A Chorus of Disapproval Study Guide

A Chorus of Disapproval by Alan Ayckbourn

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Introduction

A Chorus of Disapproval, Sir Alan Ayckbourn' s twentieth play□and one of his most successful□ premiered at the Stephen Joseph Theater in the Round in Scarborough, England, in May, 1984. Following the sell-out season in Scarborough, the play opened in a large-scale production at the National Theater in London in August, 1985. The success of the play earned Ayckbourn three major British theater awards including the London *Evening Standard* Award, the Olivier Award, and the *Drama* Award.

Ayckbo urn's first great success, *Relatively Speaking,* was a farce modeled on Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest; A Chorus of Disapproval* is not modeled on, but rather is based around, another play: John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera,* which in the play is to be performed by a local dramatic society. The play describes the ups and downs of provincial life: as the rehearsals for *The Beggar's Opera* advance, real life increasingly imitates art. As well as being a modern version of the classic "play within a play," *A Chorus of Disapprova*l also explores the attraction of the theater for ordinary people, whose apparently unremarkable lives are revealed to be unexpectedly eventful.

Ayckbourn's contribution to the theater is impressive. Although his comedies were initially considered unfashionable, they have always been well-received by critics and audiences alike, all of whom have recognized Ayckbourn's technical prowess and his unusual ability to balance comedy and pathos. *A Chorus of Disapproval,* which explores ordinary people's aspirations and disappointments, confirmed that reputation. Ayckbourn was knighted in 1987 in recognition of the extraordinary quality of his writing and his contribution to the British theatre.

Author Biography

Alan Ayckbourn was born April 12, 1939, in the London suburb of Hampstead. His parents divorced in 1943, and his mother, a writer of romantic fiction, later remarried. Ayckbourn grew up in Sussex, which he features as the setting for many of his plays. During high school he devoted most of his time to acting in and writing plays. At the age of seventeen he left school and started a career in the theater. After a few years working as an assistant stage manager and actor for Sir Donald Wolfit's touring company, Ayckbourn began a fruitful relationship with the Studio Theater Company in Scarborough, a small resort town in the South of England.

There, Ayckbourn worked for Stephen Joseph, an innovative stage manager who had introduced the concept of theater-in-the-round to England. (Ayckbourn modeled the character of Llewellyn in *A Chorus of Disapproval* on Joseph.) Ayckbourn soon started writing plays for the company. He left to work as a drama producer for the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). After Joseph's death in 1970, Ayckbourn returned to Scarborough to become the company's director of productions. He renamed the theater the Stephen Joseph Theater-in-the-Round.

In 1997, Ayckbourn fought a protracted battle with the Scarborough Town Council over funding for the faltering theater. He himself had already contributed 400,000 pounds from his own pocket, which was topped by a two million pound grant from the British National Lottery. He requested a five-year, 50,000 pound per year grant. The dispute was dubbed the battle of the "luvvies versus lavvies," because opponents of Ayckbourn's request claimed that funding the theater would necessitate closing the town's public toilets. Ayckbourn fought a public relations campaign; when he was knighted by the Queen later that year, he won the battle. The Scarborough public toilets also managed to stayed open.

Ayckbourn writes light comedies about middle class morals and manners. His first major success was *Relatively Speaking,* which opened in March, 1967, around the same time that Tom Stoppard's more structurally innovative absurdist farce *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* opened at the National Theater. For some time, Ayckbourn's adherence to the genre of light comedy damaged his reputation in comparison to innovators such as Stoppard, Harold Pinter (The Birthday Party), and Joe Orton *(What the Butler Saw)*. But he has always been popular with audiences, and critics have gradually come to praise his dramatic talents.

Ayckbourn has now written more plays than Shakespeare, and, according to Simon Trussler in the *Cambridge Illustrated Hisory of the British Theatre,* his sell-out seasons at the National Theater demonstrate a box-office appeal "unequalled since Shakespeare." He has also written a great many adaptations for the stage (including an acclaimed version of Russian playwright Alexander Ostrovsky' s play *The Forest* [1870] staged at the National Theater in the mid-1990s). He is also a respected director; he directed the premiere of A *Chorus of Disapproval* in 1984, and in 1987 he directed an award-winning production of Arthur Miller's *A View from the Bridge*.

Plot Summary

Act I

The structure of A *Chorus of Disapproval* exemplifies Ayckbourn's modernity: the first scene, for instance, is chronologically the last. The play begins with the tail-end of PALOS's performance of *The Beggar's Opera*. From there, the play unfolds like a cinematic flashback. The flashback structure maintains tension throughout the light-hearted ensemble piece: the audience, certain in the knowledge that the opera will be performed successfully, nonetheless fears that calamity will unfold, for after the curtain falls, Guy is abandoned by his fellow cast members.

In the second scene of Act I, Guy auditions by giving a fumbling rendition of the only song he knows, "All Through the Night." He is shown up by the director, Dafydd, who interrupts him to sing the song in Welsh. Although Guy's singing is obviously not up to standard, Dafydd immediately accepts him, partly because he is short one actor and partly because he is a warm, generous man.

During the audition, other cast members enter. A quick scene and lighting change follows, and the cast adjourns to a local pub named *The Fleece* (the name of the tavern suggests that the customers will be "fleeced" or conned out of their money). This pub parallels Peachum's tavern in *The Beggar's Opera*: indeed, the proprietor's daughter, Bridget, acts rather like Gay's Lucy, fighting with customers and stealing lovers.

Following this sociable occasion, Dafydd invites Guy home. A brief scene change finds the characters in a pleasant, comfortable living room. Dafydd offers Guy the part of Crook-Fingered Jack. Although it is only a one line part, Guy is thrilled and accepts. Then Dafydd's neglected wife, Hannah, enters. She is to play Polly Peachum in the *Opera.* Hannah has suffered in the shadow of her talkative and unobservant husband. Hannah and Guy connect emotionally□he is polite and attentive, which she appreciates, and she is sensitive about his recent loss, which he appreciates.

Another scene change finds PALOS again rehearsing. For all his enthusiasm, Dafydd is a disorganized director: the cast has only rehearsed the first fifteen pages of the script. Amidst the confusion, Guy receives an alluring invitation to dinner from the lascivious Fay, seconded by her reluctant husband, Ian. Jarvis Huntley-Pike, a jovial Northerner, persists in his mistaken assumption that Guy is a Scotsman. Meanwhile, the romantic tension between Guy and Hannah increases. The rehearsal ends with an unexpected boon for Guy: after a cast member drops out, he is promoted to the meatier role of Matt of the Mint.

The next scene is set in Fay and Ian's house. Guy arrives, assuming that he has been invited to dinner. Fay, however, has other plans. She is amused when Guy's friend arrives□a seventy-year-old woman whose presence is a considerable shock to Ian. The

Hubbards, as well as the Huntley-Pikes, mistakenly think that Guy can help them in their scheme to fleece Guy's company, BLM.

The last scene of Act I, a rehearsal, is set one month after these initial scenes. Dafydd comments to Guy that "these dramatics" are "doing you good," and Guy does indeed seem more confident. The Act ends with a song from the *Opera.* Although the actresses are meant to be focused upon Crispin, who is playing Macheath, they turn to Guy. Their unconscious mistake prefigures the second act's major development: Guy's elevation to the role of Macheath.

Act II

The second act opens with a tense conversation between Guy and Hannah, conducted in a local cafe. Guy appears to have undergone something of a transformation in the last few months. He is no longer a hang-dog weakling but rather a local Lothario. He has been carrying on two affairs one with Hannah, who is in love with him, and another with Fay, who is still trying to involve him in the BLM land scam. Hannah tries to badger Guy into choosing between her and Fay.

Suddenly, Fay appears. The cat-fight between the two women comically imitates a similar conflict between Polly and Lucy in *The Beggar's Opera*. Hannah departs in fury. Fay points out that it was she who handed Guy the role of Filch (another role upgrade), then hints threateningly that he must "come up with the goods" in return for the favor.

In the next scene, the conflict between Hannah and Fay is repeated in the struggles between Bridget, as Jenny Diver, and Linda, both of whom fight over Crispin, as Macheath. After Hannah and Linda depart the stage, Guy tries to inform Jarvis that people are scheming to profit from his land, but Jarvis is too busy telling Guy an old story about his grandfather to pay much attention.

Dafydd re-enters. He is oblivious to Guy's affair with Hannah, and, to make matters worse, confides in Guy that he is having trouble in his marriage. He complains that Hannah is "a bloody deep-freeze of a woman." However, since Guy knows that she is not, the audience is left to conclude that the fault lies with Dafydd. The scene ends in a now-familiar pattern: following Crispin's rude departure, the role of Macheath is vacant. Rebecca suggest that Guy accept it, and sure enough, he weakly agrees to step in.

A song from Guy, as Macheath, bridges the scene change to Rebecca Huntley-Pike's garden. It soon becomes clear that Rebecca is the source of the mysterious rumor about the BLM land deal. Guy is tempted to accept Jarvis's pay-off of five hundred pounds and does in fact pocket it. He is becoming more and more like Macheath.

A lighting change finds the cast involved in a final dress rehearsal. Guy changes into his costume for Macheath. The subsequent scene, in which he rejects Hannah, is in keeping with his stage character: his transformation is complete. The parting between the two lovers is repeatedly interrupted by a still-oblivious Dafydd, who is frantically trying to rig the lighting for the performance.

When Ian enters with the news that BLM is closing, all hell breaks loose. The land scam will not take place, and the disappointed cast members turn against Guy. Ian informs Dafydd of Hannah and Guy's affair, and Dafydd too turns against Guy.

The final scene of A is the last scene of *The Beggar's Opera*. The players enact the final reprieve of Macheath. The curtain falls and the actors embrace one another. But the audience, recalling the play's opening scene, knows that this scene will shortly be followed by their rejection of Guy. The ending is ambiguous□both a celebration of Guy (Macheath) and a rejection of the change he has wreaked upon their lives.

Act 1, Scene 1

Act 1, Scene 1 Summary

As the play opens, we are watching the final scene of John Gay's *Beggar's Opera,* performed by the members of the Pendon Amateur Light Opera Society.

Beggar's Opera is a satirical play with music written by John Gay and first performed in 1728. It tells the story of a petty thief named MacHeath, married to one woman and engaged to another, betrayed for money in prison, condemned to death, and eventually reprieved. It was a satire on the political and moral system of the time and has been both critically and popularly successful ever since.

At center stage is Guy Jones, playing MacHeath, surrounded by other actors playing parts in *Beggar's Opera*, all of whom will be individually identified later. They sing the final song, dance the final dance, and form the final tableau. The lights change to indicate the curtain has fallen. The company takes its bow, and the director, Dafydd Llewellyn, makes a speech.

He briefly mentions all the people he wants to thank without actually mentioning them by name: the cast, stage management, and the audience. He gives a very big "thank you" to "one individual without whom none of this could have happened": Guy Jones, who only joined the society a short while ago, stepped in as an emergency fill-in, and took over the leading role.

Guy gets a special round of applause, led by Dafydd and joined by the rest of the cast. The lights change again, indicating the curtain has fallen for the final time. The applause for Guy fades into silence, and the members of the company leave the stage, leaving Guy alone. As he removes his costume, the stage crew returns the set to a rehearsal configuration.

Hannah, still in her costume as Polly, MacHeath's wife, appears. She brings Guy his street clothes and very quietly congratulates him. He does not seem very enthusiastic. She leaves Guy's clothes on a table, begins to say something, then changes her mind and says goodbye in a way that indicates there is more going on at this moment than the end of a performance. Guy also says goodbye. Hannah leaves.

Guy changes his clothes and goes to the stage door. He pauses and looks back at the stage. Music plays faintly, the lights change, and we are in Guy's memory of his first time seeing that stage, two to three months ago.

Act 1, Scene 1 Analysis

This brief scene serves as a prologue to the main story, setting up the action on several levels. First, it establishes that we are going to be watching "a play within a play." The

action of *The Beggar's Opera* will play out in parallel with the action of the main play, with songs and scenes from the original play providing commentary on, or subtext for, the action in this play. As the main play continues, the parallels become increasingly frequent and obvious.

Second, this scene establishes clearly that the main character is Guy Jones and generates curiosity about who he is and what exactly happened to him to get him here. This is done mostly in Dafydd's speech, which offers enough hints to make us wonder what the full story is. This, then, is the first parallel between this play and *Beggar's Opera*. By putting Guy in the role of MacHeath, who has many relationships with women and is a thief and a rule-breaker, the playwright is setting Guy up to be something of a rogue. However, while this scene sets up some of the similarities between the two characters, there are also significant differences, which will show up as the story develops.

