

Closer Study Guide

Closer by Patrick Marber

(c)2016 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

Closer Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Scene 1.....	5
Scene 2.....	8
Scenes 3 and 4.....	10
Scene 5.....	12
Scene 6.....	15
Scene 7.....	17
Scene 8.....	19
Scene 9.....	21
Scene 10.....	24
Scene 11.....	27
Scene 12.....	30
Characters.....	33
Symbols and Symbolism.....	38
Settings.....	41
Themes and Motifs.....	42
Styles.....	46
Quotes.....	48



Plot Summary

The action of the play (which is set in London in the mid-to-late 1990's) begins in the waiting room of an urban hospital. Conversation reveals that aspiring writer Dan was the passenger in a cab that accidentally hit and knocked over waif-like Alice. As Alice waits to be checked by a doctor, she and Dan act on an immediate attraction to each other, and Alice convinces Dan to take the rest of the day off work. Sometime later, Dan (who has written a book with a character based on Alice) is getting his photograph taken by Anna. They too share an immediate attraction, which Dan tries to act on but which Anna initially rejects. When Alice arrives to meet Dan, she arranges for Anna to take her photograph. The following scene reveals that Dan and Anna have become involved. Dan, while visiting an internet sex connection site, poses as Anna in a conversation with sexually needy dermatologist Larry, who arranges to meet "Anna" the following day. When Larry and the real Anna meet, they too have an immediate connection, and they too act on that connection.

A few months later, Anna has a showing of her photographs (including the one she took of Alice) at an art gallery. Alice meets Dan there, and asks him to take her to the country with him to meet his family in the aftermath of his father's death: Dan refuses. Dan later encounters Anna, and asks her to go with him to the country: Anna refuses. Meanwhile, Larry meets Alice, and finds her attractive, but then goes to talk to Anna, conversation revealing that since their initial encounter, they've moved in together. The final scene of the first act sees the two couples in their separate living spaces, both breaking up: Dan breaks up with Alice, saying he wants to be with Anna, while Anna breaks up with Larry, saying she wants to be with Dan. Alice leaves, while Anna and Larry fight bitterly over who Anna had better sex with, Larry or Dan.

The second act begins with an encounter between Larry and Alice at the strip club where Alice now works. Their conversation is intensely sexual, with Larry ending up acting on the power that men have at strip clubs: to get the women to do whatever the men want in exchange for money. In the following scene, Dan and Anna meet to discuss whether Anna has actually gotten Larry to sign the divorce papers: at the same time, the scene includes flashbacks to the meeting between Larry and Anna, a couple of hours before in the same place, at which she asked him exactly that. The parallel conversations reveal that Anna had sex with Larry to get him to sign the papers. Dan erupts in anger.

Sometime later, Larry and Alice meet at a museum, conversation reveals that the two of them are together and that Alice is there to meet Anna to get the negatives of the photographs Anna took of her. When Anna arrives, she and Larry have a sharp, bitter encounter, and then Larry goes. Alice then asks Anna to let Dan go, so that he will come back to her (Alice) and that Anna can go back to Larry, who still wants her. The scene ends with no clarity on what Anna is going to do. A short time later, Dan visits Larry's office and begs him to let Anna go so that she can come back to him. Larry tells him to go after Alice, who genuinely loves him and needs him.



A month or so later, Alice and Dan are in a hotel room, about to go on a trip for the four year anniversary of their meeting. Their happiness falls apart when the obsessive Dan insists on knowing the truth of what happened between Alice and Larry. She finally admits that they had sex, and goads Dan into hitting her. The final scene reveals that Alice and Dan broke up that night; that Anna and Larry are also broken up, and that Larry has a new girlfriend; that Alice died in New York; and that she lied about her identity, having taken her name from a list of names on a statue. As they absorb this information, Dan and Anna break up for good.



Scene 1

Summary

January – This scene is set in the waiting room of a hospital. Alice waits alone. While she waits, she looks in a backpack that isn't hers, and smiles at some of its contents, takes out an apple, and eats it. Dan arrives with two cups of hospital coffee. He gives one to Alice, conversation revealing that the backpack is his; that he was on a street corner when a cab hit Alice and knocked her to the ground; that the cabbie seemed more concerned about himself than about Alice; and that Dan has brought her to the hospital. Their comments on the accident lead Alice to call Dan "Buster". Meanwhile, Alice asks who cut the crusts off his sandwiches (which, it seems, is what she was smiling at when she looked in his backpack). Dan comments that his mother used to cut them off for him when he was a child.

Conversation also reveals that Dan writes obituaries and that he doesn't really care for his colleagues (who joke about writing about "who's on the slab"; that he wanted to be a proper writer, but discovered he had no talent; and that his mother is dead (having died in the same hospital where he and Alice are) and his father is in a convalescent home. As Dan and Alice talk, Alice comments on where she was before the accident: in a place called Postman's Park, which has "a memorial to ordinary people who died saving the lives of others". Dan recalls sitting in that park with his father shortly after his (Dan's) mother died. Conversation becomes increasingly intimate, with Alice (at one point) caressing Dan's face.

A few moments later, a doctor in a white coat (Larry) passes. Dan tells him that he (Dan) and Alice have been waiting a long time: the implication is that Larry is a doctor. Larry notices how pretty Alice is and stops to have a look at her. He notices a scar from an old injury, and Alice says she got it in America while traveling: she got hit by a truck. After Larry goes, further conversation between Dan and Alice reveals that Alice was traveling in America with "a male" whom she left because he didn't like the fact that she was a stripper; that she wouldn't have left if she had loved him (conversation suggesting that for Alice, if you still love someone, you don't leave them); and that all she wants from any relationship is to be loved. Alice senses that despite his being shocked that she's a stripper, and despite him having a girlfriend (Ruth), Dan is attracted to her. She convinces him to call in sick to work, in spite of his protests that he might be psychotic. "I've met psychotics," Alice says. "You're not." Dan hands over his mobile phone and allows Alice to call on his behalf, revealing that his name is Daniel Woolf.

Analysis

This scene establishes two of the play's characters (Dan and Alice), one of which (Dan) turns out to be the play's ostensible and/or apparent protagonist. It sets in motion what is arguably the central relationship of the play – that between Dan and Alice, the



responses (both positive and negative) of both characters to the relationship and each other defining much of the action to come. It also introduces several of its key themes, most notably the power of sexual desire but also the theme of appearance vs. reality: as the narrative eventually reveals, neither the crust-less sandwiches in Dan's backpack nor Alice herself turns out to be everything it appears to be. There are also initial references to the thematic idea of collision and momentum: a literal one (in that the relationship between Dan and Alice begins as the result of a literal collision, i.e. between Alice and the cab) and a metaphorical one (in that the desires of Dan and Alice "collide" and begin to develop their own momentum).

All that said, the most significant element of the play as a whole that's introduced in this section has to do with how virtually every line, every comment, every element referred to is referred to or developed one way or another later in the play. In other words, almost everything that is said or spoken about is foreshadowing of an evolution in, or a repetition of, that word, phrase, idea, image, or item. Among the most notable elements here: the reference to the bread crusts (the absence of which eventually proves to be something that triggered Alice's interest in being with Dan – or, at least, she says it does); the references to Postman's Park and the memorial there (both of which are referred to later in the play, most tellingly in the final scene); and the comment about "who's on the slab" (another reference to a key moment in the final scene of the play). There is also the reference to the cabbie (whose further comments in the aftermath of the accident are referred to in the climactic confrontation between Dan and Alice in Scene 11) and Alice's use of the term "Buster" (which appears on a couple of occasions later in the narrative as a referent to the emotional intimacy that seems to have developed between Dan and Alice).

Of particular importance are the references to Alice's scar (which can be seen as metaphorically externalizing something that scarred her internally); the appearance of Larry, who shows up later in the action as a significant character; and Alice's comments about the relationship between love and leaving (comments that foreshadow confrontations and relationship endings that occur later in the play).

Discussion Question 1

In what way is the theme of violence introduced in this section?

Discussion Question 2

What is ironic or significant about Alice's comment that she got her scar after being hit by a truck? What element in the play so far does this comment seem similar to?

Discussion Question 3

What do you think are the metaphoric implications of Daniel's last name?

Vocabulary

obituary, suburbia, inconvenience, repulsive, euphemism, disarming, linguist, psychotic



Scene 2

Summary

June (the following year). Dan has his picture taken in a photography session conducted by Anna. Conversation suggests that the session is for the cover of a book that Dan has written based on the experiences of Alice who, conversation further reveals, has been Dan's partner for about a year. Conversation also reveals that Anna thinks a better title for the book would be "The Aquarium", with Dan's response suggesting that a particular "dirty bit" takes place in an aquarium.

When Dan describes Anna as "beautiful", she says she's not. Dan also describes Alice as "completely loveable and completely unleaveable". Anna reveals that she was up until four in the morning reading Dan's book; and that she makes her career taking portraits of strangers; and that she likes finding subjects for her photographs in aquariums, museums, and other public places. Dan moves in to kiss her: in spite of her comment that she doesn't kiss strangers, she kisses him back. Afterwards, Anna reveals that she's separated from her husband, and that they have no children. She also quotes a line from Dan's book: "she has one address in her address book: ours, under H for home." Dan says he cut the line because it's too sentimental, and then reveals that Alice is coming to pick him up. Anna comments that "men are crap"; Dan comments that Anna has "ruined his life"; she comments that he'll "get over it"; and then Alice arrives.

After brief greetings and after conversation reveals that Alice is now working in a restaurant, Alice has quickly exited to the bathroom, Dan tries to convince Anna to let him see her again. Anna refuses. When Alice returns, she asks Anna to take her photo, since she's never had her picture taken by a professional. At first Anna refuses, but when Alice convinces Dan to leave, Anna agrees. Dan and Anna wish each other luck with their various projects (Anna, it seems, has an exhibition of her work coming up), and then Dan goes.

Anna sets up to take Alice's picture. Conversation reveals that Alice knows what just happened between Dan and Anna. Anna reassures Alice that she (Anna) is not a thief and that she (Alice) is beautiful. As Alice weeps, Anna takes her photograph.

