Come Back, Little Sheba Study Guide

Come Back, Little Sheba by William Inge

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Introduction

Come Back, Little Sheba was to become William Inge's most popular play But the Broadway production did not create an immediate "smash hit." In his foreword to *Four Plays,* published in 1958, Inge observes that the play was popular with only about half of its reviewers and that its Broadway run was less than six months Inge also reveals that he took a cut in royalties, and the cast took a cut in salary to keep the play running after the audiences dwindled within a few weeks of its opening. But in spite of the lukewarm reviews, *Come Back, Little Sheba* brought Inge several honors, including the George Jean Nathan Award and the Theatre Time Award.

At the time of its writing, Inge 's play focused on subjects that were still controversial and not often discussed in public. Sexuality and pregnancy out of wedlock were shocking topics not usually portrayed In drama. Lola's pregnancy, which forced a shotgun wedding, was the type of scandal that families went to great effort to hide This was also true of alcohol addiction. Membership in Alcoholics Anonymous was not a topic for casual conversation, and the kind of drunken scene Doc creates in Act II was a seventeen minute revelation for most audiences.

Many critics attacked *Come Back, Little Sheba's* use of symbolism, which they felt was too obvious. Most often Lola's dreams, Sheba the dog, and the blatant phallic symbolism of Turk's Javelin were singled out for such criticism. Other reviewers noted that the characters were either flat or too contrived--or boring and repetitive. But reviewers who praised the play often found that Inge 's drama did accurately portray the suffering of ordinary people. In spite of the mixed nature of the reviews, most critics dId agree on one topic, praising the performances of Shirley Booth as Lola, and Sidney Blackmer as Doc, which they felt transcended the material.

In the decades following *Come Back, Little Sheba's* debut, the general consensus has been laudatory toward Inge 's work. The play is now considered a groundbreaking achievement in the genre of domestic drama. While its subject matter has become common fodder fueling the mundane storylines of countless soap operas, *Come Back, Little Sheba* was among the first dramas to skillfully address the confluence of such topics as alcoholism, failed marriage, and broken dreams. While the play is sometimes referred to as dated and melodramatic, it is nevertheless valued as a prototype for realistic contemporary social theater.

Author Biography

William Inge, born May 3, 1913, was the fifth and last child born to Maude and Luther Inge. He was raised in Independence, Kansas, by hIs mother; his father was a salesman and was rarely at home. After graduating from the University of Kansas in 1935, Inge attended the George Peabody College for Teachers but left before completing a master of arts degree. After a brief period teaching English at a local high school, Inge returned to college to complete his master's program. He also worked as a drama critic, and it was during this period that he met noted playwright Tennessee Williams *(Cat on a Hot Tin Roof),* who encouraged him to write. Inge completed his first play, and, with the help of Williams, *Farther Off from Heaven* was produced in 1947.

Concurrent with his riSing success as a writer, Inge began to address shortcomings in his character. He joined Alcoholics Anonymous in 1948, having already begun the process of Freudian analysis (a psychological practice designed to Improve mental health) earlier. In 1949, he wrote *Come Back, Little Sheba,* which was produced on Broadway in 1950 and earned Inge the George Jean Nathan Award and Theatre Time Award. He scored another hit with *Picnic* (1952) which won the Pulitzer Prize for drama, the Outer Circle Award, the New York Drama Critics' CIrcle Award, and the Donaldson Award. Inge had two more Broadway hits in quick succession. *Bus Stop* (1955) and *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs(1957),* which was an expanded and revised version of *Farther Off from Heaven.*

Following this early success, however, Inge's subsequent plays, *A Loss of Roses* (1959), *Natural Affection* (1963) and *Where's Daddy?* (1966) were commercial failures, each closing after only a few performances. Inge had more success with his first attempt at screenwriting, *Splendor in the Grass* (1961), which earned him the Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay in 1961. Following this success, he moved to Los Angeles to concentrate on script writing-although he never repeated his early success.

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

Plot Summary

Act I, Scene 1

The scene opens with Doc entering the set, a cluttered and untidy downstairs kitchen and living room. Doc offers to prepare breakfast for the boarder, Marie, but she declines. When his wife, Lola enters, her disarray offers a distinct contrast to the other two character's neatness. She begins by telling Doc that she has again dreamed of her dog, Little Sheba, who was lost twenty years earlier, and she wonders if she'll ever find her lost pet. But Doc doubts that the dog will ever return. Both characters are nostalgic for a period more than twenty years earlier, when both were young and still dreaming of a different life. Lola was a popular beauty who longed for children before a botched midwife's delivery ended their infant's life and any hope of another child. Doc had planned on being a medical doctor before he was forced to marry and support a pregnant Lola; instead he became a chiropractor.

Lola applauds Doc for being sober a whole year. Doc then tells Lola that he will be at Alcoho1 ics Anonymous that evening helping other people resist the urge to drink. When Lola asks Doc if he drank from disappointment, he responds that to stay sober he needs to forget the past. Doc leaves for work after noting that Marie is too nice a girl to waste time on a man like Turk.

Marie then thanks Lola for taking such good care of her. Lola wants to hear about Marie's romance with Turk, but the young man soon comes to pick up Marie. After she is left alone, an obviously lonely Lola tries to engage the postman, her neighbor, Mrs. Coffman, and the milkman in conversation. Lola finally turns to the radio for company when a messenger appears with a telegram for Marie. Lola cannot resist and steams it open to find that Marie's fiancé, Bruce, will arrive the next evening.

As Lola is reading this message, Marie walks in to ask if she can complete her drawing of a seminude Turk in the living room. After quickly hiding the telegram, Lola watches Turk pose for Marie. When Doc returns. he is angry that Turk is seminude in front of Marie, but Lola assures him that it is for an art class. When Lola confesses to Doc the contents of the telegram. he is angry that she is so nosy. But Lola dismisses his concern and tells him that she is planning a wonderful dinner for Bruce, Marie, and the two of them. Just before Doc leaves the room, he tells Lola that if something happens to Marie, he will never forgive Lola. But he does not see the passionate kiss that Marie and Turk share after he has gone upstairs.

Act I, Scene 2

When this second scene begins. it is clear that Lola has spent the day cleaning house. The rooms are neat and very clean. When Lola returns after borrowing silver polish from Mrs. Coffman, she asks Doc to show her some of his card tricks, and the two recall the

happiness of their courtship. Lola observes that their youth has vanished like Little Sheba. and she regrets that she has gotten fat and slovenly. When Lola wonders if Doc regrets being forced to marry her, he replies that what's done is done and must be forgotten. Lola cheers him by doing the Charleston. but the mood is broken when Marie returns and casually makes fun of Lola's dancing.

Lola finally gives Marie the telegram announcing Bruce's arrival the next evening. When Marie goes into the next room, Lola watches her and Turk kissing. The two are engaging in some light-hearted sexual banter, and it is clear that their relationship has progressed beyond kissing. Doc is irritated at this spying. but Lola cannot see anything wrong with watching this bit of romance. After Doc leaves, Lola watches for a few more minutes. and then, when the couple leaves for a walk, Lola returns to tile porch to call again to her lost dog.

Act II, Scene 1

It is the next morning, and Lola and Doc are at breakfast. Lola chats about Marie and Turk, but Doc tells Lola he would rather not talk. He says he did not sleep well and that he thought he heard a man's voice in the house when Marie returned after midnight. Doc walks into the living room and thinks that he hears a man's laugh coming from upstairs. He is forced to accept that Marie is not the virginal young women he had thought. A few moments later, Doc stumbles into Turk sneaking out the door. While Marie and Lola are getting the china for that evening's dinner. Doe goes into the kitchen and takes the bottle of liquor that has sat untouched for the last year. He wraps it in a coat and leaves the house. The scene ends with Lola telling Marie what a gentleman Doc is.

Act II, Scene 2

It is 5:30, and Lola is finishing her preparation for the dinner celebration. When Bruce arrives, Lola offers him a drink and goes into the kitchen to get the bottle. She discovers that the liquor is missing, and, understanding immediately that Doc is drinking, she calls his Alcoholics Anonymous mentor, Ed Anderson, for help. The scene ends with Marie and Bruce eating alone at the candle-lit table

Act II, Scene 3

Lola awakens on the sofa the next morning. She calls Ed to come over, and after she hangs up, Doc tries to sneak into the house, pretending to be sober. When Lola confronts him, his anger, resentment, and disillusionment come out in a horrifying verbal attack directed toward Lola. Doc is so out of control that he takes a hatchet and chases Lola, telling her that he is going to cut *off* all her fat and accusing her of only cleaning house when a young man is due to visit He collapses when Lola reminds him of how pretty she was when they first met.

At this point, Ed and another AA member, Elmo, arrive. They convince Doc to go with them to the hospital for treatment After they leave, Mrs. Coffman, who came over when she heard the noise of the fight, also goes home. Lola is alone when Bruce and Mane arrive, announce they are to be married, and tell Lola that Marie is moving back home with Bruce They are gone within minutes. Lola calls her mother and asks if she can come home, but it is clear that her mother says no.

