Da Study Guide

Da by Hugh Leonard

BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Da is a semi-autobiographical, two-act play by Hugh Leonard that explores the relationship of Charlie, a successful writer, with his adoptive father, whom he calls Da (as in "Dad"). *Da* was first performed at the Olympia Theatre in Dublin for the Dublin Theatre Festival in 1973. In 1978, Leonard received several awards for *Da,* including the Antoinette Perry ("Tony") Award for best play, the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award for best play, the Drama Desk Award for outstanding new play, and the Outer Critics Circle Award for outstanding play.

Da begins in May 1968, Just after Da's funeral. As Charlie sits in the kitchen of his childhood home, sorting through his father's things, he is visited by the ghost of Da. Through a series of memory scenes, Charlie recalls key incidents in his relationship with his adoptive father throughout his life. Although as a child, Charlie is fond of Da, by the time he is a teenager, he feels ashamed of his father's ignorance and crude language. Charlie also feels disdainful of Da's subservience toward his employers and Da's hostile temper toward his wife. As an adult, Charlie is a successful writer and lives in London with his wife and children. When he is done sorting through Da's things, Charlie leaves the house, locking the door behind him, With Da's ghost inside. But, as soon as Charlie turns around, the ghost has emerged from the house and insists on following him wherever he goes.

Da explores themes of death, family, memory, and identity. As the play closes, Charlie must accept that the memory of his father cannot be locked away in the past but, for better or worse, will follow him throughout his life

Author Biography

Hugh Leonard is the pen name of John Keyes Byrne, who was born on November 9, 1926, in Dublin, Ireland Leonard is the adopted son of Nicholas Keyes, a gardener, and Margaret (Doyle) Byrne, a homemaker. He was born John Byrne, later adding the surname of his adopted father as his middle name In 1941, Leonard attended College Glasthule on scholarship. In 1945, he was employed by the Irish civil service as a writer in the Department of Lands, where he worked until 1959. S. F. Gallagher relates, in his introduction to *The Selected Plays of Hugh Leonard,* that "Leonard had never seen a play until during his first year in the civil service a colleague derided his Ignorance of theatre and goaded him into attending an Abbey Theatre production of Sean 0' Casey' s *Plough and the Stars.* Inspired by this experience, Leonard began to write plays and participate in amateur theatrical productions.

In 1954, Leonard submitted his first play, *The Italian Road,* to the Abbey Theatre, which rejected it. In 1956, however, his play *The* Big *Birthday* was accepted by the Abbey Theatre. His pen name was acquired at this point because of the fact that he had sarcastically used the name of one of his characters from his earlier rejected playas the author's name of his second play, which was later accepted.

In 1955, he married Paule Jacquet, a Belgian, with whom he had a daughter named Danielle. After leaving the civil service, Leonard wrote radio serials. In 1961, he became a script editor for Granada Television in Manchester, England, and worked there until 1963. He supported himself and his family as a freelance writer in London from 1963 to 1970, writing television serials, film scripts, and television adaptations. Leonard returned to Dublin in 1970, becoming the literary editor for the Abbey Theatre from 1976 to 1977 and program director for the Dublin Theatre Festival in 1978 During the 1970s, Leonard also published weekly columns in *Hibernia* and the *Sunday Independent.* Leonard currently lives in Ireland.

Plot Summary

Act 1

Act 1 begins in May 1968 in Charlie's childhood home after the funeral of his adoptive father, whom he calls Da. As he is sorting through his father's things, throwing many of them in the fire, his ch11dhood mend Oliver, having missed the funeral, comes by to offer condolences. After Oliver leaves, the figure of Da enters as a ghost. Charlie's mother, now dead, also enters in a memory scene. In this memory, Charlie, who is seventeen and still unemployed, having just finished school SIX months earlier, is with his parents, who are awaiting a man called Drumm. They are hoping Drumm will offer Charlie a job. When Drumm arrives, Charlie is embarrassed by his father's displays of ignorance and his crude language and by his mother's explanation of his adoption. In embarrassment, Charlie leaves the house, but Drumm follows him outside and, as the two walk, he agrees to offer Charlie a job as a clerk

Back in the kitchen, Charlie, in his present self, continues to converse with the memory of His father. He complains that Da even interfered with his attempt to lose his virginity. In a memory, Charlie, now nineteen and in college, is attempting to seduce Mary Tate, a young woman with a reputation of having sex with any young man who asks her As Charlie makes a pass at Mary, his father walks up and begins talking with her. Because his father knows Mary's family, Charlie learns from the conversation that her father has abandoned her mother and her brothers and sisters. Upon hearing of these hardships, Charlie can no longer go through with his efforts to seduce Mary.