Analysis

Several elements referred to in this section, as is the case with many elements of the play's various conversations, are foreshadowings of important moments later on. The reference to aquariums can be seen as foreshadowing of a later scene (Scene 4) that takes place in an aquarium; the reference to the address book is foreshadowing of a moment in the final scene of the play, in which a reference to Alice's address book both affects the plot and, when considered in conjunction with this moment, is powerfully



poignant; and, perhaps most importantly, Anna's taking Alice's photograph, a picture that plays an important role in several subsequent scenes. Then there are the references to Anna's forthcoming exhibition (a foreshadowing of Scene 5, which is set at that exhibition) and Alice's reference to knowing what happened between Dan and Anna, which foreshadows later, additional references to all the characters knowing about the sexual activities of the other characters. Finally, Alice's reaction to what happened between Anna and Dan foreshadows similar emotional reactions by the other characters to similar pieces of news.

Meanwhile, themes developed in this section include the play's examination of the power of sexual desire (a simmering subtext throughout the first half of the scene) and the nature of love (glanced at in Alice's reaction to what happened between Dan and Anna). There is also an aspect of violence explored in this moment – not physical violence, but emotional violence in the actions of Dan and Anna. Alice's reaction certainly suggests that, on some level, she has been emotionally assaulted, at least to some degree. There is also a reference to the “appearance vs. reality” theme, which referenced, albeit through implication, in Anna's discussion of how she finds her subjects: there is the sense here that she is only interested in, or exploits, the value of how these strangers appear, rather than in any sort of reality connected to who they are. Finally, the theme of collision and momentum manifests in action, as Dan and Anna have a “collision” of desire that gives them “momentum” to move forward into their relationships, developments in which are defined by the action in the following scenes.

Discussion Question 1

What is the significance or implication of Alice's reference to working in a restaurant?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the implications of the various references to beauty in this scene. What do the reactions of the characters being called “beautiful” suggest about their attitudes towards themselves, to beauty, and to the people who call them beautiful?

Discussion Question 3

What do you think the author is saying about Anna by having her take Alice's photograph at a point where the weeping Alice is at her most vulnerable?

Vocabulary

anonymous, obscene, accurate, smug, therapeutic, sentimental, photogenic

Scenes 3 and 4

Summary

Scene 3 - January (the following year). This scene consists of an internet conversation in a chat room: the characters are silent, but their words appear on screens behind them. Dan is in his office: on his desk is a Newton's Cradle. Larry is in his own office.

Dan is in the chatroom waiting as Larry logs on. They greet each other in internet / chatroom shorthand, Dan pretending to be Anna. Their "conversation" indicates that Dan is a veteran of the chatroom but that this is Larry's first time. Their banter turns sexually explicit very quickly, with Dan (as Anna) becoming very aggressive. At one point, Larry's chat is interrupted when he takes a call from the hospital where he works and performs a very quick diagnosis: at another point, his phone rings again, but he doesn't take the call.

Larry reveals his fantasy (of being tied up and sexually used by three women) while Dan (as Anna) "reveals" the kind of rough sex "she" likes to have and asks him to meet "her". Larry at first refuses, but Dan (Anna) convinces him. Larry agrees to meet later. Dan ("Anna") suggests the aquarium the next day, and Larry agrees, also agreeing to wear his white coat. They sign off, and contemplate their screens.

Scene 4 January (the next day). Anna sits at the aquarium looking at the fish. Larry arrives, identifies her as the person he (thinks that he) chatted with the night before, and introduces himself, showing her that he wore his white coat as she "asked". At first she has no idea what he's talking about or doing, and he becomes both angry and embarrassed, demanding to know where Anna was at the time he was on the internet with "her". She says she was at a café with an "acquaintance" named Alice. Eventually, Anna realizes what has been going on, suggesting to Larry that it was Dan who contacted him: Alice, Anna says, is Dan's girlfriend, and told her he likes going on the Internet. She also says that Dan is the author of a book called "The Aquarium"; and that she finds Dan "interesting".

For his part, Larry becomes increasingly frustrated, and very angry about what Dan did, particularly when Anna says that Dan "likes" her. But then he (Larry) senses that Anna is upset, and tries to convince her to tell him what's wrong. Anna chooses to not tell him, and then, as she's confessing that it's her birthday, takes his picture. Larry wishes her a happy birthday.

Analysis

The first point to note about this scene has to do with an important component of its structure – specifically, the fact that significant periods of time pass between scenes, which in turn means that things have (or have not) happened between the characters in that time. On occasion, the play refers specifically to those between-scene events; on



other occasions, references to situation and change are implied, or need to be examined in order to be understood. A key example of this latter point occurs in Scene 4, when Anna refers to Alice as Dan's girlfriend. The point to note here is not so much the state of Alice and Dan's relationship, but the state of Dan and Anna's: at this point in the play, there is no clear sense that Dan and Anna are involved, which suggests that his impersonation of her in the chatroom has some kind of darker motivation than it would if they were together and they were just playing a game of some sort. It certainly says something, or at least implies something, about the kind of man Dan is.

Meanwhile, there are several elements developed in this scene, both in dialogue and in stage directions, that play important roles later in the narrative. The first appears in stage directions before the action even begins: the Newton's Cradle on Dan's desk, which foreshadows the appearance of another Newton's Cradle later in the narrative. Both cradles are significant in both narrative and thematic terms. Then there are the references to the aquarium, which echo references to aquariums previously in the narrative; and Anna's taking Larry's picture, which is an echo of the previous references to her interest in taking photographs of strangers which, in turn, echoes the way her choice of subjects manifests the theme of appearance vs. reality. This theme is also developed, almost more vividly than anywhere else in the play, in the Internet Scene (Scene 3). Other themes developed in this section include the play's dominant thematic interest in the power of sexual desire (manifest vividly in Scene 3 and more subtly in Scene 4) the theme of violence, in that Dan's choices in Scene 3 can be seen as representing a kind of violence against Anna.

Discussion Question 1

What are the implications of the fact that Dan is posing as Anna? What does it indicate about the state of their possible relationship?

Discussion Question 2

In what way is the theme of "appearance vs. reality" developed in this section?

Discussion Question 3

The narrative never indicates, specifically or through implication, what went on in the conversation between Alice and Anna. Given what has happened between them in the play to this point, what do you think their conversation was about?

Vocabulary

histology, atrophy, perineum, sultan, acquaintance, cyberspace



Scene 5

Summary

June (five months later). At an art gallery, Alice looks at a large photo of herself (which may or may not be the photograph taken by Anna at the end of Scene 2: stage directions are not specific on the point). Alice is joined by Dan, conversation revealing that Alice is still a waitress; that the gallery is hosting a show of Anna's work; and that Alice feels like Dan is leaving her. Dan insists that he still loves her, conversation then revealing that he is going away to the country to be by himself, "to grieve ... to think". Alice asks why he won't let her love him. He doesn't answer, and she changes the subject. Dan comments that he's tempted to go back to work writing obituaries, since the book didn't make them much money. He then goes to say good-bye to Anna before leaving for the train station. He kisses Alice on the forehead to say good-bye, and she asks him to kiss her on the lips.

As Dan goes, Larry comes, and watches Dan closely. He then joins Alice looking at the photograph of her, conversation revealing how angry Alice is about the way she's been portrayed, saying it's not the truth. Conversation then reveals that Larry recognizes Alice as the subject of Dan's book, and that Alice feels that Dan, when he was writing it, left out "the truth". Meanwhile, Alice has recognized Larry as the doctor who talked to her at the hospital in the first scene. She first tells him that the scar was the result of a knife attack from someone in the Mafia, but then says the real reason she got the scar on her leg was because "some metal went into [her] leg when [her] parents' car crashed – when they DIED." Larry offers his sympathy; Alice asks what it's like to be good; he says he's not, suggesting that she is; and then strokes her face. He then goes.

Then, in a location that stage directions describe as "elsewhere", Dan appears with his suitcase, and is met by Anna. They banter about Anna's success vs. Dan's failure, conversation revealing that his novel was not critically well received. Further conversation reveals that Anna is in love with Larry and is considering marrying him; that Dan is desperately in love with Anna and wants her to marry him instead; that Dan spent a lot of time pursuing Anna in a way that sounds a lot like stalking; and that Dan wants Anna to go with him to the country for a week while he attends his father's funeral. Anna refuses, insisting that she's not in love with Dan at all. Dan says she's lying. They are very close to each other as Larry appears. Dan sees him and goes. Anna has to remind him to take his suitcase.

Larry and Anna banter about Larry's belief that he could beat Dan in a fistfight; about how much in love with Larry Anna actually is; and about Larry's conversation with Alice, whom Anna refers to as being "open", to which Larry says that's what Alice wants her to think. Anna responds sharply with a suggestion that Larry is being self-satisfied. Their conversation almost turns angry, but then Anna apologizes, and Larry tells her to "forget it", turning the conversation to them having met each other's parents, and both sets of



parents liking their children's partners. Anna refers to Larry's mother as having a "kind face".

Analysis

The first point to note about this scene is the way its action physically manifests the play's thematic interest in collision in momentum: characters and emotions collide and ricochet off each other throughout this scene, with the result that each of them is given propulsive momentum into the following scene, which contains the climax of the act.

A second important point, and another thematically significant element, are the conversations about love, the first time the idea is discussed within the context of the play's relationships (Alice's reference to love in Scene 1 is more of a hypothetical, a reference to her beliefs about love, rather than an actual expression of it). Here it's interesting to note that while Dan introduces the subject, the most important comment about love in their conversation, like the first reference to love in the play, comes from Alice, the one character who consistently and repeatedly brings up questions of love, particularly in her relationship with Dan. There are glimpses of love in the relationship between Larry and Anna, although they never actually refer to their relationship in those terms, and also references to love in the conversation between Dan and Anna, although with them, talking about love seems to be less about the actual feeling and more about their desire for each other. At the same time, glimpses of sexual energy and tension are found in all of the opposite gender relationships that play out in this scene.

A third theme is also explored in this scene: the "appearances vs. reality" theme, manifesting here primarily in Alice's comments on Anna's art. This theme also manifests in relation to Alice's comment about Dan's book, which she suggests left out the reality of who she is.

Meanwhile, there are important elements in this scene that refer either backwards or forwards to events that have either already taken place, making them echoes (ironic or otherwise) of what has gone before or foreshadowings of what is to come. Echoes include the reference to Larry stroking Alice's face (an echo of Alice's stroking of Dan's face in Scene 1): foreshadowings include Dan kissing Alice on the forehead (which foreshadows the later revelation, in Scene 11, that he kissed her forehead in the aftermath of the accident described in Scene 1).

Discussion Question 1

What is the significance of Larry watching Dan as he (Dan) leaves? What incident(s) earlier in the play does it reflect upon or connect with?