Act II, Scene 4

It is one week later. Mrs. Coffman enters to ask if Lola would like to go to the relay races with her family, but Lola declines, Since Doc is to come home that morning. After Mrs. Coffman leaves, Doc enters and apologizes to Lola for his behavior and begs her not to leave him. Lola tells him of a recent dream she had. She tells him that she now realizes that Little Sheba is gone forever Both Lola and Doc understand that this story is an agreement to put the past behind them and move forward.

Act 1, Scene 1

Act 1, Scene 1 Summary

"Come Back, Little Sheba" is a story about struggling with the past. The wife mourns for the yesterdays and a younger age. The husband fights an old addiction. Through the supporting characters the couple eventually face their problems and learn to embrace the future.

The Delaney kitchen is dark and decorated with last night's dinner dishes. Doctor Delaney (Doc) is up preparing his breakfast. Marie, a young boarder staying with the Delaneys, is up early because she has to study for a biology exam - and not concentrate on her major studies to be an artist. Doc tells Marie that he had to take biology before he gave up college after his third year of studying to be a "real doctor." Doc's wife, Lola, gets up complaining about not being able to sleep late. She tells Doc she had a dream about losing her young dog, Little Sheba, again. Doc listens as his wife goes on to express how proud she is that he has stopped drinking and been sober for 11 months. Lola suggests Doc come with her to a movie instead of going to help a struggling alcoholic on Skid Row that night. Doc tells Lola to take Marie with her instead. When Lola tells him Marie will be busy with Turk, the two begin to argue.

Doc thinks Turk is an athlete taking advantage of a nice young girl. Lola has seen Turk and Marie making out, so she thinks Marie is not as innocent as her husband thinks. Marie announces that Turk is coming over so that they can study at the library together. Doc says he can't compete with a young football player and leaves the room. Doc stops to look at Marie's scarf in the living room but leaves the house when he hears Marie mention Turk again. While Marie and Lola are alone, Marie tells Lola she is expecting a telegram from her well off boyfriend, Bruce, in Cincinatti. Lola inquires about Marie's feelings for Turk. Marie thinks she and Turk have fun together but wants to marry Bruce. Turk is Marie's life art model for class and only a friend.

Marie would like to enter an art contest and is drawing Turk for her entry piece. Lola agrees to let Turk come over so Marie can work on her painting of Turk. Lola tells Marie how she and Doc met and married young, came into money, and lost a child before finding out that Lola could not have any more children. Turk walks in. Lola talks with him while Marie gets ready. Lola admires Turk's muscular body while listening to him talk about the sports he plays. When Marie comes out to meet Turk, Lola reminds her that they can have living room to themselves for the night. After Turk and Marie leave the house, Lola stands on the porch and calls out for Little Sheba.

Lola is bored to death at home alone all day. When the phone rings, Lola answers with hope but becomes sad when she realizes the person dialed the wrong number. When the new postman comes by, Lola convinces him to come in and have a glass of water. While the postman rests Lola tells him that her husband is a chiropractor and recovering alcoholic. Despite Lola's efforts to keep up a conversation, the postman eventually

leaves. Lola sees her neighbor, Mrs. Coffman, out hanging clothes and talks to her. Mrs. Coffman is too busy caring for her seven children to talk long. Lola reminds Mrs. Coffman that she is looking for Little Sheba. Mrs. Coffman tells her to get another dog and move on.

When the milkman arrives, Lola tries to get him to talk to her by ordering more dairy products. When that doesn't work Lola compliments the milkman on his husky body. The young milkman opens up a little and tells her he will be in strength magazine. He then proceeds to demonstrate a few pushups for her before he says he has to go. Lola spends the next few minutes tuning in to her favorite radio program. It is during the radio program that Lola receives Marie's telegram from a Western Union representative. Lola doesn't want to be nosy but eventually gives in and tries to steam open Marie's telegram to see what it says.

Turk and Marie return to the Delaney house. Lola hides the telegram in her pocket. Marie asks Turk to change and explains to Lola that because it is a life art drawing, Turk is changing into less clothing. Turk will not pose naked because only women pose naked in life arts classes. Lola admires how well Marie is drawing Turk and then admires Turk. After Doc comes home and sees Turk half naked in his living room, Doc and Lola sit in the kitchen. Doc asks Lola a lot of questions about Marie - mainly why she can't find something else to draw. Lola tells Doc she gave them permission to come over.

Despite being upset, Doc does not want to take Lola's suggestion to talk to Marie about it. Lola asks Doc if he knew women pose nude but men don't. Doc's response is that a man has to protect himself. Lola reveals to Doc that Bruce is coming to visit Marie. This news makes Doc happy because he thinks Bruce is a better man for Marie than Turk. Before he could congratulate Marie, Lola stops him. Lola tells him that now isn't the best time to talk about Bruce because Turk will feel bad. Doc wonders why, but agrees to say nothing for now.

Act 1, Scene 1 Analysis

The four characters introduced in the first scene are different in every way. Author William Inge portrays Doc as a quiet, reserved man who values a young woman's innocence. The fact that he is a chiropractor but doesn't consider himself a "real doctor" and was an alcoholic suggests that he has been unhappy with the way his life has been going. Doc's feelings toward Turk leave much for readers to speculate. Doc could be a father figure trying to protect Marie. He could also be a jealous man wishing he was a younger man with a younger wife. His subtle flirting behavior toward Marie, and the fact that he admires Marie's scarf, show the reader that regardless of whatever Doc thinks of Marie, he obviously feels a connection to her.

Lola is a lonely wife, equally unhappy with her life and searching for something. At one point Lola asks why things must get old. Because she wishes Little Sheba never got old, Little Sheba symbolizes many things to Lola. Little Sheba symbolizes what Lola is

looking for in life, but cannot find. Little Sheba also symbolizes the past memories of a younger Lola that Lola wishes she could return to. Lola admires the youthfulness she sees in Marie and Turk. Because Lola has recurring dreams about losing Little Sheba and tries hard to keep people around her, her loneliness and neediness come through. It is possible that Lola took Marie in because she saw a younger version of herself that she wanted to admire.

Inge also shows a deceptive side of Lola. Lola seems to like pumping up men with empty comments. Despite Doc's dislike for Turk, Lola intentionally allows Turk to come over. She has seen Marie and Turk make out before, but still offers the living room "all to themselves." Lola opens Marie's mail without Marie's permission and then lies to Doc in making him believe that Marie knows Bruce is coming the next day. Despite Lola being proud of Doc's sobriety, she tells him she wants him to skip helping someone else with an alcohol addiction so that they can go to the movies.

Marie and Turk are two characters who symbolize what has changed about Doc and Lola. Both characters are young. Doc and Lola must come to grips with the fact that they are older. Mrs. Coffman brings the solution to Lola's problem to light as early as this first scene. Mrs. Coffman tells Lola to get another dog and move on. One emerging theme is youth. Older people should come to grips with the fact that they are not the same age forever but can still enjoy whatever age they are.

Act 1, Scene 2

Act 1, Scene 2 Summary

After months of keeping a dirty house, Lola spends the entire day cleaning. Lola thinks Marie's boyfriend, Bruce, must see a spotless house when he arrives the next day. She even purchases new curtains and picks lilacs from Mrs. Coffman's house for a table centerpiece. Mrs. Coffman must not have poisoned Little Sheba like Lola suspected at first since she is so willing to help. Doc gets lost in a high soprano voice bellowing from the radio while Lola runs to Mrs. Coffman's to get silver polish. When Lola returns she changes the music and asks Doc to perform old card tricks for her. Doc gets compliment after compliment about how brilliant he is at card tricks.

Lola's mind wonders off. Soon she is talking about how much fun she and Doc used to have when they were dating. She reminds Doc of how many boys wanted to date her. Doc is irritated that Lola thinks he was jealous. He tells her to forget the things of the past. "How can you talk that way, Doc? That was the happiest time of our lives," Lola says. Despite Doc's obvious attempts to read the newspaper, Lola continues down Memory Lane out loud.

Lola remembers how she and Doc use to take long walks, and when Doc first kissed her and proposed to her. Doc tells her to forget those things a second time because they happened 20 years ago. Lola wonders if those years vanished into thin air like Little Sheba. Lola moves from remembering to questioning Doc. Does he regret being forced to marry her since she has let go of herself? Were they wrong for not taking their little girl that eventually died to the hospital? Does Doc regret having to give up being a doctor where he was making more money? Doc says they need to focus on the future, not the past. Doc feels he made mistakes once he started drinking. He doesn't want to get upset and then want a drink.

The subject of the past dies. Doc promises to take Lola out dancing. Marie walks in just as Lola and Doc begin to dance to a song on the radio. Marie jokingly asks Lola what type of dancing she was just doing. Lola is hurt by the comment and runs off to cry. Doc and Marie don't notice. Marie compliments Lola on how clean the house is. Marie finds the telegram from Bruce in her room and asks when it arrived. Lola lies to her and tells her it came an hour ago. Doc looks at his wife confused.

Turk arrives at the Delaney house. Marie asks them not to say anything about Bruce coming. Doc questions Lola about why she lied to Marie about when she received the telegram. Lola makes excuses, saying that Turk was there earlier and she couldn't give it to her then. Lola admits to steaming open the letter and sealing it back for Marie. Doc tells Lola that nice people don't open other people's mail. Turk tries to listen in on their conversation from the other room. Lola tells Doc she is sorry for what she did.

