While they both dress they agree they will see each other the next day, in

public, at a political rally for her husband, and two days later they will meet again in private. Left alone, The Student sits down, eats a few hors d'oeuvres, and brags to himself, "I'm fucking a married woman."

Scene Five: The Married Woman and The Politician

Back at home, the source of The Married Woman' s unhappiness is revealed. Emma and her husband, Charlie, The Politician, share a single bedroom but sleep in different beds. It is an arrangement The Politician dubs mature, convenient, and wise, since it ensures their marriage will not be based on sex alone, but on friendship and mutual respect for each other's lives as individuals. The lesson is a hollow one for The Married Woman, who really longs for the passion they shared when they met eight years earlier in Venice.

As the couple talk just before bedtime, The Married Woman asks her husband about his life before her. He admits (though they have had the conversation before) that he was foolish, sleeping with many, many women, at least one of whom was even married. Now, though, he has seen the error of his ways. He claims he is in love with Emma, and she is all he needs. The lights go out, and a slide projection reads "FIFTEEN MINUTES." When they are finished, The Married Woman tells her husband she longs for the feeling of Venice again. The Politician, ever politic, tells her that is the wonderful thing about marriage; that one day there may be time for Venice again.

Scene Six: The Politician and The Model

Romance and Venice aside, the next time The Politician appears he is sitting on a sofa in a hotel room, contentedly smoking a cigar and watching a seventeen-year-old girl he has just picked up on the street dance to a rock video and eat chocolate ice cream. The Model, Kelly, is no innocent abroad. She admits she has been with men before, though she is insulted when The Politician guesses she has entertained as many as fifty previous lovers. She snorts cocaine and pops pills throughout the scene, and complains about a previous lover who looked a lot like The Politician.

In a seemingly uncharacteristic move, The Politician takes a handful of pills himself. The begin to have sex and the lights fade to black. The projected slide reads "TWO HOURS TWENTY-EIGHT MINUTES." In the haze following their drug-influenced sexual encounter, The Model and The Politician talk about their next moves and the possible effects of cheating on a marriage. The Politician is enraged at The Model's suggestion that, since he cheats on his wife, she must be cheating on him, too. He is hypocritical and ironically blind to something his young partner finds very obvious. Finally, The Politician tries to convince The Model to let him find her an apartment of her own, where he can pay her expenses and keep her available for future trysts. Foolishly, he asks her, "Isn't that what women want?"

Scene Seven: The Model and The Playwright

Like The Politician before him, The Playwright apparently found The Model on the street or in a club somewhere and immediately brought her home, under the premise that he will sing a song for her. She initially protests that she will only stay for the song, but once The Playwright sings for her (the composition is "The Blue Room"), she is smitten, and stays long enough to be seduced. For his part, The Playwright enjoys that The Model doesn't recognize him as a celebrity artist, and he uses his deftness with words to confuse and impress her into bed with him. He promises to take her to India, "to the Raj as than," where they will see the sights and enjoy passionate lovemaking. As in the previous scenes, the lights fade and a slide projection reads "FORTY-NINE MINUTES."

Afterward, still playing the romantic gentleman, The Playwright promises her tickets to a sold-out performance of his latest work (which is meaningless to her), and vows to see her again. They leave for a late evening dinner.

Scene Eight: The Playwright and The Actress

The Playwright meets his match in his next assignation. He accompanies The Actress to a country hotel, to get away from the city and the theatre where they both spend their lives. The Actress, a few years older than he and quite a bit more composed, seems able to play the writer like a fiddle. She teases him about his point of pride, his vocabulary, telling the stunned man, "You do talk more bollocks per square meter than any man I've ever met." She even goes so far as to insult his plays. Then, just when The Playwright thinks things are going his way, The Actress tells him she has booked him another room in the hotel and the time has come for goodnight. Nevertheless, they do end up in bed together. The lights go to black and a slide projection reads "TWENTY-FIVE MINUTES." Humorously, the lights come back up to reveal the two in each other's arms, then darkness falls again and the slide reads "TWELVE MINUTES."

In the post-coital bliss that follows, The Actress admits to The Playwright, "You write brilliant plays," and that, even though everyone else in their theatre hates him because he seems conceited, she defends him by saying he has a lot to be conceited about. A backhanded compliment, but he misses the insinuation. Lying in bed together a little while longer, they debate about the sounds of nature outside (Is the chirping they hear created by crickets or frogs?) and The Actress continues her taunts, alternately poking fun at The Playwright and telling him she is in love with him; The Playwright cannot tell if she is serious or only acting.

Scene Nine: The Actress and The Aristocrat

In this scene, Hare's play starts to look in on itself. The Actress is seen on an imaginary stage, taking a bow after a performance of a play by Schnitzler, the author of *Reigen,* the work that was the original material for *The Blue Room*. Apparently, The Actress is

starring in the very play Hare's audience is watching, while at the same time really living the fictional events in her fictional world.

Back in her dressing room after the performance, The Actress is visited by The Aristocrat, a wealthy admirer who has been courting her and has just seen her perform onstage for the first time. Like many of the earlier encounters, theirs begins with some verbal jousting. The Actress insinuates The Aristocrat is here while cheating on another mistress, and the Aristocrat pleads innocence and noble intentions. He even suggests they should delay their sexual gratification until they can get to a proper room with a bed, where the right mood can be established.

Very quickly, however, mood becomes unimportant. The Actress and The Aristocrat couple on the dressing room's chaise lounge as the lights fade to black. The slide projection this time reads "ONE HOUR ONE MINUTE." Afterward, The Aristocrat is fully clothed, and picking at leftover Chinese food when he muses on one of the play's central themes. "Do you think any of us is ever just one person?" he asks his paramour. "Don't you think we all change, all the time? With one person we're one person, and with another we're another." Even though they both agree their affair is destined to end in misery, The Aristocrat agrees to return to the theatre the next day.

Scene Ten: The Aristocrat and The Girl

A year has passed since the first scene of the play, and the story has come full circle. In a dingy room above a sex shop in the red light district of the city, The Aristocrat has just spent a drunken night with The Girl from scene one. When he awakens, fully clothed in a chair across the room from the sleeping prostitute, he imagines (hopes, actually) that he passed out, inebriated, before they had sex. He gets up, pays her for her time, and kisses her on the eyelids, imagining, romantically, that his kiss is the only physical thing that passed between them. His delusion is shattered, however, when The Girl tells him that they actually did have sex the night before, and he can return anytime he likes, "Just ask for Irene."

Through the room's curtained window the day starts to appear. Music plays as The Girl gets up to bid her one-night beau goodbye. "Goodnight," The Aristocrat tells her. "Good morning," she reminds him.

Characters

The Actress

The unnamed Actress is in her forties, brash, alluring, and one of the most consistently strong personalities in the play. While the other characters all seem to encounter someone capable of disarming their defenses, this remarkable woman never seems to lose, possibly because, of everyone, she seems best able to recognize and accept the imperfections inherent in people and relationships. During her rendezvous with The Playwright, she insults his work and his propensity for fancy wordplay. She pretends Catholic piety, then pulls him into bed with her for multiple rounds of sex. One moment naughty, the next nice, even the cultured and sophisticated Playwright is unable to guess her true intentions. Later, with the well-heeled Aristocrat, she is more sincere, because she seems to like him more, but she is no less wise. She acknowledges that he has other women in his life, sees directly through his false diffidence and, in spite of knowing their relationship is doomed to fail, encourages him to stay the course. "We' re alive!" she cries to him, and experiencing life is the only way of learning.