In a memory from an earlier time, Charlie recalls adoring his father, seeing him as an "Einstein." Charlie, aged seven, takes a walk with his Da, now in his thirties and "in his prime." As they walk, Charlie asks his father where his birth mother is, claiming that his aunt informed him that she is not where they have told him she is. Da responds with an explanation that is as false as the original explanation. As they walk toward home, Charlie tells Da that he loves him, to which Da responds, "Certainly you do. Why wouldn't you?"

In a memory from Charlie's teen years, he sits in the kitchen writing a thank you letter to Nelson and Jeanette Jacobs, family acquaintances who have inquired about his job prospects. Charlie and his mother argue over what he should write in the letter, until Charlie, in defiance, writes a brief, sarcastic note, which his mother insists on sending. Charlie storms out of the house to meet his friend Oliver at the billiard hall.

Act 2

Act 2 begins with Charlie (his present self) and the Young Charlie talking in the kitchen with the ghost of Da. In a memory scene, Charlie, at age thirty, is being criticized by Drumm, for whom he has been working thirteen years. In the present time, Charlie talks

with Da about how he treated his father in old age, after his mother died. Charlie first put Da, who was becoming senile, In a home for the elderly, which Da refers to as "the poorhouse," and then, after Da punched a nurse, Charlie puts him in a private room of a psychiatric hospital.

In a another memory scene, Charlie recalls the time his father almost hit his mother. His mother comes home late one night, explaining that she ran into an old friend, Gretta Moore, who took her out for a drink. Da accuses her of having been out with Ernie Moore, Gretta's husband Charlie's mother retorts that he is simply jealous because she had preferred Ernie over him and had only ended up marrying him because her father wanted her to. At this, Da lunges at her with his fist but stops just before hitting her.

In the next memory, Da, now sixty-eight, is at the home of Mrs Prynn, for whose family he has worked as a gardener for fifty-four years. The Prynns are about to move to London and, for his years of service, give him only twenty-five pounds and a piece of Junk art. Young Charlie is disgusted that his father is so subservient to Mrs. Prynn and so grateful for such a meager pension.

In another memory, Charlie is about to leave home to fly to Belgium and marry Peggy. Although he has invited his parents to his wedding, they claim they don't want to travel that far. Charlie is eager to get away from them and on with his life. In the following memory, Charlie's mother is dead. Da is in his eighties and going senile. Charlie is visiting him from London, where he now lives. In his senility, Da thinks that Charlie is his wife's father and reenacts the scene in which he asked her father for permission to marry her, knowing that she would not go against her father's wishes.

In the present time, on the day of Da' s funeral, Drumm, now seventy, comes by the house He hands Charlie an envelope that contains his father's will and a package with the junk art from Mrs. Prynn. Drumm tells Charlie that his inheritance includes all of the money Charlie sent his father over the years, which his father had not spent but put in savings for him. When Drumm leaves, Charlie throws the Junk art into the fire. He then leaves the house for good, locking the door behind him and insisting that the ghost of his father stay locked in the house. But Da is already outside and follows behind him, singing an old song.

Act 1, Part 1

Act 1, Part 1 Summary

As the play opens, Charlie sits at the kitchen table of his childhood home in Ireland, sorting through some papers. His friend Oliver comes by to offer condolences on the recent death of Charlie's father. They talk about the funeral, how the death was sudden and unexpected, and how Charlie was in London when it happened. Their conversation shifts to the subject of their own lives, and they comment on how they haven't seen each other for fifteen years, compare notes about who has how many children, and reminisce about their childhoods - old expressions they used, movies they saw, and girls they dated. Charlie refers to a girl named Maureen who always believed that Oliver would be a great man. Oliver becomes quiet for a moment; then, as Charlie talks about how he used to model himself on a movie star, Oliver talks about his ambitions for the future, referring to a self-improvement course that he had taken. Charlie says his "da" (an Irish term for father) had always been fond of Oliver. Da suddenly appears at this point, says he never liked Oliver, and adds that if there was room in his grave he'd roll over in it. As he disappears, Oliver gets ready to leave and asks whether Charlie can help him get Da's house, since he and his wife have been on a list for house ownership for a long time and have had no luck on their own. Charlie says there's nothing he can do. Oliver leaves, and Charlie calls him a vulture.

