Bus Stop Study Guide

Bus Stop by William Inge

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Introduction

When William Inge's play, *Bus Stop,* opened on Broadway March 2, 1955, it was an immediate commercial and critical success. Based on Inge's earlier one-act play, *People in the Wind, Bus Stop* involves a pair of young lovers and their struggle to find love in the modern world.

Unlike his earlier two plays, *Come Back, Little Sheba* and *Picnic,* this work is not an in-depth study of relationships. Instead, it is considered a superficial romantic comedy. As most critics assert, *Bus Stop* simply lacks the depth of Inge's earlier work.

Inge's focus on the main couple□the nightclub singer, Cherie, and the brash cowboy, Bo□inspired more controversy. As critics complained that the other six characters in the play remain undeveloped and fail to hold the audience's attention or sympathy, Inge reasserted his hope that the audience would be interested in every character. His aim was to portray the full spectrum of romantic relationships, from positive to negative, in his work.

Author Biography

William Inge was born on May 3,1913, in Independence, Kansas. He was raised by his mother, Maude; his father was a traveling salesman and was rarely at home. After graduating from the University of Kansas in 1935, Inge attended the George Peabody College for Teachers, but left before completing his graduate program.

After a brief period teaching English at a local high school, Inge returned to college to complete his graduate degree. He also worked as a drama critic, and it was during this period that he met Tennessee Williams, who encouraged him to write drama. Inge completed his first play that year, and with the help of Williams, *Farther Off from Heaven* was produced in 1947.

In 1949, Inge wrote *Come Back, Little Sheba,* which was produced on Broadway in 1950 and earned the George Jean Nathan Award and Theatre Time Award. Three years later, *Picnic* won the Pulitzer Prize in Drama, the Outer Circle Award, the New York Drama Critics Circle Award, and the Donaldson Award.

He had two more hits on Broadway in quick succession: *Bus Stop* and *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs*. After so much early success, his next plays, *A Loss of Roses, Natural Affection,* and *Where's Daddy?* were commercial failures, each closing after only a few performances.

Inge had more success with his first attempt at screenwriting, *Splendor in the Grass,* which received the Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay in 1961. Following this success, he moved to Los Angeles to concentrate on screenplays, but never repeated his early success.

Inge was deeply affected by negative reviews of his work. He struggled with depression and alcoholism much of his life. Several of his plays focus on the complexity of family relationships and deal with characters who struggle with failed expectations, depression, and addiction. His death in 1973 from carbon monoxide poisoning was ruled a suicide.

Plot Summary

Act I

As the play opens, Grace and Elma anticipate the arrival of the bus and its passengers at the bus stop. The two women are waitresses at the diner, and as they wait for customers they discuss romance, or the lack of it: Grace has been married, but her husband left her; Elma is single and lonely. The sheriff, Will, comes into the diner and announces that the snowstorm has closed the roads and the bus and its passengers will be stuck at the diner until the road is cleared.

Almost immediately, the bus pulls in to the diner. A young blond woman, Cherie, enters. She is scared and trying to hide from a fellow passenger, Bo. Dr. Lyman and the bus driver, Carl, walk into the diner. It becomes obvious that Grace and Carl are interested in one another, and after a whispered conversation, they contrive reasons to leave and, presumably, meet secretly upstairs in Grace's apartment. Meanwhile, Dr. Lyman is obviously drunk, circumspect, and suspicious.

Eventually, Bo and Virgil enter the diner. Bo believes that he is in love with Cherie; moreover, he has practically kidnapped her with the intent of marrying her. Act I ends with a confrontation between Will and Bo, who learns that Cherie has sought the protection of the sheriff. Bo is shocked to learn that Cherie, or any other woman, might be able to resist his charms.

Act II

Act II opens with Dr. Lyman beginning his seduction of Elma. He arranges to meet her later in Topeka, where she will be attending a symphony. Elma is too innocent to recognize that Dr. Lyman's intentions are less than honorable.

Cherie reveals to Elma that she has had a long and unhappy history with men. She considers marrying Bo but asserts that she does not love him. Yet in the next breath, she contends that love is not that important, and she will probably just settle down at some point, regardless of love.

Dr. Lyman overhears the last part of this conversation, and after Cherie walks away, he also begins to talk about love. Elma suggests that they all put on some sort of show to help pass the time and enlists Virgil, Cherie, and Dr. Lyman as participants. Virgil will play the guitar, Cherie will sing, and Elma and Dr. Lyman will enact a scene from *Romeo and Juliet*.

Meanwhile, Virgil has been advising Bo about women; he tells the young man that women want tenderness from men. During Virgil's song, Bo begins to tell Cherie how tender he can be. She, however, is irritated that he would talk during his friend's performance and pushes him away. Elma and Dr. Lyman's performance ends abruptly

when he has a moment of clarity and he sees himself for what he is: a drunk and a fake. Lyman collapses on the floor and is placed on a bench to sleep it off.

Next Cherie begins to sing, and Bo is so aroused by her performance that he begins to loudly declare his love. When Cherie stops singing and slaps him, Bo seizes her and declares that they will get married immediately. She is screaming for help as Bo carries her to the door.

Will enters and a fight ensues. Bo is knocked out and arrested. The scene ends with Virgil asking Cherie not to press charges. He also tells her that Bo was sexually innocent before he met Cherie and that she was his first sexual experience. Cherie agrees to not press charges after Virgil promises to protect her from his young friend.

Act III

Act III opens a few hours later, and almost all of the characters are waking from a few hours sleep. As the sun rises, the storm has passed and the roads are clear. After checking the conditions, Will enters the diner and forces to Bo to apologize to the women. Later, Cherie confesses to him that she has been with many other men; therefore, she thinks that he has had the wrong perception of her.

At the counter, Elma prepares breakfast for Lyman, who begins to admit his failures and suggests that perhaps he should go to Toledo to the hospital and sign up for psychiatric care. Carl, Will, and Virgil go out to put chains on the bus.

Bo tells Cherie that he loves the real her, not his idealized perception of her. As Carl announces the bus's departure, Bo asks for a final kiss. Cherie shows him how to kiss her tenderly. Once again he asks her to marry him and she agrees, and the two embrace. As Bo and Cherie prepare to get back on the bus, Virgil announces that he will not be going with them. When Bo expresses his disappointment, Cherie reminds him that he cannot force people to do what he wishes.

As Carl boards the bus, he tells Elma that Lyman was wanted by the law in Kansas City for inappropriate behavior with young girls. Shocked, she realizes that Lyman was trying to seduce her.

Grace ponders the night's events, and she is disappointed that Carl did not deny that he was married. The play ends with everyone leaving the diner, and Grace going upstairs to get some sleep.

Act 1

Act 1 Summary

This entire play is set inside a dingy street corner restaurant near a bus stop in a small Kansas town. The timeframe is the 1950s. It is 1 a.m. in March. The cast of characters are Elma Duckworth – a waitress, Grace Hoylard – owner of the restaurant, Will Masters – the town Sheriff, Cherie – a chanteuse, Dr. Gerald Lyman – a former college professor, Carl – a bus driver, Virgil Blessing – a ranch hand, Bo Decker – a young rancher and cowboy.

Due to the blizzard, the café workers, Grace and Elma, are predicting that the café will probably have to stay open late to accommodate the passengers of the bus that will be arriving soon. Will comes in soon after to confirm their prediction and tells them that the telephone lines are down and that the highways are blocked all the way to Topeka.

Grace is in her late thirties or early forties and she is married to a man who tends to wander away from home and stays away for days. She does not get along with him very well even when he is home. Elma is in high school and she is a good student.