Anton

See The Student

The Aristocrat

Malcolm, The Aristocrat, is in his early thirties. His wealth derives from his family's farming estate, and his personality seems to be a combination of the best and worst the aristocracy has to offer. He is intelligent, though not very articulate; earnest, but deceptive, even to himself; sophisticated, but base and animalistic as any of the other men in the play. "My life is a search... for a love which stays real," he tells The Actress when he meets her in her dressing room. And it may be that he has good intentions on his search, but he is easily led astray. He suggests to The Actress that they put off their lovemaking until the next day, when they can find a proper room with a bed. However, she very easily seduces him into their first sexual encounter right there in her dressing room. The Aristocrat has glimpses of true insight, and in fact voices one of the most important ideas of the play, that everyone plays different parts with different people, and we're all constantly changing. Despite his aspirations toward virtue, truth, and propriety, however, The Aristocrat has a darker side he is unable to control. In the final scene of the play he awakens from a night of drunken lovemaking with a prostitute and cannot remember where he is or how he got there. To his credit, he still hopes for the best, that nothing happened between himself and The Girl. When he is told otherwise, however, his wistful, philosophic side returns. "On we go," he laments.

The Au Pair

Marie, The Au Pair, is foreign, and cares for a family and their children. Her origins (or, indeed, the origins of the family she cares for) are not described. She begins her encounter with Fred, The Cab Driver, by refusing his advances, even though she compromised herself by following him into a darkened storage closet. To help justify her actions to herself, she permits Fred to have sex with her after forcing him to tell her that it will mean something. She pretends to be fooled in order to allow herself a few minutes of guilty pleasure. After the act it is she who tries to leave first, though she is convinced to stay awhile with Fred, drinking beer and listening to the dance outside their tiny room.

Back at home, The Au Pair seems no more in control of her environment than at the dance. Whether to preserve her job, or because she lacks dignity, Marie allows herself to be treated with scorn and derision by The Student, at the same time that she permits him to have sex with her.

The Cab Driver

The Cab Driver (who later introduces himself as Fred) is shrewd, self-centered, and businesslike. Although it is he who sends out the first signals of sexual interest to the prostitute in the park (he walks past The Girl twice, with no particular destination in mind), he waits for her to make the first contact. He deflects any conversation about his personal life or a relationship beyond a brief sexual encounter, warning The Girl she would only get jealous because "I'm irresistible. Women can't resist me." He only agrees to sex when he is told he will not have to pay for it, then he finishes the act quickly and rushes back to work.

His next encounter, however, is different. He is kinder and gentler (if not altogether sincere) with the Au Pair. Their act of sex takes longer, and they both seem to have enjoyed it. When they are finished, he does not want to rush away but instead asks her to stay with him awhile. He remains awkward with emotions but more interested in her as a person.

Charlie

See The Politician

Emma

See The Married Woman

Fred

See Cab Driver

The Girl

The Girl, who calls herself Irene, is a teenage prostitute, amateurish and new to her work. She dresses the part, with a short, black leather skirt and heels, and her method of operation seems to be smoking cigarettes on a park bench, waiting to catch the attention of a potential customer. Given the chance, she is bold and aggressive. In order to build her clientele, or perhaps because she is still new, she doesn't force payment for her services. The Cab Driver is momentarily surprised when The Girl tells him she doesn't care if he pays her for sex. Then, after the act, she asks for remuneration anyway and is rejected but not discouraged. "I'll be here tomorrow," she says, purposefully.

She then disappears until the end of the play. A year has passed, and Irene has been plying her trade in a small room above a sex shop in the city. She spent the previous evening with The Aristocrat and admits to him that Fred (The Cab Driver from Scene One) wants to marry her, but she has so far resisted. Her experience during the last year doesn't seem to have hardened her. She is sympathetic toward the plight of The Aristocrat, who clearly regrets the night they spent together.

Irene

See The Girl

Kelly

See The Model

Malcolm

See The Aristocrat

Marie

See The Au Pair

The Married Woman

Emma is The Married Woman. She is in her thirties and has been married to Charlie, a prominent politician, for over eight years. They met in Venice, where they experienced several weeks of wild, romantic, passionate love. Now, however, their marriage and Charlie's career have forever changed the course of the fire that once warmed their relationship. They now sleep in separate beds in the same room, coming together only for occasional sexual encounters. Charlie is constantly working, and Emma pines for the love they once had.

In order to recapture some sense of the drama and excitement she once found with Charlie, The Married Woman begins an affair with a younger man, The Student, who is the son of some friends of the family. With him, The Married Woman is no longer pliant and submissive, she gets her way, and she finds it thrilling.

The Model

Like all of the other characters in the play, The Model (Kelly) is both more and less than she appears. As a model, someone admired for her beauty, she might be expected to radiate loveliness. Actually, she complains, "If you're a model you have to look awful. That's the job." A mere seven-teen-years-old, The Model has traveled abroad with her mother and three sisters. She is apparently not yet successful enough in her career to afford a life of luxury, or even a place of her own, but she manages to find men more than willing to provide these things for her. The Model seems addicted to cocaine and prone to the abuse of a variety of other substances. She seems to be an even match for The Politician in their sexual encounter, trumping him in a conversation about marriage by telling him that his wife no doubt cheats on him as well. Though she seems unwilling to commit to any kind of a relationship, she apparently accepts The Politician's offer of an apartment and living expenses in exchange for being his mistress. This does not, however, deter her from other amorous affairs. She follows The Playwright home, not even realizing he is a famous, wealthy, eccentric hyper-intellectual. They have absolutely nothing in common, but she enjoys the song he sings her and the sex they share, and she seems genuinely flattered by his kind, if insincere, compliments.

Robert Phethean

See The Playwright

The Playwright

Robert Phethean is a famous playwright in his early thirties. Judging by his writing studio he is both financially successful and quite eccentric. A large desk is piled with books, scripts, and CDS, and there is a piano in the shadows at the back of the room. He lights his workspace only with candles, a happy discovery, he claims, during a power

outage, that now casts a "magical" light on everything. The Playwright may or may not be the voice of David Hare himself, an idea the actual writer of *The Blue Room* no doubt intended to leave ambiguously open to interpretation.

The Playwright complains about scholars who try to pigeonhole him into categories such as "postromantic" and scoffs at the idea that journalists, too, are actually "writers." He plays a song for The Model that he calls his own, but artfully dodges the question of the composition's true authorship. He is skilled with words and seems to enjoy using his wide-ranging vocabulary to impress, to mock, and to play with his female conquests. Because of his eccentric ways, it is difficult to gauge The Playwright's sincerity when he tells The Model he is enamored of her and wants to take her around the world (or at least see her again sometime.)

For all his cleverness and verbal dexterity, however, The Playwright meets his match in The Actress. At a secluded country hotel where they have escaped for an intimate weekend, he allows the older woman to mock and shame him, seemingly because he is so powerfully attracted to her. She insults his writing, his way with words, and his arrogance, yet he keeps coming back for more. In the end, he finds himself as confused by The Actress as The Model was by him.