Before Doc leaves Lola asks him to do card tricks for Marie and Turk. Doc doesn't want to but reluctantly agrees. Lola walks ahead him to where Marie and Turk are sitting. Lola smiles when she realizes they are making out. Doc gets angry when Lola tells him what they are doing. Lola insists he come watch, but Doc thinks it is mean to spy on people. Lola is shocked to hear this. If she can watch to young people make out in the movie, why can't she watch Marie and Turk kiss?

Doc gets angrier. He thinks Marie should not be doing that if Bruce is coming. When he questions Lola about why she always sticks up for Turk, Lola reminds him that Bruce will be there tomorrow and to calm down. While Doc waits for Lola to get a coat and walk him out, he hears Marie and Turk laughing. In the kitchen Doc pulls out a whiskey bottle and looks at it. Lola comes down and Doc meets her. Before Doc walks out of the house he takes his wife's picture from Turks hand and replaces it on the shelf.

Turk tells Marie that Doc doesn't like him. He says that Doc is jealous and likes Marie, although he won't admit it. Marie laughs him off. She thinks Doc is a harmless quiet man. Turk forgets about Doc and tries to make out with Marie. Marie says they should sit and talk sometime and not always be all over each other. Turk disagrees, gets bored, and gets up to leave. Marie begs him to stay. In between kisses Turk talks to Marie rough while she flirts with him. They agree to do it. As they make plans to have some beers first and sneak back into the house when the Delaney's are asleep, Lola watches in the dark. When they leave the house, Lola stands on the porch and calls for Little Sheba.

Act 1, Scene 2 Analysis

Lola has kept the house filthy until she finds out Marie's boyfriend Bruce is coming. She cleans the house spotless in one day, which impresses everyone. The fact that Lola continues to remember the past, and even calls out to Little Sheba, suggests that she is still not content with the past being the past. She constantly reminds herself and others of how she met Doc and even how Doc used to be an alcoholic. Doc, in contrast to her, seems to have come to grips with living in the present. He continually tells Lola to forget the past and move on. Because Lola implies that Doc was forced to marry her, this may also be a source of her unhappiness.

A parallel begins to show between the older and younger characters. Doc may see himself in Bruce. He, like Bruce, was well off and married young. Marie may remind him of Lola. She is someone he admired and wanted when he was young, and she seemed to be a little loose. Marie also has no problem dating other guys, although she plans to marry Bruce. This may be why Doc gets so angry when he sees Marie with Turk, while Lola seems to approve, even though she knows Marie doesn't love Turk. Little Sheba also seems to emerge as a symbol of Doc and Lola's life. Like Little Sheba, their former life of dancing and fun has been lost.

Lola's deceptiveness continues to show up. Doc finds out she lied and even looked at Marie while she makes out with Turk. Doc thinks this unacceptable. Marie sees nothing

wrong with it. Marie's desire to watch the young couple may stem from her memories of what she and Doc use to do, but don't do anymore. Lola seems to have set up Doc. She intentionally asked Doc to show Marie and Turk his magic tricks so that he would see them making out. Because Doc is adamant about forgetting the past, this is Lola's attempt to get Doc to remember their past.

Doc still proves to be weak when it comes to alcohol. With Lola's conversation of the past he gets frustrated and thinks about alcohol. Since Doc is a recovering alcoholic, why is their alcohol in the house? Alcohol symbolizes the means by which Doc chooses to deal with his emotions. Lola's longing for the past is obvious. Doc's behavior of running from his problems is not so obvious.

Act 2, Scene 1

Act 2, Scene 1 Summary

Doc tells Lola he thought he heard a man's voice last night when Marie came home at midnight. Lola says she heard nothing and goes on to tell them how Marie and Turk were making out last night. Doc is disgusted to hear this and gets up to leave. Just as he passes the living room and admires Marie's scarf, he hears Turk's laugh. Doc leaves without telling Lola what he has heard. Mrs. Coffman pays Lola a visit. She admits she thought Lola did nothing all day. With such a clean house, Mrs. Coffman is amazed and has new respect for Lola. When Mrs. Coffman leaves, Turks sneaks out of Marie's room and runs into Doc, who was returning home for a soda. Doc says nothing to Marie or Lola about what he saw. While Marie helps Lola set the table, Doc finds the whiskey bottle in the kitchen. He sneaks the bottle out under his raincoat.

Act 2, Scene 1 Analysis

Doc is in denial. He is unwillingly to admit that Marie may be loose, despite the evidence. He knows she came in at midnight, although he asked Lola as if he didn't know. He knows he heard Turk's voice, but makes excuses for what other noises he could have heard. When he sees Turk leave his house that morning, he is no longer able to lie to himself. To Doc, innocence is lost. He turns to alcohol for comfort. Because Lola mentioned over and over that Doc was the only one she was with, is it possible that Lola also did what Marie did - entertain another guy before she married? Doc's idea to carry a raincoat to hide the whiskey symbolizes that he will encounter a (life) storm ahead.

Act 2, Scene 2

Act 2, Scene 2 Summary

At 5:30 p.m., the time when Bruce is set to arrive, Marie and Lola are putting finishing touches on the dining table. Lola admires the lilacs she picked from Mrs. Coffman's yard. Marie tells her that lilacs don't last long and by next week they will be dead. Bruce arrives. After meeting Lola he tells the girls he got a raise and hopes to take them to eat and drink cocktails at a fancy hotel. Lola tells him she prepared dinner and runs off to prepare cocktails. Although Bruce wants to go out and be alone with Marie, Marie suggests they eat there since Lola spent so much time on dinner.

In the kitchen Lola is frantic when she can't find the whiskey to make cocktails. She phones the office of Doc's friend Ed Anderson. Doc knows Ed from the Alcoholics Anonymous group. When Ed calls back she explains that she hasn't heard from Doc and the whiskey is missing. Lola lies and tells Bruce and Marie that Doc won't join them for dinner because he's stuck at the office. Since Doc is not home, Lola offers to serve Bruce and Marie dinner by candlelight. Bruce is uncomfortable with this, but Lola insists. Lola watches Bruce and Marie while they prepare to eat.

Act 2, Scene 2 Analysis

Lola is reminded that even her favorite flowers have a time limit of beauty before they fade. The flowers continue to show the overall theme that things change. Young becomes old. Beauty becomes less beautiful. Loving relationships can grow cold. Her loneliness continually puts her in awkward situations. Lola admits that she is a third wheel since Doc is not there. Instead of offering for Marie and Bruce to leave and celebrate, she insists that they stay at her home and eat. Although Lola has not heard from her husband and notices the whiskey bottle missing, she continues to engross herself with Bruce and Marie. Lola still longs for what use to be, and it consumes her.

Act 2, Scene 3

Act 2, Scene 3 Summary

Lola wakes up the next morning on the davenport. When she realizes that Doc has still not come home, she calls Ed Anderson and asks him to come over. Doc sneaks in through the back door and puts the whiskey bottle back. Lola hears him and asks where he has been. She can tell he is drunk. Doc tells her to leave him alone, but when she starts questioning his whereabouts he gets angry. Doc says that Lola made dinner for Bruce, not him, and all she wants to do is watch Marie with her men. Lola disagrees but Doc continues.

He tells her Bruce is probably being forced to marry Marie like he was forced to marry Lola. He calls Marie and Lola sluts. He tells Lola she won't use his mother's china for a dinner again because it isn't meant to be eaten off of by whores. Doc accuses Lola of knowing all along that Turk and Marie were sleeping together while he only just found out this morning. He chases Lola with an ax and tells her that after she entertains Bruce she should entertain Turk. Just as Doc passes out Mrs. Coffman comes running into the house. She tells Lola she heard her screaming and knew Doc was "sick" again. Lola cries.

Ed Anderson and Elmo Huston come into the house. They examine Doc and his state. When they try to talk to Doc he pushes them away, so they have Mrs. Coffman make him some coffee. After he drinks coffee they tell him they are taking him to city hospital. Doc throws a temper tantrum because he says only crazy people go to the city hospital. After trying to run away and even fight the two men, Doc gives in and asks for one last drink before he goes. The men let him have a cup of whiskey and then take him away from the house. Doc tries one last attempt to run away but the men catch him.

Mrs. Coffman offers help to Lola and then leaves. Marie and Bruce come home happy. Marie announces that she is engaged to Bruce. She tells Lola she has decided to quit school and go to Cincinnati to be with Bruce. Lola is still distraught over her husband but tries to genuinely congratulate the couple. Bruce and Marie do not notice Lola's troubled face because they are excited about their own news. Marie tells Lola to pack her things in a box and send them to her. After a quick goodbye to Lola, Marie and Bruce leave to do some shopping and then fly to Bruce's home. Lola calls her mother after Bruce and Marie leave. She tells her mother that Doc is "sick" again and asks to come home for a while.

Act 2, Scene 3 Analysis

Alcohol seems to allow Doc to say things he is thinking to his wife. Lola's behavior has made Doc believe that she and Marie are alike. Doc is hurt that Lola is more interested in other people's lives. He also addresses Lola's deceptiveness. Doc's alcohol problem

shows that he is dealing with some skeletons from his past. Because he tells Lola that he was made to marry her, Doc probably continually wonders what would have happened had he never met her. Would he be a "real doctor"? There is no answer to this question because Doc chose to marry Lola. The decisions he could have made eat him alive.