Discussion Question 2

As noted, the play gives no indication of which photograph of herself Alice is looking at as the scene begins. What do you think might be the symbolic implications if she is looking at the picture of herself taken by Anna at the end of Scene 2 (that is: taken just after Anna has wept about Dan)?

Discussion Question 3

What do you think the author is saying by having Dan refuse Alice's request to go to the country but then asking Anna? What does that say about Dan?

Vocabulary

cashmere, vulgar, dermatologist, pathetic, tosh, cardigan, ferocious, deceptive, moronic, carnival

Scene 6

Summary

June (a year later). This scene is set in a pair of different, separate living spaces: Anna in one, Alice in another. The action of the two scenes goes back and forth between the two areas.

In Alice's space, Dan comes home, and tells Alice that he's been having an affair with Anna ever since the conversation they had at her gallery. In Anna's space, Larry comes home from a convention, conversation revealing that he and Anna are married. Dan confesses to Alice that Anna stopped seeing Dan for a while, and that she married Larry in order to try and forget him (Dan). Alice calls what Dan is doing "brutal", and asks how someone can do what he's doing to another person. Larry shows Anna a copy of her photograph of Alice reproduced on a postcard that he found at his convention. Dan and Alice confess that they still love each other, and Dan goes out to make some tea. Larry confesses that he had sex with a prostitute while he was away, and then reveals his suspicion that Anna is leaving him. Anna confesses that she is, and that the other man in her life is Dan. Dan confesses that he loves Anna because she doesn't need him: Anna tells Larry that she needs Dan.

Alice goes: when Dan comes back with tea, he discovers that she's gone.

Larry becomes angry with Anna, asking intimate questions about her sex life with Dan, which she says is "gentler" than her sex life with him (Larry) because she feels that Larry sometimes treats her like a whore. She also reveals that she and Dan had sex in her and Larry's home. Larry begs her to stay with him (she doesn't answer); demands to know whether she ever loved him (she insists she did); and begs her to stay. She refuses, and he asks even more emotionally violent questions about her and Dan's sex life, which she answers with growing anger of her own. The scene, and the act, end with Larry telling Anna to "fuck off and die."

Analysis

In this scene, the information about what took place in the time between scenes is clearly and plainly expressed (unlike in other scenes, where information about what has transpired is revealed more subtly and/or obliquely). That information is deeply ironic: while Larry and Anna have gotten married, their commitment seems to have been a shallow one, at least for Anna, given that, if Dan is to be believed, he and Anna have been having an affair for about a year. Meanwhile, as the truth of what has been going on in secret in both relationships is revealed, the narrative manifests several of the play's themes. First, there are explorations of the power of sexual desire, manifesting first in Larry's reference to having had sex with a prostitute; later in the revelations of the Dan / Anna affair, which seems to have been motivated entirely by shared sexual



desire; and finally in Larry's focus on the sex between Dan and Anna, with which he seems to have become obsessed. Thematic questions about the nature of love also manifest in this section, as the characters each, in various ways and for various reasons (most of which are defined by a desire to manipulate) deploy love-defined arguments in their efforts to get their respective partners to admit a truth. Finally, there is the verbal violence of the various conversations, particularly the confrontation between Larry and Anna, which is deeply raw in its qualities of rage and obsession.

Structurally, this scene marks the climax of the play to this point, as the two central relationships (Dan/Alice and Larry/Anna) both seem to reach a point of crisis and/or breakdown that, at this point at least, seems to be irreparable. Meanwhile, there is deep irony in the directly opposite interpretations that Anna and Dan have of their relationship, and a similarly significant irony in Alice's decision to leave Dan when she has just said that she still loves him.

Discussion Question 1

In what ways does the theme of collision and momentum manifest in this scene?

Discussion Question 2

What do you think is the metaphoric significance of Larry bringing home "the Alice postcard"? What does it suggest about Anna's work? Alice's place in Anna's work? Alice's comments earlier that for Anna, people are just objects from which to make money?

Discussion Question 3

Why is it ironic that Alice leaves Dan even though she says she still loves him? What event earlier in the play does this incident refer back to?

Vocabulary

conciierge, bourgeois, irrelevant, cowardice, deception, phenomenal



Scene 7

Summary

September (three months later). In “The Paradise Room” of a strip club, Larry speaks with Alice, who is dressed in a short dress and high heels, with a wig. As Larry tips Alice, putting money in her garter, they engage in crude sexual banter and refer to each other’s relative ages, with Larry commenting he was in the club twenty years ago when it was another kind of club.

Conversation eventually confirms that Larry recognizes Alice from their encounter at the art gallery (Scene 5). They argue about whether Alice is telling him any truth in what she says, or is simply saying what he wants to hear because she is getting paid. He indicates he’d like to touch her: she indicates that touching is not allowed in the club. He indicates he wants to touch her later: she says she’s not a whore; he says he wouldn’t pay.

Further conversation leads to an edgy confrontation about what Alice’s real name is, with Larry insisting not only are all the women in the club protecting themselves with false names and Alice insisting that her real name is Jane. Larry says his name is Daniel, and then offers Alice all the money he has with him to tell him her real name. Again she says her name is Jane. Larry loses his temper, but Alice remains calm, insisting that if Larry wants to talk more he’ll have to give her more money. He gives her all the money that he has. Again, Alice says her name is Jane, and calls him “Buster”, which is the nickname she had for Dan.

Larry then refers to meeting Alice at the photography show; refers to how “destroyed” he believes Alice is; admits that he didn’t know she would be at the club; that he loves “everything about [her] that hurts”; and then, as he starts to cry, says that Anna won’t even see him. He begs Alice to hold him, even after the club: he’ll take her home with him where she’s safe. She says she’s not going to be his “revenge fuck”. He wants to know whether she’s ever “desired” a customer (she says yes) and whether she desires him (she says no).

Larry then makes comments about what he believes strippers to be thinking and then cries out that what he’s looking for intimacy. When Alice makes a joke, he demands that she take off her clothes and perform for him in the way he demands. She starts taking off her clothes ...

Analysis

As the second act begins, the action develops at least three of the play’s key themes. Perhaps the most obvious is the theme exploring the power of sexual desire, which plays out quite overtly in Larry’s choices throughout the scene: whether it’s as much a part of what’s going on with Alice is less clear, although there is the very strong sense



that if there is any sexual desire on Alice's part, it's very possibly as much a part of her costume as the clothes and wig she's wearing.

This, in turn, can be seen as manifesting the second apparent theme in this section: that of appearance vs. reality, a theme further developed in the conversation about the names of the women in the club, particularly Alice's name. Here it's important to note a key irony: later in the narrative, Alice reveals that her name really is Jane, meaning that in the middle of the conversations in this scene that mostly have to do with appearances vs. reality, Alice is, at least for a moment, telling the truth.

Other important things to note about this section include the question of recognition: specifically, the question of whether Larry remembers Alice as the girl from the hospital (Scene 1). Here it's important to note that in Scene 5, Alice remembers Larry from that encounter, but there are no indications that he remembers her. It would make sense, therefore, to surmise that Larry's ignorance of that encounter continues here. Then there is the issue of what's going on for Larry: whether he's truly feeling a need for intimacy (if so, he's come to a strange place to find it); whether it's possible for someone like him (whose relationships, to this point in the play, all seem to be defined, to one degree or another, by a combination of sex and power); and what he truly feels for Anna. Note that he doesn't actually say that he loves her. Finally, there is Jane's use of the nickname Buster (in a setting that suggests it's not nearly as special a nickname for Dan as Dan seems to think it is); the fact that Larry matches Alice pointed banter for pointed banter (particularly when he says his name is Daniel); and Larry's comment that he "loves" everything about Alice that hurts, which can be seen as a reference to her scar (which, given what she's wearing, is probably completely visible) and also to what Larry possibly believes is the loneliness and desperation (not to mention what he might believe is her longing for Dan) that brought her back to the strip club.

Discussion Question 1

Given the emotional content of the scene between Larry and Alice, what is ironic about the name of the room in which that scene takes place?

Discussion Question 2

In what ways is the theme of violence explored in this scene?

Discussion Question 3

Why do you think Alice tells Larry the truth about her name in this scene?

Vocabulary

pneumatic, transaction, intimacy

Scene 8

Summary

October (a month later). Dan waits in a restaurant. Anna arrives, late and flustered. Conversation reveals that Anna had been meeting with Larry to sign divorce papers, and that they met in this particular restaurant. Dan goes to the washroom.

While he's gone, Larry appears: the narrative has jumped back in time to his arrival at the restaurant. At first he refuses to sign, begging Anna to come back to him. When she refuses, he says he'll sign if Anna will have sex with him one last time. When she refuses, he speaks to her aggressively, calls her a whore, and then says he can't live without her. He goes to the bar to get drinks.

Dan returns, and after a brief conversation, realizes that Anna and Larry had sex. They argue about whether she should have told him the truth, and about whether she faked her orgasm with Larry (she did) and whether she fakes her orgasms with Dan (she admits she does, occasionally). Anna begs Dan to be "bigger than jealousy", and he says it's not possible. Anna demands to know why Dan won't kiss her when they make love and why he gets uncomfortable when she says she loves him. She then begs him to not stop loving her. Dan doesn't respond. Anna realizes he's thinking about Alice, and angrily demands why he said he loved her (Anna) if all he wanted was sex. She then accuses Dan of not believing in love, and that it bores him. He says it disappoints him, and then accuses Anna of enjoying being with Larry, saying that the only way he'll get the truth of what happened is if he asks Larry. Anna suggests that he ASK Larry.

Larry returns. His and Anna's conversation is in the past: Anna's and Dan's is in the present. Anna tells Larry that she's going to be with him out of guilt and pity, and then tells Dan she didn't do it to hurt him. Dan kisses Anna and goes to get a cab. Larry urges Anna to tell Dan about having sex with him. Anna insists he signs. Larry tells Anna he forgives her. She again insists. He signs.

Analysis

The first point to note about this section is how it unfolds the action along two timelines at the same time, both in front of the audience in the same moment. This is the sort of storytelling that only theatre can do with full effectiveness: other forms of narrative can go back and forth between scenes and/or timelines, but no matter how quickly they do so, it's rarely possible (if ever) to show past and present in the same narrative moment as is the case here. On another level, the layering of time and action here effectively and vividly dramatizes the theme of collision and momentum, in that the audience gets to see exactly what pushed Anna into the confrontation that she has with Dan (i.e. her choosing to make a difficult, awkward choice because of her feelings for him).