The Politician

Charlie is a prominent politician who is almost always working. He carries three cellular telephones with him everywhere he goes and has to schedule his time with his wife and family. Before marrying Emma, The Politician conducted a string of youthful affairs, at least one of which was with a married woman. Now, however, in the middle part of his life, he claims to love only The Married Woman, and calls his family his stability, his salvation. They met in Venice and experienced a few weeks of romantic, passionate love before wedding and settling into a more mundane existence that The Politician pronounces safer, since the bed is no longer the only thing holding them together. As if to prove his point, the couple each has their own single bed in the bedroom, and they share a bed only for occasional sex.

At the same time, however, The Politician is taking drugs and starting an affair with The Model, a seventeen-year-old cocaine addict. After two hours of intoxicated love-making, Charlie offers to set The Model up with an apartment of her own, where he can provide financial stability for her, and she can be available to him for sexual rendezvous whenever he wants. "A life of your own," he calls it, "Isn't that what women want?"

The Student

The Student, Anton, is the son of wealthy parents. He is studying law like his father, and has discovered aristocratic, imperial ways at an early age. At times he is foolish, young and naive, and at others impassioned, idealistic, and oddly sophisticated. During his first scene, with The Au Pair, his behavior is detestable. He makes unnecessary and demeaning demands on the family's foreign servant and seems to assume that

satisfying him sexually should simply be part of her job. Later, with The Married Woman, he has met his match. With Emma, a friend of his parents, he tries to be mature and seductive but only half-succeeds. She obviously is not interested in him for his worldliness but simply for sex. When he is unable to provide it because of his nervousness with an older, dominant woman, she takes charge and draws excitement from him. He is helpless, in love with her, and at the same time juvenile and proud of his accomplishment for seducing a married woman.

Themes

Sex

The most obvious motif in *The Blue Room* is sex, in all its many guises. In the play, sex is shared between a prostitute and a john, a student and an older, married woman, a politician and his wife, an artist and a model, an actress and a writer, and so on and on. In every instance, however, the build-up prior to the sexual act is more energetic and exciting than the act itself which, accordingly, is never shown on the stage. The characters all long for satisfying experiences, and some seem to be seeking meaningful relationships, but their constant changing of partners in a sexual roundelay thwarts their chances of ever finding meaning and substance with other human beings.

At their best, the characters in *The Blue Room* can seem innocent and well-intentioned. Even The Girl, a neophyte prostitute, tells The Cab Driver "The kiss is the best bit," not the act of sex itself; and early on she doesn't even demand payment for her services. Fred, The Cab Driver, for all his callousness in the first scene with The Girl, seems genuinely enamored with the Au Pair at a dance later. Even though he is incapable of discussing his feelings in any meaningful way, he makes an attempt at tenderness and at least stays for a little while after sex.

No matter how rude, incorrigible, or formidable a character in this play's world might seem at first, he or she is likely to meet his or her match just around the corner in the next scene, suggesting that our attitudes toward sex make conquerors, and fools, of us all. Sex, the play seems to suggest, is a merry-go-round of our own making. Human nature is drawn toward lechery, whether we like it or not. It is this realization that causes the frustrated Aristocrat to wail, "How do we change? How do we change who we are?" when he wakes up in a dingy room above a sex shop after a drunken night with a prostitute. Dawn comes, he and The Girl bid fare well, but the play suggests that by evening the dance will continue on.

Masks

One of the devices people rely on in a lifetime of sexual escapades and failed relationships, the play suggests, is *masks* that hide, and change, their true identities. With his Au Pair, The Student is confident, imperious even. He is the master of the house, and she the servant. Up in his room with the older Married Woman, however, he is insecure, impotent, and romantically naive. Which face is the real Student? For her part, The Married Woman is nervous about possible discovery but as confident with her young paramour as he was the Au Pair. It is she who controls the situation. Back at home, though, she is cowed by her husband, The Politician, who she really loves but no longer inspires.

Like the sex that passes from partner to partner in scene after scene, the masks the characters wear are constantly changing. The Cab Driver is a crude, anonymous john willing to have sex on a riverbank one day, and a tender, if unpolished, wooer at ballroom dance the next. The Playwright is by turn preening, boastful, and condescending with The Model, and clumsy, reserved, and altogether mastered by The Actress. It is a dilemma summed up by The Aristocrat, in what may be the play's most self-descriptive line. "Do you think any of us is ever just one person?" he asks The Actress after they have had sex in her dressing room. "Don't you think we all change, all the time? With one person we're one person, and with another we're another." True to form, this wealthy, sophisticated gentleman later finds himself rumpled in a chair in a prostitute's bedroom, missing memories of the previous night's debauchery. No one in the play, or perhaps in life, remains what they seem for long.

Style

Plot Structure

Quite cleverly, the structure of The Blue Room is part of its story. Originally titled *Reigen,* German for "round dance," the play presents a series of characters who meet, have sex, then part ways and move on to a new partner. Ultimately the play ends where it begins, with a sexual transaction between a man and a prostitute.

The larger template of the play is familiar to modern theatergoers. Rather than a single story, told in linear fashion with a handful of characters and only one or two settings, *The Blue Room* presents a series of ten separate, but interrelated, scenes involving many characters who meet in a variety of locations. The unique contribution this play makes to this type of plot structure is that it is not the story but the *characters* that carry over from one scene into the next.

The Cab Driver who meets the prostitute in the opening scene is found in a storage closet with an Au Pair in the next scene. Back at home, The Au Pair dallies with The Student, before The Student meets The Married Woman in his bedroom upstairs. She goes home to her husband, The Politician, who then picks up The Model and takes her to a hotel room. And so on. Taken one at a time, each assignation is unremarkable, common even. Together, though, they present a picture of human beings controlled by physical impulses and seemingly powerless to change their miserable destinies.

Slide Projections

The German playwright and director Bertolt Brecht advocated the use of slide projections as a replacement for scenery, or to interrupt the flow of action, in productions of his "Epic" dramas. For Brecht, slide projections were a means of "alienating " his audiences. Instead of allowing audiences to become comfortable and lulled by familiar, realistic scenery and linear, climactic storytelling, Brecht employed signs and projections that told audiences what the setting for a particular scene was, which often took the place of characters in the play by relaying important plot information.

Since Brecht used this experimental device in the 1930s and 1940s, it has caught on in mainstream theatrical production and is now a common element of modern plays. *The Blue Room* uses slide projections to show the passage of time during scenes, comment on the action of the characters, and provide a touch of humor to the play. Each time two characters come together for sex, the lights fade to black and a slide projection displays the amount of time it took for them to complete the act. The Cab Driver, for example, doesn't particularly favor The Girl. She is a prostitute and he has no emotional attachment to her, so when they have sex down by the river, their projection reads, "THREE MINUTES." Immediately afterward, he is up and gone. Later, with the Au Pair,

The Cab Driver extends his time to "NINE MINUTES," with the suggestion that he cares a little more about their tryst.

Sometimes the effect of the slide's judgment on a character can be humiliating, as when The Student panics after "FORTY-FIVE SECONDS" with the Au Pair, or fizzles in "0 MINUTES" with the Married Woman. The Married Woman and her husband, The Politician, achieve a standard, mundane "FIFTEEN MINUTES," while The Politician, under the influence of drugs, logs "TWO HOURS TWENTY-EIGHT MINUTES" with the model.