Doc thinks alcohol makes his fears go away, but it really only makes him think more of what he could have done in the past. It is ironic that Doc must now go to the same place, where he was at one time trying to help people for the same problem. Bruce and Marie's sudden departure suggests that better days may be ahead for Lola and Doc. Doc can sober up. Doc and Lola will no longer have to live with a constant reminder of what was.

Act 2, Scene 4

Act 2, Scene 4 Summary

Mrs. Coffman pays a visit to Lola a week after Doc has left. She says her son got an extra ticket so that she could go with them to the Spring Relays. Lola declines to go. She tells Mrs. Coffman she wants to be home in case Doc comes back from the hospital today. After Mrs. Coffman leaves the mailman drops off a letter, but Lola does not notice. When the milkman comes by, Lola has her order already filled out. She is unexcited when the milkman gives her the issue of the muscle magazine he was featured in.

Doc comes home. He is reserved and quiet, as he was before he started drinking. Lola is happy to see him, but is fearful of his reaction. Doc senses that she is scared of him and tells her he is better. Doc cries as he remembers how it was at the hospital. He begs Lola not to leave him. He also apologizes for his behavior and says he doesn't remember half the things he told her that day. She promises that she will stick with him.

Lola fixes Doc's breakfast when she finds out he hasn't eaten. She tells Doc she had another dream. In her dream, Turk, at her and Doc's old high school stadium, was throwing a javelin in front of thousands of people, including her and Marie,. Lola's dad, who was the coach, eventually took Turk out of the game, because he kept changing into different people, and put Doc in to play. Lola tells him that when he threw the javelin, it went straight up and never came down. As it started to rain she went looking for Little Sheba. Lola and Doc find Little Sheba dead in the middle of the field. Lola is hurt that nobody else saw her or tried to help her because they were too busy trying to get out of the rain. She decides not to help Little Sheba because Doc tells her they must move on. Lola realizes that Little Sheba isn't coming back and decides not to call for her anymore.

Act 2, Scene 4 Analysis

Lola's attitude has changed. In Act One she would have jumped at the chance to go see Turk play. In this act she wants to welcome her husband home instead of admiring Turk. Lola no longer demands attention from the mailman or milkman. She does not notice she has received a letter for the first time in almost a month. She shows no interest to the milkman when he brings her the magazine she had earlier requested. Doc does not remember the insults he yelled at Lola, but she does. For the first time in the entire story she fixes his breakfast for him.

Lola's dream symbolizes everything she has been going through the entire story. In the beginning she was lost and searching for the younger past. This is why Turk was in her dream and then kept changing into other people. Since Doc replaces Turk, the reader knows that Lola has finally learned to let go of the past and embrace the present. The

javelin Doc threw that disappeared into the sky means that Doc and Lola will move past their problems. These problems won't resurface. Lola finding Little Sheba dead shows that the past is dead and that she is now willing to let go of it and move forward. She can't help but notice that if she continues to grieve over something dead, the world and the people in it keep moving. No one else stops their lives. Because Lola has finally learned this lesson, there is no need to long for the past anymore.

Characters

Ed Anderson

with Elmo, Ed is a member of Alcoholics Anonymous. Lola calls him frantic with worry when she discovers the bottle of alcohol is missing. She again calls h1m when Doc returns home drunk. It is Ed and Elmo who take Doc to the hospital.

Bruce

Bruce is Marie's hometown, clean-cut fiancé. He provides the catalyst that finally moves Lola to clean house and prepare dinner when she eagerly anticipates his arrival When he finally arrives, Bruce asks Marie to marry and move away with him.

Mrs. Coffman

Mrs. Coffman is the Delaney's German neighbor. In the first act, she has little time for gossip With Lola and tells her that she needs to keep busy. They are not friends, as is evidenced when Lola wonders if Mrs. Coffman might have killed Sheba. But when Mrs. Coffman hears Doc attack Lola in Act II, she goes next door to check on her neighbor and offer comfort. By the final scene a friendship is forming between the two women, and Mrs. Coffman again returns to ask Lola to accompany her family to the relay games.

Doc Delaney

Doc is a chiropractor. He had planned to go to medical school, but when Lola became pregnant, he married her and settled for chiropractic school instead. Doc is an alcoholic who has been sober for one year; he relies on Alcoholics Anonymous for support. He is disillusioned and disappointed at the loss of his only child, who died at birth, the loss of his medical career, and the loss of his wife's youth and beauty. Doc views Mane as the daughter he never had. His image of her is one of innocence and purity, but he lacks any fundamental ability to see her as she really is. Doc's denial of Marie' s sexuality leads to yet another disappointment when he realizes that she is, in fact, having a sexual affair With Turk, although she has a boyfriend back home

Doc's sobriety is fragile, and to cope with yet another disillusionment in his life, he once again returns to alcohol for support. When he returns home the next morning, Doc lashes out at Lola, calling her a slut and accusing her of being a fat and lazy burden who cost him the dreams of his youth. Doc grabs a hatchet and tries to attack Lola, but he is too drunk to do any harm. After a stay in the hospital to dry out, Doc again returns to Lola. In the final scene, he appears to have come to terms with his life as it is.

Lola Delaney

Lola's life is as full of disappointments as her husband's. But rather than drink to deal with depression, Lola sleeps excessively, often not waking until noon. She was pregnant when she and Doc married, and to avoid gossip, the couple allowed a midwife to deliver the baby. The infant died, and Lola was unable to conceive again. Lola's lost youth and beauty is symbolized by her lost dog, Sheba. Sheba is as irretrievable as Lola's beauty and Doc's dreams.

Lola has become fat and slovenly, and, in her boredom, she constantly accosts her neighbors and delivery people for conversation. She has no interest in housework or cooking, and instead, seeks escape through voyeurism. She encourages her young boarder's affair with Turk, leaving them alone and establishing opportunities for the two lovers to meet and then spying on them. Lola is so interested in Marie's love IIfe that she secretly reads a telegram that announces the arrival of the girl's fiancé, Bruce

It is unclear exactly where Lola's fantasies will lead, but she cleans the house to a nearly unrecognizable state and prepares a special dinner in anticipation of Bruce's arrival. Doc correctly understands Lola's role in what he considers to be Marie's fall from innocence, and his return to alcohol and his attack upon her appears to shock Lola into reassessing her life.

Elmo Huston

Like Ed Anderson, Elmo is a member of Alcoholics Anonymous. He helps Ed take Doc to the city hospital.

Marie

Marie is the Delaney's boarder. She is an art student and serves differing roles for both Doc and Lola. Doc envisions Marie as virginal and identifies her with the *Ave Maria* he hears playing on the radio. But Lola, who was once a beauty queen and popular with boys, identifies with Mane as a younger version of herself. Marie serves as the catalyst for the action in the play. Her fall from innocence results in Doc's return to drinking. She uses Turk to alleviate her boredom as she waits for Bruce to marry her. In the play's conclusion, she quite merrily runs off to marry Bruce, completely unaware of the near tragedy she has caused. At the tune this play was written, Marie's open sexuality and her use of Turk as a sexual diversion would have been quite shocking to audiences.

Milkman

The milkman is another of Lola's objects of attention. Although she has been asked to leave a note telling him what she needs delivered, Lola repeatedly tries to engage him in conversation. It's a harmless flirtation for Lola, but causes a small delay for the

milkman. However, he is charmed by her eagerness and clearly warms up to the short conversation.

Postman

The postman seems genuinely sympathetic to Lola's loneliness. He takes the tune to come in and dank a glass of water with her and lingers long enough to exchange a few words. But when Lola tells him that her husband is a member of Alcoholics Anonymous, he seems almost uncomfortable with receiving this confidence. But after Lola presents him with a small toy for his grandchild, the postman cheerfully tells her that he will write her a letter if no one else does.

Turk

Turk is a stereotypical athletic stud. He throws the javelin, a clearly phallic symbol that reveals his purpose in the play. He poses for the art students,

and Lola is excited at the prospect of seeing him nearly unclothed as he poses for Marie. He is interested in only one thing, and most of his time on stage is spent playing sexual games with Marie. Their banter is heavy with sexual import. Turk's departure in the morning after a night spent with Marie is witnessed by Doc and leads to his fall from sobriety.

Themes

Addiction

At the time that *Come Back, Little Sheba* was first produced on Broadway, few people spoke openly about addiction. Alcohol abuse was, and remains, a common domestic problem, but families rarely spoke to outsiders about alcoholic family members. Membership in Alcoholics Anonymous was not a topic for the kind of casual conversation that Lola engages in with her milkman and postman.

Inge's play demonstrates how destructive alcohol can be. When Doc chases Lola with a hatchet in the second act, the audience is meant to feel horrified The entire seventeen minute sequence of Doc's alcoholic breakdown is disturbing to watch, and when he is taken away to the psychiatric hospital, it is Inge's intention that the viewer feel both relief and disgust. Yet he also sought to illustrate to his audience the circumstances that lead to such addictions. While clearly showing the destructiveness of dependency, Inge seeks to foster understanding for why depressed people turn to alcohol for solace or escape.