Other important points to note about this section include Larry's rapid shifts of tactics in his efforts to get Anna to sleep with him (tactics that, in their various ways, evoke the play's thematic exploration of the power of sexual desire); Dan's apparent reactions to Anna's efforts at making their relationship about more than sexual attraction (those efforts manifesting the play's thematic exploration of love); and the various intensities with which all the characters interact with each other (evocations of the play's thematic emphasis on violence – in this case, verbal violence with undertones of sexual violence).

Discussion Question 1

Should Anna have told Dan the truth? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

What does Anna's choice to have sex with Larry suggest about her feelings for Dan?

Discussion Question 3

What does it mean to be "bigger than jealousy"? What is Anna asking of Dan when she makes this comment to him?

Vocabulary

valiant



Scene 9

Summary

November (a month later). Alice is in a museum, wearing a sweater that Larry was wearing earlier and looking at an exhibit of a life-sized Victorian girl “dressed in rags”. Larry arrives, they kiss, and conversation reveals that Larry is late because he stopped off at Postman’s Park to look at the memorial. Conversation also reveals that it’s Larry’s birthday. Alice gives him a small present, and then she disappears. Larry opens the present, and discovers it’s a Newton’s Cradle.

Anna arrives, and is surprised to see Larry. She reveals that she’s there to meet Alice, who wants the negatives of their photo shoot. She sees the present given to Larry by Alice and asks who it’s from. At first Larry lies and says it’s from his father, but then he confesses that it’s from Alice, adding that they’re having an affair and, after Anna asks, revealing that he met Alice at a strip club about a month ago, the night before the conversation about the divorce papers. Larry also asks Anna whether she told Dan about what happened that day, and how he took it. Anna says she did tell the truth, and that Dan took it “like a man”. She then asks Larry to not hate her, but he says it’s easier than loving her. He says that the affair between him and Alice is “nothing”, and then asks Anna to tell her lawyers to hurry up with finalizing the divorce. He then goes out.

Alice returns and meets Anna, who asks how she (Alice) got so brutal. Alice says she’s “lived a little”. She then asks whether Anna cuts the crusts off Dan’s sandwiches, but Anna has no idea what she’s talking about. Conversation reveals that Anna is now taking pictures of derelict buildings (Alice comments that it’s “the beauty of ugliness”). Alice comments on how Larry cries in his sleep and how sad his family is that Anna left him. Alice then suggests that Anna go back to Larry, with Alice commenting that if she did, it would mean that Dan might go back to Alice. When Anna goes on to say that she fell in love with Dan, Alice comments that falling in love is a way to disguise the truth: that someone who “fell in love” just gave in to temptation, going on to say that she (Alice) chose to be with Dan, that she said to herself “I will give all my love to this charming man who cuts off his crusts.” They banter about each other’s relative ages, leading Anna to apologize for being selfish, and Alice to comment on how Ruth (Dan’s ex) “went to pieces” after he left. As Anna recognizes the sweater that Alice is wearing, she (Anna) comments that “they love the way we make them feel, but not us.”

Conversation then reveals that Dan says “buster” a lot in his sleep, Alice commenting that she doesn’t know what it means. She starts to go, but Anna reminds her about the negatives. Alice picks them up and then hands them to Anna, telling her to “do the right thing”.

Analysis

Several elements in this scene follow the narrative's established pattern of either bringing back elements from earlier in the play or introducing elements that will play important roles later on: sometimes, as is the case with the Newton's Cradle, both are true (i.e. they were viewed before, in circumstances that give their presence here particular meaning; and will be viewed again, in circumstances that carry both layers of their previous appearances with them). Aside from the Newton's Cradle, this includes the reference to Postman's Park and the memorial (which, as previously noted, plays a key role in the action of the final scene); the references to the crusts on Dan's sandwiches (the first significant reference to which was in Scene 1, the true meaning of that reference also manifesting in the final scene); and the references to "Buster", which here reveals more about Dan and his true feelings about Alice than he seems to have revealed anywhere else in the play, and which foreshadows events in Scene 11, the climax of the Alice / Dan relationship.

Meanwhile, this scene entwines developments in two of the narrative's themes more explicitly than elsewhere in the play: specifically, the tension between sexual desire and the power of love, with the conflict between Alice and Anna in particular playing out in relation to the continuum between the two experiences of relationship. There is also the sense that for both women, they are acting from inner places that have taken them beyond appearances and into their own inner realities – specifically, the emotional needs they each have for both the men in their lives ... or are they saying what they say out of a desire to manipulate the other one, and make her feel guilty about her choices and actions? The narrative is not clear, but in structural terms, because the play is drawing closer to its climax, there is the sense that the characters are drawing closer to their own inner truths, as uncomfortable as they may be. Here, it's important to note that Anna's comment about how "they love the way we make them feel, but not us" can be seen as commenting not only on the attitudes and actions of Dan and Larry specifically, but perhaps on the attitudes and actions of men in general.

Finally, Alice's choice to return the photographic negatives to Anna can be seen as evoking the play's thematic exploration of appearance vs. reality: Alice, in handing the negatives back, is metaphorically suggesting that on some level she no longer wants to be the person that she, like the photographs, have made others believe that she is, and wants to be truer to herself than she has been in the past. This is ironic foreshadowing of the events in Scene 11, in which she reveals that she is still unable to reveal all of the truth.

Discussion Question 1

What do you think is the metaphoric significance of the exhibit Alice is looking at as the scene begins?



Discussion Question 2

What point do you think the author is making by suggesting that Alice is wearing one of Larry's sweaters?

Discussion Question 3

What does Alice mean when she tells Anna, at the end of the scene, to “do the right thing”?

Vocabulary

ancestor, evasive, primitive, derelict, conscience



Scene 10

Summary

December (a month later). In Larry's office. Dan visits Larry, and says he wants Anna back, telling Larry that if he loves her, he'll let her go so she'll be happy. Larry suggests that Anna doesn't want to be happy, and that she is in fact a "depressive" (i.e. someone who feels more like themselves if they're living a depressing life). Larry goes on to say that he loves Anna too, and that he thinks Dan is selfish. Dan says that Larry is the one who's selfish, adding that Larry doesn't want Anna, he wants revenge, and that he (Larry) will never forgive her for loving him (Dan) first. Larry says he has forgiven her, adding that "without forgiveness we're savages". Dan says Larry's marriage is a joke, but Larry reveals that Anna "never sent the divorce papers to her lawyer". He says this means that she has chosen him, not Dan, and that if Dan tries to touch her, he (Larry) will kill him.

Larry is then called to take care of a patient and prepares to go. Dan confronts him about what happened on the day the papers were supposed to be signed, calling him an animal. Larry indicates he's tired of talking about Dan: he's done nothing but talk about Dan all week, hearing how he (Dan) calls for his mother in his sleep; saying that Dan doesn't know about love because he doesn't know how to compromise; and that he (Dan) has no idea about the truth about Alice who, he believes, created her own scar in response to the apparent trauma of her childhood. Such actions, he says, are a recognized medical condition. He tells Dan that all Alice wanted was to be loved, and then watches as Dan breaks down in tears.

After a few moments, Larry suggest that Dan go back to Alice, saying that he (Larry) knows where to find her, and that when they saw each other at the club, Alice talked about Dan. Larry then writes Dan a prescription: the address of the club. As Dan gets himself together and prepares to go, he notices the Newton's Cradle on Larry's desk, and asks where it came from. Larry says it was "a present", and nothing more. As conversation continues, they talk about how much Larry liked Dan's book, and how Dan should write another. When Dan says he doesn't have any material, Larry reveals he was sexually abused as a child, adding that "every human life is a million stories".

Further conversation reveals that Dan is now the editor of the obituary section at the newspaper where he works, having taken over the job when the previous editor died. Dan thanks Larry for being kind. Larry confesses that he had sex with Alice, and that he's not "big enough" to forgive Dan for hurting her. And then he calls Dan "Buster".

Analysis

As is often the case with the characters and situations in this play, the first question to ask about the events of this scene is whether anyone is telling the truth. The narrative



has already indicated that Alice can be trusted very little, if at all: the question of whether anything Larry says is actually true comes up vividly in this scene. Does he really think Anna is a “depressive”? Did Anna really not send the divorce papers to the lawyer? Was Larry really abused by a child? Or is he only saying what he is so he can continue to have power over and take revenge on Dan? In any case, no matter how much Larry says in this scene is actually true, his actions certainly constitute emotional violence on his part, a development of one of the play’s key themes. At the same time, the play continues its thematic exploration of the nature of love (in Larry’s references to the feelings Dan and Alice have for each other, as well as Alice’s feelings for him). Here it’s interesting to note that there are few, if any, references to sexual desire: the confrontation between Dan and Larry seems to be based more on the deeper feelings that Larry seems to be able to experience only superficially at the same time as Dan seems to be discovering depths of feeling in himself ... unless he too is lying.

Also in this scene, the narrative once again includes elements that have been introduced before and/or will reappear later. These include the references to Dan’s job writing obituaries (which, at this point in the play, foreshadows important events in the play’s final scene as well as echoing comments that have gone before); Dan’s comments about the Newton’s Cradle (seen earlier as a gift to Larry from Alice, which was itself already an echo of something that Dan kept on HIS desk – perhaps also a gift from Alice?); and Larry calling Dan “Buster”. Then there is the comment by Larry about not being “big enough” to forgive Dan for hurting Alice (a clear echo of Scene 8, in which Anna asked Dan to be “bigger than” jealousy, both comments suggesting that the men are not strong enough to not give in to their feelings) and the reference to Dan calling for his mother. This, along the lines of Larry’s other comments, may or may not be true – if it is, though, it’s another indicator of how troubled Dan really is: so is Dan’s reference to his belief that he doesn’t have the “material” to write another book, a suggestion of just how badly the failure of his first book affected him.

Discussion Question 1

Given what has been revealed about Larry up to this point in the play, how much do you think of what he says to Dan is the truth, and how much is lies? Explain your answer.

Discussion Question 2

Why does Dan break down in tears? What is he so upset about?

Discussion Question 3

Why is it significant that Larry calls Dan “Buster”? What do you think Larry is trying to accomplish by doing so?