Cherie, a young blonde girl, walks in carrying a large straw suitcase. She is around twenty years old with unkempt hair, a sequin and net dress, gilded sandals, brightly enameled toes and a skimpy metal cloth jacket. She has a Southern accent and is from the Ozarks. She immediately goes over to Grace and Elma and asks if she can hide somewhere. She is unable to find a hiding place for and has no money for a hotel. She explains to Will that she needs protection from a cowboy who is asleep on the bus. She says that she met the cowboy at the Blue Dragon nightclub where she worked and that he abducted her while she was making plans to go somewhere else (thus the packed suitcase). Will reassures her that she'll be alright and Elma backs him up by telling Cherie that Will is a religious man and very good at taking care of people. Cherie tells Elma that she was a singer at the nightclub and revels that she had dropped out of school to take care of her siblings. She was separated from her family during a flood and managed to get away with one of her sisters.

Carl, the bus driver, walks in and spars with Will as if they are old friends. Will tells Carl that he should wake up the passengers on the bus so that they do not freeze. Carl and Grace flirt and he tells her that he knows her apartment is upstairs from the restaurant. Carl tells Will that he'll wake up the passengers in the bus but won't be back for a while because he's going to go for a walk for a few hours. Later on, Grace uses the excuse of a headache to get out of the café and to her apartment.

Another passenger from the bus, Dr. Lyman is upset when he learns from Carl that they are still in Kansas. He was expecting to have crossed the state border. He asks for a double shot of whisky but when Elma tells him that they don't sell alcohol, he produces his own and mixes it with a bottle of lemon soda provided by Elma. He strikes up a

conversation with Elma and informs her that he has been married three times but is now a free man. He also tells her that he has trouble keeping down a job. In between conversations, he recites poetry and talks about Shakespeare.

The cowboy, Bo Decker and his friend Virgil Blessing, the only two passengers who were left in the bus, walk into the restaurant. Bo is tall, thin, in his early 20s, unkempt. He is wearing faded jeans, boots, a Stetson, a shiny horsehide jacket and a bandana around his neck. Virgil, 40-something, is dressed similar to Bo except that he is a bit tidier. Both men look as if they have just been awoken.

Bo accosts Cherie (or "Cherry" as he calls her) for abandoning him on the bus. Meanwhile, Will keeps trying to get Bo or Virgil to close the café door that they have left open. Eventually, Bo gets into an argument with Will about the door but Virgil calms him down. Temporarily rebuffed, Bo orders food: three raw hamburgers, ham and eggs, potato salad, a piece of lemon pie, a piece of chocolate pie, and a quart of milk.

After eating, Bo tries to be affectionate to Cherie who attempts to avoid his embraces. Bo is flabbergasted at Cherie's resistance because he says that he's unaccustomed to a women turning down his advances. Will intervenes between Bo and Cherie as Bo continues to harass Cherie about the suitcase and her intentions. Frustrated with trying to keep Bo away from Cherie, Will finally tells Bo that Cherie does not love him. Bo gets angry with Will but Virgil intervenes to keep the peace. Will leaves the café but tells everyone that he will be right across the road and easily available if necessary. Bo paces around the café but finally settles down in a seat next to Virgil and is overwhelmed by the possibility that it might be possible for a girl to not love him.

Act 1 Analysis

This William Inge play explores the relationships that develop when a bus full of passengers is stranded and forced to spend a long time together inside a small café/restaurant in a small town in Kansas. Having been born in Kansas, Inge brings personal experience to the location and characters of the play.

In this scene, the audience learns about the existing relationships among the characters.

Grace is in an unhappy marriage and likes the bus driver Carl. She and Elma work together and get along well. They are on friendly terms with the town sheriff Will. Cherie is trying to run away from Bo, who wants to kidnap her to his ranch in Montana and marry her. Virgil and Bo are good friends and Virgil is responsible for keeping Bo's temper in check. Dr. Lyman has been married three times and possibly fired from his job as a professor for being sexually involved with one of his students.

As the story unfolds, the existing relationships between the characters twist and turn into possibilities and regrets. Grace and Carl make plans to have a secret rendezvous in her bedroom that is upstairs from the café. Dr. Lyman and Elma develop a friendship; Elma innocently accepts him as a friend whereas Dr. Lyman has ulterior sexual motives

towards her. Bo tries further to assert his right to marry Cherie but manages to alienate her even further. Will intervenes to stop Bo from harassing Cherie. Virgil manages Bo's temper so that a fight does not break out between Bo and the sheriff.

At this stage, the scene inside the café has become a complex cauldron of emotions.

Act 2

Act 2 Summary

The location is the same as in Scene 1 and takes place a few minutes after Scene 1.

Virgil is playing a cowboy ballad on his guitar. Bo is sulking. Cherie is reading a magazine. Elma and Dr. Lyman are chatting.

It turns out that Dr. Lyman was a professor at an East Coast College and holds extreme disdain for both the college and its students. He says that he is a Magna Cum Laude from University of Chicago, a Rhodes Scholar and has a Ph.D. from Harvard. He claims that he just could not take it anymore and resigned from the University and bought a ticket to go to Las Vegas. Knowing that Elma is scheduled to go to Topeka tomorrow to hear a symphony, Dr. Lyman asks her if she would take him to the library there. He then suggests that he buy dinner for her and take her to the symphony. Elma innocently accepts the offer. Dr. Lyman tells her that it might be best if she does not tell anyone of the plans.

Will stops in to get some coffee and goes off to check on the condition of the roads. Bo talks to Virgil about taking Cherie to the Justice of the Peace across the street and marrying her and says he would do it if Will were not there to stop him. Virgil tries to distract Bo and they talk about being lonely.

Cherie talks to Elma about Bo and tells her that Bo wanted to get married the day after they first slept together. He told her that he was going to take her away to Montana. Afraid of what Bo might do, Cherie decided to leave town and live with a friend in Kansas. As she was getting ready to buy a ticket, Bo stepped up, bought a ticket for her to go to Montana instead and compelled her to board the bus with him.

Virgil reveals to Bo that he decided never to marry because he does not want to give up his independence but that he regrets having made that decision. He tells Bo that maybe Cherie does not like him because he does not act gallant around her. Bo does not understand and continues to feel frustrated about the situation. Meanwhile, Cherie is confused about what she wants but after some thought decides she must feel respected, by whomever she decides to marry.

Dr. Lyman complains to Elma that people have unrealistic expectations about love. Elma reminds him that he has been married three times. He continues on to say that maybe it is no longer possible for people to give enough of themselves to experience true love. Elma does not understand him. Dr. Lyman changes the subject and asks Elma about the dress she will wear to the symphony and says that she will look very pretty in it.

Virgil's guitar playing inspires everyone in the café. Cherie asks him to play more music. He says that he will play if she sings. They make a deal and start figuring out what they

want to perform. Elma asks Dr. Lyman to read poetry. He agrees to play Romeo on the condition that she plays the role of Juliet.

Bo feels jealous of the friendship that has sparked between Cherie and Virgil. Virgil explains that it is because he treats her tenderly and that Bo should show his tender side if he wants Cherie to like him. Bo talks to Cherie and tries to tell her that he has a tender side. However, she gets annoyed at him because he's talking while Virgil is playing guitar and she's preparing to perform.

In the spirit of the night, Elma and Dr. Lyman decide to act out the balcony scene from Romeo and Juliet. However, Dr. Lyman is too drunk to be able to carry it off. Cherie sings causing Bo's passion for her to increase further and he talks to Virgil while she is singing and tells him that he wants her even more. Cherie is enraged by his talking during her song and slaps him after she finishes singing. This provokes Bo and he becomes aggressive with her causing her to become angrier. The sheriff Will intervenes which leads to a fight between him and Bo. Will manages to subdue Bo and puts handcuffs on him.

Meanwhile, Dr. Lyman has gotten progressively drunker and has started to feel guilty about his secret longings for Elma. He falls asleep on a bench. Elma confides in Grace and Grace advises her not to meet him in Topeka.