Da reappears. Charlie tries to make him go away, but he remains, chatting about the funeral and the weather. He notices that Charlie doesn't have a cup of tea, and even though Charlie protests he's got a full one right beside him, prepares to pour him one. Charlie comments to us how he's seen this whole routine before, and watches as Da fumbles with the teapot because it's too hot and too heavy for his arthritic hand. He ends up putting the teapot in the middle of the floor, and then sits in his armchair for a smoke. Charlie tries again to get rid of him, saying he's gotten rid of all his belongings, and that once he's done sorting out all his papers he's going back to London. Da doesn't budge. Charlie tells him that Drumm was right, referring to a day in his childhood when Drumm had come to give him a job reference.

We see that earlier scene play out, as Charlie's mother comes in, shouting for Young Charlie to come downstairs and telling Da that when Drumm arrives, he's to keep quiet. Charlie's younger self, Young Charlie, appears, and it's clear that he and Charlie can't stand each other. Mother tries to get Young Charlie to change into a clean shirt. He refuses and speaks disrespectfully to her. She slaps him and pulls the shirt over his shoulders. Charlie comments that Young Charlie never did stand up to Da and Mother. Drumm arrives, and Da goes out to meet him, while Mother tells Young Charlie to behave with good manners. Young Charlie complains that Drumm is only a clerk, but Charlie reminds him that Drumm is a *Chief* Clerk. As Mother and Da greet Drumm, Young Charlie comments to Charlie that Mother and Da always "crawled," but before Charlie can respond, Mother and Da bring Drumm in.

Act 1, Part 1 Analysis

The action of this scene clearly dramatizes the play's theme, which is that it's impossible to escape the past. Charlie, the central character, is confronted by his past in several ways: his father's papers, the visit of his childhood friend, the actual spirit of his dead father, and conversations with his younger self. All of this gives the past a tangibly physical presence, which reveals the play's theme much more effectively than if, for example, Charlie simply talked about his youth. It is interesting to note that Charlie doesn't converse with Mother the way he converses with Da and Young Charlie. This suggests that he has less difficulty with her role in his past than he has with the roles of the other two.

Two questions arise from this scene. Firstly, why is Charlie so angry that Da is so active in his memory? The answer, as this scene and the overall action of the play make clear, is that Charlie is trying to let go of what he sees as an unhappy past and to move on with his life. Da's continued appearances make it impossible for him to do that. This leads to the second question: Why is Da so powerfully and insistently present in Charlie's memory at this particular point in Charlie's life? The answer becomes clearer as more aspects of Da's personality are revealed and as we see what's missing in Charlie's life and memories that Da's presence awakens. In other words, the action of the play makes it apparent that Da is there to remind Charlie of something he's forgotten but actually needs to remember if he is to move forward. The conflict in the play comes from Charlie's desire to only remember Da as a bad influence.

Charlie's defensiveness in response to Oliver's careful queries into the circumstances of Da's death and funeral foreshadows later confrontations between Charlie and Young Charlie about the same issue; the confrontations suggest that Charlie is feeling guilty about the way things happened. Meanwhile, Charlie's dismissive and even mocking response to Oliver suggests that aspects of Oliver's life make him uncomfortable. This is seen in the way Oliver becomes unhappy when Charlie speaks of how people believed he (Oliver) would be important, the way Oliver hides his bald spot (which suggests that he's in denial about the fact that he's aging physically), and the way he seems to talk a little too often and a little too proudly about all the potential for success he sees in his future (which suggests that he's trying to talk himself into a positive attitude). These are all echoed later both in Young Charlie's criticisms of Charlie and in Charlie's comments about himself, suggesting, perhaps, another reason why Charlie doesn't want to face his past as represented by Da. The overall impression is that Charlie doesn't want to face the reality of his own life because it seems too similar to the wreckage of someone else's. The narrative journey of the play, then, is that Da brings Charlie closer to aspects of his past that might make being in the present easier.

Act 1, Part 2

Act 1, Part 2 Summary

After coming in and being fussed over by Mother and Da, Drumm asks Young Charlie several questions. It is essentially a job interview, and Young Charlie doesn't make much of a good impression, mostly because Da and Mother keep answering for him. Drumm asks Young Charlie to go for a walk with him, and Young Charlie runs upstairs to get a jacket. Drumm tells Da and Mother that there aren't a lot of jobs available in Ireland and suggests that they send Young Charlie to England. Da says that when Hitler and the Germans take over there will be plenty of jobs for everyone. Mother quickly says that Young Charlie will stay in Ireland with his family, where it's safe, adding that his own family didn't want him, so his adopted family will take care of him.