In each instance, the slide projection represents the literal passage of time, as well as a change of mood in the scene, sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse. The Playwright is a dapper gentleman to The Model after their respectable "FORTY-NINE MINUTES." Once The Actress spends "TWENTY-FIVE MINUTES" followed by an additional "TWELVE MINUTES" with The Playwright, she stops insulting him and tells him, "You write brilliant plays." Later, though, the effect of "ONE HOUR ONE MINUTE" on The Actress and The Aristocrat is melancholy and the loss of romance.

Historical Context

Although David Hare began his playwriting career in England during the turbulent 1960s and 1970s, he grew to popular prominence during the "Thatcher Decade" of the 1980s, an era that has influenced his work to the present day. During the 1980s, Hare was an outspoken critic of the "Iron Lady," as Great Britain's Prime Minister from 1979-1990, Margaret Thatcher, was known. As the leader of the reigning Conservative Party (or "Tories") in Great Britain, Thatcher stood for everything Hare and the liberal Labour Party were against. During her terms in office, she sold and privatized many government-operated businesses such as British Airways and British Telecom. She also fought to damage the influence and control of labor unions in Great Britain, and her administration drastically reduced the welfare benefits offered to Britons, particularly in the areas of education and health.

Thatcher's methods produced boom years for many. Overall wages and standards of living rose during the 1980s, and the decade is often remembered as a period of rampant greed and consumerism, much like the same years in America during Ronald Reagan's presidency. Still, many more people were pushed aside, and the gap between the "haves" and "have-nots" grew wider. During the Thatcher Decade, Hare's plays, such as *Pravda* (1985) and *The Secret Rapture* (1988), were scathing indictments of British society under a Conservative government.

In 1990, Thatcher was turned out of office, thanks largely to a temporary increase in inflation and friction between her administration and governments on continental Europe that were seeking to unify their currency and reduce trade barriers. The Iron Lady was replaced by John Major, another Conservative Party representative. For seven more years, Major and the Conservative Party attempted to curb inflation, stabilize the pound (British currency), and improve relations with the European community and their increasingly hostile colony to the west, Ireland. At one point during his term of office, Major received only a fourteen percent approval rating from the people of Great Britain, the lowest of any Prime Minister in the country's history. During the Major years, Hare continued his attacks on Conservative government with a trilogy of plays aimed at social institutions: *Racing Demon* (1990),about the Church of England; *Murmuring Judges* (1991), concerning Britain's legal system; and *The Absence of War* (1993), a commentary on politics in England.

Hare's arch-nemeses, the Conservatives, were finally driven from office in 1997, when the long-suffering Labour Party produced Tony Blair as the new Prime Minister of Britain. With Labour back in office, many of the political worries Hare had been critiquing in his plays for so many years were, temporarily at least, held at bay. While Hare was writing *The Blue Room,* Blair was restructuring the health care system in Britain to better serve low- and middle-income families. Blair also created closer ties to the European Union (though by 1999, Great Britain had still not chosen to participate in the new unified European currency system, based on the "Euro"), and, in 1998-99, he helped revive the stalled peace talks over British rule in Northern Ireland.

Throughout the Thatcher Decade, the John Major years, and Tony Blair's "New Labour" administration, a major change also occurred in one of England's most famous institutions: the royal family. English royalty, at one time the ruling kings and queens of one of the largest commonwealth empires the world has ever known, steadily lost their power and prestige during the final years of the twentieth century. While the actual king or queen of Britain has been merely a figurehead for many years, with the real power to create and enforce laws given to the Prime Minister and Parliament, history and tradition combined to at least make the royal family an object of reverence for the people of England. However, the divorce of Diana, the immensely popular Princess of Wales, from her husband, Charles in 1996, followed by the princess's death in an automobile accident in Paris in 1997, caused the people of Great Britain to question the morals and the function of their royal family. By 1999, many politicians and social critics wondered aloud how long it would be before Britain, home to crowned heads from King Alfred the Great to Queen Elizabeth, turned its back on royalty.

Critical Overview

David Hare's *The Blue Room* has been "freely adapted" from Dr. Arthur Schnitzler's *La Ronde* which in turn was based on a series of two-character sketches Schnitzler wrote in 1896 entitled *Reigen*. At the time, Schnitzler's scenes were deemed near pornographic. The author claimed he never intended his sketches to be performed publicly but simply to be shared among friends. When the vignettes were finally pulled together on the stage for the first time in Vienna in 1921, police closed the performance. The same year, in Berlin, actors performing the work were hauled into court and subjected to a trial on obscenity charges. In a social turnabout years later, director Max Ophuls's 1950 film version of *La Ronde,* became a cult classic, an appealing blend of nostalgia, enchantment, and titillation.

Sex still sells, and when word went out in 1998 that the well-known screen siren Nicole Kidman was starring in *The Blue Room,* and that she would be naked, or nearly so, in almost every scene, the New York run of the play opened with $4 million in advance ticket sales. Scalped tickets sold for hundreds of dollars a seat, and much of the criticism leveled at the work in the popular press surrounded the production's *hype* (and Kidman's semi-clothed body) rather than the play's literary worth.

For all its promise of sexual stimulation, though, review after review pointed out that one of the actual aims of the play seemed to be to illustrate how tawdry and unsatisfying sex often is. Charles Isherwood wrote in *Variety,* "For all the steamy sexual traffic onstage, watching the play is a chilly, empty experience." In *LI Business News,* Richard Scholem noted "The point of Hare's adaptation seems to be the vapidness and emptiness of often mechanical sex. That the anticipation and pursuit of sex, the precoital shadow boxing that takes place before consummation generates more excitement, hope and interest than the act itself, which is most often an empty disappointment, sometimes a comical fiasco." In the *New York Times* Ben Brantley suggested Hare's main point was that "sex would always have been better somewhere else, at some other time, with another person; erotic satisfaction is a chimera, the elusive quarry of an eternal and fruitless hunt."

In *The Blue Room,* the hunt is indeed everything, and most critics agreed the parade of characters who participate in the daisy chain of sexual affairs was one of the most appealing features of the play. As a playwright, Hare is particularly known for his intimate, multi-dimensional, sympathetic female characters. Many of his plays center around women with strong, forceful personalities *(The Secret Rapture, Plenty,* and *Skylight* are just three examples). Accordingly, a common note sounded by reviewers about the various characters in *The Blue Room* was that, in every instance, the female parts were much more varied and interesting than the male ones.

"The Cab Driver, Student, Politician, Playwright and Aristocrat.. . are rather boorish, macho types," Scholem observed, "not nearly as juicy, complex or even mysterious as the female parts." Brantley wrote, "Mr. Glen [Iain Glen, who played all the male roles]

has the harder row to hoe of the two stars, since the men of *The Blue Room* tend to be blind and fatuous, swaggering macho jokes with little redeeming self-consciousness."