Virgil begs Cherie not to press charges against Bo so that he can be let out of jail and allowed to board the bus. Virgil shocks Cherie by informing her that Bo was a virgin before he slept with her. Cherie, taken aback by this news, decides to help Bo.

Act 2 Analysis

In this scene, the audience learns more about the characters as all the relationships reach a climactic moment.

The conversation between Bo and Virgil reveals that Bo is not as tough as he looks but is very naïve about how to behave around a woman. Virgil is a gentle man and cares deeply for Bo. Cherie does not know that she wants in terms of love but she does know that being treated well is an important aspect of being in love. Dr. Lyman is a depressed alcoholic with an academic background and an unstable life. Elma is intelligent and innocent. Grace is lonely and looking for emotional and sexual comfort.

The friendship between Bo and Virgil plays out revealing Virgil's tenderness and love for Bo. Bo's extreme possessiveness of Cherie and the resulting aggressiveness leads to his having a fight with the Sheriff Will and being put in handcuffs. Cherie has a moment of epiphany where she learns of Bo's lack of experience with women, suddenly gains an insight into him that makes him appear more human, and perhaps helps her understand the source of his possessiveness.

The relationship among the other characters also reaches a climactic end. Dr. Lyman realizes his mistake in trying to lead astray an innocent girl. Grace and Carl return from their rendezvous having finally moved past their flirtatious relationship to a sexual one.

Act 3

Act 3 Summary

It is 5 a.m. of the same day as the previous scenes. Everyone is in the café, including Bo, who has a black eye and a bandaged hand, but they are all either sleeping or resting except for Elma who is sweeping. Also, Grace and Carl who are talking to each other.

The scene opens with Grace and Carl flirting and talking about the fact that they were finally able to have sex. Will comes in through the door to inform them that the highway will be clear and ready soon for transportation. He checks in with Bo, tell him that what he did was for Bo's welfare and asks him if he has followed his orders. Bo has not. Therefore, Will asks him to go ahead with the plan. Bo gets up and apologizes to Grace and Elma but dreads having to apologize to Cherie.

After some encouragement from Will, Bo goes up and apologizes to Cherie. As an extra gesture of goodwill, he gives her some money to facilitate her return back home. He wishes her good luck and they both retreat from each other awkwardly. Bo is dejected and depressed and Virgil tries to cheer him up. However, Bo wants Cherie and nothing will lift his spirits. Cherie comes over to tell him that she has had several boyfriends before she met him and she is not the kind of girl that he thinks she is. He tells her that he was a virgin when he met her and that he's shy with women but was taken by her and fell in love with her. When she questions his love, he says that he could not have sex with a woman unless he loved her.

Meanwhile, Carl starts to get ready to get the bus on the road, Dr. Lyman wakes up, and

Virgil goes out to help Carl. Carl orders all the passengers to board the bus. Bo and Will shake hands. Bo asks Cherie her permission to give her a goodbye kiss. She obliges but tells him to be gentle.

Dr. Lyman decides to 'do the right thing' and calls off his 'date' with Elma and continue on his trip to Denver. Carl informs Grace that Dr. Lyman has gotten into trouble for getting involved with young girls. He flirts with Grace and leaves.

After some time has passed, Bo gathers up his nerves once again to talk to Cherie. He tells her that he does not care about the fact that she has been with other men and that he's innocent enough for both of them. She is touched by the sentimentality. Unwilling to back down from his original position, he says that his offer to marry her and take her to Montana still stands. Cherie, won over by the gentle side of Bo, says yes.

Virgil announces that he will not be going back to Montana with Bo and Cherie. Bo will not have any of this and insists that Virgil come along. However, Virgil is adamant and claims that he has found another job. Cherie asks him to come and visit them.

Therefore, the bus leaves with all the passengers except Virgil. He decides to board the bus to Albuquerque that will be coming along at 8 a.m.

Grace informs Elma about Dr. Lyman's past, but instead of being alarmed, Elma is flattered that Dr. Lyman might have wanted to make love to her.

Virgil asks Grace if he could stay in the café until the next bus comes but she says she is closing it down but he could take the next bus to Kansas City. Not wanting to return to Kansas City, Virgil decides to wait for the Albuquerque bus. "Then I'm sorry, Mister, but you're just left out in the cold," says Grace. "Well…that's what happens to some people," says Virgil to himself as he picks up his guitar and leaves.

Act 3 Analysis

This scene opens on a languid tone. Everyone is tired from a long night. Even the headstrong cowboy who has been humbled is toned down in his animal ferocity.

Many of the relationship loose ends are tied up in this scene and new possibilities are opened up. Grace and Carl have opened a new chapter in their relationship, one that might either be the start of something new or possibly the end of something old. Elma is tantalized by the possibilities of her sexual powers when she discovers that Dr. Lyman was planning to seduce her. Bo and Cherie start a new life together. Virgil loses a close friend and is lonely but he will be starting a new life.

The play ends on both a happy and a sad note in that Bo and Cherie find love but Virgil finds himself "left out in the cold."

Characters

Virgil Blessing

Virgil is also a cowboy and Bo's long-time friend. Significantly older than Bo, he functions as a father figure for the young man. Virgil has never been married, but he is more knowledgeable about women than Bo and advises him how to behave with women.

Carl

Carl is the bus driver. Grace is sweet on him and he seems to be interested in her, but only as a sexual tryst when he is in town. He declines to answer questions on his marital status.

Cherie

Only nineteen, Cherie is dressed in sequins and sandals, clearly inappropriate for the weather and circumstances. Her makeup is overdone, with too much lipstick and eyeliner. She is on the bus because Bo is taking her to a Montana ranch. He plans on getting married, but Cherie claims that he has abducted her.

Forced to quit high school when she was twelve to cook and clean for her five older brothers and two younger sisters, Cherie grew up too fast. She has been involved with men since she was fourteen, but she still has romantic ideas about love. In fact, her dream is fall in love and get married. Although she displays antipathy towards Bo, what she really wants is romance and tenderness from him. She also wants him to accept her as she truly is, not because he feels obligated or has idealized visions of her.

Bo Decker

Bo is a cowboy from Montana. He is twenty-one and quite infatuated with Cherie. He is brash and aggressive toward others; in his initial appearance in the play, for example, he quickly announces that he owns his own ranch, has won a number of awards at the rodeo, had his picture taken for *Life Magazine,* and thus, deserves everyone's respect and attention.

Bo and Cherie have been sexually intimate, and he mistakes that for love. He determines that they must get married, since it would be inappropriate otherwise. When it appears that Cherie has rejected him, Bo reveals to Virgil that he has been very lonely. Bo's approach to women is one of loudness, strength, and obstinacy. He is too insecure about his image and his feelings and therefore acts like a bully. Yet by the time

the play ends, Bo has matured enough to show his tender side to Cherie. As a result, she agrees to marry him.

Elma Duckworth

A local high school student, Elma works at the diner as a waitress. A very bright but lonely girl, she becomes the object of Dr, Lyman's attention when he arrives on the bus. Elma is too innocent and inexperienced to realize that Lyman is a duplicitous man with bad intentions. She is so starved for male attention that she is flattered by his interest in her. In the end, she learns that Lyman was trying to seduce her, as he has many other young women. She realizes that she has learned a valuable lesson about men and life.

Grace

Grace works in the diner. She is in her late thirties or early forties and lives alone above the diner. She was once married, but her husband left her. Lonely and single, she asserts that she is fine with the brief sexual encounters she has with Carl, the bus driver. Yet, when he declines to say if he is married at the end of the play, she realizes that she is dissatisfied with their relationship.

Dr. Gerald Lyman

Dr. Lyman is also a passenger on the bus. He is about fifty years old and has been drinking when the play opens. In fact, he is an alcoholic and has been married and divorced three times. He wants to get out of Kansas as soon as possible; later in the play, it is revealed that he is in trouble with the law for loitering around schools and young girls. This predilection for pedophilia explains his attempted seduction of Elma, the young waitress at the diner. As the play progresses, it becomes clear that he is in need of serious psychological help.