Vocabulary

simplicity, compromise, diabolical, deluded, prescription, humane, ferocious



Scene 11

Summary

January (a month later). Dan and Alice are in a hotel room. At first their conversation is playful and banter filled, revealing that they're about to go on holiday to New York to celebrate the four year anniversary of their meeting (Scene 1) and that Alice never lets anyone see her passport photo. They also reminisce about the day they met, with Alice remembering more details than Dan – although Dan remembers a brief conversation with the cabbie in the aftermath of Dan kissing Alice on the forehead while they were riding in the ambulance to the hospital (the cabbie asking Dan if Alice was “his”, and Dan saying yes, she was). There is also the memory of a doctor at the hospital giving Alice a cigarette (Larry), whom Dan remembers but Alice doesn't (or says she doesn't). They also reminisce about how they reconnected, when Dan came to find Alice at the strip club.

Conversation turns darker, however, as Dan finds himself unable to keep from asking Alice about her scar (she denies she gave it to herself) and about her relationship with Larry, saying that he can't HELP asking about it because he's “insane”. When she tries to avoid answering his questions, he insists that he wants the truth, adding that for him, Alice and the truth “are known strangers”. He then asks whether she gave Larry a present. She says no. He prepares to leave, continuing to demand that she tell him the truth, because “without it we're animals. Trust me,” he adds, “I love you.”

With that, Alice tells him she no longer loves him. “I don't want to lie and I can't tell the truth so it's over.” As she gives him his passport, he begs her to stay, but she says she's going, revealing that she had sex with Larry, “several times”, but that she preferred Dan. When Dan confesses that he knows, but that he wanted Alice to say it, she sees him as having “tested” her, and says she would have loved him forever if he hadn't, but he now has to go. He protests that he loves her, but she demands that he show her. He begs her to stay, then demands to know why she had sex with Larry. She tells him that it was because Dan wasn't there and because Larry asked her “nicely”. Dan calls her a liar, and demands to know who she really is. She says she's “no one” and spits in his face. He grabs her. She taunts him, telling him to hit her. He does. She taunts him again: “Do you have a single original thought in your head?”

Analysis

This scene contains the play's climax, its point of highest physical, emotional, and/or thematic tension. That point comes late in the scene, when Dan slaps Alice: the only example of overt physical violence in the play (i.e. a physical evocation of the play's thematic interest in violence, which up to this point has been primarily emotional or verbal); the most violent confrontation between appearance and reality in the play (as Dan is finally goaded to a point of eruption by Alice's refusal to let him know who her



reality is); and is, in many ways, the most physical example of the play's thematic interest in collision and momentum. The momentum that results from this particular collision is revealed in the following scene, which indicates that the collision here resulted in the characters being propelled away from each other by the momentum of anger.

Finally in relation to themes, there are developments in the play's thematic exploration of the nature of love, as Dan seems to act in response to what he believes to be genuine feelings of love for Alice, and Alice, in response, acts on a personal belief that she stated back at the beginning of the play: that you only leave someone when you don't love them anymore. That being said, there is some question about whether what Alice says is actually true: not only does the play portray her as being a liar all along, but that aspect of her identity is reiterated here, as she tells Dan she doesn't remember the doctor at the hospital (Larry): earlier in the narrative, Scene 5, she says that she did.

Meanwhile, there is a mix of new and old details in this scene, the latter making reference to events earlier in the play (i.e. the encounter in the hospital) that have been discussed before; the former making reference to new information about old details (i.e. the detail about the kiss on the forehead and the brief conversation with the cabbie). Then there is Dan's question about Alice giving Larry a present, which suggests that in the aftermath of Scene 10, in which Larry told Dan that the Newton's Cradle was a present, Dan came to suspect that the Cradle was a gift from Alice, the possible implication being that either gave Dan HIS Newton's Cradle or that she gave Larry HIS as kind of a joke on Dan. The narrative isn't clear: what is clear is that Dan has quickly moved from being relatively happy and contented with Alice to being dangerously, desperately, and eventually violently obsessed.

Finally, there is the last line of the scene: Alice's vitriolic comment about Dan's lack of originality. There is the sense here that this comment, ostensibly a response to his hitting her only after she tells him to, relates on another level to the failure of Dan's book which, it must be remembered, was based at least in part on Alice's life but at the same time didn't include the truth about that life (see Alice's earlier comment about the book - Scene 5).

Discussion Question 1

Why does Dan describe himself as "insane"? What other aspect of his life might he be referring to?

Discussion Question 2

What incident earlier in the play is clearly echoed in what the story tells the audience about how Dan and Alice reunited? What does this suggest about what has gone on between Scenes 10 and 11?



Discussion Question 3

What does Dan mean when he suggests that without truth in a relationship, the people in it are “animals”?

Vocabulary

damsel, stabilizer, loll, justify, distraught



Scene 12

Summary

July (six months later). This scene takes place in Postman's Park. Anna is there waiting. Larry arrives in his white doctor's coat. The first part of their conversation is an echo of the conversation that took place when they met (Scene 4). They then refer to the park's memorial to people who saved the lives of others. Eventually, conversation then refers to Larry having ended up with a young nurse named Polly, who insisted that he leave private practice and go back to work at the hospital; and that he injured himself "that night". He half-heartedly tries to restart something with Anna, but she tells him to "fuck off", revealing that she's getting emotional comfort and fulfillment from a mongrel that she adopted off the street.

Further conversation reveals that Alice has died – Anna comments that it happened in New York, that Dan is flying over right away, and that he wanted to see both her and Larry before he left. Conversation also reveals that Dan and Alice broke up the previous January, and that Anna believes Dan was listed in Alice's passport as "next of kin". Larry tells Anna to look for Alice Ayres on the memorial. Anna calls him "horrible", but then Larry reads the story of Alice Ayres engraved on the statue: having saved children "at the cost of her own young life". "She made herself up," he says, referring to the character of Alice. After a few moments of silence, Larry prepares to go. Anna calls him a coward. Larry admits it. Dan then arrives, apologizing for being late. Larry apologizes for leaving, and Dan says he understands. Larry goes.

When Anna suggests that Dan sit, Dan refuses, saying that the bench is where he and his father used to sit. When he suggests that he told Anna that story, she tells him that he told Alice. This leads Dan to reveal that Alice's name was actually Jane – he only found out when the police in New York called him, which they did, he says, because his name was in the address book. She was, he says, hit by a car. He then comments that when his colleague at work asked "Who's on the slab?" as usual, he (Dan) broke down and cried. He also reveals that his relationship with Alice started with a misunderstanding: he never cut the crusts off his own sandwiches. They were gone on the day he met Alice simply because the loaf of bread he was using to make the sandwiches fell apart.

Dan then goes on to reveal that he bumped into Ruth (his ex-girlfriend), and was surprised to learn that she's gotten married and had a child, and that her husband is a Spanish poet whose work Ruth translated. The title of his poetry collection is "Solitude". Dan then says he has to leave. He and Anna say good bye, and "exit separately".



Analysis

There are several important elements to note about this section, perhaps the most significant being the multi-leveled revelations about Alice's true identity. What's interesting to note is that the narrative only reveals a portion of the truth: it's never made entirely clear WHY she made the choices she did. There are indications that, at the very least, Alice had an earlier life that she wanted to leave behind, but beyond that there are no details. These revelations are the final, and perhaps climactic, manifestation of the play's thematic look at the relationship between appearance and reality.

A second important element has to do with resolutions of various plotlines. Aside from the resolution given to the Dan / Alice storyline, the narrative also makes it clear that Larry and Anna have broken up once and for all: the meaning of the phrase "that night" is never explicitly given, but there is the sense that there was some kind of confrontation between Larry and Anna that resulted in the relationship coming to its final end. Then there is the setting of the scene in Postman's Park, which has been referred to several times throughout the narrative for reasons that, in this scene, finally become clear: the Park, and the memorial constructed there, are metaphoric representations of a fundamental human truth ... that acts of self-sacrifice, of the sort that none of the generally selfish characters in the play have actually felt inclined to perform, are acts of genuine, selfless, unconditional, compassionate love for another human being. The characters in the play never act selflessly or unconditionally: thus, the placement of the play's final scene in a physical environment that literally and specifically pays tribute to that kind of love is, to say the least, deeply ironic. In other words, the setting of this scene is an evocation of the play's thematic exploration of the nature of love, suggesting that love at its most valuable is free from selfish agenda or sexual desire.

Finally, there are a few other tie-ins between events and references in this scene and events and references earlier on. First, Dan's comment about his reaction to "Who's on the slab?" is an echo of the first time he used the phrase: in Scene 1, in a description of how much he hates his job. The use of the phrase has a particularly poignant, triggering meaning for him here. Then, the reference to Alice / Jane's address book can be seen as referring back to something mentioned by Dan in Scene 2: his comment that the character in his book (which was based on Alice) had one entry in her address book: home. There is the sense that the reference to the address book here suggests that Alice's true "home" was not with Dan, or with Larry, but with the secret side of herself that she seems determined to have kept hidden. Finally: there is the reference to Ruth, referred to earlier as Dan's ex-girlfriend and who now seems to have found a sort of peace and contentment, a kind of fulfilling life that, the audience suspects, she never would have had with Dan ... or, for that matter, that any of the characters would have had with each other. It's appropriate, therefore, not only that the title of Ruth's partner's poetry collection is "Solitude", but also that the final stage direction suggests that Anna and Dan exit the stage "separately".



Discussion Question 1

What is significant about Dan's revelation about the crusts on his sandwiches on the first day that he and Alice met? Which of the play's themes does this revelation of the truth evoke?

Discussion Question 2

What does Dan's refusal to sit suggest about his feelings for his father? About his capacity for feeling in general?

Discussion Question 3

Why is the title of the poetry collection significant at this point in the play?

Vocabulary

sentimental, Victorian, philanthropist, pompous, intrepid, callous



Characters

Alice

Alice is described in character notes by the author as “a girl from the town” which, in the language of the geography of London, England where the play is set, suggests that she comes from a part of the city that is somewhat lower class. The point is not made to suggest that Alice lives in poverty, or even a blue collar (working) community, but there is, even now in England, a definite and centuries-old sense of hierarchy about class, identity, and residency: therefore, and simply because of where she is defined as being from, the suggestion is that Alice is somewhat lower on the social scale than the other characters.