Young Charlie comes back down and listens, without being noticed, as Mother tells the story of how Young Charlie's birth mother had tried to abort him. Charlie comments cynically on Mother's "performance" as she talks about how the doctor said Young Charlie would never amount to much and how she and Young Charlie have proven him wrong. Young Charlie runs out. Drumm goes out after him, Da comments that that went well, and Mother angrily clears away the tea things.

Charlie confronts Da, asking why he hadn't stopped Mother and wonders what his thoughts had been during all those years of working, drinking, and card parties. Mother comes back in and angrily berates Da for talking about Hitler, saying he's ruined Young Charlie's chances of a job. Mother comments that it's not the first time he's made a show out of the boy, and it won't be the last; she adds that it's no surprise that Young Charlie ran out and that he's finished with Da for good. She leaves, and Charlie comments again to Da that he could have stopped her.

Out in the yard, Drumm sits with Young Charlie. As they make small talk about whether Young Charlie succumbs to the diversions of drink and young women, Drumm reveals that he's got no sons and says that Young Charlie can have a job if he wants it. He advises him not to take it, though, suggesting that jobs are harder to get out of than to get into, bad jobs in particular. Young Charlie is too excited about the prospect of earning money to listen and accepts the job. Drumm advises him to clean up his habits and to not tell anyone the story of how he was adopted, saying that it will just open him up to ridicule. Young Charlie starts to cry, but Drumm says he'll get no sympathy from him. He then warns Young Charlie about Da, saying that he's small in spirit, stupid, and no good.

For a moment, we see Da begging for a job to help pay for new clothes for Young Charlie so that he can look good at his new job.

Back in the scene with Young Charlie, Drumm advises him to "live in your own world, not with one foot in his." He then goes out, leaving Young Charlie alone and angry.

In the present, as Da hunts for a pack of cigarettes Drumm had given him a couple of weeks before he died, Charlie tells him that Drumm was absolutely right, that Da really was no good. He talks about how memories of Da haunt him constantly, keeping him from being fully successful. Da finds the cigarettes and urges Charlie to take them, saying the same words that Drumm had said when he'd first offered them, "Take them when you're told to." Charlie complains that Da was a millstone around his neck all his life, and recalls how Da even spoiled his attempts to lose his virginity.

Act 1, Part 2 Analysis

An important thing to remember is that the memory sequences in this play are told from Charlie's perspective. This means that we see things the way he believes, and needs to believe, they happened, not necessarily as they were. However, there is a clue in the way these memories play out as to what Charlie needs to learn as a result of having them.

Most of the memories in the play, starting with the memories in this section, feature Charlie's younger self, Young Charlie, whom adult Charlie clearly sees as having played a part in the unhappiness of his past. There are two occasions in which Charlie himself steps into a memory instead of his younger self, both of which provide key sources of information about what Charlie needs. These occasions will be discussed later. In this scene, though, and throughout the rest of the play, Young Charlie clearly represents Charlie's powerful sense of self-loathing, a key aspect of the past that he's trying to forget and a clue indicating the reasons for his unhappiness in the present.

Aside from the important revelation that Da supported Hitler and the Nazis in the early stages of World War II, the key element in this section of the play is the contrast between Da and Drumm. This scene conveys clearly that they are both father figures to Young Charlie but in very different ways. Da comes across as happy-go-lucky, unsophisticated and optimistic, while Drumm comes across as sour, cynical, and pessimistic but more obviously interested in Young Charlie's long-term welfare. It's also clear that Charlie believes Drumm's perspective to have been right, to the point of suggesting that if he'd listened to Drumm in the first place he'd have had a truer perspective on Da long ago and therefore had a much healthier present life. Da's joy in living, however, is something that Charlie clearly doesn't share and has just as clearly refused to share. Thus in this scene, we begin to understand the positive things about Da that Charlie needs to be reminded of. This is not to say that Da's irresponsibility should be forgotten, but rather that that irresponsibility should not obscure the desire for joy and pleasure that fueled it.

The story of Young Charlie's adoption is clearly an embarrassment to him, mostly because he sees how Da and Mother use it to make themselves look good when they tell it. This embarrassment is something that Charlie has carried with him into the present, a fact that is revealed by the sarcastic comments he makes as Mother is telling the story. His discomfort at both stages of his life suggests that his adoption is

something else he has not made peace with, and that this, too, must be resolved in order to make his present more tolerable.