While London critics raved about the sensuality and excitement of the play (one critic for the *Daily Telegraph* famously dubbed Nicole Kidman "pure theatrical Viagra"), American reviewers were generally less impressed with the work. "A shrug, and an occasional worldly chuckle, is pretty much all that *The Blue Room* elicits," lamented Brantley, "The entire evening is not unlike Ms. Kidman's much-discussed body: smooth, pale and slender." Also in the *New York Times,* Frank Rich complained, "The director, Sam Mendes, and adapter, David Hare, lent *The Blue Room* their cachet, but not their best efforts." *The Blue Room* "is a lightweight piece by a heavyweight playwright," proclaimed Scholem.

Perhaps seeking an excuse for why such a successful playwright might have floundered on this project, Rod Dreher suggested in the *National Review* that "this dreary, vapid, airless evening of theater is such a depressingly accurate reflection of our time." To Dreher, audiences deserved what they got as a result of the society they had created. He continued:

I screw, therefore I am. Sex is certainly an ignoble basis for metaphysics, but who can deny that it's the one most people these days seem to swear by? When a society becomes unmoored from traditional religious belief or moral idealism, and in the absence of social stigma as an external reinforcement of inwardly held virtue, it is no surprise that the sex instinct will assert its rule as if by divine right. And a society in which the cheap thrills of celebrity and quickie sex are sovereign is a society willing to pay anything for the chance to see a famous actress's rear end in shallow, pseudo highbrow erotica which can't even boast of a positive review in the *Times*.

Criticism

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

Lane A. Glenn is a Ph.D. specializing in theatre history and literature. In this essay, he discusses the different cultural climates offin de siecle *Vienna, when Arthur Schnitzler's* Reigen *was first produced, and the Europe and America of the late-twentieth century, when playwright David Hare updated Schnitzler's work as* The Blue Room.

Dr. Arthur Schnitzler began writing *Reigen,* a "round dance" of sexual escapades among a variety of characters in turn-of-the-century Vienna, during the winter of 1896-97. He initially considered his collection of "dialogues," as he called them, too scandalous to ever be staged, and preferred to simply have them printed, at his own expense, and distributed to friends for their enjoyment. Reportedly, when his fiancee asked to see a copy, he even refused her, saying *Reigen* was not appropriate reading for a young lady.

It wasn't until 1920 that Schnitzler allowed a publicly staged performance of *Reigen,* and even then it opened out of town, in Berlin. The German production met with demonstrations, riots, and the arrest of the cast on charges of obscenity (they were later acquitted). The next year, in 1921, the Viennese premiere of the play was closed by police,who considered the performance a form of public pornography.

What a difference a century can make. A hundred years after Dr. Schnitzler shocked his society (some of the more sensitive members, anyway) with *Reigen,* the first production of English playwright David Hare's 1998 adaptation of the work, *The Blue Room,* was greeted by a very different kind of disturbance: ticket riots. Publicity for Hare's modernized daisy chain of casual sexual encounters proudly trumpeted the appearance of a scantily clad, and occasionally nude, popular film star, Australian actress Nicole Kidman, and instead of shouting moral outrage, theatre-goers clamored in line for tickets. The limited run of the show on Broadway in New York City opened with an amazing $4 million in advance sales, and scalped seats were reportedly going for several hundred dollars a cushion. Same play, same prurience, but a *very* different audience.

The production record of *Reigen* in its various forms throughout the century illustrates the cultural relativity of all literature. What is shocking and abhorrent to one group of people in one particular place at one specific time sometimes becomes quaint, or even comical, to a different society years later. Important, burning issues, particularly those with contemporary political themes, fade into the distant, collective memory of a culture, while new hot topics take their place. It is as true of Shakespeare, Mark Twain, and Harriet Beecher Stowe as it is of Arthur Schnitzler and David Hare: The words remain the same, but they are heard a different way.

In the Introduction to *Hands Around: A Cycle of Ten Dialogues,* a limited-circulation, English language translation of Arthur Schnitzler's *Reigen,* printed for members of the Schnitzler Society in 1929, the anonymous translators of the text observe:

Humanity seems gayest when dancing on the brink of a volcano. The culture of a period preceding a social cataclysm is marked by a spirit of light wit and sophisticated elegance which finds expression in a literature of a distinct type. This literature is light-hearted, audacious and self-conscious. It can treat with the most charming insouciance subjects which in another age would have been awkward or even vulgar. But with the riper experience of a period approaching its end the writers feel untrammeled in the choice of them by pride or prejudice knowing that they will never transgress the line of good taste.

This observation is an attempt to position *Reigen* in its proper place in history. In Schnitzler's Vienna, the twilight years of the nineteenth century (often referred to by the French *term fin de siecle)* were a time of aristocratic sophistication, intellectual and artistic achievement, and social gaiety. In the words of Charles Osborne, another of Schnitzler's English translators, the era "produced significant new movements in the arts in several countries, notably England, France, and Austria. Nowhere, however, did the arts thrive more richly in those years than in Austria, and specifically in its capital city, Vienna, which is where many of the most exciting developments had their beginnings."

Those developments the accomplishments of *fin de siecle* Vienna were created by the hands and minds of an amazing collection of painters, composers, philosophers, playwrights, and scientists, all gathered together in one place and time. Among the notables were the poet and playwright Hugo von Hofmannsthal, the painter Oskar Kokoschka, composer Johann Strauss, and one of the most influential thinkers of the twentieth century, the psychologist Sigmund Freud, whose *Interpretation of Dreams* was published in 1900, laying the foundation for modern psychoanalysis.

When they say humanity is gayest while "dancing on the brink of a volcano," the translators of *Hands Around* are suggesting that, without realizing it, the Viennese of Schnitzler's day and Schnitzler's play were experiencing a last hurrah before proud, cultured, aristocratic Vienna would be consumed and forever changed by the First and Second World Wars. In other words, the creation of this play had to wait until the time was just right, and a little longer would have been too late.

In his description of *The Round Dance,* in *Hauptmann, Wedekind and Schnitzler,* scholar Peter Skrine suggested, "The idea [of the play] was a good one: one wonders why no one had thought of it before. Perhaps someone had, but it was of course unthinkable on the modern stage until in the Vienna of the early-1900s a sufficiently large group of open-minded theatre-goers... were able to provide a potential audience in sympathy with what Schnitzler was doing and the encouragement he needed to bring out into the open what he had on his mind."

Thanks to decades worth of intense exploration into anthropology, biology, sociology, and psychology by scientists in the nineteenth century, Schnitzler was also better armed than any of his predecessor playwrights had been to write such an insightful play. Charles Darwin, Karl Marx, and Auguste Comte contributed to *Reigen,* indirectly at least as much as the atmosphere of aristocratic Vienna. "Schnitzler was drawing the logical

literary consequences from the biological and sociological discoveries of the late-nineteenth century," Skrine noted. "Sex is the basic manifestation of life, and he therefore presents it as the common denominator of a wide cross-section of humanity drawn from the widely differing social strata of Viennese society."

A century later, that social strata has changed somewhat. Schnitzler's characters remain largely intact in Hare's *Blue Room*. The "Sweet Young Lady" of Schnitzler's play, who sips a little too much wine with the Husband character, becomes a cocaine sniffing, pill-popping waifish Model in Hare's updating, but otherwise the people onstage are remarkably similar. Those in the audience, however, have undergone a major transformation.