That said, the most important thing to note about the very young Alice, the first character to appear in the play, is that from the beginning, she is portraying herself as something she is not. Conversation in the final scene of the play reveals that she has been giving a false name to everyone with whom she has been coming in contact: her name, as she says to Larry in Scene 7, is actually Jane (a truth in the middle of a conversation that in many ways seems to consist almost entirely of lies, or at the very least manipulations of truth). In any case, the fact that Alice gives a false name at the beginning calls virtually everything she says into question, from the stories she tells about how she got the scar on her leg (the first of which is told in the first scene) to what she says about love, both in general terms and in more specific terms relating to how she feels about the other characters, particularly Larry and Dan.

Paradoxically, however, Alice seems to also be the one character in the play who speaks an important truth about love: that if you love someone, as she says in the very first scene, you don't ever choose to leave him (or her), the implication being that you stay in the relationship until love asserts (or re-asserts) itself as the dominant emotion in the relationship. This makes Alice a thematically significant character on two levels: not only do the layers of her identity become one of the most vivid and apparent manifestations of the “appearance vs. reality” theme, but her comments about love become the primary evocation of the play's thematic exploration of the nature of love.

Dan

Dan is described in the author's character notes as “a man from the suburbs”. In the socio / economic hierarchy of London life that forms an important layer of subtext to the play, this places him slightly lower on the social scale than Alice: the suburbs are, in England, generally viewed as having less social / economic status than the town, but more than “the country”, which is where Anna comes from.

Dan is arguably the play's central character and protagonist. The action of the play starts with him and his choices (Scene 1) and ends with him and both his choices, his



realizations, and his apparent transformations (Scene 12). He begins the play struggling for both connection (which he finds with Alice) and career success, which he starts to find with the writing and publication of his first book, but which fails him when the book isn't well received by either critics or the public. The disappointment arising from this circumstance and the sense of failure that emerges from it can be seen as a possible trigger and/or possible fuel for his anger, frustration, and increasing desperation, feelings that govern many (most?) of his actions throughout the rest of the play.

Very early in the action, Dan is revealed to be a man of indiscriminate sexual appetites (that is: he doesn't seem to have many boundaries around wanting and/or trying to have women) with a streak of sadism and capacity to manipulate that widens as his frustration deepens. He seems very confused about what he wants and who he is, becoming increasingly desperate to both discover what he truly desires and actually HAVE what he desires, which is both Alice and the truth of who she is. He comes close to getting the former, but when he pushes too hard in his efforts to get the latter, he is confronted with powerful resistance which, in turn, triggers him to the only act of physical violence in the play (Scene 11). There is the sense that this violence releases some kind of barrier in him: at the play's conclusion (Scene 12), he seems to realize not only how vulnerable he is, but how responsible he has been for hurting others, including the women he thinks he loves.

Larry

The author's character notes describe Larry as "a man from the city". This indication of where he's from suggests, in the same way as the references to the other characters' origins, that Larry is in some ways of a higher social / cultural / economic status than the other characters. In London terms, "the city" is the financial district: there's a lot of money there, a lot of prestige, and there is the sense that Larry (who is, after all, a dermatologist – that is, a doctor whose training and specialty give him substantial potential for substantial income) is, at the very least, economically MUCH better off than the other characters. While the question of whether, or even if, Larry's relative financial prosperity affects his relationships with the other characters, there are strong implications that it does: it's important to remember that Alice is a stripper and, for a while, a waitress; Dan works in a newspaper and is a failed writer; Anna is a photographer ... all are in positions that put them lower on the social and economic ladder than Larry, and there is the sense that, at least sub-textually, he feels it, knows it, and acts on it.

More so than the other characters, Larry has a deep and powerful streak of sexual extremity in his character, initially evident in Scene 3 (the Internet Scene) but which also comes to the fore in later scenes where his focus is almost entirely on having and/or maintaining sexual power over, at various times, both Alice and Anna. There is also the sense that of the two male characters in the play, Larry has a smaller capacity for vulnerability or genuine feeling: most of the time, he seems more interested in using expressions of love as a weapon or tool to get what he wants.



Finally, he also has a cruel side: while the other characters are often vicious and deliberately hurtful, Larry takes this experience one step further. He is repeatedly and determinedly destructive, seemingly intent upon not just wounding the people with whom he comes in conflict, but wounding them deeply.

Of all the four characters, Larry seems to be the one with the least capacity for conscience, for remorse, and for compassion, his attempt to get Dan to go back to Alice notwithstanding: Larry says he's doing what he's doing out of respect for Dan's feelings towards Alice, but in the context of the play as a whole, Larry is, in fact, acting out of his own self-interest: if Dan goes back to Alice, he (Dan) will leave Anna alone so that he (Larry) will have her all to himself.

Anna

In the author's character notes, Anna is described as "a woman from the country". This places her at the lowest point of social / economic / cultural status of the four characters: in the commonly held (but rarely spoken about) values about class and origin in Britain, "the country" is even further outside the boundaries of what is considered high class. In this hierarchy, "the country" is a place one visits: one doesn't live there unless one can't help it, or unless one has enough money to come back into the city frequently. Add to this the fact that Anna is a kind of artist (i.e. a photographer), and the result is a character who may very well have a sense of herself as being relatively low on the totem pole of cultural approval. This may explain the sense of ambition that lingers around her and seems to permeate many of her actions and choices; the sense of hardness and ruthlessness that goes along with that ambition that makes her come across as an even harder, tougher character than Alice who, in spite of working in a profession in which cynicism is almost necessary (i.e. stripping) is still able to at least pretend she is vulnerable. There is little or no vulnerability in Anna, except that which emerges, albeit very briefly, in the aftermath of a conversation with Alice, the content of which is never revealed.

Of the four characters in the play, Anna comes across as being the one most able to hold her own in an argument: she gives as good as she gets, counter-attacking when she is herself being attacked. Dan tends to crumble; Alice tends to submit; and Larry tends to react to attacks with a form of deflection or denial. Anna, however, attacks when she is attacked, responding to accusations with accusations of her own; responding to viciousness with viciousness of her own; and, above all, standing up for what she has come to believe is the truth about herself and her experiences. She is the toughest of all the characters, perhaps as a result of having grown up in the country or from being an artist, both situations in which individuals often have to fight for recognition and respect.



The Cabbie

In the first scene of the play, conversation between Dan and Alice reveals that Alice was struck by a cab in which Dan was driving; that the cab driver (the "cabbie") was concerned both about having hurt Alice and about facing some kind of serious consequences (legal charges, a law suit); and that Dan let him off the hook.

Harry

Harry is one of two writers who work with Dan in the obituary department of a newspaper: specifically, Harry is the editor. All three have a fairly good working relationship. When Harry dies, Dan is promoted into his position.

Graham

Graham is the second of two employees who work with Dan in the obituary section. When Dan is promoted, Graham remains in his position. Graham's daily, tactless question of "Who's on the slab?" (i.e. "Who's died?") seems to be the one real irritant for Dan about his job. At the end of the play, Graham's repetition of the question sends Dan into a sudden explosion of grief in the aftermath of Alice's death.

Ruth

Ruth is Dan's girlfriend at the beginning of the play, but he leaves her to be with Alice. At the end of the play, Dan describes an unexpected encounter with Ruth in which he learned that she is happily married with a child.

Polly

At the end of the play, Larry reveals that he has become involved with a much younger woman named Polly, a nurse at the hospital where he has a staff position. His references to her suggest that she has something of a controlling nature: it was at her insistence that he left private practice and took the hospital job.

Dan's Father

In the play's first scene, Dan refers to a significant moment of quiet intimacy he shared with his father in the aftermath of his (Dan's) mother's death, a moment made even more significant by the fact that Dan's father is suffering from dementia, and is unlikely to remember the encounter. At the end of the play, after the deaths of both Alice and his father, Dan refuses to sit on the bench in Postman's Park where the encounter took place: there is a sense that he (Dan) has discovered that his relationship with his father was even more important than he initially believed.



Dan's Mother

The references to Dan's mother in the play are generally less significant to both the play and to Dan than the references to Dan's father. Nevertheless, they are important: there is the sense that Dan was close to his mother, while references to her cutting the crusts off his sandwiches when he was a child play an indirectly significant role in the development of the relationship between Dan and Alice.



Symbols and Symbolism

Dan's Backpack

In the first scene of the play, Alice looks into Dan's backpack without permission, and finds things in there that she, both then and later in the play, respond to and which, as she later confesses, both trigger and define her feelings for him. There is a sense that in the same way as she looks into the backpack, she also looks into his soul which, in the same way as the contents of the backpack, trigger and define her feelings even further, and more deeply.

Dan's Sandwiches

Perhaps the most significant thing that Alice finds in Dan's backpack are his sandwiches, which as she notes, seem to have the crusts cut off. She makes repeated references to the sandwiches, particularly the missing crusts, throughout the play, commenting at one point that they were a particularly significant trigger for the development of her feelings. At the play's conclusion, after the revelation of Alice's death, Dan confesses that the missing crusts were, in fact, an accident: that they didn't mean anything at all to him, or about him.

Dan's Book

After meeting Alice and beginning a relationship with her, Dan writes a book that is, in part, based on her story. Narration reveals the book is not a success, which perhaps contributes to the sense that Dan is taking out his frustrations about his life and career on the people around him, and with whom he is involved.

The Postman's Park Memorial

The real-life Postman's Park is the site of a memorial to ordinary people who committed acts of great personal sacrifice in order to save and/or improve the lives of others. The memorial is referenced several times throughout the play, most significantly in its final scene (Scene 12), where it is revealed that Alice took her name from one of those on the memorial.

Alice's Scar

Also in the first scene of the play, reference is made to a scar on Alice's leg. There are several stories told about where the scar came from: Alice tells two of them, Larry hypothesizes the third. The actual truth of what happened is never explicitly defined, but



nevertheless, the scar can be seen as a symbol of whatever inner scar Alice has that has made her run away from her identity.

Anna's Photographs

When she is first introduced into the action, Anna describes her photographs as using "strangers" for their subjects. In the course of the play, she photographs both Dan and Alice, incorporating pictures of the latter into a professional, formal exhibition. The photographs can be seen as a manifestation of the play's thematic interest in appearance vs. reality: while they capture a particular image of a particular person, they only ever reveal what the camera sees (i.e. the person's appearance) without looking into who they are in reality.

Anna's Photograph of Alice

The one photograph of Anna's that receives prominent attention in the play is one she takes of Alice, shot on the day that Alice discovers that the man with whom she is involved (Dan) is having an affair with Anna. The photograph becomes an important part of Anna's display at the art gallery (Scene 5), and as such also becomes an important part of the overall sense that the photos manifest the theme of appearance vs. reality. Later in the play, Alice demands that Anna give her the negatives of all the photos taken during the initial shoot. This can be seen as an attempt by Alice to reclaim something of her own identity.