Perhaps most importantly, this scene suggests that Charlie was never treated and cared for in terms of who he truly was, but rather in terms of what he represented. To Da, he represented the successful and prosperous adulthood that he (Da) didn't have, while to Mother he was the embodiment of her goodness of heart and capacity for Christian compassion. This scene vividly illustrates how Charlie was never really a son, or a person, to either of his parents.

Act 1, Part 3

Act 1, Part 3 Summary

A young woman named Mary appears, and Charlie tells Da how every young man in the school wanted to be with her, because there were rumors that she let boys have sex with her. As Mary sits on a bench and reads, Young Charlie and Oliver appear. Oliver wants Young Charlie to go down to the pool hall with him, but Young Charlie is determined to ask Mary out. Oliver, disappointed, goes off alone. Young Charlie sits next to Mary and starts making conversation. Mary doesn't seem interested, but as Young Charlie moves closer and actually puts his hand on her knee, she starts to respond positively. This makes Young Charlie behave just strangely enough that Mary starts to wonder about him, but nevertheless she puts her hand on his knee.

At that moment, Da appears and takes over the conversation, asking who Mary's family is, saying that he knows them, and asking where her father is. Mary becomes upset, saying that her father disappeared years ago and that she doesn't want to know where he is. Mary starts to cry, and as Da comforts her, Charlie tells us that at that moment, Mary became a person as opposed to someone who he could just have sex with; the last thing he wanted, he says, was to be with a person. Da leaves, and Mary says that Da is a great guy, adding that she'll go out with Young Charlie if he wants. Young Charlie says he's got to meet Oliver down at the pool hall. Mary goes off disappointed, crying, and teasing Young Charlie about being "Daddy's Little Baby."

Act 1, Part 3 Analysis

This brief scene suggests that at least part of Charlie's anger and resentment toward Da is unfounded and that Charlie blames Da for things that weren't really his fault. It is true that Da's actions in this scene changed Mary's attitude, which then changed Young Charlie's attitude In turn. It is also clear, though, that in spite of Charlie's attempts to blame him for what happened, Da didn't deliberately ruin Young Charlie's chances; he was just being himself, open hearted and chatty. The implication is that possibly none of the things that Charlie claims Da did were done with any kind of negative intent. In spite of the fact that this story is being told from Charlie's perspective, glimpses of what was truly happening can occasionally be seen. In this scene, for example, the glimpsed truth is that Da was simply thoughtless, which may be the deepest source of Charlie's resentment. If Da had been deliberately malicious, it would have meant that he was at least thinking about Charlie and aware of him. By acting thoughtlessly, though, he showed that he wasn't thinking much about Charlie at all, which reinforces the idea proposed earlier that on some level, Da didn't think of Charlie as a person but as a representation.

Act 1, Part 4

Act 1, Part 4 Summary

The discovery of one of Da's keepsakes makes Charlie remember a time in his childhood when he and Da had gone out to play with the family dog. We see this memory play out, and as they walk among the hills, Da tells (Adult) Charlie a story about how the devil himself had visited that particular cliff. This leads Charlie to tell Da that he's not afraid of the devil so much as he's afraid of his birth mother coming and taking him away. He says that his aunt had told him that what Da had said about his birth mother wasn't true. Da tells Charlie that he never told him a lie, tells him his mother works in the lighthouse cooking for the lighthouse keeper, and says that if she ever shows her face she'll get the boot, adding that it'll be nothing compared to the boot he will give Charlie's aunt. Charlie impulsively says "I love you," and Da replies "Why shouldn't [you]?"

Charlie quickly becomes an adult again and angrily explains that he shouldn't love Da because he's a liar; he then asks himself why Mother had married him. This leads into the memory of Mother explaining to Young Charlie that she had been in love with someone else named Ernie, but that Da had come to her home one day saying he had a good job and wanted to marry her. She explains that she had no say in the matter, that that was the way things were done in those days, and then tells him to get back to work on the letter he's writing. Young Charlie reads what he's written so far, thanking friends in extravagant language for a job offer but explaining that he's already employed. Mother tells him that his writing is too fancy and that he should write in plain English. Young Charlie tries to explain that he's just having some fun, but she refuses to listen; as Da comes in, she tells him to make Young Charlie write a real letter. Young Charlie angrily writes another, less clever sounding letter, and Mother takes it, saying she doesn't trust him to post it. Young Charlie angrily goes out to the pool hall.