Schnitzler's audiences claimed to be surprised by the acts of debauchery in *Reigen*. Perhaps to provide a mask of honor for an otherwise dishonorable production, some critics suggested that there was a moral lesson to be learned from the play: Besides the emptiness and emotional despair that are passed along by casual sex, venereal diseases may also find their way from partner to partner. In the 1990s, audiences in Europe and America have seen it all, on the stage and on the screen, and are unlikely to be truly shocked by any mere display of the naked human form. Titillated yes, but shocked, no. They have lived through a decade of proliferating pornography, thanks to the widespread use of the Internet, and witnessed the impeachment of U.S. President Bill Clinton over a variety of sexual affairs, ending with the now infamous White House intern Monica Lewinsky. Their steamy encounters were described in graphic detail by an infamous Special Prosecutor, whose written report, including accounts of oral sex in the president's office, was made public and printed in serial form in newspapers and magazines across the country. As Rod Dreher dryly noted in a review of *The Blue Room* in the *National Review,* "It's easy to imagine what a shock these vignettes must have delivered to Schnitzler's cultured audiences in 1920s Vienna, but at this late date in the sexual revolution, especially after the year-long Lewinskian Thermidor, it's all very old hat. Been there, done that, saw it on C-SPAN."

Modern audiences might be expected, however, to be more frightened by the specter of AIDS, a devastating sexually transmitted disease that killed nearly 7 million people between the time of its discovery in 1981 and the time *The Blue Room* was staged in 1998. Intriguingly, however, Hare does not turn AIDS into a major, or even minor, topic of discussion in the new adaptation. At one point in the sexual roundelay, the Au Pair tells her new beau, the Cab Driver, she wants to wait to have sex "because of the risk. ... It's not safe nowadays." But when he tells her the act will mean something significant to him, her resolve melts and they fall down together on a bed of cardboard boxes. Occasional glimpses of tentative regrets are all that surface in the play.

Perhaps this seeming lack of social consciousness can be forgiven, in light of Hare's previous track record of socially important works. Describing the playwright's previous work, Robert Viagas wrote in *Back Stage,* "Hare's plays examine various facets of the troubled late-20th century British soul." This is undeniably true of plays like *Plenty, The Secret Rapture,* and Hare's remarkable trilogy of dramas examining British social institutions, *Racing Demon, Murmuring Judges,* and *The Absence of War*. With *The*

Blue Room, however, Britain's most popular playwright-polemicist was telling a more *universal* story, and seemed to be less concerned with large social issues, than with intimate, personal crises that are experienced the same the world over, in any time period.

Unlike Schnitzler's original work, which deliberately attempts to evoke the spirit of *fin de siecle* Vienna, *The Blue Room*'s preface suggests only that "The play is set in one of the great cities of the world, in the present day," and, indeed, there is little about the work that ties it to a particular geographic location. Schnitzler's audiences may indeed have seen something uniquely Austrian, or German, about the characters in *Reigen*. In fact, Skrine asserted that without the proper treatment of the language and a delicately nuanced approach to the unique Viennese personality, the play would become something very different than its author intended." *The Round Dance* is a play which needs plenty of tact," said Skrine. "If the subtle inflections of Viennese speech and the details of Viennese manners are not captured, the true qualities of the text are apt to evaporate, and we are left with an episodic and rather smutty entertainment in which Schnitzler's delightfully varied and pointed dialogue might just as well be replaced by coarse innuendo and heavy breathing."

Half a century later, when he filmed *Reigen* as *La Ronde* in 1950, Max Ophuls must have felt the same way. His production, which has become a favorite of cinema buffs everywhere, labors to recreate the same Viennese turn-of-the-century elegance and wistfulness found in Schnitzler's play. Five more decades later though, a full century after Dr. Schnitzler circulated copies of his "dialogues" he had printed at his own expense among a select group of friends, Hare's new adaptation has proven that it really is a small world after all. In the last hours of the twentieth century, geographic boundaries and cultural differences are melting away in a flurry of electronic global communications and a powerful world economy. It doesn't matter whether *The Blue Room* takes place in Vienna, Venice, or Ventura, California, its characters possess recognizable traits of people the world over, and they struggle with some of the same problems individuals in advanced societies have always found themselves struggling with - class conflicts, loveless relationships, sexual inhibition, and its counterpart, aggressive licentiousness.

In the 1990s, however, those themes, in this story, haven't achieved the same resonance they once found with audiences less programmed for voyeuristic thrills. As Charles Isherwood noted in his review of *The Blue Room* for *Variety,* "One notes an irony: At the last turn of the century, when the original was written, it was considered too dangerous to be published and later inspired police action; on the cusp of the next, the new text has become virtually insignificant, lost in the swirl of celebrity hype that has surrounded the production. Play? What play? Draw your own conclusion about the decline of culture."

Source: Lane A. Glenn, for *Drama for Students,* Gale, 2000.

Critical Essay #2

Simon reviews the Broadway debut of Hare's adaptation of Arthur Schnitzler's Reigen, *finding that the new work, while offering dazzling performances, does not live up to its source material*.

Perhaps the one world-theater figure left undervalued many years after his death is Arthur Schnitzler. Esteemed by the cognoscenti, his work performed intermittently (though often in bastardized versions), and dimly known to many theatergoers, he has yet to achieve the honors due a genius in both drama and fiction. Unfortunately, the updating of his comedy *Reigen* by David Hare (rhymes with Guare) as *The Blue Room* will not add many laurels to the great Austrian's reputation.

Reigen ("Round Dance"), known mostly from Max Ophuls's movie version, *La Ronde*—a flamboyant but facile Ophulsification—is a play that astutely views the sexual act as also a sexual leveler and psychological placebo, but only fleetingly satisfying in any capacity. It is both a dance of sex (A screws B, B screws C, and so on until J screws A) and a dance of death—the death of love, as various partners from diverse social strata declare feelings for one another that are transparently transient.

What Schnitzler achieves, and Hare pretty much loses, is a careful demonstration of how sex takes on varying significance depending on the status of the participants, and of how emotions change from before intercourse to after. Yet Hare and his clever director, Sam Mendes, have conceived this modernization as a bravura display piece for one actor and one actress, each playing five parts. That way, however, the sense of a cross section of humankind caught in the act fades, and the focus becomes the versatility of the two performers. Similarly, the startling minimalist décor by Mark Thompson and neon-edged abstract lighting by Hugh Vanstone further detract from Schnitzler's detailed and minutely documented societal and existential exploration.

Still, if all you want is two highly attractive performers—she an Australian-American movie star, he a British-stage leading man—exhibiting their skills and bodies in a sufficiently sophisticated but slick vehicle, more Hare than Schnitzler, *The Blue Room* fills the bill.

I doubt whether there exists a young actress anywhere today who better combines physical allure with histrionic gifts than Nicole Kidman. Here she manages five idiosyncratic and duly varied performances that will not be outshone by an almost continuous dishabille and brief nudity (mostly from the back) that would be enough to eclipse many a lesser talent. For Miss Kidman's is a great and very nearly flawless beauty, extending from hair to toes and skipping nothing, unless, unlike me, you feel that a tall, willowy, essentially girlish figure is inferior to womanly copiousness. But be forewarned: You will see much more of Miss Kidman's face, legs, and feet, superb as they are, than of her torso.