Will Masters

Will is the town sheriff, bent on maintaining order. A deacon at the Congregational Church, he is admired by Elma and Grace, who assure Cherie that the sheriff will protect her. He forces Bo to accept responsibility for his actions.

Themes

Change and Transformation

Initially, Bo is a loud and aggressive man; yet eventually with the help of Virgil and Cherie, he begins to mature into a more sensitive, tender one. On account of his inexperience with women and his insecurity with himself, he does not know how to relate to people. His love for Cherie transforms him: only by losing her does he find the courage to confront his limitations and move forward with his life. Only then does Cherie accept his love.

Friendship

Bo and Virgil's friendship is a strong and long-lasting one. Older by twenty years, Virgil has taken care of Bo since the death of his parents and has become a father figure for the young man. During the course of the play, Virgil tries to restrain Bo, hoping to keep him out of trouble. He provides valuable advice on how Bo should act, especially with Cherie. With Virgil, Bo is able to finally express his loneliness. When Cherie accepts Bo's proposal, Virgil bows out of Bo's life so that he can build a life with Cherie.

Loneliness

Loneliness is an important theme in *Bus Stop* and propels most of the action in the play. In particular, Bo cannot bear the thought of returning to his lonely ranch. For this reason he mistakes his sexual relationship with Cherie for love and later mistakes love for ownership. Yet Bo cannot really love Cherie until he begins to acknowledge the depth of his loneliness and need. When he can really relate to her, with tenderness and caring, the young couple find common ground: their loneliness.

Grace is also motivated by loneliness. She tells Elma that she hates to return to her apartment above the diner alone. Her brief sexual encounters with Carl appear to offer her temporary respite from that emptiness, but it is only for a few hours and then she is alone again. Carl's visits are limited to twenty-minute stops, and while that is enough time for a brief sexual tryst, it is ultimately dissatisfying.

Moral Corruption

More than Grace and Carl's casual sexual relationship or Cherie's checkered history, the most egregious moral corruption in the play takes place between Lyman and Elma. His history of seducing young girls into a sexual relationship is known as pedophilia; in fact, he is fleeing the police for seducing underage girls. When he first enters the diner, Lyman is attracted to Elma and devotes much of the play to arranging a secret meeting.

He contrives business in Toledo and attempts to seduce her with a romantic scene from *Romeo and Juliet*.

Pride

Bo's identity is largely defined by pride. In fact, his initial appearance underscores this theme as he loudly describes his accomplishments to the people in the diner. His relationship with Cherie is negatively affected by this trait too. When she rejects him, he cannot believe that Cherie might not love him; the very idea is inconceivable. Therefore, he tries to force her to love and accept him.

Moreover, after Bo loses his fight with the sheriff, he is humiliated and unable to apologize to Cherie for his behavior. When Bo is finally able to put aside his pride and tell her that he loves her for who she truly is, he is able to form a bond with Cherie.

Style

Act

Dramas are divided into different acts. In Greek plays the drama was usually divided into five acts. This is the formula for most serious drama from the Greeks to the Romans and to later playwrights like William Shakespeare. The five acts denote the structure of dramatic action: exposition, complication, climax, falling action, and catastrophe. This five-act structure was standard until the nineteenth century, when Ibsen combined some of the acts.

Bus Stop is a three-act play. The exposition and complication are combined in the first act when the audience first learns of Cherie's abduction and of Bo's plans for a wedding. The climax occurs in the second act when Bo fights with Will, is arrested, and Cherie learns why Bo feels so committed to her. The catastrophe fails to occur in the third act□*Bus Stop* is comedy, not a drama. If this had been written as drama, Cherie would not have changed her mind and Bo would have boarded the bus, alone and heartbroken.

Audience

The audience is defined as the people for whom a drama is performed. Many authors write with an audience in mind. Inge states in the forward to *Four Plays* that he wanted his audience to observe several different portrayals of love and to be interested in all the characters. This is unusual; in general, authors never tell their audience what reaction they expect.

Character

Characters can range from simple stereotypical figures to more complex multifaceted ones. They may also be defined by personality traits, such as the rogue or the damsel in distress. The actions of the characters drive the play.

Characterization is the process of creating a character, replete with personality traits that help define who he will be and how he will behave in a given situation. For instance, Grace is lonely. The audience knows this because she tells them so on several occasions, but also because as she leaves the stage at the end of the play, her wistful glance reveals how much she dreads the loneliness upstairs.

Setting

The elements of setting may include geographic location, physical or mental environments, prevailing cultural attitudes, or the historical time in which the action

takes place. The location for *Bus Stop* is a small diner. All of the action occurs between 1 a.m. and 5 a.m. on a Sunday morning in this same setting. The limited setting forces all the action to occur within a small space and all the characters to interact.

Historical Context

Booming 1950s Economy

In the post-World War II years, the nation was economically prosperous. The G.I. Bill provided the means for returning soldiers to get a better education. More importantly, it funded a program whereby each soldier could buy a house. This spurred a boom in new home construction, which led to increased production of all the appliances, furniture, and automobiles. All of this production led to an increase in employment and in the gross national product. With World War II behind them, and extra money to spend and more time to spend it, Americans turned to entertainment in increasing numbers.

Joe DiMaggio and Marilyn Monroe

Bus Stop might very well have been art imitating life. The year before the play's debut on Broadway, Joe DiMaggio married Marilyn Monroe. It was not a marriage between a lonely cowboy and a cabaret singer, but the union between DiMaggio, one of the best athletes of all time, and Marilyn Monroe was almost as unlikely. Accordingly, it became front-page news as the world was captivated by their marriage. In many ways, their union represented a joining of two of the most visible forces of the 1950s: baseball and Hollywood.

Marilyn Monroe was one of the biggest stars of the 1950s. She had appeared nude in the very first issue of a new men's magazine, *Playboy,* in 1953. More than fifty thousand copies of the magazine sold, indicating the strength of her appeal. The role of Cherie in *Bus Stop* seems written for her, and indeed, she starred in the film version of the play when it was released in 1956.

Monroe was popular for her ability to appeal to different audiences. A beautiful woman, she represented sexuality□and therefore attracted so many of the budding teenagers of the fifties. It is little wonder that audiences perceived Monroe's marriage to DiMaggio as unlikely. This star of the New York Yankees represented the benefits of hard work and good character. He was a private, quiet man that shunned media attention; she was a vibrant, media-savvy movie star that craved attention.

Critical Overview

Bus Stop opened on Broadway March 2, 1955, for the first of 475 performances. If the reviews are any indication, this play was a success with both critics and audiences. Robert Coleman of the *Daily Mirror* summed it up when he advised that *Bus Stop* "should prove a popular terminal for playgoers for months to come." In this "endearing, though deceptively simple, comedy," the audience can find "magical warmth and humor," according to Coleman. In wrapping up his review, Coleman advised readers to make reservations right away, since the play "has heart, compassion, wisdom, and loads of laughs."

Another positive assessment was provided by Walter F. Kerr of the *Herald Review*. While citing the strengths of the cast, Kerr also praised Inge's writing. Kerr stated that, "the fascination of the funny and very touching evening lies not in its surprises but in its sharp, honest, down-to-earth eye for character." He observed that Inge "has not set out to write an epic, just a warm and sensible little scrap between a couple of stranded, stubborn, appealing people."

A mixed review was offered by Richard Watts, Jr. of the *New York Post*, who stated that "in a day when there is reason to worry about the state of American playwriting, he [Inge] brings to the theatre a kind of warm-hearted compassion, creative vigor, freshness of approach and appreciation of average humanity that can be wonderfully touching and stimulating." Watts deemed *Bus Stop* a "romantic comedy about ordinary people that is at once humorous, simple, steadily entertaining and vastly endearing. It is also splendidly acted."