Third, in the very brief scene between Guy and Hannah, there is the strong sense that there is a lot going on between the two of them that is not actually explained. This sense of subtext (something going on beneath the text, or the actual words) is a powerful and effective tool in foreshadowing.

Finally, the moment of transition after Guy leaves sets up the convention (the way the story is told) and demonstrates that the action is going to be moving back and forth through time, not always flowing in a straight line. This is another effective story-telling technique that draws us into the narrative and keeps us curious about what is going to happen next.

Act 1, Scene 2

Act 1, Scene 2 Summary

As the beginning of this scene blends with the end of the prologue, Guy has just come into the rehearsal area looking for someone. Bridget, a member of the company, clumps in loudly with a piece of furniture and asks who Guy is looking for. Guy answers vaguely. Bridget misunderstands and after a bit of comic dialogue, Bridget starts the conversation over. Guy tells her he is looking for the director, Mr. Llewellyn. Bridget goes off to get him.

Guy sees a nearby piano, pulls out a piece of music, plunks a couple of notes, tries to sing, and realizes the music is out of his range. He is on his way out the door when Dafydd comes in, energetic and talkative. He introduces himself, apologizes for being late and calls Mr. Ames, the rehearsal pianist and music director for the play. Guy introduces himself, but Dafydd barely notices him. He calls to hurry Mr. Ames and asks what Guy is planning to sing. When Guy tells Dafydd that he is going to sing a popular Welsh song, Dafydd, who is very proudly Welsh, jokes about whether Guy has any right to sing it. When he finds out that Guy is going to sing the song in English and not Welsh, he jumps about in mock pain. Mr. Ames appears and plays the introduction, and Guy nervously prepares to sing. Before Guy can open his mouth, Dafydd starts singing the song in Welsh and is so moved that he brings himself to tears. He stops, apologizes to Guy for interrupting, then moves out into the auditorium to listen as Mr. Ames plays the introduction again and Guy starts to sing.

Before Guy gets out more than two or three lines, Dafydd yells out directions about breathing and pronunciation. This makes Guy more flustered, but he starts on cue and keeps going.

As he sings, Dafydd shouts out more directions about posture and breathing, singing with Guy occasionally. At the same time, members of the company, who we saw in the opening number but who are now dressed in their regular clothes, appear from back stage and listen. Again, their individual characters will be detailed later in the play.

When Guy finishes, Dafydd and the members of the company applaud. This takes Guy by surprise; he did not realize anyone was listening. Several of the women of the company seem particularly interested in Guy, making a point of referring to him as "masculine" and "manly." The men are more interested in heading for the bar.

Bridget shouts loudly to calm the hubbub and get rehearsal back under control. Some of the women want to go to the bar right away, but Rebecca, an older woman who appears to have had a bit to drink already, convinces them all to stay. They waited in the back while Dafydd rehearsed, and she wants to see what he was working on.

Mr. Ames reads the opening speech of *The Beggar's Opera*. Ted, a vague and dull man in his forties, reads his first speech and exits too early. The rehearsal stops; the two speeches are as far as the rehearsal has gone. Disgusted with the lack of progress, Rebecca leads the company off to the bar.

Jarvis, an opinionated eccentric in his fifties, offers suggestions to Dafydd about how the scene could be improved. Dafydd accepts them but then confides to Guy that he thinks Jarvis is "interfering." Dafydd invites Guy to join the company at the bar, which is run by a "cantankerous old□ chap," and introduces Bridget. Guy tells Bridget he is going to "brave this cantankerous old" bartender and asks if she will be there. Dafydd says she will; she is the bartender's daughter.

Act 1, Scene 2 Analysis

This scene introduces the second major character in the play, Dafydd Llewellyn. The differences between Dafydd and Guy are drawn clearly and vividly: Dafydd is talkative, energetic and a little outrageous while Guy is quiet, low key and a little shy. The playwright's technique here is clear and effective, defining the main traits of the central character by creating a secondary character with contrasting traits.

Dafydd and Guy are two sides of a love triangle that will become a major plot in the play. At this point, the third side has not been identified, but the extreme difference between the two characters already sets up tension between them that will increase as the triangle develops and eventually explodes into dramatic confrontation.

The action of the main story, the rehearsal of *Beggar's Opera*, does not move too far in this scene, which is more about setting up characters and relationships. The most significant thing that happens, in terms of setting up conflicts for later in the play, is that several of the women find Guy "manly" and "masculine." In other words, sexual tension begins right away, not just because Guy is attractive, but also as Fay says later, because he is new.

What fuels both the comedy of the piece and its dramatic tension is that Guy seems to be unaware that he is attractive, which leads him to be caught up in the romantic and sexual games of the woman almost by accident. This makes him a more likeable character to us. If he set out deliberately to seduce and/or manipulate these women, we would like him less and find his predicament less funny. This lack of awareness, a fundamental aspect of Guy's character, also plays into a secondary plot that also starts up later. This is also a fundamental difference between Guy and MacHeath, the character from *Beggar's Opera*. MacHeath is much more aware than Guy of who he is, how he affects women, and the outcomes of his choices.

Act 1, Scene 3

Act 1, Scene 3 Summary

In the bar after the rehearsal, Dafydd orders a beer while Guy orders a gin and tonic. This choice is unusual since most of the cast drinks beer.

Rebecca shouts across the bar that the other actors all agree that Guy should play a character called Matt the Mint. The drinks arrive and Dafydd proposes a toast to the production, revealing that they have another three and half months of rehearsal. Bridget, now working behind the bar, tells Dafydd there is a phone call for him from his wife. Dafydd goes to the phone, leaving Guy to keep an eye on his beer.

Fay, one of the other women who finds Guy attractive, comes over to him. She chats flirtatiously, telling him that it is great having a new man in the company. Their conversation is interrupted twice. First to interrupt is Jarvis, who comments that since Guy has a drink in each hand, he must be Scottish. Then Fay's husband, Ian, interrupts and abruptly leaves with her. Jarvis then orders Guy another drink, and as they are waiting, Mr. Ames sits at a piano in the corner and sings a song from *The Beggar's Opera* about the inspiration of wine and women.

Just as Dafydd returns from his phone call, Bridget appears, ringing a bell to signal last call for drinks. She also asks Mr. Ames to stop playing and the crowd to stop singing since the piano is reserved for private functions. Linda, a young woman in the company, mouths off at Bridget and defiantly plays the piano. Her ineffective parents, Enid and Ted, try to make her stop, but she persists, urged on by Crispin, her bad-boy boyfriend and another company member. Bridget pushes Linda away from the piano. Crispin puts himself between the two of them, but Bridget aims a kick at his groin and a punch at his head. As the other actors try to make peace, Crispin and Bridget fight their way out the door. Bridget comes back alone and holds the door open so Linda can leave.

Dafydd asks for his beer back. Guy, who has been steadily drinking it because of all the tension in the company, hands him an empty glass. Dafydd shrugs it off and hopes that Bridget has not offended Crispin: he is playing the lead, MacHeath, and there is no one to replace him.

Enid and Ted pass on their way out, apologizing for Linda's behavior and expressing their concern about Crispin. Only Dafydd and Guy are left. Dafydd invites Guy back to his home to discuss how Guy is going to be cast in *Beggar's Opera*. They leave, and Bridget closes up.

Crispin returns. He and Bridget look at each other for a moment, then run to each other and kiss passionately.

Act 1, Scene 3 Analysis

Guy does not play a very active role in this scene; he is much more of an observer than a participant. This reinforces a second aspect to his character: he is someone who goes along with things rather than one who makes them happen. This is another of the differences between Guy and MacHeath. MacHeath is a much more dramatically active character.

The playwright sketches his characters clearly and vividly in a short amount of time in this scene. Within a few lines each, it's made clear that Fay is a flirt and her husband is not all that happy about it. Jarvis has eccentric and pre-conceived opinions; Enid and Ted are ineffective parents and dull people; Bridget has a volatile temper; Linda has a nasty streak; Crispin is a manipulator. All of these characteristics either affect or illustrate the action and the story later in the play.

For the first time in this scene, a song from *The Beggar's Opera* is used to illustrate what is going on in the main action of the play. When Mr. Ames sings about wine and women inspiring men "with courage, love and joy," he is foreshadowing what is going to happen later to Guy. It is also an expression of irony since Guy is also going to experience frustration, pain and confusion due to his involvement with women.

Act 1, Scene 4

Act 1, Scene 4 Summary

Dafydd and Guy arrive at Dafydd's home, which seems small and too family-oriented for someone with Dafydd's personality. There is a large male doll on the sofa, which Dafydd says his children pretend is him when he has been away too long or too often. He disappears into the kitchen to put on the kettle for tea.

Hannah comes in ready for bed, her face covered with cream. She is calling to Dafydd. She runs away when she sees Guy. Dafydd yells at her to go to bed, but Hannah feels she cannot "if there's someone here." Dafydd says that "this chap doesn't matter" and comes back in carrying a script. He realizes uncomfortably that Guy heard their whole conversation, and he tries to laugh it off, then quickly turns the conversation to the play.

He tells Guy that he sees him as Crook Finger'd Jack, describing the character as one that is bound to make a powerful impact on an audience, even if it is a smaller role. Guy agrees, and Dafydd gives him the script, telling him that *Beggar's Opera* is very different from the usual thing the company does. He explains that even though the play is old, it is still very relevant. He seems very enthusiastic, and Guy asks whether Dafydd ever worked in the theatre professionally. Dafydd answers vaguely that he did some work, but before he goes into any detail, Hannah comes back having wiped off the cream, changed clothes, and made cocoa.

Dafydd introduces Hannah and Guy, telling Hannah that Guy is going to play Crook Finger'd Jack. Hannah comments that Guy is too handsome to play a character like that. Dafydd suggests that Guy should have an eye-patch.

After an awkward pause, the conversation turns to Dafydd and Hannah's two daughters, both of whom were given Welsh names by Dafydd's mother. Dafydd comments that everything in the house is Welsh, while Hannah comments that the only thing that is not Welsh is she.

As the conversation continues, Guy reveals that his wife died recently. Dafydd makes a boorish joke about how she died, which Hannah covers by sympathetically asking how long ago it happened. Guy reveals that it has been a little over a year; it took him a while to adjust, but he decided it was time to get out again. Joining the cast of *Beggar's Opera* was his way of doing that.

After another brief conversation about the Welsh origination of Dafydd's name, Hannah returns the conversation to more superficial topics by asking where Guy works. He says he works for BLM, a large industrial plant on the western side of town, in a minor capacity. Just as Dafydd starts to speak about why that is interesting, the phone rings. Dafydd goes to answer it, saying that it is probably Ted and Enid having "Linda trouble" again.

Alone with Guy, Hannah tells him about another example of "Linda trouble"- how Enid came home from work one day to find all her clothes on fire. Guy reveals that his wife was unable to have children. Hannah asks if he misses her. When he says he misses her very much, Hannah wonders if she herself will be missed. Guy tries to convince her that she would be, but she doubts it. She gives an angry speech about how much Dafydd is missed when he is not at home and talks about how much time the kids spend with the Daddy doll on the sofa. She refers to herself as Mummy doll. She then apologizes to Guy for talking so much, calling herself boring. Guy says she is not boring at all, and they look at each other quite intimately.

Dafydd returns with the news that all is well with Linda and her family. Hannah says it is time to go to bed, and Guy gets ready to leave. As Dafydd fetches Guy's coat, Guy and Hannah have another intimate moment together. Dafydd, who surprises Guy with the news that Hannah is in the show too, interrupts them. When Hannah leaves, Guy stares after her like "a man enchanted."

Before Guy can set out for home, Dafydd brings up the subject of BLM. In his "real" life as a lawyer, Dafydd is working for a client who wants to purchase some land adjoining the BLM property. He has heard a rumor that BLM is interested in buying the property and asks Guy to let him know if he hears anything about that rumor. It seems that Dafydd is interested in buying the land from the current owner, then selling it to BLM for a large profit. Guy protests that the person who should be told is the person actually selling the land, but Dafydd protests that he, Dafydd, could not do that. If he did, he would be acting against his client's best interests, and it would not be ethical. Guy pulls on his coat and leaves.

Ted appears in his costume from *Beggar's Opera* and sings a brief song about the crookedness of lawyers.

Act 1, Scene 4 Analysis

The foundations of the two main plots in the play - Guy's increasingly larger roles in *The Beggar's Opera* and the love triangle with Guy, Hannah and Dafydd - are laid more firmly in this long, multi-layered scene. This is an excellent example of how action is tied to character in a dramatic story. The events that happen in this scene are all directly related to who these people are and what they need.