Charlie comments that it was a long time before he realized that love was still love, even if it was expressed badly, as Da and Mother had usually expressed theirs. Da, in a memory not connected to the memory we just saw, reminds Charlie to watch his step and let the light from the lighthouse guide him. Charlie comments that lighting their way home is the least his (real) mother can do.

Act 1, Part 4 Analysis

Mother's mention of how she'd been in love with a man named Ernie foreshadows a later key confrontation she has with Da, but there are four other elements to this scene that play important roles in the play's larger thematic and narrative pictures.

The first element is that this is the first of two key scenes in which adult Charlie participates in a memory instead of Young Charlie. In the case of this scene, the fact

that Charlie participates suggests that the innocence, joy and love that Charlie had felt at that time are the parts of his relationship with Da that he recalls most fondly and wants most to recapture. This at least partially answers the previously posed question of what it is that Da's presence brings into Charlie's life at this point. The second element is the nature of the memory, specifically that it has to do with questions about what happened to Charlie's birth mother. Because it is the adult Charlie having the memory, the implication is that he still doesn't know the truth, which is both another reason for him to resent Da, and another reason that Charlie is unhappy in the present.

The third element of importance is that in this scene, for the first time it is specifically made clear that Da and Mother see Young Charlie for who they think he should be rather than who he is. This is illustrated by their argument over the letter, as they make him write it in the way they think it should be written as opposed to the way he wants to write it. The final and most important element in this scene is that Charlie recognizes that Da and Mother did actually love him. The juxtaposition of his admission with the memory of Da telling him to let the light guide him suggests that this is perhaps the most important thing that Charlie needs to remember: the love, as opposed to the negative memories he has been so focused on.

Act 2, Part 1

Act 2, Part 1 Summary

Charlie comes onstage, drunk from spending time at the bar. He's followed by Young Charlie, whom Charlie tells to go away. He complains that Young Charlie and Da are always bothering him, showing up when and where they're not wanted. As if to prove his point, Da is sitting in the living room when Charlie comes into the house. He listens as Young Charlie tells Charlie that he'd hoped he'd become something more than what Charlie seems to be; he comments on how he (Young Charlie) never needed to drink, and on how he (Adult Charlie) has no spirit or life left in him. Charlie counters by accusing Young Charlie of being cheap, reminding him of how he could only afford to give Da six razor blades for Christmas one year because he had spent all of his money on a girl. As Da gets up to see if he has any of those razor blades left, Young Charlie berates Charlie for not being there when Da got ill and died and says that he may not have had any money but he did have principles. Charlie reminds him of how he was determined to spend only a month in the job at Drumm's, and the scene shifts immediately to the memory of a conversation Young Charlie had with Drumm after being at the job for thirteen years.

In the memory, Drumm takes Young Charlie to task for misfiling a letter, saying that a thirty year old man with a wife, a child and what he thinks is a superior mind should know how to file. Young Charlie almost loses his temper but manages to stay in control. Charlie tells us that he had been taught well by Drumm but hadn't liked him; at one point he had crossed the street to avoid meeting him and after that was never spoken to at work again.

Da finds one of the razor blades and gives it to Charlie. Charlie comments on how cheap Da was, and then expresses surprise that Da had ever cashed the checks he sent. Da says the money from the checks had helped him escape from the two nursing homes that Charlie put him into and fondly remembers how he had been so determined to escape that he had hit one of the nurses. He asks Charlie whether he ever saw him angry, and Charlie says he had. This leads into a memory of how Da once lost his temper at Mother.

Mother appears, late for dinner, but happy. Da tries to find out why she's in such a good mood, and Mother finally confesses that she had met an old friend, who happens to be married to Ernie, the man she'd been in love with as a girl. Da says that Ernie's been dead for several years, Mother disagrees, Da insists, and Mother tells him she'll know for sure in a week, since she's invited out for a meal with Ernie and her friend. Da forbids her to go, and Mother says he's just jealous because he knows she always preferred Ernie to him; she adds that if her father hadn't told her to marry Da ... She doesn't finish the sentence, because Da raises his fist to hit her. Mother tells him to go ahead and do it, and then she'll be out the door. Da backs off, and Mother mutters that

she knows he only went to her father because he knew she wouldn't accept him if he didn't. Da goes out angrily.