However, Watts maintained that it lacked "the poignant dramatic sturdiness and the tragic implications that were present in *Come Back, Little Sheba* and *Picnic*. It is unashamedly sentimental in its viewpoint. And I suppose it was written chiefly as entertainment, if you regard that as bad." But Watts clearly did not see entertainment as a bad thing, and noted that Inge's play is "set down with all of Mr. Inge's skill and warmth."

John McClain of the *Journal American* also expressed some reservations about*Bus Stop,* noting that "the whole thing stops dead in the middle of the second act." Yet McClain contended that *"Bus Stop* will be with us as long as the road to The Music Box is open."

There is no hesitation in the review by Brooks Atkinson of *The New York Times*. Atkinson deemed *Bus Stop* "an uproarious comedy that never strays from the truth." He also asserted that "once it gets started it flows naturally and sympathetically through the hearts and hopes of some admirable people."

He was especially complimentary of Inge's writing. Atkinson pointed to the dialogue and stated that there are "some moving conversations about the nature of love and the generosity that makes it possible." This, according to the reviewer, was because Inge

"has more than an evening's entertainment in mind. He has ideas and principles .. . [and] he says a number of simple truths that give height and depth to his writing." To sum up his review, Atkinson recommended "both the writing and the acting ... [as] a memorable achievement."

The one dissenting voice was that of John Chapman of the *Daily News,* who declared that Inge had "written a scenario instead of a play." He deemed the play as "make-believe, and not very exciting at that." He concluded: "I couldn't get myself to care very much about the romance between the young cowboy and the slightly soiled lady. I just didn't believe in it□and if one doesn't believe in something it is a scenario and not a play."

Criticism

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

Critical Essay #1

Metzger is a Ph.D. specializing in literature and drama at the University of New Mexico. In this essay, she discusses the changing perceptions of Inge's romanticism.

In 1955, Americans were watching I *Love Lucy, The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet, Father Knows Best,* and *Davy Crockett*. In these programs, life was easy; jobs were plentiful, and the American Dream appeared as a tangible reality. It was an idealized image of an America that only existed on television and on the stage.

In *Bus Stop,* William Inge attempts to create a story that is, according to him, "a composite picture of varying kinds of love, ranging from the innocent to the depraved." This was his intent, as stated in the forward to *Four Plays,* published in 1958. This very sentiment recalls a time in American social history when love and sexuality could be neatly defined and classified. Inge's play was meant for an America defined by picket fences, perfect families, and romantic infatuations that could be resolved in thirty minutes.

It is now clear that the world was not so perfect. The Cold War raged, women were marginalized, and the fight for civil rights was escalating; but for two hours audiences could escape and find solace in a small Midwestern town even if it was not real.

Inge features three romantic situations in *Bus Stop* Bo and Cherie, Grace and Carl, and Elma and Lyman. While Inge may have hoped that the audience would find each couple equally interesting, it is clear that Bo and Cherie take center stage. And although they are obviously unsuited for one another, the romantic ideal is that love conquers all.

In the 1950s, television audiences knew that all the differences, problems, and conflicts would be neatly resolved before the last commercial aired. Strong parents, mostly fathers, could set any problem straight. Viewers rarely questioned this formula, and indeed, there was something comforting about its very predictability. Critics who reviewed *Bus Stop* noted that whether Bo and Cherie ended up together was never a question. What held the audience' s interest was how the couple would reach the end goal.

In this respect, romantic comedy, whether it appeared on television, film, or theater, provided the same comforting resolution. As Gerald Weales notes, "it is proper that Cherie and Bo exit together for a Montana ranch where, according to the conventions of the theater, they will live happily ever after." This is the ultimate goal of the writer whose plot embraces romantic love.

If, as Inge states, he wanted to portray varying kinds of love, how can Cherie and Bo's romance be classified? Consider that Bo's sole goal in finding a wife is to assuage his loneliness. He barely knows Cherie, never ask if she loves him, and indeed, does not seem to want the answer to that question. Her choice to leave with him appears to be

based as much on opportunity and lack of choice, as it is on genuine affection, if in fact, she actually loves him. For most of the play she does not even like him.

Thus, their union at the end of the play is formulaic and unrealistic. It is, however, in keeping with romanticized visions of ideal love, which insists that sex should end in marriage.

Inge's goal of portraying depraved love might be defined by any of the three couples, since at least one member of each pairing also defies the mores of the 1950s. In the puritanical atmosphere of the period, illicit sexuality, as Inge demonstrated in *Come Back, Little Sheba* and *Picnic,* is always cause for public concern. In *Bus Stop,* Cherie admits to a sexual history. She has had many partners, beginning at age fourteen with her cousin and continuing even when she met Bo. That is, in fact, how they first got together; the problem for Cherie is that Bo mistakes sex for love.

According to the values of the 1950s, Cherie must love Bo, since she cannot simply walk off insisting that it was only sex□even if it was. She must love him, or she must be provided with a reason for her sexual freedom, as is Grace.

The older, more experienced Grace is as lonely as Bo, but marriage is not the answer. She states that she is only looking for a temporary or momentary encounter. Her denial of marriage as a goal contradicts the accepted premise that unmarried sex should lead to love. In *Picnic* Rosemary's sexual encounter forces a marriage to her seducer. And like Grace, Rosemary, is not a young girl. Grace's acceptance of her occasional need for a man, without marriage, could establish her as a female lead with questionable morals.

But neither Cherie nor Grace, although representing questionable morality in the repressed and repressive 1950s, really fits a depraved definition of love. No doubt Inge meant for Lyman's planned seduction of Elma to be viewed as depraved, as it would have been in 1955.

Elma is, after all, still in high school; therefore, Lyman's flirtation appears quite perverted. Yet this seduction also reveals several ambiguities. Although Elma's age is never revealed, the audience knows she is still in high school; however, she is old enough to be working in a diner at 1 a.m. on a Sunday morning. Thus, Elma is probably only a year or two younger than Cherie, who is nineteen.

Also, Hollywood films have traditionally presented young women, many just out of school, who become involved in romances with older men. This is the staple of romantic comedies of the 1930s and 1940s.

So what makes the situation between Lyman and Elma depraved? It is the very lack of love. Although Inge is looking to reveal depraved love, Lyman is, as the audience learns in the play's last act, a seducer of young girls. He has a history of loitering outside schools in order to meet them. Lyman's carefully orchestrated seduction of Elma is not love, but in fact a pathological perversion.

Although, she is flattered at the attention of an older, educated man, Elma's naive acceptance of his attentions is based on flirtation and on an innocent misunderstanding of his intent. Elma fails to see Lyman as a "disillusioned eastern intellectual," as Rudolf Erben describes him. Although he has a record of failed relationships and a disastrous career, Lyman glosses over his failures. He describes himself as free from responsibility and ready to explore the world. This is attractive to a small-town girl, whose intelligence and knowledge is alienating to her contemporaries. But it is no more than a flirtation, and when Lyman's history is revealed, Elma is shocked to find that she has been the object of a planned seduction.

In the end, Inge cannot resist saving Lyman from his own cardinal desires. The "play within a play," designed as entertainment but appropriated by Lyman as a means of seduction, provides an epiphany for Lyman, who suddenly realizes that he is no young, romantic Romeo. William E. H. Meyer Jr. observes that Dr. Lyman is "forced to come to terms with his dubious and dark penchant for young girls." The audience is promised that Lyman is about to be reformed of his deviant ways. This resolution is in keeping with the television sitcom model, except that Lyman is the father who resolves all conflict.