Alice's Costume at the Strip Club

The text goes into significant detail about what Alice is wearing at the strip club in her scene with Larry (Scene 7). There is a sense that she looks, and is choosing to look, very different from her "regular" self, a sense that is among the strongest metaphoric representations of the play's thematic interest in appearance vs. reality. It also serves as another layer of mystery concealing the truth of who Alice really is.

"Buster"

"Buster" is Dan's nickname for Alice. She uses it first, referring to him sarcastically as "Buster" in Scene 1, at their first meeting. Later, he uses it more intimately in Scene 5, a reflection of their emotional intimacy and connection. Later in the narrative, Anna reveals that Dan says "Buster" in his sleep, but Alice says she doesn't know what he means. Later, however, Larry uses the word as a kind of weapon against Dan, suggesting that Anna has told him about it and that Larry has figured out at least something of what it means to Dan. The nickname symbolizes vulnerability in general, and Dan's vulnerability in particular. Later in the play, the use of the term represents the ways someone's vulnerability can be turned against them.



Newton's Cradle

Several times throughout the play, the action refers to a "Newton's Cradle". This is a device that consists of a series of spheres or globes, of any size, suspended in a row from a single horizontal crosspiece (a Newton's cradle can be any size: the ones referenced in the play are desktop "toys"). One or more of the spheres at the end of the row is pulled away from the others and allowed to drop. When the dropped sphere(s) impact the others in the row, those others are affected by momentum and the transference of energy, and are themselves knocked into swinging out. The second sphere(s) then fall back down, impact the first spheres, and the energy is transferred back and forth. On one level, Newton's Cradles function in the play as representations of personalized affection that morph into representations of betrayal. On another level, the action of the cradle can be seen as metaphorically representing the actions of the characters, who impact and ricochet into each other in the same way as the spheres of a Cradle.



Settings

England

England is the play's primary, big-picture setting. The language of the play, its references and slang, and in some ways its sub-textual (i.e. implied) class consciousness are all uniquely, identifiably British.

London

Great Britain's capital city, is the secondary setting of the play. The city's complex layers of economic prosperity, frequent superficiality, sense of self-importance, and history of sexual exploration all play sub-textual (i.e. implied) roles in shaping the characters and their actions,

The Late 1990's.

Originally written and first produced in 1997, the play seems intended to take place at approximately that time. It was a period in England when internet hook-ups (i.e. sexually motivated meetings between people established online) were beginning to become more and more the means of choice for younger urban people (such as these characters are) to connect.

The Internet Chatroom

An online chat-room, designed and intended to facilitate hook-ups as defined above, is the setting for the key scene in which Dan poses as Anna and sets up a date with the eager Larry. In an innovative stylistic choice, the scene plays out on two levels of reality: that of the characters, and that of their respective screen identities.

Postman's Park

The real life park, with its memorial to so-called ordinary citizens who committed extraordinary acts of self sacrifice to save the lives of others, is the setting for the play's final scene. It is also referred to in several other scenes in the play, the metaphoric implication being an ironic one: unlike the people memorialized in Postman's Park, the characters don't seem to be at all willing to sacrifice themselves (their needs, their desires, their feelings) for the needs and/or feelings of anyone else.



Themes and Motifs

The Power of Sexual Desire

Virtually all the play's action, to one degree or another, is motivated by sexual desire experienced or acted upon by the characters. Right from the beginning, in the first scene between Dan and Alice, there is the very clear sense that while they are each intrigued with the other on other levels, they are primarily driven by a powerful physical attraction. As the play progresses, those sorts of attractions play out in each of the characters and the ways in which they interact: the connections and subsequent relationships between Dan / Anna, Anna / Larry, and Larry / Alice are all primarily defined by their physical or sexual desires for each other. Many, if not most, of the other experiences of the characters (i.e. love, anger, jealousy, urgings towards violence) are triggered, defined by, or responses to their experiences of sexual desire.

Here it's important to note that sexual feelings define and motivate the action in other ways than direct person-to-person physical interaction. The referent here is the chat room encounter in Scene 3 between Larry and Dan (who is pretending to be Anna), in which both characters seem to indicate an aspect of sexual identity that exists separately from their relationships with another person. They both seem to get some kind of sexual or emotional stimulation out of their visits to the chatroom, with Dan seemingly getting even more excited as a result of pretending to be someone else: there may, in fact, even be sexual excitement associated with his ideas of the eventual encounter with the man he knows only from the chatroom and the real Anna.

In any case, it's interesting to note that it's very rare that there is any kind of overt physical representation of the characters' sexuality: more often than not, they're talking about it, or reacting to it. The only physicalized representations of sexuality occur in relationship to Alice: specifically, in her strip club scene with Larry (Scene 7) and her hotel room scene with Dan (Scene 11). In both these scenes, sexuality has a clear physical presence that the other scenes tend to lack, sexuality there emerging primarily through conversation and implied interaction.

The Nature of Love

References to love and to the characters' views of love appear early in the play: specifically, in the first encounter between Dan and Alice (Scene 1, in the hospital). Interestingly, it is Alice, the character who is also the most overtly, physically sexual in the play, who speaks first of love. She also seems to be the most motivated by a desire for it, the search for it, and an awareness of what its existence means to, and for, a relationship. The other characters seem to be motivated by other things, primarily sexual desire. Love, for them, comes later. For Alice, however, love is always in the equation, whether it's closer to the foreground of her relationship (as it is with Dan) or further in the background (as it is in her relationship with Larry). There is the sense that



for the other characters, awareness of love; experiences of love; and the importance of love are all experienced later, emerging as a result of first having gratified their sexual desires and later of realizing that those desires might actually be connected to, or exist in a response to, something deeper.

Ultimately, the play's portrait of the nature of love can, in fact, be defined by Alice's references in the first scene: she says, in effect, that if you love someone, you don't leave them. You only leave, she adds, if you stop loving. In many ways, the actions of the characters suggest something even darker: that leaving a relationship is practically inevitable if there is no real love there. It seems easy for Dan to leave Alice because there is no sense that he loves her, even though he might say so. It seems easy for Anna to leave Dan for the same reason, and the same could be said for Larry leaving Alice. These three characters seem to be more obsessive in their behavior, rather than loving. Alice, when she leaves Dan the first time (Scene 6) seems to do so for a reason other than no longer loving him: perhaps because she knows that in his mind and in his heart he already HAS left (given that he's just told her he wants to be with Anna). When she leaves him the second time (Scene 11) she makes it very clear that she truly no longer loves him. Love, for her – as opposed to the other characters, and as she herself suggests - is more important to her than any other aspect of a relationship.

Appearance vs. Reality

This theme manifests in several ways throughout the play. Anna's photographs are, in many ways, snapshots of how her subjects appear to her, as opposed to who they are. The photographs are, in many ways, means for her to gain fame, notoriety, and/or income, all aspects of existence that are ultimately and perhaps inevitably foreign to her subjects, which she herself describes as "strangers": she clearly doesn't want to know anything about their reality, only being interested in what they look like.

Then there is the so-called "Internet Scene" (Scene 3), in which Dan presents himself as someone utterly different from who he truly is, and in doing so, manipulates Larry into revealing a part of himself that is arguably more true to who he genuinely is than his "appearance" as a responsible, attentive physician.

Perhaps the most obvious, or the most significant, is the way Alice, by the end of the play, is revealed to have conjured her entire identity – at least, as much of it as she allows the other characters and the audience to see – out of a name on the Postman's Park monument. No one, neither the audience nor any of the other characters, is allowed into her true self in any major way: there is a sense that some of her comments about love might come from the truth of her perceptions, beliefs, or values, but they are still filtered through the layers of the different external identities she presents. Nowhere is this aspect of her character, and of her function in the play, more apparent than in Scene 7, the strip club scene, in which she and the play both confound the assumptions and beliefs of both Larry and the audience. In this scene, Alice's enactment of the



various layers of character, visually manifest in the layers of clothing and sexuality that she removes and reveals, echoes the less visually vivid, but no less emotionally relevant, layering of intention and reality, of appearance and truth, that goes on with the other characters.

What's particularly interesting about this theme is how the truth often shows up in this play – specifically, in ways that tend to embody, or manifest, the fourth of its major themes: its exploration and/or portrayal of violence.

Violence

There are several ways in which violence manifests throughout the play. The first, and perhaps most obvious, is the verbal violence all the characters, at various points in the narrative, inflict upon each other. They call each other names; describe various sex acts in hurtfully crude ways; and say mean-spirited things to, and about, each other virtually without ceasing. There are very few words of tenderness or gentleness spoken anywhere in the piece.

A related point has to do with the second type of violence on display in the play. While no character is ever sexually assaulted, at least overtly, there is nevertheless the pervasive sense that the actual sex experienced by the characters or perpetrated ON the characters by each other has a violent aspect. No one is actually raped, but scenes like the Internet Scene (Scene 3), the Strip Club Scene (Scene 7) and, perhaps most significantly, the Hotel Room Scene (Scene 11) all carry with them the sense that sex is charged by a simultaneous desire to hurt, humiliate or torture.

This, in turn, leads to the third and final aspect of violence in the piece: physical violence, and in particular, the physical attack on Alice by Dan in Scene 11. Granted, Alice clearly goads Dan into hitting her, but there is also the sense that she does so in response to his barely reined-in temper: she wants him to see and understand how violent he actually is, she she pushes him beyond what might be described as a point of no return. The moment suggests that she wants Dan (the man whom she once loved more than she seems to have loved anyone) to be aware - and more fully understand - of the dark side of himself; how much emotional harm such violence can cause; and how weak a human being he ultimately is. It may be that Dan's violence towards Alice is, in fact, foreshadowed by the references to the scar on her leg, the actual source of which is never explicitly explained but which nevertheless seems (according to the revelations at the end of the play) to represent emotional or psychological injury as much as it does physical injury.

Collision and Momentum

A so-called Newton's Cradle appears on several occasions throughout the play. The Cradle is a row of connecting spheres suspended from a horizontal bar. When one sphere is swung out and then let go, so it impacts the other spheres, the sphere at the OTHER end of the row flies out. This is the result of a pair of important concepts in



physics (conservation of momentum and transference of energy) but the actual science behind the Cradle is of less immediate relevance to the play than the aspect of human existence that its function suggests. Simply put, the action of the first sphere (colliding with a row of spheres) and having an impact on a sphere at the end of the row (that is, having an effect on an object not directly or immediately connected) clearly and vividly evokes the experiences of all the characters in the play.