Act 2, Part 1 Analysis

The main narrative and thematic purpose of this half of the play is to reveal depths of character in both Da and Charlie. In Da's case, as had happened in the earlier scene in which Da interrupted Young Charlie and Mary, glimpses of who Da truly was appear throughout this act in spite of the fact that the memories are viewed from Charlie's negative perspective. In this scene, as he argues with Mother, Da's anger and jealousy are clearly displayed, which in and of themselves can easily be seen as negatives. However, when taken in context with a scene that comes later in this act, in which the true depth of Da's love for Mother is revealed, his jealousy and anger are plainly the result of deeply held pain and insecurity, which may in fact echo Charlie's own pain and insecurity about his birth mother.

In terms of revealing character in Charlie, his views of himself are again represented by Young Charlie in his complaints and comments about the way Charlie lives his life. Young Charlie clearly gives voice to Charlie's self hatred. Then, the memory of the encounter with Drumm reinforces the idea that Charlie literally despises himself for making weak decisions and living an empty life, while Drumm's sarcastic reference to Young Charlie's supposed intelligence represents Charlie's own attitudes.

The fact that Da had kept the razor blades for so many years illustrates how careful he was with money, and foreshadows the end of the play, in which the money that Charlie sent him to live on is returned. The point here is that Charlie clearly believes Da to have been cheap, but later scenes tell us that Da was really being frugal in order to provide for Charlie.

Act 2, Part 2

Act 2, Part 2 Summary

A middle aged woman, Mrs. Prynne, comes in and asks Young Charlie where Da is. Young Charlie fetches him, calling Mrs. Prynne "the mistress." As Da hurriedly pulls on his coat, we learn that the Master of the house where Da works as gardener has died and that the servants are receiving legacies. Young Charlie asks Da how much the cook got, and when Da tells him a hundred, Young Charlie becomes excited. Da goes to Mrs. Prynne, who compliments him on his work and tells him that her father, the Master, had asked her to make sure that Da had a pension of twenty six pounds per year. She offers Da a legacy of twenty five pounds, explaining that the cook is a special case. Finally, she gives Da a memento: a clump of sunglasses, fused into a kind of sculpture in a fire during the San Francisco earthquake of 1906. She shakes Da's hand and leaves. Young Charlie can't believe how little money Da got, but Da thinks only of the good things he had received while the Master was alive, and promises some of the legacy to Young Charlie for a wedding present. Young Charlie warns Da that Mother will be angry that he got such little money and says he's going home.

Back in the present, Da brings the sunglasses into the living room, where Charlie is again working on the papers. As Charlie ridicules the amount of money in the legacy, Da tells him that Mother had taken the spectacles down to the pawnshop, where the pawnbroker had told her they were priceless. Da says this shows just how valuable the sculpture was, but Charlie insists that it shows how valuable it wasn't, adding that the spectacles have gone missing. Da tells him he doesn't know where they are and goes through Charlie's briefcase, commenting on how few papers Charlie is taking with him. Charlie says he burned almost everything, and Da says that most of the papers were useless anyway. Charlie gets his coat and prepares to leave, as Da calls Mother in to say goodbye.

Act 2, Part 2 Analysis

In the scene with Mrs. Prynne, more positive aspects of Da's character are glimpsed through the darkness of Charlie's negative memory of him. Firstly, Da's loyalty to his late employer in spite of being badly treated financially is touching, all the more so because both Young Charlie and Charlie ridicule him for it. The impression of Da that's starting to appear is one of a man struggling to do his best for himself and his family in spite of being worn down by circumstances. Secondly, Da's intention to save some of the legacy for a wedding present indicates that at least on occasion, Da did think about his son's welfare. Meanwhile, the mention of a wedding present foreshadows Young Charlie's departure in the next scene.

The melted sunglasses are a symbol of how vision and ways of seeing can become twisted. In particular, they represent the way Charlie has been looking at his past with

an agenda, twisting his memories to justify his anger and resentment. As mentioned before, he sees his past the way he wants to. Drumm's returning of the glasses at the end of the play, therefore, symbolizes how Charlie's vision of the past has changed as a result of glimpsing Da's humanity in his generally negative memories.

Act 2, Part 3

Act 2, Part 3 Summary

Mother appears and calls for Young Charlie, who comes downstairs followed by Oliver. We learn that Young Charlie is going off to Brussels to get married; Da and Mother had been invited but refused to go, Mother complaining that it was too far and Da was too unwell. She kisses Young Charlie, trying to hide how upset she is. Da shakes his hand, holding on far too long as he gives him last minute advice. Finally he lets go, and Young Charlie and Oliver leave. Da comments to Mother that they should have gone with him, but Mother hints that if they'd been at the wedding, it might have been a hindrance to the marriage. She goes up to change the sheets on Young Charlie's bed.