As the play concludes, Lyman rejects his past behavior, Grace accepts a twice-weekly sexual tryst in place of love, and Cherie accepts the isolation of a Montana ranch in place of the dance halls of Kansas City. Is any of this love? Or is it the easy resolution that audiences accept? In this sense, the romance between Bo and Cherie fits Inge's stated intent to present innocent love□except that he is truly the innocent participant.

Bus Stop is enjoyable; it is humorous and entertaining, but to a modern audience, jaded by the depravity of television that focuses on sexual crime, violence, and confession, Inge's play is innocent flirtation. Even Lyman appears as only disgusting and not depraved when compared to the criminals encountered on the news. Forty years after *Bus Stop,* Inge reveals himself to be the true innocent romantic.

Source: Sheri E. Metzger, for *Drama for Students,* Gale, 2000.

Critical Essay #2

Hayes offers a mostly favorable review of Inge's play, but the critic laments that Bus Stop *lacks the spark of the playwright's earlier works, notably* Picnic *and* Come Back, Little Sheba.

A vaudeville of personality, picturesque and vivid: thus might one suggest the flavor and quality of Mr. William Inge's new play. For in this bleached and seedy café, poised carelessly on a wasteland of snowbound prairies, an American *Symposium* is mounted; it is the nature of love with which Mr. Inge is concerned. The light of his sensibility flickers with active indolence over the theme, catching its many faces of truth; the director, Harold Clurman□with his special talent for modulation□ faultlessly places each of these small private epiphanies in a seamless texture of dramatic experience. Everything is common about the raw matter of "Bus Stop" but the taste and feeling with which it has been elevated to human worth. How delicately drawn, indeed□and played with such rightness and exactitude by Phyllis Love□is the young girl, burgeoning uneasily into love; how subtly, too, does Mr. Inge convey the initial stirrings into dignity of his two major characters: the lumpish, not-yet-housebroken cowboy, all bullying rush and bravado, and his soundlessly vapid victim, this night-club hostess with her scrappy and pathetic tags of gentility. The subject could not (in the human sense) be less promising, yet out of such shapeless moral anarchy□only the comic face of which is kept in the foreground□Mr. Inge and Mr. Clurman have extracted the truth of the grotesque, modest and vague, but within its small and limited world, legitimate. And the production bodies forth this accomplishment: with their superbly developed realistic techniques, Kim Stanley and Albert Salmi bring wit and wry tenderness and an interior veracity to these two central roles; indeed, the ensemble performance is a superior illustration of the power and ease with which American players inhabit the theater of realistic conventions. It is superfluous, of course, to note that however gratifying and congenial, this is but one of the major modes of dramatic experience.

Pleasure, then, I have recorded; permit me now a reservation. In a notice of Mr. Inge's earlier ' *'Picnic,"* I observed that his was a talent in which sensibility exceeded the dispositions of the intellect□that is, one in which the power to order and clarify experience was as yet inadequate to the imaginative apprehension of it. Now ' *'Bus Stop"* would seem to suggest that Mr. Inge has sought to dissolve the impasse by developing a vein of domestic comedy, a genre for which he has most considerable gifts. One may commend the resolution of the problem, yet there has been a concomitant loss: what I miss in *"Bus Stop"* is that numinous sense of personality, a bleakly exquisite poetry of solitude which fleetingly brushes the grey actualities of *"Picnic"* and *"Come Back, Little Sheba."* The *imaging* here is as secure and lucid as in the earlier plays, but there is, behind it, a diminished pressure of intellectual and emotional energy. Mr. Inge is thus limited in his attempt to deal increasingly with serious experience; to its evaluation, he can bring only standards which, however humane, are ultimately provincial. (Would not, for example, a more penetrating mind have reached to the truth of the essential *disastrousness* of love in America?) Again: a haze of sentimentality obscures those characters which, as it were, sustain the moral weight of

the play: the complaisant mistress of the café (a good performance by Elaine Stritch, though excessively mannered), and the alcoholic middle-aged intellectual. Anthony Ross' brilliant control of the latter role mutes its slushy banalities, but surely there is something disturbing symptomatic and how typically American, in the fact that the Socrates of this particular *agape* should be a boozy professor of literature, whose irregular amorous interests have more than occasionally invited the serious attention of the local instruments of law?

Source: Richard Hayes. Review of *Bus Stop* in the *Commonweal,* Vol. LXII, No. 1, April 8, 1995, p. 14.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, Meyer compares Inge's view of American ideals, as represented in Bus Stop, *with that of other notable authors. The critic also addresses claims that Inge's play lacks depth, arguing that* Bus Stop *actually offers profound insight into small town America.*

Bus Stop—both the play and the movie—is an attempt to dramatize what is pre-eminently undra-matic, *viz.,* the evolution of small-town hyperverbality into American hypervisuality. This shift in sensibility or revolution in "taste" is an extremely difficult phenomenon to depict—the playwright, William Inge, here choosing to employ the more demonstrable theme of love/sexuality in order to express or encompass this New-World evolution. Indeed, so vital but protean and mercurial is this problem of the shift from ear to eye, from traditional authority to self-reliance, that such well-known anthologists of American culture as Blair, Stewart, Hornberger and Miller, in their *The Literature of the United States,* have missed the contribution of Inge altogether and have dismissed his work as "popular" and "lacking depth." Yet, *Bus Stop* remains a profound portrait of the Emersonian/American "transparent eyeball" in transit—the superseding of "small-town" values for Ishmael's passion "to see the world" or the Stevensesque ephebe's command to rise above any municipality in order to "see the sun again with an ignorant eye." All the characters of *Bus Stop*—from Bo to Grace—are confronted with this American hypervisual *rite de passage,* no matter whether they are "lucky" or "unlucky" in love.

Act 1, then, introduces us to the "bus stop" or small-town restaurant where the hyperverbal smalltown crew and also the little band of travelers must confront the wider concerns of hypervisual America—where such clichés as "March comes in like a Lion" or the later-employed famous Shakespearean rhetoric of the Old World must face the New-World "great window" and be still before "the sweeping wind and flying snow." Not for nothing does the curtain rise upon Elma standing and *"looking out the large plate-glass window, awed by the fury of the elements"*; and not for nothing are the first words uttered directed to the play's ensuing dangerous command— "You should come over here and *look out, to see* the way the wind is blowing things all over town" (p. 6, italics mine). Grace, however, prefers to concern herself with the *tele-phone*—not *tele-vision*—and she will be one of those characters destined, at the play's end, to fail to grasp the necessity to transcend local talk via national vision.

The storm itself, of course, represents the awesome and ungovernable power of America itself— what Emerson called "Nature" as he was confronted by the god-like power of the wilderness wherein he felt himself both diminished and aggrandized: "I am nothing; I see all; ... I am part or parcel of God." Here, Will, the "local" authority or smalltown sheriff, can only fume at his own impotence: "A storm like this makes me mad.... It's just like all the elements had lost their reason... I like to see things in order" (p. 8). In the face of this awesome display of power observed through the "large plate-glass window," all Will can do is fall back upon the above cliché of how "March comes in like a Lion." And all Elma, the young waitress, can do is rely upon parental security:

"Nights like this, I'm glad I have a home to go to" (p. 6). Yet, indeed, in the early lines that Elma speaks—"I shouldn't think anyone would take a trip tonight unless he absolutely *had* to" (p. 6)—we find the primary thrust or ironic "theme" of the drama—the absolutely necessary hypervisual *rite de passage* which every American is forced to make at some point in his or her life. Walt Whitman put it thus: "You must travel that road for yourself." And Emerson clarified the nature of that journey with the reprimand: "Do we fear lest we should *outsee* nature and God, and drink truth dry!" (italics mine). Here the passengers and the small-town locals are rendered equals by the storm—by the irrational but ultimately vivifying power of our "genius in America, with tyrannous eye."