Alice impacts Dan, who impacts Anna, who impacts Larry ... Dan impacts Larry who impacts Anna ... Dan impacts Alice, who impacts Anna, who impacts Larry ... and so on and so on throughout the entire narrative. The effect here might be described as being that of an emotional Newton's Cradle, a collision between two characters giving one character momentum and sending him or her into collision with another character, who in turn absorbs THAT momentum and collides with another character ... and so on and so on.

Here it's important to note that it's emotions, needs, and desires that end up in collision with each other, and not just physicalities. Yes, because the relationships and so much of the play are defined by sexuality and how the characters experience it, there is a clear sense of physical "collision" going on, not to mention the ways in which those "collisions" give "momentum" to the characters so they feel compelled to rush into other "collisions" with other people. But that form of collision, that kind of physical momentum is, perhaps, less significant than the emotional collisions that take place, and the emotional momentums that the characters experience as a result. In fact, perhaps an even better term for what this play does, in its metaphoric representation of the action of a Newton's Cradle, is "ricochet", with characters sharply bouncing off each other physically, sexually, emotionally, and psychologically. This, in turn, lends a deep irony to the play's title: the concept of "ricochet", in which objects bounce off each other and get further away from each other, could not be further removed from the concept of objects or people getting "closer."

Styles

Point of View

On one level, the essential narrative point of view of the play is an objective one, with situations and relationships being explored from a variety of points of view over the course of the play. There is an argument to be made that because Dan is the closest character the play has to a protagonist (in that the story begins and ends with him, and he seems to undergo the most significant emotional and psychological transformation over the course of the narrative) that on some level the story is told from his point of view, and that the experiences of the other characters (who each have their own individual stories as well) function as elements of narrative that move Dan's story forward. However, because the play doesn't really dig into Dan's experiences with any more depth or intensity than it does for the other characters (with the exception of Alice, whose mystery is a fundamental component of both her identity and the play), the play's narrative point of view might be most accurately described as objective and mostly omniscient (i.e. knowing all the characters equally).

In terms of the play's thematic point of view, there is the general sense that in its exploration of the darker sides of desire (both emotional and physical), the play is essentially making a point about the necessity for self-control. Each of the characters, in their own ways and to varying degrees, hurts the other characters as a result of giving in to their raw emotions without considering what or how their doing, and what the consequences might be. They are creatures of impulse, these four characters, and while they each reveal a capacity for calculation, manipulation, and planning, these aspects of their identities and actions are ultimately defined by slow-burning, rather than quick flaming, intensities of emotion – or, by slow burning emotion that creates the opportunity for emotion to flare, such as is the case when Alice manipulates Anna into meeting her at the art gallery. In other words, the play's thematic intention seems to be to suggest desperate emotion leads to unnecessarily painful consequences.

Language and Meaning

The first point to note about the use of language in “Closer” is that it is a play, and as such, virtually all the information about character and story emerges from the dialogue – what the characters say, how the characters say it, and when and where they say it. The question of why is, more often than not, inferred or understood from the other elements: motivations, intentions, goals, and feelings are, for the most part, either rarely spoken about directly or accessible by listening closely to the various conversations.

The second point to note about the play's language is that its references to sexual activity are often expressed in terms of crudity and curse words; that references to other characters (particularly to the women by the men, but to other characters by all the characters regardless of their gender) tend to be derogatory and verbally violent (a



manifestation of the play's thematic interest in violence); and, perhaps most importantly, references to sexual relations rarely include references to love. There is the strong sense, throughout the play, that sex is something different from love, and that love is more often associated with experiences of desperation and longing.

The third point to note about language is that for much of the play, the lines spoken by the characters are short, terse, and loaded with implication. There are very few lines, or sections of dialogue, that do not refer to something else that has been said / done, or will be said / done, somewhere else in the play. Sometimes it happens clearly and obviously; sometimes it happens obliquely and subtly; but these connections weave through the entirety of the play, reinforcing in language the sense that the action of the play is, on some level, defined by an authorial intention to explore the nature of inevitable and inescapable connection – between people, between their needs or longings, and between their actions and reactions.

Structure

One particularly interesting point to note about the play's overall structure is the amount of time that takes place between each of the scenes. At the beginning of the published version of the play, the author defines just how much time passes from one scene to the next (a length of time that varies from as little as a single night to as much as over a year), but also makes it clear that he doesn't want these definitions to appear anywhere in the play's program or design. The notes seem to exist solely for the understanding of the reader and/or the artists creating a production of the play, meaning that it's up to those artists to create the sense not only of time having passed, but also how much. It's also important to note, however, that while the action of the scenes doesn't always indicate exactly how much time has passed, it consistently indicates what has happened in that time. The audience is informed about what's happened, just not exactly when. The sense that subsequently arises is that for the most part, the structure of the piece is essentially linear, moving forward through time from event to event until the play's climax (Scene 11: the confrontation between Dan and Alice in the hotel room).

The one exception to this aspect of the play's structure shows up in Scene 8, in which two moments in time exist simultaneously – Anna's conversation with Dan about whether she's finalized her divorce from Larry, and Anna's conversation with Larry earlier in the day about the divorce. The primary action of the scene is the Dan / Anna side of the conversation, which continues the forward / linear motion of the play and its structure: the Larry / Anna part of the scene is a flashback (i.e. a glimpse of the past) that plays out in immediate relativity to the present. This is the only place in the narrative that integrates a structural movement backwards, rather than forwards.



Quotes

Alice: And what would YOUR euphemism be? Dan: (softly) For me? Alice: Mm. Dan: He was ... reserved. Alice: And mine? Dan: She was ... disarming.

-- Alice / Dan (Scene 1)

Importance: Late in their initial conversation, after Alice has caressed Dan's face, their conversation takes an intimate, confessional turn that foreshadows further intimate developments in their relationship.

Dan: You didn't find it obscene? Anna: What. Dan: The book. Anna: No, I thought it was ... accurate. Dan: About what. Anna: About sex. About love.

-- Dan / Anna (Scene 2)

Importance: With this quote, Dan touches on the issue of the frankness of his book. It's important to remember that in Scene 1, Dan indicated it had always been his dream to write a book: the implication here that he has either discovered inspiration in Alice, or that he has essentially used her life as material to realize his dream.

Dan (as Anna): Dont b a pussy. Live without riskisdeath. Desire,like the world,is am accident. The bestsex is anon. We liv as we dream, ALONE. I'll make you cum like a train. (all spelling errors [sic])

-- Dan (as Anna) (Scene 3)

Importance: Dan, posing as Anna in an internet chat room, lures Larry into an assignation (date). The language here is that of the Internet (texting) shorthand used by Dan in his communications.

Larry: Crying is allowed. Anna: I'm not allowed. Thanks, anyway.

-- Larry / Anna (Scene 4)

Importance: In this brief exchange, Larry offers consolation to Anna whom he senses is upset. Anna reveals just how much under control she keeps her feelings.

It's a lie. It's a bunch of sad strangers photographed beautifully and all the rich fuckers who appreciate art say it's beautiful because that's what they want to see. But the people in the photos are sad and alone but the pictures make the world seem beautiful. So the exhibition is reassuring, which makes it a lie, and everyone loves a Big Fat Lie."

-- Alice (Scene 5)

Importance: Attending Anna's art show, in which a photograph of her is prominently displayed, Alice angrily reveals to Larry how she feels about what Anna has done. This is one of the play's more overt explorations of its thematic interest in appearances vs. reality.



Alice: ... No one will ever love you as much as I do. Dan: I know. Alice: Why isn't love enough? I'm the one who leaves. I'm supposed to leave YOU. I'M the one who leaves.
-- Alice / Dan (Scene 6)

Importance: This exchange marks the climax of the confrontation between Dan and Alice at the end of the first act. After this, Dan goes to make tea; Alice leaves; and Dan comes back to find her gone. There is a sense here that Alice is speaking for all the characters when she asks why love isn't enough, an evocation of the play's thematic interest in the nature of love.

Everything is a version of something else.
-- Larry (Scene 7)

Importance: This quote sums up one of the play's essential core themes: that appearances are not always reality.

... you think you haven't given us anything of yourselves. You think because you don't love us or desire us or even LIKE us you think you've WON ... but you DO give us something of yourselves: you give us - imagery - and we do with it what we will. If you women could see one minute of our Home Movies - the shit that slops through our minds every day - you'd string us up by our balls, you really would. You don't understand the territory. Because you ARE the territory.
-- Larry (to Alice) (Scene 7)

Importance: In this quote, Larry reveals what he believes to be the truth about himself and all men, in terms of their attitudes and values around sex with women: how men, essentially, see women as property, something to be owned, or conquered, or claimed. Here the narrative comments on its theme of the power of sexual desire.

That's the most stupid expression in the world. 'I feel in love' - as if you had no CHOICE. There's a moment, there's always a moment; I can do this, I can give in to this or I can resist it. I don't know when your moment was but I bet there was one.
-- Alice (to Anna) (Scene 9)

Importance: In this quote, Alice attacks what she sees as Anna's hypocrisy in relation to her choice to leave Larry and be with Dan. Here again, Alice is the de facto spokesperson of the play's thematic exploration of the nature of love.

Our flesh is ferocious - our bodies will kill us - our bones will outlive us.
-- Larry (to Dan) (Scene 10)

Importance: In this quote, Larry sums up the thematically central idea that while sexual desire is powerful and often controlling, it is temporary, and often deadly. As such, it manifests the play's thematic consideration of the nature of such desire.

Where is this 'love'? I can't see it, I can't TOUCH it, I can't FEEL it. I can HEAR it, I can hear some WORDS but I can't DO anything with your easy words.



-- Alice (to Dan) (Scene 11)

Importance: Alice demands that Dan prove to her that he loves her in the way he says he does. Once again, she is the thematic spokesperson for the power of love in the play.

She told me that she fell in love with me because - I cut off my crusts - but it was just - it was only THAT day - because the bread - BROKE in my hands.

-- Dan (to Anna) (Scene 12)

Importance: Here Dan reveals a truth about the day that he and Alice met, a truth beneath a lie (or a concealing) that was at the heart of their relationship. This is an example of the play's consideration of appearances (i.e. Alice's assumption about where the crusts went) vs. reality (i.e. the truth of what happened to the crusts).