Change and Transformation

The lives that Doc and Lola planned more than twenty years earlier have not come to fruition. Lola longs for her past happiness, for the time when she was young and beautiful and Doc was jealous of the other young men who also courted her. She wants to capture again the happiness of their early courtship and marriage and the anticipation of a baby. Instead, Lola has become fat and sloppy. Her appearance is careless and their house messy and dirty, and the children she longed for did not come. The baby died when Doc and Lola were forced to go to a midwife to avoid gossip about her premarital pregnancy. As a result of complications from that experience, Lola was unable to conceive again.

Doc also longs for the past. Before he was forced to marry and support a pregnant Lola, he planned on attending medical school and a subsequent career in medicine. Instead, he became a chiropractor, and, to forget the past, he also began to drink. The dissonance between Doc and Lola's youthful dreams and their unfulfilled present is the central conflict of the play. Their transformation from nostalgic longing to final acceptance is the work's thematic resolution.

Limitations and Opportunities

Doc drinks because he is disappointed and disillusioned at the loss of opportunity in his life. As a young man, he wanted to go to medical school and become a doctor. In place of his dream, however, he had to settle for less, becoming a chiropractor. The woman for whom he gave up his dream career has become fat and slovenly. Lola's hopes for a

family and fulfilling marriage were dashed when their baby died at birth. Society prescribed that a woman's primary role was that of mother and wife. Unable to perform even this limited role, Lola sees no place for herself in postwar society She is subsequently' more interested in the lives of others who have a better chance of fulfilling these expectations-such as Marie and Turk or Marie and Bruce-than she is of her own. The play's resolution, with Doc and Lola finally coming to terms with their lot in life, offers the hope that they may finally transcend the disappointments in their lives and, together, discover new opportunities.

Loneliness

Lola spends her days trying to fill the time. She is lethargic and disinterested in keeping her home clean. She wants to sleep away half the day and fill the rest with idle gossip or voyeuristic pursuits; her primary pleasure comes from vicariously enjoying Turk and Marie's romance and cornering strangers into mindless conversations. Lola's loneliness is also evident in her invitation to cook dinner for Bruce and Marie, whose company she needs to assuage the emptiness in her life.

Memory and Reminiscence

Much of Inge's drama is centered on the time Lola and Doc spend dwelling on their past. Both remember the time when they were courting, when they were both happy and carefree Lola remembers her beauty and how the boys all swarmed around her. She remembers Doc's jealousy and how much he loved her. Doc remembers his plans to go to medical school and his dreams of a brilliant career in medicine, but his membership in Alcoholics Anonymous has taught him that such memories are best forgotten. He tells Lola that the past is behind them and recites the AA prayer. It is important to note that when Doc is out of control and in a drunken rage, It is Lola's reminder of her past beauty that calms him and ends the danger. Inge clearly shows the couples' nostalgia as a refuge from the regret of their present Circumstances. Their memories are an oasis to which they can retreat when their real lives become too depressing. That they are able to dispense with their reliance on such memories-an addiction as real and dangerous as Doc's drinking-represents a major turning point in their lives.

Sexuality

Marie's sexuality is the catalyst for Doc's return to drinking after a year of sobriety. Such overt sexuality was a new subject for the theatre; nice girls from good families did not engage in premarital sex as Marie so openly does. Those who did were the shameful objects of quickie marriages or back room abortions. Lola's early sexuality is seen by Doc as a bellwether to their later unhappiness, their premarital sex led to an unplanned pregnancy, marriage, and, ultimately, the loss of their dreams. Doc thus views such behavior as wrong and dangerous. When he is drunk, Doc accuses Lola of sexual

impropriety. And now Mane, who is engaged to the nice boy back home, is having sex with Turk, a boy she does not love and who she has no intention of marrying But Doc, who feels both sexual and paternal desires toward Mane, associates the young woman with the Virgin Mary. When he discovers that she is bedding a stereotypical jock whom she does not love, Doc's illusions are shattered, and he suffers a breakdown.

Sexuality in the 1950s was a taboo subject. There existed a great discrepancy between what was preached and what was practiced-as evidenced by Doc's participation in premarital sex and later condemnation of such behavior. Inge's use of sex in *Come Back, Little Sheba* is primarily as a tool to allow Doc to confront reality. His realization that a "Virginal" woman such as Marie possesses carnal desire sends him into a tailspin, yet the realization also enables him to eventually deal with the mistakes of his past and face the consequences. For Lola, sex offers entertainment in the form of the lovemaking she witnesses between Mane and Turk. Doc's breakdown brings her to the realization that such behavior is unhealthy. She also understands that she must deal with reality and that sex must play a more personal role in her life.

Style

Act

An act is a major division in a drama. In Greek plays the sections of the drama signified by the appearance of the chorus were usually divided into five acts. This is the formula for most serious drama from the Greeks to the Romans to the Elizabethan playwrights like William Shakespeare. The five acts denote the structure of dramatic action. They are exposition, complication, climax, falling action, and catastrophe. The five-act structure was followed until the nineteenth century when Henrik Ibsen *(A Doll's House)* combined elements into fewer acts. *Come Back, Little Sheba* is a two-act play. The exposition and complication are combined in the first act when the audience learns of Doc and Lola's disappointments, Doc's drinking problem, and Marie's affair with Turk. The climax occurs in the second act when Doc begins to drink again. Doc's drunken return in Scene 2 provides the falling action, and the catastrophe occurs in this act when Doc and Lola are forced to recognize that they must live with the choices they have made and that the past cannot be changed.

Scene

Scenes are subdivisions of an act. A scene may change when all of the main characters either enter or exit the stage. But a change of scene may also indicate a change of time. In *Come Back. Little Sheba.* the second scene of Act I occurs later on the same day, and thus, indicates the passage of time in the play.

Setting

The time, place. and culture in which the action of the play takes place is called the setting. The elements of setting may include geographic location, physical or mental environments. prevailing cultural attitudes. or the historical time in which the action takes place. The location for Inge' s play is the downstairs of an old house in a Midwestern city; the time is post-World War II. The action occurs over a period of two days. The proceedings are further reduced to one set, the downstairs of the Delaney home. This narrows the focus to Doc and Lola's home, both literally and figuratively. The setting is the result of their life choices, the sum of their actions. It is the battleground upon which they must resolve their differences and move forward.

Plot

This term refers to the pattern of events. Generally plots should have a beginning, a middle, and a conclusion, but they may also sometimes be a series of episodes connected together. Basically, the plot provides the author with the means to explore primary themes. Students are often confused between the two terms; but themes

explore ideas, and plots simply relate what happens in a very obvious manner. Thus the plot of *Come Back., Little Sheba* is the story of a husband and wife who find that their present is not commensurate with the dreams of their past. But the themes are those of loneliness, addiction, and lost opportunities.

Character

A person in a dramatic work. The actions of each character are what constitute the story. Character can also include the idea of a particular individual's morality. Characters can range from simple stereotypical figures to more complex multi-faceted ones. Characters may also be defined by personality traits, such as the rogue or the damsel in distress. "Characterization" is the process of creating a lifelike person from an author's imagination. To accomplish this the author provides the character with personality traits that help define who he will be and how he will behave in a given situation.

For instance, in the beginning of *Come Back, Little Sheba,* Doc is sober, although his evasive answers to Lola indicate he is not happy or even accepting of the life he is living. As the play progresses, it becomes clearer that Doc is in a great deal of emotional pain. He is using Marie's purity to represent all the lost opportunities in Ins life. When he realizes that she is not what he thought, he cannot deal with even one more disappointment in his life. These sequences define the character of Doc as a broken, disillusioned man. The traits Inge assigns to him identify him as such and his actions are therefore plausible to the audience.

Drama

A drama is often defined as any work designed to be presented on the stage. It consists of a story, of actors portraying characters, and of action But historically, drama can also consist of tragedy, comedy, religious pageant, and spectacle. In modem usage, drama explores serious topics and themes but does not achieve the same level as tragedy. Drama is also applicable as a term to describe a storyline that is serious in nature and theme. *Come Back, Little Sheba* represents both definitions of the term.

Catharsis

Catharsis is the release of emotions, usually fear and pity. The term as first used by Aristotle in Ins *Poetics* to refer to the desired effect of tragedy on the audience. The final act of *Come Back, Little Sheba* is cathartic because the tension has been building as the audience has watched the affair of Mane and Turk progress, understanding of course, that its lack of concealment will lead to a climax when Doc realizes that Marie is not pure and virginal. When Doc finally explodes in rage at Lola, the audience also feels the eruption of this tension as a catharsis. For the audience, Doc, and Lola, this catharsis brings clearer understanding and, it is Inge's hope, change for the better.

Symbolism

Symbolism is the use of one object to replace another. It is an important tool in literature. The symbol is an object or image that implies a reality beyond its original meaning. This is different from a metaphor, which summons forth an object in order to describe an idea or a quality. For example, the dog Little Sheba is a symbol of Lola's lost youth

She searches for the dog, just as she searches for her lost beauty and youth. The javelin that he throws is a symbol for Turk's role in the play. He is a sexual plaything for Mane. The javelin is clearly identified with male sexual genitalia and sexuality. Likewise, Doc's idealized perception of Mane represents his desire to correct the mistakes of Ins past. He wants to believe that Mane will behave in a pure fashion and thus not suffer the fate that Lola has.