As I noted above, the quintessential shift from small-town word to American vision is most difficult to "portray" and certainly cannot be accomplished by means of any traditional or Aristotelian notions of plot, character or even theme. Thus Inge has chosen the more "popular" topic of human love and sexuality in order to "suggest" the deeper dilemma going on within the restaurant or what Hemingway called his small cafe, "a clean, well-lighted place." Here Man and Woman come to act out the "play within a play," the voyeur and exhibitionist coming to terms with the essence of American reality and passion. Here, then, it is most important that the "love affair" at the center of the drama be that between Bo and Cherie, between Mr. and Miss America—between two "beautiful people " who can represent "amber waves of grain" and "purple mountains' majesty" or the fruitful-ness of our Emersonian "incomparable materials" from "sea to shining sea." The sexual encounter between Carl and Grace or the flirtation between Dr. Lyman and Elma are also important as variations on the theme of voyeur and exhibitionist or of genuine and spurious love; but the driving force in the play is the pursuit of seductively-dressed and prettily-blond Cherie by Bo—another Brom Bones in hot pursuit of his buxom Miss America, Katrina Van Tassel. Of course, what Bo has to learn about the actual capture of his "voluptuous" hypervisual ideal forms the tension of the second and third acts. But the quest of the Montana rancher for the Ozark beauty is the *sine qua non* of *Bus Stop*—and, indeed, of the whole of American literature, from Cooper's Hawkeye to Vonnegut' s more ironic Deadeye Dick. These small-town lovers will have to discover in their romance the more serious problem of the American Dream— of what it means to be either a spot-lighted Hester Prynne or a spotlighted Miss U.S.A. or even a spot-lighted *chanteuse* under the almost unbearable scrutiny of "the public gaze." It does no good for Cherie to exclaim, "Is there some place I kin hide?" (p. 9). For the Woman, there is no escape except into the hypervisual maturity and responsibility of "America is a poem in our eyes." For the Man, there is no conquest except by the self-abnegation which confesses the utter destitution of the "transparent eyeball": "I just never realized ... a gal might not... love me" (p. 29).

Act 2 begins with the "courting" of Elma by Dr. Lyman and also with Dr. Lyman's jaded talk about "higher education." Although this dialogue seems almost too peripheral to the main thrust of the play, this commentary about love and wisdom is really essential to what follows. Here, ideal love is to be neither the seduction of the naively young by the old ("people might not understand"); nor is it to be the simple abduction or rape of the Woman by the Man ("Ya cain't *force* a gal to marry ya," p. 33). Somehow there has to be an elevation of love wherein both Man and Woman can feel themselves participating

in a destiny transcending "what ya might call a *sexual* attraction" (p. 34). Hawthorne called this the long-awaited "brighter period" in Male-Female relations: and Emerson called it the "sublime vision" that elevates the "chaste" soul. Perhaps Father Edward Taylor, the early Puritan divine, summed it up best by indicating the merger of sublime sexuality with divine hypervision when he shouted□"Oh! if his Glory ever kiss thine Eye." In Bo, this is the impulse behind his "most fervent love" for his Miss America□"Ain't she beautiful, Virge?" (p. 47)□but an impulsive adoration that must find itself molded by patience and tenderness or by what Bo reveals in confessing to Cherie that "I jest couldn't kill them 'sweet li'l deers with the sad eyes'" (p. 43). Here Bo is beginning to learn something of the congenial power of what we might call "The America Religion of Vision."

Of course, too, the most "dramatic" moments of *Bus Stop* come here in Act 2, in the "floor show" and in the fight between Bo and Will. When Elma suggests the display of talents, Dr. Lyman erroneously supposes it to be an idea "straight from Chaucer" (p. 40). Rather, this is an *American* "demonstration" and has as its central purpose the hypervisual display of Cherie in her costume, not the hyperverbal recitation of Shakespeare. Elma and Dr. Lyman may repeat some of the lines from *Romeo and Juliet,* but this only serves to reveal the distance between Shakespearean rhetoric and American vision. Juliet-Elma may well be "like the sun"; but this is the New-World Revolutionary Light wherein, as Jonathan Edwards noted, the former laws of nature were superseded: "The Sun shall rise in the West." Shakespearean language, with its "winged messenger of heaven," can no longer be the American model and is impotent, like Dr. Lyman, in the face of the New-World "great window" and "great awakening": Emerson writes□"When I see the daybreak I am not reminded of these Homeric, or Shakespearean, or Miltonic, or Chaucerian, pictures"; nor of "Pope and Johnson and Addison [who] write *as if they had never seen the face of the country"* (italics mine). However, Dr. Lyman is enough of an "American Scholar" to at least realize something of his *aesthetic,* as well as moral, failure in asserting that he can't "continue this meaningless little act!"□when he realizes that he has betrayed the American Dream and thus his "name . . . is hateful" to himself (p. 46).

Bo, of course, as the All-American "hero," immediately senses the falsity of the Shakespearean enactment, culminating in Dr. Lyman's breakdown: "If thass the way to make love ... I'm gonna give up" (p. 46). Instead, Bo attempts to win his Miss America by the only means he knows□by physical battle with the small-town authority, the sheriff. It matters little that he is finally whipped and taken to jail; in fact, this "humiliation" of lover *and* artist is necessary to demonstrate to the Woman that the Man's ego is sublimated, at her feet. This spectacle of battle and defeat, in fact, gives the Woman the opportunity to experience the voyeur's role, to feel the power of observation: Cherie tells Bo "... and if I was a man, I'd beat the livin' *daylights* out of ya, and thass what some man's gonna do some day, and when it happens, I hope I'm there to see" (p. 47, italics mine). During the fight itself, Elma, Cherie and Grace all *"hurry to the window to watch"* (p. 48). Moreover, in the midst of all this exhibitionism and voyeurism, Dr. Lyman points to the crucial evolution occurring□the aesthetic American Revolution generated by New-World pioneers and "smalltown folk":

It takes strong men and women to *love* ... People big enough to *grow* with their love and live inside a whole, *wide new dimension* (p. 49, final italics mine).

D. H. Lawrence called this the new consciousness arising upon the continent of America and no where else□a cultural upheaval which would cause condescending Europeans (and American critics) to *"open new eyes"* (italics mine). Emily Dickinson simply called it our "new Circumference" or "new Equation given"□our "very Lunacy of Light." Dr. Lyman here rightly laments his inability to give his "most private self to another" (p. 49); for this "self' is none other than the "transparent eyeball" and its reduction or elevation of the other to hypervision. The most profound and ironic truth that *Bus Stop* has to offer is Dr. Lyman's assertion that "I've *nothing* in my heart for a true woman" (p. 50, italics mine)□the same "nothing" that drove James's John Marcher into a loveless existence as "the man to whom *nothing* was to happen," as this voyeur cannot "love" but only "see." Unless American hypervision can unite Man and Woman into an idealization wherein *both* feel power and worth□*both* experience "sexuality" and "tenderness"□the only result can be the loneliness which encompasses all the characters, from time to time, in *Bus Stop*. This "theme," of course, as has been insisted upon above, is no easy matter for any playwright or "word-smith" to incorporate into either words or what Blair, *et al*., have called Inge's "popular drama." Hence the "small town" with its "small talk" must finally find itself without anything to say□what Emerson intuited in declaring that "speech becomes less and ceases in a nobler silence." O Say, then, Can *YOU* See why America has no lyrical Lion or growling Bear as its national symbol□but the "eagle-eyed" American Eagle of 6X vision! O Say, Can *YOU* See why the American Liberty Bell ominously cracked upon its first ringing□a breach with the courtly muses of Europe and a disfunction which the hyperverbal English would no doubt have immediately repaired, while the Americans left the bell in silence and are now quite content merely to go and *view* this national symbol. O Say, Can *YOU* See why the American harbor greets its visitors and immigrants with no chiming "Big Ben," cognizant of lyricality and time□ but with the upheld torch of Miss Hypervisual American Liberty and her "Battle Hymn,' ' "Mine EYES Have SEEN the Glory!"