Dafydd is clearly someone who gets a lot out of being the biggest personality around. That is why he gives Guy - someone who, as the previous scene has shown, attracts attention - a very small part with one or two lines to keep him in his place. Just as clearly, Guy is someone who has a lot of doubt about his own self worth and is also very lonely. That's why he is so glad to accept the part even though it is small and why he is so drawn to both Dafydd, who seems to want him around, and Hannah, who seems warm and interested. It also becomes clear in this scene that Hannah is lonely and frustrated. This is why she responds with such warmth and vulnerability to Guy. In short, the action of the play is moved further along by what these characters are trying to achieve in relationship to one another, which is a key element in good drama.

This scene also introduces a new plot element: the BLM storyline. It does not seem to be fully woven into the story as a whole, mostly because much of the action related to BLM, which comes up again as the play progresses, does not seem to arise from character need, as does the action in the primary plot line. Instead, it seems like something the playwright added to create additional tension. It comes across as a more serious element that jars with the romantic comedy elements of the rest of the play.

The Daddy doll is the largest, and perhaps the only real, symbol in the play. It represents artificiality, specifically the fakeness of the good marriage that Hannah and Dafydd show the world. It also represents the artificiality of Dafydd's feelings, the lack of soul in many of his choices, and the fakeness of Dafydd's role as father to the twin daughters, which is revealed later in the play. When the daughters call the doll "Guy," later in the play, it supports this explanation of the symbol's meaning.

Finally, there is another interjection of a song from *Beggar's Opera*. Again, this reinforces and comments on the action in this play.

Act 1, Scene 5

Act 1, Scene 5 Summary

The action continues without interruption. Ted finishes his song, which is now part of a rehearsal. Hannah, Enid and Ted try to get through their scene, and Dafydd expresses huge frustration at the rehearsals being ten days behind schedule and Ted having to leave to attend a dance at work. When Ted makes more mistakes, Dafydd completely loses his temper, destroys Ted's script and calls him names. Enid and Hannah both tell Dafydd off and go after Ted.

Guy, who has been watching the whole thing, tries to talk with Dafydd about how to play the part of Crook Finger'd Jack, but Dafydd brushes him off. Rebecca then comes on, complaining about having to wait so long to participate in rehearsals. Dafydd loses his temper with her. She and Fay go off to the bar. Ian remains behind.

Linda appears, and when Dafydd asks where Crispin is, she says he should ask Bridget, who says Crispin is probably in bed where she left him. Linda and Bridget leave separately. Hannah returns and tells Dafydd there is a phone call for him. After Dafydd goes, Hannah and Guy look at each other affectionately, and then Hannah leaves.

Ian, who saw the way Hannah and Guy looked at each other, tells Guy a story of how Dafydd directed a really awful production of Sound of Music once. Then, in a conversation loaded with sexual innuendo completely lost on Guy, he asks Guy to join him and Fay on Friday for "a bit of fun," and to bring a friend, "female, of course." He leaves to join Fay at the bar but not before hinting that he would like to ask Guy about his work.

Alone on the stage, Guy practices the one line he has as Crook Finger'd Jack. He is interrupted by Jarvis, who is glad to see him practicing his craft. Jarvis tells a story about being forced to eat a pile of sawdust after not making a workshop floor clean enough to eat off. He leaves, urging Guy to stick up for himself.

Guy tries his line again with a Scottish accent. Hannah brings him some tea and asks if he will work on their scene together again. Guy agrees, and they rehearse a scene in which their characters talk about their love for each other. Just as the emotions of the scene are about to happen for real between the two of them, Dafydd returns with the bad news that the man playing the part of Matt the Mint, a larger part than Crook Finger'd Jack, has dropped out. He asks Guy to fill in. Guy agrees. Dafydd leaves for the bar. Hannah congratulates Guy with a kiss that turns out to be more passionate than either of them planned. Guy leaves, and Hannah remains. While Hannah is there, Enid, in character from *Beggar's Opera*, sings a song about Hannah's *Beggar's Opera* character being in love.

Act 1, Scene 5 Analysis

This scene is straightforward plot development. We see Dafydd's difficulties with the rehearsal, Guy getting a new role, and the Hannah/Guy relationship taking the next step forward. We get another hint, via Ian, that Guy's job is going to become an important plot element, but again its insertion does not seem to fit with the rest of the action.

An interesting sub-plot that does not seem to have much to do with the main action at this point is the triangle between Linda, Bridget and Crispin. Later in the play, another two-women/one man triangle develops, and the more overt violence and tension of the first triangle both foreshadow and parallel the tensions that are more beneath the surface in the triangle that appears later.

What Ian is actually talking about in the scene between him and Guy is clear to us, if not to Guy: Ian is inviting Guy and a friend over for some kind of sexual game. Guy, innocently oblivious to this innuendo as he is to most things, goes along with the invitation because, as mentioned above, he is lonely and such an invitation is exactly what he joined the theatre company for. This is another difference between Guy and MacHeath. MacHeath is always aware of sexual undertones in any conversation.

Act 1, Scene 6

Act 1, Scene 6 Summary

The action moves to Fay and Ian's living room, where there are erotic paintings on the wall, which are never actually seen; the details are left to the imagination. Fay is armed with exotic cocktails, a faultless appearance and lots of charm when Guy arrives. He and Fay make small talk about the booze, how Fay and Ian are currently hooked on tequila, and about the paintings and how they have to be put away when Ian's mother arrives.

Fay, thinking that Guy knows all about the sexual games that are to be played, tells him that just about anything goes, except for anything "cruel or painful." Guy responds with a comment about veal, which comes from calves raised under extremely restricted conditions and which some people consider cruel and painful. Fay takes this comment as a joke, and she and Guy play a verbal game based on the spelling of "veal."

Fay then comments that Guy's friend is late. When the conversation reveals that Guy's friend lives in an old folks home, Fay realizes that Guy has misunderstood the point of the evening completely and finds it all very funny. She is particularly looking forward to seeing Ian's face when he meets Guy's seventy-year-old friend.

Ian returns. Fay convinces Guy to keep his friend's age as a surprise and then leaves the room with the tequila. Ian takes the opportunity of having Guy alone to ask him the same question Dafydd did about BLM and whether the rumor that the company is interested in buying that empty property is true. Guy tells him the same thing he told Dafydd, that he did not know, but he would keep an ear open. Ian does not seem happy that Dafydd has already talked to Guy and promises to make it "worth [Guy's] while."

The doorbell rings. Fay runs on with another drink for Ian, telling him he "might need it." As Ian answers the door, Fay leads Guy into the bedroom. Ian comes back in, waiting for Guy's friend to tidy up in the bathroom. He takes a big gulp of his drink. Guy, in costume as Matt of the Mint and roaring drunk, sings a drinking song about the glories of going to war.

Act 1, Scene 6 Analysis

This scene is the most straightforwardly and intensely funny scene in the play, built on the classic comic technique of misunderstanding. Once again, Guy gets himself caught up in something that he does not understand, but instead of trying to back out or figure out what is going on, he just goes with the flow. While his choices are clearly and consistently based on his driving need for company and affection, he is quite child-like in that he does not seem aware of the possible consequences of his actions. This makes him quite an appealing central character and his situations even funnier, more so than MacHeath, who is more calculating.

The scene also sets up the second romantic triangle between Fay, Hannah and Guy. This triangle echoes the Bridget/Linda/Crispin story. The difference with this triangle is that Fay seems to have a lot less of an emotional connection to what's going on than either Linda or Bridget. In fact, as we will see later, her connection is much less than Hannah's. Again, this scene very clearly moves the dramatic action and tension forward.

The broad sexual comedy between Fay and Guy is interrupted by another interjection of the BLM storyline. At this point, the presence of this plot almost becomes distracting: all the other plots - the love triangles, the *Beggar's Opera* rehearsals, the other background relationships - all form a complete and integrated picture. Everything going on relates to everything else. The BLM storyline, however, has not really moved forward and does not really seem connected.

Act 1, Scene 7

Act 1, Scene 7 Summary

Again, the music ending the previous scene blends with the beginning of this scene: another rehearsal of *Beggar's Opera*. After Guy finishes his song, Dafydd talks with him about Crispin, who has "both those girls on a string" and tells him that Ian has dropped out of the production. Dafydd asks Guy to take over Ian's larger role of Filch, telling him that since he joined the company, he has been "growing in confidence every day." Guy agrees. Dafydd reveals that asking Guy to be the replacement was Fay's idea, announces to the company the change in casting and moves the rehearsal on.

Guy, as Filch, Crispin, as MacHeath, and the women perform a song-and-dance celebrating the joys of youth, and calling for indulgence and being carefree. As they continue, Dafydd shouts out directions.

At the end, Dafydd calls out that the women should turn to MacHeath, Crispin. Instead, all the women except Enid face Guy. Enid quickly switches to do what the rest are doing. Dafydd shakes her by the shoulders, has a tantrum, and breaks the rehearsal for fifteen minutes. Bridget goes to put on the kettle for tea. Crispin disappears in a huff, and the women disperse, sympathizing with Enid. Guy is left alone and "for a moment seems to us very pleased with life so far."

Act 1, Scene 7 Analysis

It is not stated clearly at this point why Ian withdraws from *The Beggar's Opera*. By placing this scene next to the one where Fay takes Guy for a romp in the bedroom, the playwright implies that it has something to do with Ian's feelings about that incident. The truth is revealed later, but the point at this stage in the play is that again, without actually doing anything, Guy's steady rise in the ranks of the company continues, and the plot advances.

When the women bow to Guy rather than Crispin, it foreshadows the later action of the play, in which Guy actually takes over the role of MacHeath.

Dafydd's opinion that Guy has been growing in confidence is partly true and partly ironic. It is true that Guy has found the improved social life he joined the company to find, and as a result has probably grown in confidence. But what makes the statement ironic is that Dafydd doesn't know, while we do, that most of Guy's confidence is because he's been found romantically interesting by two attractive women and has become involved with them.

In the final stage direction of the act, when the playwright says Guy seems "pleased with life so far," it raises the implication that Guy set out to become romantically involved with someone in the company. It is left ambiguous by the playwright exactly why Guy is

pleased, which means that it becomes a question for the actor playing Guy, the director, and ultimately us.

Is Guy both sexually and dramatically ambitious, and is that the reason for his happiness (he is advancing both with the ladies and in the play), or is he just sweetly glad that he is doing something other than grieving for his wife? In other words, is he calculating or innocent? Is he making things happen or going along for the ride and enjoying it immensely? If he is revealed to be calculating, it throws into question everything we have thought about Guy to this point, given that everything we have seen of him so far has indicated that he is, in fact, an innocent. Either way, Guy seems unaware of the web he is spinning for himself and of what is going to happen when he realizes he is caught, which is something we find ourselves wondering and is the question necessary to carry us over the intermission and into act two.

Act 2, Scene 1

Act 2, Scene 1 Summary

This scene starts with another song from *The Beggar's Opera*. Crispin, as MacHeath, sings about how a woman's beauty and the joys of being with her can dissolve a man's depression.

The song blends into a conversation in a café between Hannah and Guy. Hannah begins by challenging Guy to make up his mind between her and another woman, who is not named but we assume is Fay. Guy tells Hannah it is not that easy and that he loves them both in different ways. Hannah describes herself as the one that is loved because she does his laundry and his mending and then suddenly asks if Guy has found a pair of Dafydd's missing underwear. After figuring out just what pair she's talking about, Guy admits he is probably wearing the missing underwear.

Hannah then complains about having to meet privately in "cafes and pubs and bus shelters." When Guy wonders where else they can go, Hannah implies that it does not really matter, that everybody knows except Dafydd. She tells Guy that the children have started calling the Daddy doll "Guy" and that Dafydd has not wanted her romantically for years. Now she is sure nobody wants her in that way. Before Guy can reassure her, she tells him it is lucky Dafydd has not found out since he has a vicious temper and would beat him. She starts to cry, but when Guy tries to calm her, Hannah's tears change to anger. Fay has appeared, carrying several shopping bags.

It is awkward for all three of them, and Guy suggests one of them leave. Fay says she only came by to bring Guy something and pulls out a paper bag. Hannah grabs for it, insisting that by giving Guy secret presents right in front of her, Fay is trying to humiliate her. Guy promises to open the bag in front of Hannah and then there will be no secrets. Fay and Hannah agree, Guy opens the bag and takes out the missing underwear. After the women briefly tussle over the underwear, Guy tells Fay that they are really Dafydd's. Hannah storms out and Fay gets ready to leave. As she goes, she tells Guy that Ian has been asking if Guy has heard anything more about the BLM land deal. When Guy tells her he has not, Fay reveals that the land BLM supposedly wants is owned by Jarvis, and Ian gave up his role in the play as part of the "deal" in which Ian makes room for Guy to get the bigger part and Guy makes room for Ian to get in on the land deal. Fay makes a final veiled threat about not wanting things to get "nasty." Guy leaves, now quite uneasy.