I dwell on body so much because that is what the hype has been all about, dishonest in hype's usual way. You get more nudity on the masculine side, from Iain Glen, an equally fine performer and not inconsiderable looker. But what with capitalization on Miss Kidman's star aura, and underestimation of female and homosexual audiences, Glen's even greater self-baring has gotten less publicity.

The hundred uninterrupted minutes go by without boring you, but do not expect major erotic, any more than artistic, stimulation. No doubt intentionally, the essence of eroticism□the passionately sensual interplay of two performers□has been downplayed, if not exactly curbed. Moreover, what was incomparably daring a century ago (1897, and then in 1900, only privately printed) is mere marginal titillation today. And Hare, to his credit, was not simply after sexual jokiness, although he may still have overemphasized it.

Source: John Simon, review of *The Blue Room* in *New York,* Vol. 31, no. 50, January 4, 1999, p. 69.

Critical Essay #3

Rich offers a mixed review of The Blue Room, *praising the two lead actors, Nicole Kidman and Iain Glen, but finding the attendant hype surrounding movie star Kidman's presence in the play to overshadow the actual work*.

If the theater is a temple, it's no surprise that the most popular faith on Broadway this holiday season is *"The Blue Room,"* to which pilgrims flock from miles around to worship Nicole Kidman's tush.

But given the competing prurience on tap this year, anyone who sees *"The Blue Room"* must be baffled. It's no Starr report. You pay your money - even $35 balcony seats are scalped for hundreds - and all you get is 100 minutes of arch acting - class skits in which Ms. Kidman's backside (and only her backside) is visible undraped for about five seconds. The dim lighting hasn't been turned up a watt since the similar faux-nude tableau in "Hair" 30 years ago. Let the sunshine in - please!

The shortfall between the show's lurid reputation and its PG-13 content - as well as that between its status as a highfalutin cultural event and its slim theatrical rewards - once more proves that our waning century's most powerful invention, publicity, can alter even empirical reality once harnessed to sex to sell a product. The notoriously rapacious promotional machine of Ms. Kidman and her husband, Tom Cruise, has pulled off the feat of making cynical, allegedly sophisticated New Yorkers look like rubes who shell out big bucks for a carny show that's all smoke and mirrors once they're inside the tent.

What brought the product, Ms. Kidman, to Broadway? She isn't a has been, like the usual TV refugees who turned up as novelty acts in "Grease." Nor is she in the category of Christian Slater, currently doing penance in another play, "Side Man," to re-establish his employ ability after a highly public detox. And she doesn' t need her paltry Broadway paycheck. (The entire box-office gross for the 12-week run of *"The Blue Room"* equals roughly a fifth of what Mr. Cruise alone makes per picture.)

Officially, yes, Ms. Kidman simply yearned to return to her stage roots in a classic. *("The Blue Room"* is an updating of Arthur Schnitzler, albeit in Cliff Notes form.) The actual motive, though, is a stalled screen career. Ms. Kidman's recent movies ("The Peacemaker," "Practical Magic") didn't set the world on fire, so it's time to manufacture buzz - and where cheaper or easier to do it than on star-and-sex-deprived Broadway, where the biggest celebrities are "Lion King" puppets, vanity productions can be assembled for a fraction of Hollywood's cost, and only 1,000 seats a night need be sold to earn the accolade "smash hit"?

The *"Blue Room"* agenda was dictated to a compliant *Newsweek,* which set the tone for the monkey-see media to follow. Ms. Kidman, we were told, is no longer "Mrs. Tom Cruise, a nepotistic status assigned to her by a twitchy, bitchy Hollywood," but a budding superstar heading for "what may be a career unlike any other." Eager to hop on the ' *'Blue Room"* gravy train for its own commercial purposes, Newsweek oversold the

sexual come-on, taking a lead from the British critic, apparently on sabbatical from a monastery, who had fatuously labeled Ms. Kidman's performance "pure theatrical Viagra" at its debut in London. The magazine's cover announced that "Nicole Kidman bares all," and its article led with the empty promise that the star would be seen on stage "in various percentages of undress (including a climactic 100 percent)." The play's artistic bona fides were similarly hyped, the director, Sam Mendes, and adaptor, David Hare, lent *"The Blue Room"* their cachet but not their best efforts.

Ms. Kidman is a good actress. If she had found a stage vehicle as challenging as her best movie, "To Die For," she might have had an acting rather than a publicity triumph. Instead she became one of the few stars of recent seasons to be denied a unanimous standing ovation on her Broadway opening night.

The morning after, New York critics blew the whistle on the whole stunt, noting its acute shortfall as both sex show and cultural event. Too little, too late. Ticket buyers had already been suckered into spending some $4 million in advance to subsidize Ms. Kidman's image makeover, and what New Yorker wants to admit he's been had? A ticket to *"The Blue Room,"* the terminally tedious club no one can get into, still confirms status, even if anyone in search of pure theatrical Viagra might have had a better shot with the Rockettes.

Source: Frank Rich, "Nicole Kidman's Behind" in the *New York Times,* December 30, 1998, p. A17.

Critical Essay #4

Kroll focuses on the performance of Nicole Kidman in his review of The Blue Room, *finding the actress to be the greatest attraction to seeing the play*.

The most passionately anticipated movie in years is Stanley Kubrick's "Eyes Wide Shut," starring Tom Cruise and his wife, Nicole Kidman. Now that desire is being partially slaked by the appearance of Kidman onstage in London in David Hare's erotically charged new play *The Blue Room*. While Kubrick edits the closely guarded film in his London lair, Kidman is hitting the boards like a fireball, scorching the normally nonflammable critics. The *Daily Telegraph* swore that Kidman was "pure sexual Viagra." The *Guardian* said, "She is not just a star, she delivers the goods." As for Kidman, she's acting in the 250-seat Donmar Warehouse because "you cannot look just to movies to be fulfilled."

"The Blue Room" is Hare's modernized version of Arthur Schnitzler's "La Ronde," in which five men and five women form an inadvertent sexual daisy chain that crosses lines of social class and money. In Hare's version, two actors, Kidman and Iain Glen, play all 10 contemporary copulators. Both give virtuoso performances, switching identities, costumes, accents and positions with speed, elegance, pathos and hilarity. These attributes apply equally to Sam Mendes's staging and to Hare's play, which looks with cool empathy at the illusions and deceptions of the modern mating dance.

As a stage image, Kidman is the essence of -escense: luminescent, opalescent, incandescent. As an actress, she evokes with wit and style a teenage hooker, a French au pair, an upscale wife, a coked-up model, an imperious stage diva. Matching her is Glen as a lecherous cabdriver, a callow student, a self-adoring playwright, a philandering politician, a jaded aristocrat. Flinging their clothes off and on with finger-straining abandon, they couple in stage blackouts, to the frazzling accompaniment of an electric buzzer, followed by a sign signaling the length of their liaisons. (Winner: the politician at 2 hours 28 minutes. Flunkout: the student at 0.)

It took guts for movie-star Kidman, 31, to step into the naked reality of the stage in such a risky project. Living in London with Cruise for 18 months while working on Kubrick's project, Kidman felt the call of the theater, where she hadn't worked since she was 19 in her native Australia. The skydiving, mountain-climbing Kidman was undaunted by the relentless sexuality of "The Blue Room." The most erotic scene in the play is one in which the playwright tenderly dresses the model after they've made love. "That was my idea," says Kidman. "I thought it was sexier for him than ripping her clothes off."