Historical Context

Post-World War II America was a period marked by the shift of populations from cities to suburbs. Thanks to the GJ. Bill (which provided government funding for the college education of men exiting the armed services), thousands of men who would never have been able to go to college found the way suddenly made easier A building boom meant that those better educated men marry and the families could buy the new houses being built on tracts all across suburban America.

The decade also marked the beginning of a period of domestic perfection. Television would turn the postwar ideal of perfect families in perfect homes surrounded by perfect white fences into the national Image. Unfortunately for many families, failure to live up to this Ideal resulted in depression and despondency-much like Doc and Lola in *Come Back, Little Sheba.* Darkness was also evident in the political events of the decade. It was the beginning of Joseph McCarthy's "red scare" during which the House Un-American Activities Committee persecuted numerous American citizens suspected of communism. In Korea, early skirmishes signaled America's involvement in yet another war

Despite the public emphasis on suburban existence, a large portion of America was still centered on a rural way of life. In Kansas, Inge's birthplace and the setting for *Come Back, Little Sheba,* there were fewer than one million people living in a state that serves as the exact geographical center of the U.S By 1949, Kansas was still an agricultural center with one fourth of the nation's wheat grown there.

In cities across the nation, the women who had run factories and kept assembly lines running during World War II were out of men's slacks and once again back in aprons, domestically at work in their homes. By 1949, the baby boom of postwar America was well established. The emphasis, after years of depression followed by years of war, was on stability and family. Women lost the jobs they held during the war because war veterans needed work; instead, women were returned to the domestic sphere they had occupied before the war. The role of wife and mother was repeatedly portrayed in the media as the highest aspiration for a woman in postwar society. When Lola laments early in the play that she does not know what she is supposed to do in a childless house, she is giving voice to the dark underside of that perfect American family. In the midst of a baby boom, what is a woman without children to do? Lola tells the audience that Doc does not want her working, but he is only repeating the natural order of domestic life.

Few women were working outside the home in tills era, but women were beginning to become a stronger force in society. With production of consumer goods at an all time high, women as consumers were beginning to have more power. In addition, their wartime participation in the American work force had given them a taste of independence and pride in workmanship. The postwar years marked the beginnings of the women's movement that would flower in the ensuing decades. For many women, the 1950s reinforced the belief that they should have the same opportunities as men in

both domestic and business situations Yet due to the prosperity of the postwar business boom, many other women saw no reason to question the status quo. With increased money circulating in the economy, consumer spending was up and times were good.

A postwar production economy was trying to meet the demand for new cars, new washers, and the multitude of new items that television advertise ments promised each family they would need. Auto manufacturer General Motors's profit in 1950 was nearly $636.5 million. The Gross National Product was $284 billion, a huge increase from 1940's $99 billion. The manufacture and sale of television sets also sharply increased to meet new demands. The acquisition of material goods was another symbol of the American Dream. If a family did not have a new home, new car, and completely modem new kitchen, then they were not living the good life.

Critical Overview

When *Come Back, Little Sheba* opened on Broadway in February of 1950, it was to mixed reviews. Most critics cheered the performances of Shirley Booth and Sydney Blackmer in the lead roles. But all too many deplored the actors' waste in a play described as "dramatic trivialities" (Howard Bames in *New York Theatre Critics' Reviews)* and "underwritten to the point of barrenness" (Brooks Atkinson in his second *New York Times* review two weeks after the play's opening). Barnes and Atkinson were not alone. *Commonweal's* Kappo Phelan labeled Inge 's drama "a poor play on all counts," and in a review Written for the *New Yorker, Wolcott* Gibbs called attention to the play's mix of "realism and psychiatric claptrap.' , Yet not all Critics hated the play; many liked it and many more had mixed reactions. Atkinson, in his first review for the *New York Times,* noted the play's topics as "terrifyingly true" and its story as "straightforward and unjacketed."

The play's reception when it was released as a film in 1952 was similarly mixed. Booth's reprised performance was again noted as excellent, but critics still attacked the film, though in fewer numbers. The critic for *Theatre Arts,* Robert Hatch, complimented Booth's performance and said that Inge's play is an "acute and compassionate statement of the horror implicit in wasted lives." Also noting the excellence of Booth's performance was Philip Hartung, whose review in *Commonweal* praised the play's "repeated plea for compassion and understanding of one's fellow man."

Come Back, Little Sheba was the first of four Broadway hits for Inge . But, this drama could not be described as a smash hit. It played for less than six months. Inge himself observed in the forward to the play that his work "did good business for only a few weeks and then houses began to dwindle to the size of tea parties." Inge admitted that he took a cut in royalties and the actors took salary cuts to keep the play on stage. Yet based on *Come Back, Little Sheba's* Broadway debut, Inge was voted the most promising new playwright by the Drama Critics Circle. And Booth and Blackmer each won Antionette ("Tony") Perry Awards for their performances.

The work was more successful financially as a film.

Inge's depiction of Midwestern life provided a new setting for Broadway theater patrons. Prior to Inge 's string of plays, most works focused on northeastern urban characters or the southern characters of Tennessee Williams. The topics portrayed in Inge 's drama were also new to Broadway The frank manner in which Inge presents alcoholism and addiction in the play was shocking to many viewers. And the audience would have also been horrified by the scene of Doc' s drunken attack on Lola; domestic abuse, especially as it related to alcohol, was a subject discussed only in hushed whispers in the 1950s. Inge's depictions, however, opened the door for further dramatic discussion of the topics. In subsequent decades the matter become a popular topic for film and theater, with works such as *Lost Weekend* and *Leaving Las Vegas* presenting stark and realistic visions of addiction.

As with the topic of abuse, Inge innovated open portrayals of sex. One reviewer of *Come Back, Little Sheba, Catholic World's* Euphemia Wyatt, found the scenes between Marie and Turk embarrassing. Certainly other members of the audience may have felt the same way. Marie makes only the slightest effort to be discrete as she sneaks Turk up to her bedroom after the Delaneys have gone to bed. Her sexual bantering with Turk offers no indication that she is embarrassed, only that she and Turk are interested in casual sex. In fact, Marie makes clear that Turk is being used as a diversion until she can marry her boyfriend back home. This was a shocking revelation' in that many believed a woman should only have sex after marriage and, further, that the act serve only as a method of procreation

Addressing such topics may have earned Inge initial criticism, but by portraying them so realistically in his play he paved the way for a new contemporary theater. Later appraisals of Inge's work invariably include *Come Back, Little Sheba,* citing it as a seminal work of modem drama

Criticism

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

Critical Essay #1

Metzger is a professional writer who specializes in literature and drama. In this essay she discusses Inge's exploration of social preconceptions regarding marriage and success in postwar America. She concludes that Inge was ahead of his time in addressing inequities in the expected social roles of men and women.

When *Come Back, Little Sheba* made its first appearance on Broadway, many reviewers dismissed it as a boring domestic soap opera. Others focused on the psychological complexities of the two lead characters. But Jane Courant argued in *Studies in American Drama* that audiences should, instead, appreciate Inge' s drama for Its revolutionary exploration of social and cultural ideas. Courant noted that Inge "confronted sexual stereotyping, social conformity, and especially the cultural media that reinforced these values." Earlier, when Inge was still a drama critic for the *Saint Louis Star-Times,* he had criticized Hollywood films for creating only passive, accepting women.

Accordingly, said Courant, when Inge wrote *Come Back, Little Sheba* it was with the intent of creating a woman as rich and complex as any male character, who "coexisted with men as fully developed characters with strong physical and spiritual needs." Thus, Lola states early in the play, "When I lost my baby and found out I couldn't have any more, I didn't know what to do with myself." Lola is haunted by this loss, which she channels into her plaintive calls for her lost dog, Sheba. Doc, of course, is haunted by the loss of his career. When he was forced to give up his dreams of medical school, Doc also lost the economic and social prestige that came with the medical license.

Both their losses come at a point in postwar America where the baby boom signals the Importance of family and a consumer-driven economy propels the prosperity of the nation. But the Delaneys have neither children nor prosperity. Courant declared that the "postwar American environment placed enormous value on social status and material success," and these values were "unabashedly proclaimed by the expanding electronic media, anxious to sell a vast array of consumer goods." In an early draft of *Come Back, Little Sheba,* Courant stated that Inge has Lola enter in Act I as the radio plays an ad for a cream to restore a woman's youth. Since the symbolism of Inge's play is so heavily focused on the loss of youth' s beauty and promise, the connection to media influence is readily apparent.

The importance of media, especially Hollywood movies, is apparent in Lola's justification for watching Marie and Turk kissing. When Doc Criticizes Turk and warns Lola that the young man is probably forcing Marie to kiss him, Lola replies that Marie "is kissing him like he was Rudolph Valentino." When Doc tries to stop his wife's description of Marie's and Turk's embrace, Lola replies that Doc thinks "every young girl is Jennifer Jones in *The Song of Bernadette."* And in Lola's reply to Doc's accusation of spying, she compares what she is doing to watching actors kiss in a movie. Lola is unable to separate the reality of what Marie and Turk are doing from the beguiling images created in Hollywood. Courant argued that this exchange has different meanings for Lola and

Doc. For Lola, "a fascinating movie is going on in her own home, and with no meaningful purpose in her own life, she passively accepts a role of observer with no notion of interfering." But Doc, "inappropriately places responsibility for Marie's behavior on his wife." Neither husband or wife seem aware that both are confusing illusion with reality.