As Fay sits smiling at the table, Linda, in character from *Beggar's Opera*, sings a song about a housewife catching a rat and throwing it "to the dog or cat."

Act 2, Scene 1 Analysis

A few things have happened offstage since the end of Act 1. The affair between Guy and Fay has continued as has the affair between Guy and Hannah. Somehow, Fay and Hannah have found out about each other. As seems to be the case throughout the play, Guy seems to be caught in the middle, reacting to things around him as opposed to making things happen. Revealing that Guy is caught between the demands of two women makes Crispin's song at the beginning of the act ironic, in that Guy's relationships with these two women are starting to cause difficulties for Guy, rather than just bringing him joy.

The contrast between the two women and their reasons for having their respective affairs with Guy, is clearly drawn. Hannah's need for a relationship with Guy is based upon her lack of self-esteem and her desire to feel important. To Fay, however, the whole thing is a game and a means to an end for both her and Ian. When Fay brings up the BLM land deal again, the implication is that Guy is just being used, and it is this idea rather than the idea of being caught between two women that makes him uneasy. More and more, the evidence suggests that Guy is not calculating but an innocent caught up in events beyond his control and the manipulations of other people. This is a similarity between this play and *Beggar's Opera*: MacHeath is also caught up in events beyond his control. Unlike Guy, however, MacHeath plays a more active role in causing those events in the first place.

Linda's song at the end of the scene serves as a commentary on Fay's character and motivations and foreshadows how Guy is going to be left to fend for himself after the land deal scheme unravels.

Act 2, Scene 2

Act 2, Scene 2 Summary

As Hannah, Linda and Crispin rehearse a scene from *Beggar's Opera* in character, Dafydd watches from the auditorium. Jarvis sits to one side, listening to a personal stereo system when Guy arrives, ready to start work. Dafydd tells Guy that it will be a while before they are ready for him. Things are moving slowly, as usual and he complains about both Linda and Crispin.

Linda messes up her lines, and when Bridget prompts her, the simmering feud between the two of them begins to boil. Hannah tries to calm them down, Dafydd tries to bully them into getting back to work, and Crispin seems to be enjoying the whole thing. When Bridget laughs at one of Linda's lines, Linda gets angry, grabs Bridget's hair, and a physical fight ensues. As the fight continues, Crispin sings a song from *Beggar's Opera* about "how happy he'd be with either."

Guy and Dafydd pull Linda and Bridget apart. Hannah takes Linda off in one direction while Guy and Dafydd carry Bridget off in another. When Dafydd returns, he blames Crispin for causing the whole thing, threatening to "sort him out." Crispin loses his temper and threatens Dafydd with violence. Dafydd, scared of actual violence, babbles incoherently. As Hannah and Guy return, Crispin knees Dafydd in the groin and cheerfully leaves. Hannah helps Dafydd backstage, leaving Guy alone with Jarvis.

Jarvis lets Guy listen to what he's been listening to on his portable stereo, the sound of a pump engine, a "vanishing sound" of England. Guy takes the chance to ask Jarvis about the land that's part of the rumored BLM land deal. Jarvis tells Guy how his very religious grandfather bought the land and made it into a cricket field for his workers on the condition that they not use it on Sundays. One Sunday, his grandfather saw them on it and the next day demolished the field. Since then the land has sat empty. Guy mentions the rumor that BLM might be interested in the land and suggests that it would be worth quite a bit of money if Jarvis were interested in selling.

Jarvis tells Guy he is glad of the information and that he will be "looked after." Guy says he does not want to be looked after and that he only told Jarvis because he does not want Jarvis to have one "put over" on him, that he was being "friendly." Jarvis cynically dismisses the comment, saying that he plans to leave this life honestly; he will pay off this debt as he has paid off all the others.

At this point Rebecca, Jarvis' wife, comes in, having heard part of the conversation. She does not make any comments. Instead, she goes straight backstage to get the rehearsal back on track. Jarvis leaves. Guy works on his lines for a moment then Dafydd returns and tells Guy he is really worried for the play now that Crispin seems to have quit.

He goes on to complain about how people in England have no respect for the theatre and how when he directs, he always says he's just going to have a ball, but somehow it always ends up being "life or death." He says in this situation it may look like he is in serious trouble, but out in the "real world," he really is in serious trouble, and he does not care. He goes on to explain how difficult things are with Hannah. He talks about her being a good wife and running the home well but not being romantically warm. When Guy brings up their children, Dafydd says they never "talk about that" and changes the subject.

Rebecca returns. She tells Dafydd and Guy that the tannoy, the speaker system that broadcasts what is going on backstage into the dressing rooms, has been on and that Hannah and the entire company have heard everything that Dafydd has said. She also says that the company has talked about how to carry on without Crispin and has decided that Guy should be the new MacHeath.

As Rebecca and Dafydd leave, Guy sings a song from *Beggar's Opera* about how difficult it is to choose between two women.

Act 2, Scene 2 Analysis

The inter-relationship between scenes from *Beggar's Opera* and this play is quite complex in this scene. Action flows freely back and forth between the two plays to great comic and dramatic effect. The fight between Linda and Bridget parallels a fight between two women over MacHeath and parallels the verbal battle between Hannah and Fay over Guy in Act 2, Scene 1. The MacHeath song sung by Crispin parallels the situations Crispin and Guy are both in, but while Crispin and MacHeath, seem to enjoy being fought over, Guy does not. When Guy sings second MacHeath song, it is doubly effective because it reveals Guy's feelings about being in this situation, and it is the first time, with the exception of the prologue, that he sings in the character of MacHeath. This is an effective piece of structural construction by the playwright to build the action of the play so that Guy sings this song immediately after being cast as MacHeath.

Another first for Guy in this scene is that he actually takes action when he asks Jarvis about the BLM land. Up to this point, with the exception of actually showing up for his audition at the beginning, this is the first time Guy actually does something. The rest of the time, he is reacting to what other people want of him, need of him, or ask of him. What is ironic about this moment is that Jarvis misunderstands him, setting up yet another misunderstanding that Guy has to get out of. In other words, it seems that no matter what Guy does, whether he acts or reacts, he gets himself caught up in situations beyond his control. Once again, there is evidence to answer the question posed at the end of Act 1. It seems again that Guy is less a manipulator and more an innocent.

Dafydd's long speech contains hints about a darker situation and a darker personality for him than we have been allowed to see so far. The hint that he is in trouble in his life outside the theatre does not really go any further. We never know just what that trouble

is. It would make sense for us to think that it has something to do with the mysterious client he referred to when he asked Guy about the BLM land deal. He could also be talking about his problems with Hannah. His comment about never talking about the twins is never explained either. It is implied that he is not actually the twins' biological father. His comment that Hannah is romantically cold to him is ironic on a number of levels. We know that she thinks he is cold. We know she is not cold to everybody since she is having the affair with Guy, and we know about the affair in the first place while he evidently does not. This again sets up suspense in our minds. What is going to happen when he does find out?

Act 2, Scene 3

Act 2, Scene 3 Summary

As Guy finishes his song as MacHeath, lights come up on Rebecca's back garde, where she sits waiting. When the song is done, Guy joins her. She offers him tea, a drink, and a cigarette, all of which he refuses. She tells him that she thinks he is going to be a great MacHeath, Dafydd is lucky to have him, and that he's "jollied ...□ up" everybody in the cast in different ways. She then suggests that it is time he made her day in the same way as he has made the days of so many people.

They mime making small talk as Ted, Enid and Jarvis sing a song from *Beggar's Opera* about the joys of youth.

When the song finishes, Rebecca brings the conversation back around to the favor she wants and reassures Guy that she does not want the same kind of "favors" that he has been doing for Hannah and Fay. Instead, she wants to talk about Jarvis' land and the BLM deal, which is something Guy wanted to talk about as well. He has received a large sum of money in the mail anonymously and because of his conversation with Jarvis, in which Jarvis promised to "look after" him, he thinks Jarvis sent it to him. Rebecca says that that idea is "unlikely" and asks why Guy thinks that. Guy starts to explain that he warned Jarvis about the rumor and why he did it, but Rebecca takes the conversation in another direction.

She wonders what would happen if the rumor were not true. The price of the land would still go up, Jarvis would still be ahead and the joke would be on the people that Guy was trying to warn Jarvis about. She hints that it might be in Guy's best interests to not deny the rumor and maybe even encourage it. Finally, she suggests that Guy is too busy getting ready to play MacHeath to worry too much about it, but he should remember that it was she who got him the part in the first place.

As she hurries him off to rehearsal, Guy wonders aloud who started the rumor. When Rebecca realizes he is asking the question in total innocence, she answers with innocence herself, "I expect we'll never know." Guy wonders what he should do with the money. Rebecca suggests that he should just have fun with it and leaves. Guy almost leaves the money behind but then comes back and picks it up.

Hannah, Fay, Enid and Linda appear, in costume, and help Guy change into his MacHeath costume. Meanwhile, Bridget, also in costume, appears and sings a song about a rooster attended by his hens.

Act 2, Scene 3 Analysis

This relatively brief scene ties together all the loose ends about the BLM rumor. It is never stated outright, but the subtext of the scene is that Rebecca started the rumor

about the land deal in order to get more money for Jarvis, and Guy has just been a cog in the motor of her plan. It also seems clear that the money has come from Jarvis, and Rebecca does not know about it.

The first song from *Beggar's Opera* sung in this scene is an ironic parallel to what Rebecca is doing. Hers is the plan of someone older and more cynical, as opposed to that of someone enjoying the simple joys of youth sung about in the song and perhaps experienced by Guy in his affairs.

Guy keeps the money for the same reason as he continues the affairs with Hannah and Fay. It may make things difficult, but it will bring him pleasure, which is one of the things he joined the company for in the first place.

The second *Beggar's Opera* song playfully illustrates the situation with Guy and his women.

Act 2, Scene 4

Act 2, Scene 4 Summary

The song blends into this next scene. In the middle of a technical rehearsal, Dafydd is running on and off the stage trying to set the lights, where they go, and how bright they are while Hannah and Guy are trying to sort out their relationship.

Hannah asks why Guy has not called. He avoids answering by saying he has been busy with the play, but Hannah does not accept that. Finally, with Dafydd nearby, Guy tells Hannah that it is time to stop the affair. When she asks why, Guy says he does not want to hurt Dafydd. Hannah says that is just an excuse to ditch her, which Guy says is not true.

As lights keep changing, Hannah tells Guy that she was ready to give up everything for him and that she meant every word of love she ever said. Dafydd finishes with the lights and lets Guy and Hannah move from their spots. When Dafydd sees Hannah crying, he misunderstands and thinks she is in pain from staring into the lights. As Dafydd goes back to work, Guy and Hannah say "I love you," become their characters in *Beggar's Opera*, and sing a song about how sad it is to break up.

When the song finishes, Hannah runs offstage and Dafydd comes on, fixing more lights while Guy tries to talk to him about Hannah. Dafydd is not really listening. He tells Guy that he is going to make a great MacHeath and the audience is going to love him. He asks Guy to hold the ladder for him, climbs up, and changes a light.

Jarvis comes on, asking for approval for his costume. Dafydd impatiently says it is fine, and Jarvis leaves. Dafydd comes down the ladder and yells more directions at the lights operator just as Ian angrily shows up with the evening paper. On the front page is news that BLM is closing down with a loss of five hundred jobs and relocation of one-hundred and thirty. Rebecca appears as Ian accuses Guy of keeping the news a secret. Guy confesses that not only did he not know about the closing but also that he is one of the ones being fired. Rebecca, also apparently angry, says she is not surprised. Ian, still angry, disappears. Rebecca gets approval for her costume from Dafydd and goes backstage again. Dafydd reassures Guy that he is going to be all right and goes backstage to get things moving back there.

Fay comes out with Guy's wig and a mirror. As Guy puts the wig on, Fay accuses him of plotting to make fools of all of them. Overwhelmed and hurt, Guy just sits silently as the rest of the company comes onstage and gets ready to start the rehearsal. Dafydd comes from backstage, more subdued than usual. He starts the rehearsal, telling them it is a "technical run" for stage management and lighting.