Act 3, then, finds the small-town restaurant under the vital, but quiet, "dawn's early light": Inge directs us to the following□

Early morning.. . the storm has cleared, and outside the window we see the slow dawning, creeping above the distant hills, revealing a landscape all in peaceful white (p. 52).

Bo, addressed by the authority of the sheriff, simply says: "I don't feel like talkin"' (p. 53). However, when later pressed into "apologizing" and musing upon his lonesome homestead, Bo has not forgotten his "beautiful angel"; he tells Virgil, "I ain't int'rested in no school marm. ... I want Cherry" (p. 57). Although Cherie was a *"chan-teuse"* who sang of "That Old Black Magic" of Word and Music, her real attraction for Bo is her appealing vision; he tells her, "You was so purty, and ya seemed so kinda warmhearted and sweet" (p. 59). In the face of this "tender" hypervisual confession and kiss, and in the face of her realization that Bo is offering her the chance to participate in the regenerating of the "Virgin Land"□Bo tells her that he's "virgin enough" for both of

them Cherie can be "won" by this adoring Brom Bones of Montana: she encourages him, "Bo ya think you really did love me?" (p. 59). Bo can then fully possess his "pearl of great price," conceived in the spot-light or what Hawthorne called "A Flood of Sunshine": Bo holds her *"cautiously, as though holding a precious object that was still a little strange to him"* (p. 60). Even Dr. Lyman is now, in the "dawn's early light," forced to come to terms with his dubious and dark penchant for young girls: he no longer wishes to seduce Elma but engages in the aesthetically and morally elevating experience of having simply enjoyed her presence and friendship of having *seen* her for what she really is.

From now on, then, all the travelers from this small-town depot will find the road "clear" but "awful slick" what Robert Frost called the dangerous "road not taken" into American hypervisuality. Emerson referred to it as the painful challenge to "bring the past for judgment into the *thousand-eyed present,* and live ever in a *new day*." From now on, Cherie will find consolation in lonely Montana from the fact that her "love" has transcended small-town values for American fortitude and adventure. Here, Inge has simply given Bo and Cherie the direction: *"They... embrace. All look"* (p. 63) the only time that *all* the characters have been united in a single meaningful act. In *Moby-Dick,* Melville had expanded this direction via the New-World paradigm: "I look, you look, he looks; we look, ye look, they look." Moreover, from now on, Elma will find her status and self-esteem enhanced by the fact that a man even a questionable one has found her beautiful and hypervisually valuable: "Just think, he wanted to make love to *me*" (p. 66). However, from now on, Virgil and his guitar will be "left out in the cold" bereft of that Love which offers the highest American consummation in vision, not music. And, finally, Grace will continue to long for, but not receive, the "true marriage" of exhibitionist and voyeur under the aegis of our "genius in America, with tyrannous eye." All she can do is to *"[cast] her eyes tiredly over the establishment"* (p. 67). This is the "establishment" of "America the Hypervisual" the small-town locus where all American buses must finally stop for illumination, where all hyperverbal midnights of the soul are revivified in the cold, clear and hard-won "dawn's early light." The curtain merely falls on an empty stage awaiting the next convoy of what Emerson called our" foolish traveling Americans."

O Say, Can *YOU* See why *Bus Stop* will have to be reread not as "lacking depth" but as profoundly indicating the supersession of the small town and its hyperverbal traditions by the broader hypervisual concerns of what Walt Whitman called the dazzling panorama of "these United States."

Source: William E. H. Meyer, Jr. ' *'Bus Stop*: American Eye vs. Small-Town Ear" in *Modern Drama,* Vol. XXXV, no. 3, September, 1992, pp. 444-50.

Adaptations

Bus Stop was made into a popular Hollywood film in 1956. It was nominated for several awards, including an Academy Award Best Supporting Actor nomination for Don Murray. The National Board of Review Awards selected *Bus Stop* one of the ten best films in 1956. Marilyn Monroe starred as Cherie, and many critics consider it to be her best film performance. The film also starred Hope Lange, Eileen Heckart, and Arthur O'Connell. Joshua Logan directed for Fox Studios. This is a ninety-six minute color film available in Beta and VHS.

Topics for Further Study

After World War II, the U. S. government began an aggressive campaign to build a system of freeways that would link the United States and make travel between cities easier. Investigate the sociological impact of the highway system on rural America. How has life changed for these communities?

In *Bus Stop,* Bo and Virgil have just participated in the rodeo in Kansas City. Research the impact of rodeos on cowboy life. What rewards do cowboys receive from their participation in these events, other than awards?

Lyman is an alcoholic who has failed at his career and at several marriages. Investigate the role of alcohol addiction among professionals, such as Lyman, an unemployed college professor. What professions are most affected by this disease?

Alcoholism and sexuality are important themes in several of Inge's plays. Compare Doc and his pursuit of Marie in *Come Back, Little Sheba* with the relationship of Lyman and Elma in *Bus Stop*

Compare and Contrast

1955: Walt Disney opened Disneyland in Los Angeles, California. Built for $17 million, the park was so successful that Disney immediately made plans to expand it.

Today: The Disney Corporation continues to grow. The company is now worth nearly 80 billion dollars and has expanded into film and television, as well as merchandising.

1955: Nineteen years after its introduction, the Volkswagen Beetle manufactured its one millionth car.

Today: The Volkswagen Beetle has been redesigned and reintroduced to the American automobile buyer. It has once again proved popular and successful, as it appeals to a youthful demographic.

1955: TV dinners are introduced as an easy and popular alternative for busy housewives.

Today: Frozen prepared meals are very popular with consumers. Their convenience makes them a popular choice for working parents with little time to make home-cooked meals.

1955: The first shopping mall opens in the Detroit area in 1954. By the end of the following year, 1800 new shopping malls open across the country.

Today: Shopping malls are a common experience in American life. They have become gathering places for teenagers.

1955: The United States federal minimum wage is increased from $0.75 to $1 an hour.

Today: Nearly forty-five years later, the minimum wage has increased by less than $5.

What Do I Read Next?

William Inge's *Picnic* (1953) concerns young love. Although more serious than *Bus Stop,* it is also a comedic look at the vicissitudes of sex and relationships.

The Canterbury Tales (c. 1380), by Geoffrey Chaucer, is a compilation of stories told by travelers to pass the time. It is one of the best-known short story collections of English literature.

Giovanni Boccaccio's *The Decameron* (c. 1350) is a collection of comedic and often risqué stories told by a group of stranded travelers.

The Taming of the Shrew (c. 1593), by the great English playwright William Shakespeare, is a comedic play that chronicles the efforts of a young man to win the love of a reluctant bride.

Lanford Wilson's play, *Angels Fall* (1982), focuses on a group of people stranded together in northern New Mexico. This work is a serious examination of how tragedy often motivates change and growth.

Further Study

Leeson, Richard M. *William Inge: A Research and Production Sourcebook,* Greenwood Press, 1994.

A critical overview of Inge's plays with information about reviews and critical studies.

McClure, Arthur F. *Memories of Splendor: The Midwestern World of William Inge,* Kansas State Historical Society, 1989.

Contains production information and photographs of Inge and his work.

Shuman, R. Baird. *William Inge,* Twayne Publishers, 1996.

This book is primarily a biography of Inge's work. It also contains a detailed discussion of each of his works.

Voss, Ralph F. *A Life of William Inge: The Strains of Triumph*. University of Kansas Press, 1989.

A critical biography of Inge's life and work.

Wager, Walter. "William Inge." *The Playwrights Speak*. Delacorte Press, 1967.

Wagner presents interviews with several contemporary playwrights. This book presents an opportunity to "hear" each writer express his or her thoughts about the art of writing.

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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.

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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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