Inge was ahead of his time when, through Lola, he points out the inequities between women and men. When Marie tells Lola that the female models in her art class can pose nude, but men must be covered, Lola is shocked at the inequity, and she exclaims, "If it' s alright for a woman, it oughta' be for a man." But there is a double standard governing the behavior of men and women. This discrepancy is again noted when Doc automatically assumes Marie is pure and virginal, even identifying her with the Virgin Mary when he hears *Ave Maria;* but he naturally assumes that Turk is another debauched male, only interested in one thing-sex.

The reality that Inge makes clear is that Mane is as sexually charged as Turk Thus, the social implications of Inge 's characterizations are important. The contrast between Doc and Turk is even more interesting. Doc is as sexually repressed as the illusion he creates about Marie. And Turk, whom Doc thinks of as a seducer of Young virgins, is himself being used by the sexually liberated Mane. All of this reversed role-playing predicts the sexual revolution and women's rights movements that will explode in the 1960s Inge's drama is nearly fifteen years ahead of Its time. Given the potential for misunderstanding the playwright's intentions, it is little wonder that 1950 theatre critics provided such mixed reviews when *Come Back, Little Sheba* opened.

Marie has been the focus of much of the play's critical review. Her open sexuality and the easy manner in which she dismisses Turk when her fiancé, Bruce, appears, is a incongruity for the cultural milieu in which Inge was writing. Marie does not easily fit into any grouping. She is neither pure nor tainted. And, she is more complex than she initially appears. For instance, when Marie first enters the stage she is described as wearing only a sheer dainty negligee. Mane seems genuinely unaware of Doc' s infatuation with her or of the inappropriateness of her clothing. And yet, as she "starts dancing away from him," as the stage direction requires, there is a hint of flirtation. This is even more evident when Marie returns to the stage after she has dressed After Lola kisses Doc goodbye, Mane Jokes, "Aren't you going to kiss me, Dr. Delaney?"

Jordan Miller ignored this flirtation and the stage direction that Inge has supplied, and asserted in the *Kansas Quarterly* that Mane's role in Doc's fall is inadvertent. After first describing Mane as a "bubbly. . . classic stereotype of the oh-so-enthusiastic coed, eager to get her education in her own free way," Miller later referred to Mane as a complication to "Doc's trial." But Miller did not blame Marie for what happens to Doc and Lola; he blamed Lola Miller excused Doc's infatuation with Marie by describing her as "the picture to Doc of the Lola that might have been," and so, "his infatuation with her is entirely understandable." Miller argued that Doc's enjoyment in Mane is to be expected in the face of Lola's appearance and he observed that "in Doc's vicarious enjoyment of Marie's fresh daintiness as a Lola substitute, as well as his intense pleasure at her very

nearness, the conflict he is enduring within himself involving his loyalties to ills repulsive wife is all the more obvious."

Later, Miller excused Doc's fall from sobriety, as "appropriate" and "effective." When he placed the blame for Doc's behavior on Lola, Miller assigned a meaning to the play that Inge never intended and, in fact. denied. Courant quoted an early article that Inge wrote for *Theatre Arts* in which he stated that Lola is "childish rather than slovenly" and that "she possesses enough human warmth and compassion to make her his [Doc's] equal."

Lola is more than a symbol of Doc's lost dreams or her own discarded hopes. And she is much more complex than Miller admitted when he described her as "childish. . . [and] infantile," with an "arrested emotional development." However, when Miller acknowledged that Lola is the "picture of a thousand, of ten thousand women whose lives have descended to just such meaningless routines,"

he was articulating a social problem that Inge illuminates in this play. During World War II, women assumed many of the roles that men had traditionally held. Women worked in factories, on assembly lines, and in support of the war effort. When the war ended, and the men returned, women were fired to ensure employment for the returning veterans. Doc's insistence that Tola not work was all too commonplace in the results of such actions. Lola has spent twenty years in the emptiness of her house. It is little wonder that she wants to sleep until noon or that she has little interest in cleaning her prison.

An interesting contrast is offered by Mrs. Coffman, who has seven children and a spotless home. Her house is not empty; she has the challenge of caring for a large family to fill her days. Lola, though, has nothing to fill her days. Lola's loneliness, manifested in her eagerness to gossip and chatter with whomever comes to her door, is clearly obvious. Her life is a "meaningless routine," but it is because of a social standard that creates two distinct spheres for men and women. Doc works in the public sphere; the work is not the career he wanted, but it is a way to escape into the world. It is ironic that Doc has relegated Lola to the domestic sphere and an unfulfilled existence when his drinking is in reaction to his own unfulfilled dreams.

Source: Sheri Metzger, for *Drama for Students,* Gale, 1998.

Critical Essay #2

In this review of a 1984 revival production of Come Back, Little Sheba, *Henry offers a favorable appraisal of the play and reaffirms Inge's place among America's best playwrights.*

When *Come Back. Little Sheba* opened on Broadway in 1950, critics hailed its author, William Inge, as an authentic voice of the plain people west of the Mississippi. He burnished his reputation for passionate simplicity with *Picnic* (winner of a 1953 Pulitzer Prize), *Bus Stop* (1955) and *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs* (1957). Never a master of plot or construction, Inge was incomparably tender, a poet laureate of adolescent sexuality and middle-aged longing. An honored place in theater history seemed assured. Then all went sour. Flop followed flop; drink and depression overtook him. When he committed suicide in 1973, the New York *Times* obituary appraised him as a man who had "lost his gift. "Gift there was, however, and after near oblivion, Inge is being rediscovered: last week the Roundabout Theater in New York City mounted a powerful *Come Back, Little Sheba.* the first major Manhattan production since its premiere. The Berkshire Theater Festival in Stockbridge, Mass., is currently staging *A Loss of Roses* with Elizabeth Franz and Shaun Cassidy. A musical version of *Bus Stop* and a West Coast stage revival of *Picnic* are pending, and Washington PM' Drama Critic David Richards is

Like all of Inge's best plays, *Sheba* is slight of plot but musky with atmosphere An alcoholic chiropractor (Philip Bosco) and his latterly wife (Shirley Knight) live in a dreary house in the Midwest, diverted from maudlin introspection only by their boarder, a sprightly college student (Mia Dillon). Doom seeps through every dusty curtain. Although the husband is supposedly recovered, it is apparent that he is looking for an excuse to take a drink. Although the college girl is beloved as a surrogate for the couple's baby daughter who died 20 years before, it is evident that she will, however inadvertently, add to the wreckage of the marriage. The title refers to the wife's calling for a lost puppy, yet it is clear that hers is in truth a *cri de coeur* for the unassuageable pain of growing old before she has even grown up. If this is the heartland, it is as seen by Freud: the husband lusts after the girl and fantasizes about her as the Virtuous virgin that his wife was not; the wife acts kittenish even with the milkman; the girl selects lovers, then discards them. Middle age is portrayed as a time of aching sexual frustration, made more acute by the close-at-hand vision of youth. Some of Inge's kitchen-sink exposition seems dated and clumsy in its mix of naturalism and artifice. But *Sheba* remains a showcase for poignant acting. Knight attains a lumpish sweetness but does not sentimentalize her character as a victim. Bosco has little to do until his whisky-sodden storming, but radiates the disappointment that beclouds the house. Dillon blends coy charm with unhesitating selfishness. And as her beau of convenience, Kevin Conroy is boisterously funny yet pathetic, reveling in his self-image as "a brute," never realizing that it is he who is being overpowered Inge did not transform his characters: they end where they began. But he understood them. In their interplay was genuine life, often blunted but ever resilient.