The rest of the company disperses, leaving Guy and Dafydd alone. Dafydd furiously whispers to Guy that Ian has told him everything about Guy and Hannah, swears at him,

and hopes that he gets what is coming to him. He then quickly changes his tune, wishes Guy all the best for the performance, and calls for lights, which change as Guy is left alone on stage.

The action shifts to *Beggar's Opera* at the point where Guy (as MacHeath) is confronted by Hannah and Linda (as his wife and girlfriend respectively) before he is taken to his execution. They sing a song of love and lost courage. Jarvis (as a jailer) enters to take Guy/ MacHeath to his execution, where Rebecca, Bridget, Fay and Enid, all in character, enter as MacHeath's other wives.

A hangman appears and settles a noose around Guy/MacHeath's neck. Just as he's about to be hanged, Ted, as the narrator, and Mr. Ames, as the beggar, play the final scene from *Beggar's Opera* in which the hanging is stopped and MacHeath is reprieved. The hangman removes his hood, and he is revealed to be Dafydd.

We end with the same song and dance with which we began. Guy/MacHeath joined in celebration by all his women and friends, singing, "The wretch of today may be happy tomorrow." It seems that all is forgiven.

Act 2, Scene 4 Analysis

The lines between the action of *Beggar's Opera* and this play are never as blurry as they are at the beginning of this scene. Guy and Hannah play out the same sort of breakup scene as themselves and as their characters in the play. It may sound confusing, but it is an effective example of one of the most dramatically effective aspects of theatre: the fact that two realities can exist onstage at the same time. In movies, for example, the story would have to flip back and forth between the realities. The simultaneous playing out of realities illuminates and deepens our understanding of both while making the scene more interesting and challenging to watch.

In addition, the scene between Guy and Hannah is the emotional climax of the play, the point at which the emotions of the central characters are at their highest. Adding the level of simultaneous realities gives the climax even more impact.

The dialogue in this scene contributes to its effectiveness. Several of Dafydd's lines are ironic in that while he is actually talking about what is going on with the lights, it seems to us as though he is commenting on what is happening with Guy and Hannah. It makes the scene funny and sad at the same time, a good use of counterpoint (two emotional states being played out at the same time).

The energy and feeling of the scene changes completely with Ian's entrance. This is where the truth of what is going on at BLM is revealed as a plot twist and, as such, is the climax of this secondary plot. The revelation that Guy has lost his job adds another level of poignancy to his situation, especially in the face of all the manipulations and misunderstandings of the people around him, including Fay and Ian, who are revealed to be just plain nasty when Ian tells Dafydd about Guy and Hannah.

Dafydd's reaction to this news is played for comic effect rather than dramatic; he starts out distracted when he returns to the stage, then angry when he whispers to Guy, then encouraging when he wishes Guy a good show. It is, however, consistent with the way Dafydd has expressed his feelings up to this point: quickly, shallowly and easily changed. In other words, he is just like the Daddy doll: all appearance, no real heart.

In the finale of *Beggar's Opera*, MacHeath is condemned, but a last minute reprieve saves his life. This is an example of *deus ex machina*, a plot device that was first used in the first plays performed in ancient Greece. It refers to the sudden appearance of someone or something that causes the ending of the play to resolve, usually into a happy ending but sometimes into a tragic one. In the case of the Greek plays, it was usually the appearance of one of the gods that triggered the change. In the case of *Beggar's Opera*, it is the appearance of a messenger with the reprieve. By making the ending of *Beggar's Opera* also the ending of this play, again blending two realities, the playwright is suggesting that Guy is also being reprieved.

A *deus ex machina* ending is often perceived as being unsatisfying since it does not always make sense in terms of the story that has gone before. In the case of both *Beggar's Opera* and *Chorus of Disapproval*, such an ending could be satisfying if we take it to suggest that the actions of the central character are not really all that serious, that they are little more than jokes, or pranks, or sowing wild oats.

The themes of this play are less important than the humor, which is often the case with light comedies such as this. It would not be going too far, though, to suggest that the story is ultimately about what happens when someone does not really notice what is going on around him/her. He/she could be caught up in events and end up in trouble. In other words, pay attention, ask questions and think before you act.

Characters

Mr. Ames

Mr. Ames is PALOS's shy piano-player. His personality is in direct contrast to Dafydd's. He only has a few lines of spoken dialogue.

Bridget Baines

Bridget is the daughter of the local publican. Bridget's official position at PALOS is stage manager and script prompt. In *A Chorus of Disapproval* she also parallels the character of Lucy, the publican's daughter in *The Beggar's Opera.* She is a rather ill-tempered young woman who manages to intimidate friends and foes alike with her physical aggression. Bridget's appearances usually center on her affair with Crispin and her hostility towards her rival, Linda. Her big scene comes in Act II, when she provokes Linda to tears.

Fay Hubbard

Fay is an attractive, sophisticated thirty-something woman. Ayckbourn describes her as "one of the local younger married jet-set." Fay calmly embarks upon an affair with Guy and lands him the part of Filch, assuming that he will then provide her with financially lucrative information about the supposed BLM land scam. She perceives their relationship as a "deal" and threatens Guy when he appears to renege on his side of it.

Ian Hubbard

Ian is an ambitious thirty-something man, married to the very attractive Fay. The couple are determined to advance in the world. Ian owns a building firm, which is his excuse for wanting to buy Jarvis' s land, but it is more probable that he and the Huntley-Pikes hope to inflate the land's price and then sell it at a profit. He resigns his role as Filch in order to secure Guy's help in the scam, and reluctantly agrees to Fay's partner-swapping arrangement. When Guy misunderstands the arrangement and brings along an elderly woman friend to the Hubbard household, Ian is humiliated. He has his revenge when he reveals Guy and Hannah's affair to Dafydd in Act II.

Jarvis Huntley-Pike

"Mad" but "harmless," Jarvis owns the land that is the subject of so much wheeling and dealing in *A Chorus of Disapproval*. In his late-fifties, he is a British Northerner, prone to making bad jokes and enamored with the sound of his own voice. Jarvis's misreading of Guy□his belief that Guy is a Scotsman, based solely on the fact that when he first sees

him Guy is holding a beer in one hand and a whiskey in the other□generates a good deal of humor throughout the play. Jarvis's longest appearance is in Act II, when he tells Guy a story about his philanthropic, religious grandfather, the first owner of the land, who built a cricket pitch for his workers on the land but destroyed it after he saw them playing cricket on a Sunday.

Rebecca Huntley-Pike

Rebecca is the wife of the jovial Jarvis. Younger than her husband, she shares his predilection for alcohol. Her major appearances are in the rehearsal sequence in Act I and the conversation she has with Guy in her garden in Act II. In all probability, Rebecca is the source of the rumors about BLM expanding. Just as Fay procures Guy a better part in the play, Rebecca procures him the part of Macheath. Just as Fay expects Guy to do her a favor in return, so too does Rebecca. She and her husband are nonetheless disappointed in their schemes.

Guy Jones

Guy Jones is the protagonist of *A Chorus of Disapproval,* yet he is a curiously faceless character. His chief characteristic is his passivity; in fact it is his passive acceptance of other peoples' plans for him that propels him to center stage. Guy has recently been widowed. He decides a change is in order and joins the local musical society.

Guy works for the multi-national firm BLM in "a rather small local branch in a rather obscure department called Alternative Forward Costing." Although he is clearly not a mover or a shaker, Guy's insider position within BLM makes him the focus of interest for greedy cast members.

Initially allocated a one-line part as Crook-Fingered Jack in John Gay's eighteenth-century musical *The Beggar's Opera,* Guy soon advances through the ranks, aided by recalcitrant actors and scheming actresses, until he wins the lead role of Macheath. He has a somewhat superficial affair with one of the cast members, Fay, and also embarks upon a more serious affair with his co-star, Hannah, who plays Polly. This relationship has dramatic consequences for Guy, Hannah, and her husband, Llewellyn; as the curtain falls, Guy has not only lost his job at BLM, he has also managed to alienate all of the cast members.

Dafydd ap Llewellyn

The energetic Dafydd is on-stage almost as often as Guy Jones, and although Guy is the focus of the play, Dafydd's role is in many ways far more interesting. Dafydd is a lawyer whose real passion is the theater. He longs to work with better actors than those that the local musical society PALOS provides, but he makes up for their lack of talent with his own enthusiasm.

Dafydd's passion for the theater—and his pride in all things Welsh—contrasts with his passionless marriage. Although he loves his wife Hannah, he neglects her, and their relationship is not satisfying physically. The revelation that Hannah and Guy have been having an affair is devastating to him; nonetheless, at the curtain call, he graciously thanks Guy for playing Macheath at such short notice.

Hannah is married to Dafydd. A generous and loving woman and the mother of twin girls, she feels neglected and occasionally patronized by her husband. Everything in the Llewellyn household is Welsh, Hannah tells Guy in Act I, "except me."

Hannah even goes so far as to wonder if she would be missed if she died. It is these feelings of neglect that propel her into an affair with Guy, whose politeness and attentiveness are a pleasant change for her.

Hannah plays Polly Peachum in the PALOS production of *The Beggar's Opera,* and her role, as well as her marital problems, make her something of a tragi-comic figure.

At the end of the play, Hannah gambles all on Guy's love, offering to leave her marriage and her children for him, but he rejects her. It is unclear how her relationship with Dafydd will develop, but it is clear that Guy's presence in her life has changed her irrevocably.

Crispin Usher

Crispin is a tough, hostile young man who originally lands the part of Macheath in the PALOS production. Like Macheath, Crispin "runs" two women at the same time: Bridget and Linda. His big scene occurs in Act II, when he comes to blows with Dafydd, then cheerfully throws the towel in, thus leaving the company without its lead actor.

Enid Washbrook

Enid is a timid, unobtrusive, older woman, Linda's beleaguered mother.

Linda Washbrook

Linda is the daughter of Ted and Enid and has only a smidgen more character than her washed-out parents. She plays Lucy in *The Beggar's Opera* and acts out the part in real life by competing with Bridget for Crispin's affection. Unlike Bridget, who manages to match Crispin in the toughness stakes, Linda is not really up to the part nor to battles with her rival. In Act II she is flummoxed by Bridget's provocative behavior and collapses in tears.

Themes

Change and Transformation

Ayckbourn explores the theme of change and transformation in *A Chorus of Disapproval* through the characters of Guy Jones and Hannah Lleweylln. In the very first scene of the play, Guy, as Macheath, sings about the possibility of change: "The wretch of to-day, may be happy to-morrow." After he finishes singing, the lighting alters and the action changes to backstage. The transformation is twofold: from play-within-play to real play and from the cast's celebration to their rejection of Guy. The change in their attitude toward him□which is in fact the major theme of the play□is underlined by his costume change.

Guy's involvement in the production fundamentally transforms him. He begins the play a shy, tentative man, who seems to pale before the drive, energy, and eccentricity of his director. Ayckbourn emphasizes the contrast between the two men in the audition scene: Guy's off-key, uncertain rendition of "All Through the Night" is lost beneath Dafydd's full-throated Welsh tenor. Nonetheless, as he grows in confidence and is applauded for his skill, the experience of acting transforms Guy.

It is not simply Guy's involvement in theater that transforms him: his romantic entanglements are equally important. Although Guy is shy and tentative, he possesses a sensitive character that women find intrinsically appealing, and it is this quality that enables him to connect wi th Hannah. Guy's combination of good looks, weak personality, and naivete also make him appealing to the predatory Fay, while other women, such as Enid and Rebecca, find him "masculine" and "manly." Women find him attractive, although the reasons they nominate seem to have more to do with what they need and perceive than with the person Guy actually is. Even when he "plays" a romantic lead, he wears a mask that reflects others' imagination of his personality.

Hannah is meant to play the *Opera's* romantic lead, Polly Peachum. Ayckbourn delays the introduction of Hannah partly to increase dramatic suspense and partly to surprise the audience, for Hannah seems the antithesis of Polly. Rather than being a pretty, saucy young woman, Hannah is older, wears no make-up, and is confused and flurried. But after her brief encounter with Guy, she exits on a flirtatious note, and the tone has been struck for their subsequent interaction.

Hannah's involvement with Guy transforms her. Their roles in the production enable the lovers to participate in a romance that would otherwise be barred from them, but they learn that the theater cannot offer a permanent shelter from life's problems. In fact, her affair with Guy forces Hannah to acknowledge existing problems in her life and to act upon them. In her first conversation with Guy she confesses to feeling unappreciated, a grievance that she had never previously expressed. When the curtain falls on the affair, the fantasy is over. Although Hannah offers to leave Dayfdd and her children for Guy, it

is unclear whether she would actually do so. All that is clear is that she sees her marriage□and herself□in a new light. She has been irrevocably transformed.