Kidman has a special insight into the character of the young model. She's frank about her own emotional history and her youthful dalliance with drugs. "When I was 17,I had a relationship with a 37-year-old man," she says. "Another man was 13 years older than me. He was lovely and kind. He gave me such a strong belief in men, which is a lovely thing to have." Kidman studied ballet as a youngster, and later joined a theater group in Sydney. Inevitably the movies grabbed the girl with the red-gold hair and moon-glow

skin. Her best American role so far was the murderously ambitious TV weather girl in 1995's "To Die For." (Her next film, "Practical Magic," opens mid-October.) Cruise and Kidman - whose previous films together, "Days of Thunder" and "Far and Away," were not successful - are as anxious as anyone to see what Kubrick has wrought with them in "Eyes Wide Shut."

The director has buttoned the lips of everyone connected with the film (now set to open next summer). But Kidman's awed affection for Kubrick ("He's truly inspired") threatens to pop one button. The movie, a thriller about jealousy and sexual obsession, involves scenes of highly charged eroticism with Kidman and Cruise reportedly as husband-and-wife psychiatrists. "Stanley was extremely respectful of us, of our marriage," says Kidman. "He set those scenes up from the beginning so that he dealt with us separately. He told us, 'I don't want you to direct each other or give each other notes.' He thought that when a threesome works on such sensitive scenes, two can gang up on the third without meaning to."

"The Blue Room" will run through October, but Kidman won't escape from sex. Her next film is "In the Cut," from novelist Susanna Moore's (what else?) erotic thriller, which Kidman bought for filmmaker Jane Campion, who directed her in "Portrait of a Lady." "Jane will push me to the limit, she'll ask me to do things I've never done before," says Kidman. She doesn't sound like someone who has threatened to give up acting. "It's the awful scrutiny of your private life that gets you down." She and Cruise are currently suing an English magazine that wrote they were getting divorced. Their two children go to English schools, but Kidman says ideally she'd like to raise the kids in Australia. As for her husband, she calls him "wonderfully American." It sounds as if no one country, no one medium, is going to contain her energy and daring.

Source: Jack Kroll, "Scorched-Earth Strategy" in *Newsweek,* Vol. 132, May 10, 1998, p. 89.

Adaptations

David Hare's *The Blue Room* is based on a series of sketches called *Reigen,* written by Arthur Schnitzler in 1896. Director Max Ophuls created a film version of *Reigen* called La Ronde, which premiered in 1950 and has since become a favorite of foreign film buffs. The film stars Simone Signoret and Anton Walbrook as the revolving series of intertwined lovers.

Topics for Further Study

Schnitzler's original work, *Reigen,* upon which *The Blue Room* is based, suggested that one of the unfortunate things passed along in the "round dance" of loose sexual relations is venereal diseases. Although it is not a prominent feature of Hare's play, AIDS is the modern counterpart to this worry, and a couple of characters do express concerns about proper "hygiene." Research the most recent statistics and medical findings about the AIDS virus. How many people are now affected by this disease? What have governments and physicians been doing to combat the spread of AIDS?

Watch *La Ronde,* the 1950 film version of Schnitzler's work directed by Max Ophuls, and compare it with David Hare's adaptation, *The Blue Room*. How are the stories and characters similar? How do they differ? What is the effect of Ophuls's faithful recreation of turn-of-the-century Vienna as the setting for his film, versus Hare's ambiguous suggestion that the play simply occur, "in one of the great cities of the world, in the present day" ? Finally, how have attitudes toward the characters' sexual looseness changed over the years?

One of the characters in *The Blue Room* is a playwright, like Hare himself. Examine the scenes involving The Playwright. What is his opinion of the artist's place in society? How does he feel about his audiences? What is his relationship like with the media? With others in the theatre? How much of The Playwright's personality might be shared by the author of *The Blue Room?*

At the turn of the century, Schnitzler' s Vienna was considered a center of European science and culture. Prior to the First World War, two million people occupied the crown jewel of the Austrian Empire. Vienna was the source for the modernist art movement, the origin of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical theories, and the capital of European music, home to such famous composers as Joseph Haydn, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and Ludwig van Beethoven. Research *fin de siecle* Vienna. How did the city manage to become so influential in art, music, and thought? When and why did its fortunes change?

What Do I Read Next?

David Hare is the author or adapter of more than twenty stage plays and a number of screenplays. Some of his best known and most popular plays include *Plenty* (1978), *The Secret Rapture* (1988), and his trilogy of plays about social institutions in Great Britain, *Racing Demon* (for which he earned both an Olivier Award and a Tony Award following its production in 1990), *Murmuring Judges* (1991), and *The Absence of War* (1992).

Besides writing plays, David Hare is also an accomplished screenwriter, director, and essayist. *Writing Left-Handed* is a collection of his essays that have appeared in newspapers, playbills, and anthologies over the years. The book includes the playwright's insights into his craft, as well as his perspectives on theatre history in Great Britain, and his opinions about a variety of contemporary political issues.

Various versions of Arthur Schnitzler's original series of dialogues that were the inspiration for *The Blue Room* exist in English translations. Among them are Schnitzler's *Hands Around: A Cycle of Ten Dialogues* (1995) and *The Round Dance* (1983). In both, a series of people conduct sexual affairs that are intertwined, like the characters in Hare's play. Schnitzler was also a novelist of some renown.

The Road into the Open (1992) depicts Imperial Vienna at the turn of the century. Before the First World War, the city is a center of European culture, a backdrop against which Schnitzler presents themes ranging from anti-Semitism to the struggles of artists, as well as his more familiar treatment of the complications of love and sex among various men and women.

John Gray's 1992 best-selling self-help book *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* is billed as "a practical guide for improving communication and getting what you want in your relationships." Gray is a relationship counselor who examines some of the differences between men and women and suggests that, in order to develop happier relationships, couples must recognize and accept those differences.

English Restoration comedies are famous for characters who are constantly chasing each other into and out of sexual relationships. William Wycherley's *The Country Wife* (1673) and William Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700) both present husbands, wives, and lovers who go to elaborate lengths to deceive each other while carrying on clandestine affairs.

Further Study

Liptzin, Solomon and Sol Liptzin. *Arthur Schnitzler (Studies in Austrian Literature, Culture, and Thought),* Ariadne Publishers, 1995.

At once a history, biography, and literary critique, the Liptzins' study examines Schnitzler's place in Austrian and world literature and illuminates some of the most important themes in the author's work.

Page, Malcolm, compiler. *File on Hare,* Methuen, 1986.

A collection of excerpted criticism of Hare's plays, taken largely from theatre reviews in London and New York newspapers and magazines. Also includes a chronology of Hare's work.

Schorske, Carl E. *Fin-De-Siecle Vienna: Politics and Culture,* Random House, 1981.

In seven separate studies, Schorske provides a social and political history of turn-of-the-century Vienna that examines early modernism in art, music, and thought.

Zeifman, Hersh, editor. *David Hare: A Casebook,* Garland Publishing, 1994.

A collection of essays about Hare's most important plays, accompanied by a chronology of his work and a bibliography of Hare interviews and criticism.

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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.

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□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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