Source: William A. Henry III, "The Laureate of Longinrigin" III *Time,* Volume 124, no 4, July 23, 1984, pp 103

Critical Essay #3

Gibbs reviews the original Broadway production of Come Back, Little Sheba, *awarding plaudits to the cast yet finding Inge'* s *text short on substance. Despite his mixed feelings, Gibbs still finds several portions of the play fascinating and one scene in particular "genuinely shocking.* "

In the last scene of *Come Back, Little Sheba,* at the Booth, the forty-year-old heroine tells her husband about a dream she had the night before. She was, it seems, a spectator at a track meet, watching the javelin throw. At first, it appeared to her that the star performer was a young athlete who had stirred her powerfully in her waking life, not only by posing for a drawing in his running trunks but also by seducing a pretty student who happened to be boarding in her house. Rapidly, however, he turned into a succession of other young men, whose muscular physiques and fetching ways had appealed to her rather strongly, too. The confusion was finally resolved when this multiple personality was disqualified from further competition by her father, who chanced to be an official at the meet, and the event was won by her husband, who threw the javelin so high that it disappeared in the sky. The dream ended with her discovery of the body of her little dog, Sheba, who had run away one night and never come back and whom, in some mysterious way, she had come to identify with everything she had lost in life. It is doubtful whether so much elementary and perhaps slightly preposterous symbolism has ever been crowded into one dream before in the history of the theatre, and the fact that the author, William Inge, thinks enough of it to employ it as a sort of official key to the meaning of his play may partially explain why *Come Back, Little Sheba,* for all the true and touching things it has to say, is on the whole much less satisfactory than it ought to be. The story so conscientiously diagrammed by the dream is a fairly simple one. When the elderly hero was a young man, he had hoped to be a great doctor. However, a youthful romance with a girl somewhat beneath him had resulted in pregnancy and a hasty marriage, and he had been obliged to give up his medical studies and take to the science of chiropractic. When the child was born dead, the couple's frustration was complete, and by the time the play opens, he is a temporarily reclaimed drunkard, a member of Alcoholics Anonymous, and she is a hopeless slattern, indifferent to her own appearance and that of her house, and even unwilling to get up and cook his breakfast. Her only surviving interests, in fact, are popular radio programs; conversations with the deliverymen, especially if handsome; the love affair being conducted by her boarder, from which she obviously gets a strong vicarious excitement; and, of course, the loss of her dog it is a dismal existence, a nightmare of suburban domesticity, but the unhappy pair are at least resigned to it until the husband, identifying the boarder with the daughter he never had, is infuriated by what he takes to be an attempt of his wife to debauch her and goes back to his bottle. There is a genuinely shocking scene in which, after reproaching her with ruining his life and turning theIr home into a bordello, he attacks her with a hatchet, but fortunately he falls down in a drunken stupor before any blood is shed. Nevertheless, the situation is still alarming, and everybody is rather relieved when two envoys from Alcoholics Anonymous come and take him away to a hospital. When he returns, a week

later, he is naturally a chastened man, and the two are reconciled. It is apparently Mr. Inge's contention that since they have nothing but each other, they had better forget the past (there is some talk about getting a new dog to replace little Sheba) and try to make the best of things as they are. I found it rather hard to believe that conditions wouldn't be precisely as bad, if not worse, within a couple of months, but it is quite possible that I am underrating the power of good resolutions, made under great emotional tension, not to mention that of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Though I have a good many misgivings about the play, which strikes me as a peculiar mixture of effective realism and psychiatric claptrap, I have none at all about the performances given in it by Shirley Booth and Sidney Blackmer. Mr Inge's heroine is an unusually taxing part, Since she could readily seem only a silly and graceless woman, amply deserving everything her husband says about her, but Miss Booth achieves the difficult feat of arousing both pity and sympathy for her. It is a considerable accomplishment, calling for acting qualities, for a range of emotion, that I hadn't been aware she possessed. Mr. Blackmer's Job is easier, long-suffering husbands and dipsomaniacs being among the few almost foolproof assignments the stage has to offer, but the transition between these two conditions certainly presents its problems, and I think he handles them admirably. Of the others, I especially liked John Randolph, as a physical-culture addict, and Olga Fabian, as a busybody living next door, and there were sound contributions by Joan Lorring, Lonny Chapman, and Daniel A. Reed. Howard Bay's set, described in the program as "an old house in a run-down neighborhood," has a fidelity to these specifications that would drive almost any man to drink.

Source: Wolcott Gibbs, "The Dream and the Dog" In the *New Yorker,* Volume XXVI, no 1, February, 1950, pp 69,70.

Adaptations

Come Back, Little Sheba was adapted as a film in 1952 it was produced by Hal B. Wallace for Paramount Pictures and stars Shirley Booth as Lola, Burt Lancaster as Doc, Terry Moore as Marie, and Richard Jaeckel as Turk. Booth won an Academy A ward for her performance.

A made-for-television version was presented on NBC in 1977. The cast includes Lawrence Olivier, Joanne Woodward, Carne Fisher, and Nicholas Campbell. It was produced by Granada Television.

A musical adaptation titled *Sheba* opened III 1974 III Chicago. It starred Kay Ballard, George Wallace, Kimberly Farr, and Gary Sand.

Topics for Further Study

Research the history of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Most people did not speak freely of addictions in 1950. Consider whether Inge's play breaks any new ground in its portrayal of an alcoholic's relapse and recovery.

Some critics have criticized *Come Back, Little Sheba* for its lack of depth. Yet the play was very popular both on stage and as a movie. How do you account for its popularity?

At the conclusion of this play, both Doc and Lola appear to have accepted the reality of their lives and both seem ready to move forward together. The dog, which had symbolized Lola's lost beauty and youth, is no longer the object of Lola's search. Explore the symbolism in the play and decide if you think that Inge relies too heavily on symbolism to carry his plot.

Research the American post World War II experience. The early 1950s are often identified with isolation and repressed sexuality. In what ways do the Delaneys represent this repressed and inhibited ideal?

Compare and Contrast

1949: Blue Cross Insurance programs cover thirty-seven million Americans, more than six times the number insured only ten years before.

Today: Almost half of all Americans have no health insurance. In 1998, President Clinton and the U.S. Congress will once again consider a new health care package to ensure that all Americans have access to affordable health care.

1949: Auto registrations show one passenger car for every 3.75 Americans.

Today: Almost every American family has at least one automobile, with most owning two or three. The car has become an indelible symbol of life in America, with the majority of the population relying on the vehicles as their primary mode of transportation; autos have become personal statements, reflecting the personality and independence of their owners.

1949: Tranquilizer drugs that eliminate anxiety and excitement without making users too drowsy are developed by Wallace Laboratories and by Wyeth Laboratories. The drug Valium becomes a common accessory for high-strung personalities.

Today: Tranquilizers, anti-depressants, and other anti-anxiety drugs are heavily advertised in all publications and readily available to almost everyone. Valium has been supplanted in the public consciousness by such "mental aids" as Prozac and Halcion. Still more turn to illegal drugs such as marijuana for relaxation and stress relief.

1949: The age of mass media begins; the nation now has more than one hundred television stations broadcasting in thirty-eight states. Five million homes have sets, but forty-five million homes still have radios.

Today: Television sets occupy almost every home, with most domiciles having more than one set. Families that used to be grouped around the radio in the evening have been replaced by families that spread out in different rooms to watch programming on different sets. The internet becomes a new media venue for entertainment and information.

What Do I Read Next?

Published in 1953, *Picnic* is Inge's second Broadway play to be set in the Midwest. The play is concerned with the relationship between a sexually attractive man and a group of lonely women.

Bus Stop, also by Inge, was published in 1955. Instead of a drama, Inge has used Kansas as a setting for a romantic comedy about a small group of people stranded in a snow storm The happy ending of this play is not typical of Inge.

Look Homeward, Angel, a 1929 novel by Thomas Wolfe, is also a realistic depiction of a family relationship, with the central character, Eugene, the son of an alcoholic.

Edward Albee's 1962 play, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?,* examines the brutal and sometimes violent relationship between a husband and wife. As with Inge's play, broken dreams playa pivotal role in the story.

The Lost Weekend, a 1945 film starring Ray Milland, and *Leaving Las Vegas,* a 1995 film starring Nicholas Cage, are uncompromising examinations of alcoholism and the destruction it brings.

Further Study

Courant, Jane. "Social and Cultural Prophecy in the Works of William Inge" in *Studies in American Drama,* Vol. 6, no, 2, 1991.

Courant is a professor at the University of California, Santa Cruz, Her Critical realm of Inge is based on cultural-historical theory and seeks to examine the motivations and intents of Inge based on social influences, Her primary argument is that with the distance of several years and the events of the 1960s, it is easy to see how Inge was anticipating social change.

Inge, Waltham. "The Schizophremc Wonder" in *Theatre Arts,* May, 1950, pp, 22-23,

In this article, Inge is respond to the harsh criticism of the female characters in his play He defends them by stating that Critics are unable to "separate low morals from low incomes"

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

This is a thorough critical overview of Inge's plays with information about reviews and critical studies.

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

This book contains production information and photographs of Inge and his work.

Miller, Jordan, "Waltham Inge Last of the Realists?" in *Kansas Quarterly,* Vol 2, no 2,1970, pp, 17-26.

Miller is a professor at the Adversity of Rhode Island. Miller is from Kansas, and he finds that Inge's settings are very realistic and that he accurately portrays Kansas-and midwestern-life, In this article, Miller pra!1ses Inge's realistic portrayal of his characters.

Shuman, R. Baird. *William Inge,* Twayne (Boston), 1989.

This is a critical examination of all of Inge's plays.

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

This is a critical biography of Inge's life.

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Phelan, Kappppo. "The State" in *Commonweal,March* 3, 1950, pp. 558

Sarotte, Georges-Michel "William Inge "Homosexual Spite' in Action" in *Like a Brother, Like a Lover, Male Homosexuality in the American Novel and Theater from Herman Melville to James Baldwin,* Translated by Richard Miller, Doubleday, 1978, pp 121-23.

Wea1es, Gerald. "The New Pineros" in *American Drama Since World War Two,* Harcourt (New York), 1962, pp, 4O-56.

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Project Editor
David Galens

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

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

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

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

For more information, contact
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535
Or you can visit our Internet site at
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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

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

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

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

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

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

Selection Criteria

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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