Justice and Injustice

The opening scene of A *Chorus of Disapproval* makes clear that Guy has antagonized the cast. The play thus resembles a sort of staged detective hunt: the audience, knowing the ending, endeavors to determine how Guy misbehaved and why he is punished. By the end of the second act, those questions have been answered: Guy has strung along two women simultaneously, disappointing both of them in different ways, and he has mislead (deliberately or not) other people about their financial schemes. To an extent, the audience can only agree with Dafydd when he says, "And my one prayer is that one of these days, you'll get what's coming to you."

Yet the unexpected occurs: as the curtain finally falls, the actors embrace "their hero of the night, Guy himself." The transformation mirrors the final reprieve given to Macheath in the Opera. But this change is more than clever mimicry; Ayckbourn appears to suspend his judgment and to ask the audience to decide for themselves whether Guy should really "get what's coming" to him. Are not other characters equally culpable? Dafydd himself was muddled up in the land scam: what right does he have to cast the first stone? What of Hannah herself? Did Guy really disappoint her, or did she, as a wife and a mother, act irresponsibly? Upon whom should the sword of justice fall? Ayckbourn is not so much undecided about these questions as he is determined to encourage his audience to think these questions through thoroughly.

The exploration of the themes of justice and injustice is not limited to Guy's bedroom antics. The parallels between the BLM land scam and the corrupt activities of the characters in *The Beggar's Opera* are too close to be coincidental. In fact, Ayckbourn makes such close parallels in order to critique contemporary middle-class aspirations. The play was written during the first years of the 1980s boom in Britain, a period in which the term "yuppie" was first coined, and Ayckbourn's depiction of social ambition and greed amongst the provincial middle classes is evidence of his sharp observation and his prescient vision. Ayckbourn does not condemn but rather draws attention to these failings in human nature, leaving his audience to decide for themselves how best to address their presence in contemporary society.

Style

The Balance of Comedy and Tragedy

In *The Beggar's Opera,* John Gay shows ordinary people aping the behavior of their betters. Gay's attitude is one of cynical condemnation, but Ayckbourn, writing more than two hundred years later, extends and refines his insight for a new age. It is Ayckbourn's remarkable insight that while ordinary people can fall prey to the same failings as their betters, those same lives are also filled with moments of extraordinary pathos and humor. Breadth and depth of emotion are not confined to the traditional figures of "great theater," such as kings and princes, but are rather characteristic of the human condition. Although neither Guy, Fay, nor Dafydd are "great," Ayckbourn depicts their comic and at times sad struggles with the universal experience of romantic love sympathetically. Although the audience might condemn Hannah's adultery, Guy's duplicity, and Dafydd's insensitivity toward his wife, they are also able to identify strains within their characters that are unquestionably admirable: Hannah's tenderness, Guy's sensitivity, Dafydd's passion.

Ayckbourn is held in high esteem for his ability to balance tragic subject matter with comic events. The playwright's subject matter is invariably middle-class life and marriage, explored within a traditional comic framework that relies upon the conventions of mistaken identities, misunderstandings, and precisely timed exits and entrances. However, Ayckbourn generally refuses to adhere to comic convention when ending his plays. Although the characters' amusing misconceptions are usually resolved, Ayckbourn does not offer the audience the usual happy ending that follows such clarification.

In a pattern that Ayckbourn established in his first great success, *Relatively Speaking,* and that is also evident in *A Chorus of Disapproval* the ending of the play is ambiguous and open to interpretation. In this way he refuses to emphasize either the play's comic elements or its tragic undertones but rather tries to hold the two strands in balance.

A perfect example of Ayckbourn's ability to hold these apparently opposing elements in equilibrium is the song that opens Act II, a celebration of women sung by Crispin, as Macheath. As the song finishes, a crossfade introduces the next scene, located in a cafe. Hannah and Guy are talking over coffee and cake. It is immediately apparent that Hannah wants more from the affair than Guy is prepared to give her and that she is deeply distressed by his affair with Fay. Nonetheless, the audience's insight into Hannah's fractured emotional state is accompanied by wonderful moments of slapstick comedy, mostly focused on Dafydd's "paisley patterned " underpants that Guy mistakenly put on at Hannah's, then left at Fay's that morning. When Fay threatens Guy, emotions run full circle and the scene ends on a more serious tone. Such deft juggling of pathos and humor is typically acknowledged by critics as one of Ayckbourn's greatest talents.

The Play-within-the-Play

The device of the play-within-the-play is an ancient one, much favored by Renaissance playwrights. In William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1601), Hamlet hires a band of traveling players to perform a play about fratricide called "The Mouse-trap" in order to decide whether or not Claudius murdered Hamlet's father. Claudius's guilty reaction to the players' masque resolves Hamlet's doubts. Ben Jonson, a contemporary of Shakespeare, was also fond of the device. He used it in his comedy, *Bartholemew Fair* (1614), to satirize the audience's stupidity, to respond to Puritan attacks on the theater, and to celebrate the splendor and worth of the stage.

With the rise of realism and naturalism as the dominant acting and writing styles in the nineteenth century, the device fell out of use. But late twentieth-century playwrights are keen to explore the artificiality of the stage and to encourage their audience's awareness of the process of perception. They have returned the device to center-stage. In Britain, Tom Stoppard and Alan Ayckbourn have made it the centerpiece of their writing. Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1967), which echoes Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1955) and is structured around Shakespeare's *Hamlet,* hinges upon the idea of the play-within-the-play. Other Stoppard plays also rest upon the device, most notably *The Real Thing* (1982), as does his cinematic hit, *Shakespeare in Love* (1998). Likewise, Ayckbourn's first success, *Relatively Speaking* (1967), deliberately echoes the structure and themes of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895).

The play-within-the-play conceit enables Ayck-bourn to deepen and enrich his themes. The bare bones of the plot□Guy Jones's decision to audition for PALOS, his increasing artistic success, his romantic entanglements, his naive involvement in the BLM scheme□might be interesting in themselves. However, Ayckbourn makes these events considerably funnier and sadder by juxtaposing extracts from Gay's opera□thus by creating parallels between art and experience. Guy runs two women simultaneously, just as Macheath juggles both Polly and Lucy; the people surrounding Guy masquerade as decent and pleasant but are actually as greedy and rapacious as the thieves and con men they portray in Gay's work. Parallels between the stage and real life mean that events and characters assume a wider meaning.

Nonetheless, Ayckbourn limits the extent to which parallels between art and experience can be seen. The light-heartedness of the opera, in which a last-minute reprieve saves Macheath from the hangman's noose, contrasts to the growing seriousness of the real life company, in which Guy's antics cannot be neatly and quickly erased but are rather the cause of enduring unhappiness. Life does not always mimic art, for in life there is no god-like author to tie up loose ends and to erase blots on the copy book. What remains is the human capacity to endure, just as art also endures.

Historical Context

The Consumer 1980s and Ayckbourn as Social Critic

Britain never really recovered economically from the Second World War. Although the 1950s and 1960s were marked by full employment, wages remained low and billions of pounds were squandered in a futile effort to retain hold of rebellious British colonies like Malaysia and Burma. The economic situation splintered further in the 1970s. Crunched by a global recession and the OPEC oil crisis, inflation soared and the British economy staggered to a halt. Unemployment rose dramatically. The situation seemed to reach a crisis point during the so-called "Winter of Discontent" in 1978-79. Major unions launched wage claims and went on strike; the Labor government's thin majority disappeared; and the party lost a vote of confidence in the House of Commons.

When Margaret Thatcher took the office of prime minister in 1979, she vowed to subdue the unions□which she accused of crippling industrial growth□to minimize taxation, and to woo business interests back to Britain. After a tough first few years in office, Thatcher's reign looked shaky but was secured by victory in the Falklands War (1982).

The 1980s began with a bang and ended with a whimper: the economy boomed then went spectacularly bust. While many people profited from urban expansion□which affected small businesses and the real estate market□some went under. The increasing divide between rich and poor was viewed with concern by many in Britain's artistic community, and they were joined by others who were worried about the growing domination of corporate culture at the expense of community values.).

Ayckbourn's A Chorus of Disapproval, which is set in the fictional Welsh town of Pendon, is ostensibly removed from such concerns. But Ayckbourn's decision to concentrate upon smalltown life in fact enables him to create subtle social criticism. By depicting corruption, greed, and "insider dealing" within a small community, Ayckbourn demonstrates that 1980s corporate culture has eaten into even the smallest and most isolated of communities.

The inclusion of material from The Beggar's Opera points to an unfortunate truth: greed and corruption have long been part of British culture. But the BLM land scam represents a version of these age-old traits that is particular to the 1980s. Each schemer has a different ploy: Dafydd wants to avoid paying too much for land, Ian and Fay want to buy the land at a low price and sell it at a higher price, while Jarvis and Rebecca, the owners of the land, deliberately create false information in order to sell the land in a climate of false expectations. Nonetheless, the only true profiteer in this scheme is the corporation, BLM, which decides to down-size operations, lay off employees, and thus increase its profitability.).

The Changing Position of Women

Although most people tend to think about contemporary feminism as originating simultaneous tocounter-culture movements in the late-1960s, the movement for women's rights actually dates from the late-eighteenth century. Enlightenment philosophers and pamphleteers criticized the limited application of the doctrine of human rights, as developed in the American and French Revolutions, arguing that it should not be limited to men but should also include women.

During the nineteenth century in America, women's rights advocates fought side by side with advocates of abolitionism and of temperance for societal reform. By the early-twentieth century, the suffragette movement, which fought for women's right to vote and to own property in their own name, had won victories in Australia and New Zealand, and was soon to win victories in America and Britain. Although feminists remained active after they won the right to vote, it was not until the 1960s that the movement returned to world-wide prominence. .

Change does not happen overnight, however, and society today is still struggling to absorb the ramifications of this "revolution in female consciousness." Fay and Hannah represent different positions in this period of adjustment. Neither are interested in the women's rights movements, but both women have been affected by the social changes it wrought. .

Fay is a product of the sexual liberation and experimentation of the 1960s and 1970s. Confident and attractive, she casually plans to swap sexual partners and uses her sexuality as leverage in the BLM land scam. Fay is no feminist: she neither seeks equality nor urges reform. Rather, she is an individualist who makes use of her sexuality for her own profit.

Both women are married, but Hannah's marriage is light years away from Fay's. Unlike Fay, Hannah has held to the traditional ideal of marriage. She is a mother, a housewife, and a wife. But Hannah is not happy, and her affair with Guy is the catalyst that enables her to break free from a stagnant situation. For the first time she can articulate all that is wrong with her marriage□as well as all that she values in Dafydd□and to imagine the possibility of life outside the home. Should she remain with her children and husband, and if so, at what cost? Will she leave her husband, as Nora does in Henrik Ibsen's A *Doll's House* (1879)? Or will she remain to work through her problems with Dafydd? .

The audience does not need to know whether or not Hannah leaves Dafydd, for what is most important is that she has undergone a radical change in perception. Like many women in the 1970s and 1980s, Hannah's first step towards an improved place in society is a reevaluation of her commitment to domesticity.

Critical Overview

Ayckbourn writes out the English comedic tradition made famous by such luminaries as Oscar Wilde and Noel Coward *(Hay Fever)*. However, in the late-1960s, when Ayckbourn's career took off, the comedy of manners was no longer fashionable. Critics preferred more abstract writing of the style initiated in the Postwar period by the Irish playwright Samuel Beckett *(Waiting for Godot)* and, two decades later, his British imitators Harold Pinter *(The Homecoming)* and Tom Stoppard. Ayckbourn has always been popular with audiences, and critics have also come to value his work. His knighthood in 1987 confirmed his status as one of Britain's most influential and successful playwrights.

Critical reception of A *Chorus of Disapproval's* debut was largely positive, and it has since become known as one of Ayckbourn's best plays. In his review in the *Guardian,* Michael Billington praised the play as "a magnificent comedy," and drew attention to the intricately plotted structure of the play. But his praise for Ayckbourn was not limited to the writer's technical prowess. Billington also argued that part of the reason that the play was "heart-breakingly funny" was because Ayckbourn's characterizations were so "psychologically acute."

Irving Wardle, writing in the London *Times,* emphasized precisely this same quality in Ayckbourn's writing. His review highlighted the darker elements of the play, particularly the passive nature of Guy Jones. Wardle claimed that Ayckbourn's characterization of Guy owed a considerable debt to Russian playwright Anton Chekhov. Like the title character in Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* (1900), Guy is "a totally passive figure who throws a surrounding and highly assertive society into turmoil. Everyone defines Guy according to their own fantasy: as a lover, a crafty businessman, a Scot, or anything else that springs to mind." In Wardle's estimation, the play owes as much to the Russian comedic tradition as it does to the British comedic tradition.

Wardle argued the case for Chekhov, but Billington, in a 1990 essay, thought more of the influence of another Russian dramatist, Nikolai Gogol. The play, Billington argued, had an "unacknowledged source: Gogol's 1836 Russian comedy, *The Government Inspector*. In that, a humble St. Petersburg clerk arrives in a small provincial town, is mistaken for the Inspector General and is enthusiastically feted to prevent him exposing the bribery and corruption that is rampant in local government." Billington added, "Guy Jones ... is very much like Gogol's Khlestakov." Given Ayckbourn's interest and familiarity with the Russian comic tradition□he adapted *The Forest* (1870), by Russian playwright Alexander Ostrovsky, for the National Theater□either of these claims may well hold true.

Billington also discussed an element that has fascinated other critics: Ayckbourn's use of the play-within-a-play. The device allows Ayckbourn to explore the lives of provincial townspeople and to emphasize the importance of art in everyday life. Ayckbourn uses the device to demonstrate "how art consumes, shapes, and organizes life."

Billington argued that as well as foregrounding the importance of art, the device of the play-within-a-play allowed Ayckbourn to comment upon contemporary society. "Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* famously demonstrated eighteenth-century low-life aping political corruption; Ayckbourn today shows bourgeois pillars of the community jovially pretending to be highwaymen and behaving with much the same shark-like rapacity when it comes to land deals." Richard Hornby, writing in the *Hudson Review,* agreed. Ayckbourn, he wrote, targets "sexual prudery, venality, and hypocrisy." The critic pointed out that even the amusing sub-plot about the BLM land deal had a direct parallel in Gay's Opera: "Gay'ssong 'I'mBubbled,' refers to the South Sea Bubble, the great land scheme of the time, which is reflected in the shady scheme in the outer play." Indeed, most critics found that Ayckbourn's social commentary was a light-hearted but nonetheless constant undercurrent in the play.

Critical opinion about A *Chorus of Disapproval* has been remarkably consistent: all have praised Ayckbourn's rare ability to "weave so much sadness, pathos and bitterness into a play that is still a comedy." Almost all critics commented upon Ayckbourn's technical prowess: although he is an entirely different writer from Tom Stoppard, the two are often compared for their ability to create plays whose intricate structure and complex plots reveal considerable dramatic acumen. Now that the tide has turned and critics are finally taking Ayckbourn's talents with more than a pinch of salt, they seem united in the belief that Ayckbourn's contribution to British theater has been considerable and that A *Chorus of Disapproval* is rich proof of his achievements.

Criticism

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

Critical Essay #1

Ifeka is a Ph.D. specializing in American and British literature. In this essay she argues that A Chorus of Disapproval *marries social criticism with comedy through the close parallels between it and* The Beggar's Opera.

Alan Ayckbourn has always enjoyed popularity among audiences, but for too long his critical reputation suffered under the lingering suggestion that a writer of light farce had little, if anything, to say about contemporary society. This view has been modified in recent years, although it is still rare to find criticism of Ayckbourn that takes him seriously as a social critic. Even a play like A *Chorus of Disapproval,* in which the close parallels Ayckbourn draws between his play and John Gay's The Beggar's Opera are a clear comment on contemporary society, is usually discussed in terms of the play's artistic merits rather than its socially critical elements. Yet it is precisely through the "artistic" elements of the play that Ayckbourn develops his subtle criticism of (prime minister) Margaret Thatcher-era Britain. The key to understanding his integration of social criticism and comedy is the close parallel Ayckbourn creates between both plays and thus between Britain in the early-eighteenth century and the late-twentieth.

Eighteenth-century Britain was a place of tremendous change and turmoil. Following the first great national revolution in Europe, the English Civil War (1640-1646), the Protector Cromwell closed the theaters and for fourteen years the stages were silent. The Restoration era of Charles II (1660) brought many changes to British politics and also transformed the stage: Charles reopened the theaters, supported them with royal patronage, and allowed women to appear on stage. By the early decades of the eighteenth century, the theater was the most popular form of public entertainment. In a culture that lacked television or cinema and in which literacy was the exception, not the norm, the theater offered everyone, rich and poor, spectacular visual effects and gripping stories.

Meanwhile, the explosion in print culture drew more and more would-be writers to London, who churned out sensational biographies of criminals and libertines, as well as penny-poetry, popular ballads, reviews, and essays. "Grub Street" supported an entire culture of print-shops, taverns, and coffee-houses, and playwrights preened in its praise or withered in its contempt.

The time was ripe for a writer who could soak up the juices of popular culture and entertain his audience with a new combination of satire, pathos, and humor; John Gay proved to be just such a man. The Beggar's Opera was first staged at Lincoln's Inn Fields in 1728, and, as John Brewer noted in *The Pleasures of the Imagination,* the play quickly "became the talking point of the chattering classes.... At a time when most productions endured for less than a dozen performances, it lasted for an unprecedented sixty-two nights in its first season."

Gay's ballad opera was a sensation. His backers and patrons had doubted whether the unusual mixture of popular ballads and operatic arias, a love story with tales from the

criminal underworld, political satire, and pomp, would appeal to audiences, but they were proved wrong. The play was not only an overnight sensation, it became the most often performed play of the century. It was revived year after year until the late-1780s, and□just as contemporary Hollywood movie-makers extend their profits by selling toy and board game "tie-ins" to their mass market films□so could an audience member buy house screens, fans, and playing cards decorated with music and pictures from Gay's opera. There were no "top ten" charts then, but the songs from the opera were widely popular and allusions to the characters and language became commonplace.

The play appealed to audiences for a number of reasons, but a primary attraction was its sly commentary on contemporary society: the corruption of government officials and parliamentarians, the aristocratic pretensions of low-life criminals, and the self-serving social-climbing of lower-middle class "shopkeepers." Audiences appreciated this sly social and political satire. *The Beggar's Opera* remained popular because the text lent itself "to topical political allusion, which the performers often provided in improvisations or elaborations on the play's text."

Ayckbourn's decision to center *Chorus's* depiction of the inner workings of a small town dramatic society around Gay's ballad opera is thus not insignificant. The choice of the play-within-a-play immediately begs the audience to consider carefully the parallels between themes, plot, and characters, and as well as those between earlyeighteenth century and late-twentieth century British society.

These parallels are not always immediately apparent. In Gay's opera, Captain Macheath is a highwayman, a charismatic figure noted for his gallantry, sexual allure, and wit. Guy Jones, whose very name speaks his "everyman" drabness, may well be "manly" and "masculine," but it would a long shot to call him witty, wild, or dashing. Whereas Gay's eighteenth-century hero wins favor with the audience for his daring acts, Ayckbourn's late twentieth-century anti-hero is most noticeable for his passivity. Yet American director Mel Shapiro has argued that Guy's character is open to interpretation; rather than seeing him as naive and innocent, Shapiro's lead actor believed Guy was potentially conniving, knowing, and opportunistic and played the role accordingly. To act the part of a man acting a part is a tricky feat, but such an interpretation of Guy is not uncommon, particularly since Guy clearly "grows into" Macheath's character during the course of the play. Such an interpretation certainly makes for a juicer role and a more complex play.

The plots of each play also seem antithetical. *The Beggar's Opera* portrays the high times and misdemeanors of a highwayman□his involvement with Polly Peachum, Lucy Lockit, and Jenny Diver, and his betrayal by the mean-hearted Peachum and by one of his one gang, Jemmy Twitcher. *A Chorus of Disapproval* seems light years away from such material: here is no London low life but rather the respectable members of a small town community whose lives, if anything, seem stultifyingly dull.

It is precisely this superficial contrast that Ayckbourn exploits so craftily in his plotting of the play. *The Beggar's Opera* is staged by a "Beggar" in the shadow of the gallows. The audience expects that Macheath will be hanged at the end of the play. The opening

scene of *A Chorus of Disapproval* makes clear to the audience that Guy is being shunned by his fellow cast members: the entire play takes place in the shadow of this rejection. This kind of parallel between the stage and gallows was a familiar analogy in Gay's day□public executions were a popular form of public entertainment, and the throngs who gathered to gawk at the condemned man were able to buy hot cider and watch bear-baitings while they waited.

The ending of Ayckbourn's play is further evidence of the structural similarity between it and *The Beggar's Opera*. In *The Beggar's Opera,* the last scene finds Macheath imprisoned, mourned over by his paramours, and about to be executed. But□against all expectation□he is granted a last-minute reprieve by the Beggar, who, as John Brewer neatly explains, "justifies this unexpected twist of the plot by maintaining that 'an opera must end happily' and 'in this kind of drama 'tis no matter how absurdly things are brought about'." Likewise, in the last scene of *A Chorus of Disapproval,* the audience expects that after the curtain falls they will witness Guy Jones being served his just deserts. On the contrary, the production is a smash, and after the performance ends "happily and triumphantly," the actors "embrace each other, most especially their hero of the night, Guy himself."

The structural similarity of the plays emphasizes Ayckbourn's close adherence to Gay's themes. Key amongst these are the social climbing and scheming of the bored middle class and the sexual promiscuity that hides behind the facade of respectable appearances. The chief targets of Ayckbourn's criticism are the BLM land schemers□Dafydd, Fay and Ian, and Jarvis and Rebecca. Each "interest group" attempts to extract information illegally from Guy, offering him a "pay-off' as a reward for his cooperation. Dafydd is a lawyer, and when at one moment he offers Guy an "arrangement" for his "help," then adds that Guy should not share the information because "I'd be betraying my own client... [it] wouldn't be ethical," the audience is at once amused and repulsed by such hypocrisy. The most artful plotter of all, Rebecca, who has spread rumors about BLM in order to inflate the land's price, bribes Guy and encourages him not to "deny the rumor."

The punch-line to their wheeling and dealing is that BLM is in fact about to down-size, not expand, and that the whole community will feel the impact of the cuts, including, of course, Guy himself. Ayckbourn parallels Dafydd's petty corruption with Peachum's but advances Gay's original satire one step further by suggesting that in the late-twentieth century, the only fish to grow fatter from such greedy skullduggery are the big multinational corporations.

Although the chief targets of Ayckbourn's satire are the original PALOS members, it is Guy's rise through the ranks that exemplifies the cast members' self-serving approach to life. Each step up the ladder of success until he wins the dubious honor of playing Macheath is the result of a helping hand□or, more accurately, a greased palm. Innocent to the fact that Guy's sticky fingers will soon be robbing him of his own wife, Dafydd first casts Guy as Crook-Fingered Jack. The female cast members support Guy's elevation to Matt of the Mint before Fay, hoping for information about BLM, secures him the role of Filch and offers him sexual favors. Finally, Rebecca seeks to secure Guy's silent

acquiescence to her rumor-mongering by winning him the role of Macheath and sweetening the deal with five hundred pounds. Guy's "casting couch" climb to success parallels Macheath's equally immoral rise to fame, fortune, and popularity. Both men's bubbles are pricked by the intervention of "justice" in the form of an avenging man (Polly's father, Peachum in *Beggar's,* and Ian and Dafydd in *Chorus).*

Too often, Ayckbourn's critics allow their interest in his comedic talents to obscure his satiric skills. Ayckbourn's social criticism is never blunt or heavy-handed, but the very faculty for which he is so often praised□his ability to unite humor and pathos□succeeds in part because of his subtle criticism of contemporary society. It is the emotional damage that results from Guy's philandering and bribe-taking, and the ethical corruption of the PALOS members' property speculation, that packs *Chorus's* punch. Moreover, the careful accrual of parallels between Gay and Ayckbourn's play□and their societies□broadens his social criticism from one small town to British society in general. Flexible ethics, hollow respectability, sexual promiscuity□ these are the targets that Gay scored through with his quill and at which Ayckbourn, two hundred and fifty years later, also aimed his pen.

Source: Helena Ifeka, for *Drama for Students,* Gale, 2000.

Critical Essay #2

Kauffman reviews the film adaptation of Ayckbourn's play, finding that the movie version does not match the charms of the original stage play.

Alan Ayckbourn is a phenomenon. He is by far the most prolific British playwright of his time; after beginning as an actor and director (he still directs), he began writing plays in 1959 and has had 37 produced. Most of these plays by report (who could have seen them all?) are comedies on dark subjects about the English middle classes. Vis-à-vis film, Ayckbourn's career has two odd aspects. First, for all his success, no play of his has been filmed until now. Second, the play that he chose to launch his film career is, in my limited Ayckbourn experience, one of his weakest.

A *Chorus of Disapproval* (Southgate) is set in Scarborough, that pretty coastal town in northeast England where Ayckbourn lives and runs a theater. A young widower (Jeremy Irons) is transferred to the town by the giant company that employs him. As soon as he settles in, he reads an ad calling for performers in an amateur production of Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*. He auditions; is accepted for a one-line role; then, by a series of accidents, moves to a larger role and eventually to the lead, MacHeath. He also gets involved with two married women in the cast. And he also gets involved, though quite honestly, in a scheme to profit by a land purchase his company is supposed to make.

Amateur theatricals can be, have been, serviceable in plots as catalyst and counterpoint. But Ayckbourn, who did the screen adaptation with the director, Michael Winner, makes only routine use of the amateur show itself and no use at all of Gay's work as counterpoint. Irons gets into jams with the two women, then gets out of them: nothing is arrived at one way or another. As for the land deal, it's just plot filler, with a hint of a threat that never materializes and a finish that's quite incredible.

Incredible, too, are scenes in which the director excoriates actors in terms they have no need to endure; in which the two wives fight over Irons in a restaurant; in which wife-swapping takes place with a blatancy that makes *Oh! Calcutta!* look prim.

About the only interest in Irons's performance is in the touch of Midlands accent he gives it (his character was born in Leeds). But Prunella Scales, familiar as John Cleese's wife in the *Fawlty Towers* TV series, plays one of the smitten wives in a worn yet winning way. Anthony Hopkins plays her husband, Dafydd ap Llewellyn, the director of the show, with lilting Welsh accent and bullock energy. He rams right into the part, stocky and square, squinting in his left eye, evidently portraying a man he has met somewhere along the way. The script calls for him to do things we can't believe, but he's so good that we feel it's Dafydd who is trapped in the plot, not Hopkins.

Winner, a director who started as a mediocrity 25 years ago and has since declined, is not much help. In any effective sense, the screen debut of Ayckbourn the Prolific is yet to come.

Source: Stanley Kauffman, "Truth and Inconsequences" in the *New Republic,* Vol. 201, no. 11, September 11, 1989, pp. 26-27.

Critical Essay #3

Hornby offers a favorable review of Ayckbourn 's play.

A good play that recently transferred to the West End from the National is Alan Ayckbourn's *Chorus of Disapproval*. Ayckbourn has received little serious critical attention, probably because he is so often compared to our Neil Simon. Like Simon, he writes comedies of contemporary life, and like Simon, he makes a lot of money at it, but otherwise the two are very dissimilar. Simon creates mostly eccentric characters, who are sometimes hilarious and sometimes all too predictable; Ayckbourn creates drab, ordinary characters who turn out to be oddly interesting and always funny. Simon's main source of humor is in verbal gags; Ayckbourn almost never uses them, relying instead on character and situation. Finally, Simon has little sense of dramatic structure (his main weakness), while Ayckbourn is obsessed with it; play after play involves some technical novelty, as in *The Norman Conquests,* a trilogy in which the same play is simply repeated three times in different parts of the same house; each play can be viewed independently, and differs in tone and viewpoint from the others, yet has the same six characters and follows the same events.

In *Chorus of Disapproval,*the key technical device is a play within the play; a provincial amateur drama group is performing John Gay's eighteenth-century satire, *The Beggar's Opera* (also the source for Brecht's *Threepenny Opera).* The characters, as usual with Ayckbourn, are ordinary middle-class folk, who turn out to be involved in shady business deals, personal intrigue, and sexual aggression. A naive new member joins the troupe, who immediately project their fantasies on him; although he is just a decent, unassuming fellow with no talent, holding an unimportant job in a large corporation, they see him as a great lover, shrewd businessman, and lead performer. Seduced by two women, drawn into both sides of a dubious land scheme, he simultaneously moves up in the cast as it undergoes the attrition that is typical of amateur groups, until he is playing the lead□by which time he has lost his job, his fellow performers have developed total contempt for him, and the women have dropped him.

Ayckbourn plays off the inner versus the outer play with grace and humor; Gay's play is a send-up of the same middle class attitudes and values, particularly sexual prudery, venality, and hypocrisy, as are held by the characters playing them. Gay's song "I'm Bubbled," refers to the South Sea Bubble, the great land scheme of the time, which is reflected in the shady scheme in the outer play; Macheath's having two wives reflects his offstage problem of having two mistresses. Yet ironically there is no happy ending in the main, outer play as there is in *The Beggar's Opera*. Although his plays are very funny, Ayckbourn's vision is dark; sex is an ensnarement, while idealism and decency lead merely to loss. As with Chekhov, he combines an underlying sadness with great affection for his characters, yet is unsentimental about them.

In transferring to the West End, *Chorus* took on a largely new cast, all of whom were good, and one of whom, Colin Blakely as the obsessive Welsh director of the provincial

amateur theatre company,was especially fine. Ayckbourn himself directed, as he often does (he owns his own theatre in Scarborough, where he tries out most of his plays), skillfully handling the large cast, the many set changes, and the delightful comic business.

Overall, the British theatre continues to show tremendous strength, as it has for three decades. There are problems, complaints, scandals, and colossal failures, as there always are in the theatre (if anything, these are more prevalent in its greatest periods). In New York, fewer shows open each year, major theatres lie dark for months and even years, while prices rise enormously, yet theatre people seem blandly optimistic; in London, there is an explosion of theatrical activity, and people complain constantly. It is obvious which theatre is more alive!

Source: Richard Hornby, review of A *Chorus of Disapproval in the Hudson Review,* Vol. XXXIX, no. 4, Winter, 1987, pp. 642-43.

Adaptations

A Chorus of Disapproval was produced as a feature film in Britain in 1989, directed by Michael Winner with a screenplay adapted by Ayckbourn and Winner. It stars Jeremy Irons as Guy, Anthony Hopkins as Dafydd, and Prunella Scales as Hannah.

Topics for Further Study

Many critics feel that Dafydd's character is much more interesting for both the audience and the actor than Guy Jones's character. Do you agree?

Given that A *Chorus of Disapproval* features a play-within-a-play, how would you approach directing it? What problems might arise in attempting to present two distinct dramatic works within one presentation?

Do Hannah's declarations of her love for Guy ring true, or are there other conclusions you might draw about her feelings and actions?

Compare and contrast the character of Guy Jones and Macheath (from John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera)*. Both of these characters are accused of being womanizers and deceivers. Are these accurate descriptions of both men? If not, how would you characterize them, particularly their differences and similarities?

Focus upon one theme within the play□for instance, the theme of corruption and swindling, or the theme of adulterous love□and choose an example from another medium that also explores it (for instance, a television soap opera, a newspaper report, a painting). Discuss both examples in detail; then contrast the style in which they explore the theme and the message they present to their audience.

Ayckbourn structures the play around a flashback. What effect does the flashback structure have upon the audience watching the play? How does it effect their perception of the events that unfold and of the characters themselves?

Compare and Contrast

1984: The British economy is just recovering from the depression of the 1970s. This new boom period is led by a group of young urban professionals, whose conspicuous consumption leads to the coining of the pejorative term "yuppie."

Today: The British economy went through a "boom and bust" cycle in the late-1980s and early-1990s but now seems more stable. All over the world people are speculating that the "new world order" has been accompanied by a shakedown in the economic system. In 1999, Europe took its final steps towards becoming an integrated economic system, while the Dow Jones Index (the primary indicator of the U.S. Stock Market) passed the 10,000 mark.

1984 After the success of the Falklands War in 1982, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher won her second general election and returned the Conservative party to power. She narrowly escapes death when an IRA bomb explodes in her hotel at a Conservative Party conference.

Today: After Prime Minister Tony Blair's New Labor party swept to victory in 1997, thus ending fifteen years of Conservative Party rule, Britain has moved closer to union with Europe, has continued the Northern Ireland peace talks, and has become increasingly involved in European peace-keeping.

1984: The situation in Northern Ireland continues to deteriorate. The British government spends billions of pounds annually on maintaining their presence in Northern Ireland. Meanwhile, the Irish Republican Army's (IRA) massive campaign for improved prisoners' rights, known as the "Dirty Protest" and the "Blanket Protest," is followed by a tragic hunger strike that results in the death of eleven IRA prisoners.

Today: Sinn Fein (the political arm of the IRA) leader Gerry Adams negotiates a peace accord with the Irish and British governments. A Republican cease-fire in 1995 was followed by a Loyalist cease-fire that year. The cease-fires have since been broken and then resumed; likewise, the 1997 Easter Peace Agreement promised much but has, as yet, delivered little. Hopes remain high for a peace settlement in Northern Ireland.

1984: Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA) graduate Kenneth Branagh emerges as a major talent at the Royal Shakespeare Company when he plays the title role in *Henry V* and Laertes in *Hamlet.* The production of Henry V is a major new interpretation of the long-ignored play and is critically and commercially successful.

Today: Branagh has become one of Britain's most successful actors. He founded his own theater company, The Renaissance Theatre Company, in 1987, and has also directed and starred in several films, such as *Henry V* (1988), for which he earned

Oscar nominations for best director and best actor. More recently he has appeared in Woody Allen's 1998 farce *Celebrity.*

What Do I Read Next?

A Chorus Line (1975) is a Pulitzer Prize-winning musical about a group of young actors and actresses struggling to make it on Broadway. The play depicts the other side of Broadway the sacrifices and hardships people endure to make it on the stage. It is also blessed with a wonderful score. It was conceived and choreographed by Michael Bennett; lyrics were written by Edward Kleban, and the music was created by Marvin Hamlisch. It played for over fifteen years on Broadway.

Tom Stoppard's *The Real Thing* (1982) is another example of a contemporary British play that uses the device of a play-within-a-play. Like *A Chorus of Disapproval*, it is set squarely in the world of theater, although it is concerned with successful West End theater, not provincial companies. It is also focused on love and marriage. .

Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* (1913) is a classic comedy about a professor, Henry Higgins, who makes a bet that he can pass off a young Cockney flower-seller, Eliza Doolittle, as a society lady by teaching her standard English and manners. While the play is light-hearted, its depiction of Eliza's rise to social acceptance, and her subsequent rebellion against the professor, offers an astute commentary on the British class system. .

The Importance of Being Earnest (1895), by Oscar Wilde, is a classic light farce that is structured on a series of misunderstandings. John Worthing (Jack) and Algernon Moncrieff (Algy) are two men-about-town in pursuit of Gwendolyn Fairfax (Algy's cousin) and Jack's ward, Cecily Cardew. Both men use aliases to conceal their double lives. The play showcases Wilde's exceptional wit. .

Alan Ayckbourn modeled his first successful play, *Relatively Speaking* (1967), on Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest.* The play is a comedy of manners and the structure also hinges on hilarious misunderstandings between the four central characters. .

The Beggar's Opera is a ballad opera by the eighteenth-century librettist John Gay. It was first produced in 1728, and has been popular ever since. It is a musical comedy about a group of low-life Londoners who ape the manners of the bourgeois. Macheath, the protagonist, is a master thief and lover who is betrayed by his father-in-law, Peachum but is saved by a last-minute reprieve. The German playwright Bertolt Brecht, with composer Kurt Weill, created a modern version of the opera in 1928 called *The Threepenny Opera.*.

Further Study

Billington, Michael. *One Night Stands,* Nick Hern Books, 1993. This collection of the *Guardian's* famous theater critic contains a good selection from two decades of criticism. .

Bloom, Harold, editor. *John Gay's The Beggar's Opera,* New York: Chelsea House, 1988. .

An excellent collection of essays on the *Opera.*

Branagh, Kenneth. *Beginning,* London: 1989. .

This entertaining autobiography provides insight into Branagh's meteoric rise to fame and into the world of the London theatre. .

Brook, Peter. *The Empty Space,* London: 1968. .

Brook was one of the most influential theater directors in Britain in the Postwar period. He was long associated with the Royal Shakespeare Company. His directorial style showed the influences of Antonin Artaud and Bertolt Brecht. This collection of his essays offers analysis on the basic problems facing contemporary theater; the work has influenced many British and foreign directors. .

Hume, Robert, editor. *The London Theater World, 1660- 1800,* Southern Illinois Press, 1980. .

This wide-ranging study is well-written and provides plenty of information about British theater during John Gay's lifetime, offering background with which to compare Ayckbourn' s settings and environment in *Chorus.* .

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Billington, Michael. "Art on Sleeve" in the *Guardian,* August 2, 1985, p. 11.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

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

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

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

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

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

Selection Criteria

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

How Each Entry Is Organized

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

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

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

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

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

Other Features

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

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

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

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

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

Citing Drama for Students

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We Welcome Your Suggestions

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

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