Da and Charlie comment on how Mother had died "an Irishwoman's death," drinking tea. This leads Charlie to remember a conversation he had had with Da's doctor, in which he had talked about wanting to move Da to London with him; the doctor had said Da would be happier dying in familiar surroundings, though. Charlie then remembers a conversation he had with Da in Da's final days, in which Da, suffering from dementia, talked to him as though he was Mother's father. Da talks about how beautiful Mother is and how good he'd be to her. Charlie tries to talk him out of the hallucination, but Da continues and asks him (as Mother's father) to put a good word in for him. Charlie takes on the character of Mother's father and says he will. Da says he won't be sorry, sings an Irish song, then turns back into the other version of himself and denies he had ever behaved that way.

Act 2, Part 3 Analysis

This section of the play reveals two occasions in which Da was most vulnerable, a key step in the play's dramatic and thematic journey toward Charlie's acceptance of his past.

The first is Da's farewell to Young Charlie. The previously discussed impression that Da is trying desperately to do well by his family in spite of their circumstances is reinforced by the way he holds tightly to Young Charlie's hand and offers him pointless but well meaning advice. While it's clearly true that at times Da saw Charlie as a representation of potential happiness, it becomes clear in this scene that he also cared deeply about his son. This reinforces the discovery Charlie made at the end of the second act, that Da and Mother both loved him. The fact that the adult Charlie is having this memory and the one that follows suggests that he's starting to accept that Da wasn't the true monster he's needed him to be in the past.

The memory of the time when Da mistook Charlie for Mother's father is the second time in the play that Charlie participates in a memory rather than watching Young Charlie do it. Because Young Charlie represents Charlie's self-loathing, Charlie's participation in

both of these memories suggests that they are parts of the past that he doesn't hate himself for being involved in. His participation also suggests that these are the parts of his past that he most needs to connect with. In the case of this scene, Charlie needs to be reminded of how much Da had truly loved his mother, how vulnerable Da could truly be, and again that he wasn't a monster. This is the thematic climax of the play, the point at which Charlie realizes that he needs all of his past and can't run away from it.

The realization doesn't mean that he likes the idea, and the end of this scene and the entire next scene illustrate both how frightened he is that his perspective on the past is changing and how irritated Da can still make him. Nevertheless, this scene, along with the earlier scene at the end of the first act, make it clear that Charlie will have to learn to look at the past in a different way.

Act 2, Part 4

Act 2, Part 4 Summary

Drumm appears, now in his seventies. Charlie lets him into the house, and after a bit of small talk, Drumm reveals that Da has left Charlie a sum of money; it turns out to be the money that Charlie had sent Da after he escaped from the second nursing home. As Charlie becomes angry, Drumm reveals the second reason for his visit. He pulls out the fused spectacles and tells Charlie that Da had told him to keep them safe so that they could be passed on to Charlie after he died. Charlie gets even angrier, but Drumm tells him to calm down and says that even though Da may have been ignorant in some ways, he may still have been a good man. He goes out, saying that he enjoyed seeing Charlie again.

Charlie becomes angry at Da for not taking his money. As Da calmly offers him a cup of tea, Charlie complains about how Da gave and gave and gave but wouldn't accept repayment. He angrily tries to crush the glasses sculpture but cuts himself. Da offers him a handkerchief but Charlie refuses it, calling him ignorant. Da says that yes, he had enjoyed himself, but in the end he didn't die a pauper like so many others; he left money behind. He also says that he'll go to England with Charlie now to make up for not going when he was ill, as Charlie had wanted him to do. Charlie tries to leave without him, but it's useless; Da follows him out, saying he'll keep up and singing a cheerful Irish song.

Act 2, Part 4 Analysis

This scene is the climax of the play, the point at which the true past and Charlie's remembered past inescapably confront each other. Specifically, the conversation between Charlie and Drumm reveals two aspects of the relationship between Charlie and Da, both of which clearly challenge the view of the past that Charlie has previously held.

The first revelation is that Charlie feels he owes Da a debt of gratitude. This is revealed when Charlie talks about how much Da gave him and refers to Da's refusal to let him pay it all back. The second revelation is that the debt of gratitude has no reason to exist, because Da did what he did out of a spirit of selflessness. This is indicated by the revelation that Da had saved the money sent by Charlie and returned it to him, which means that even in his old age, Da felt that his responsibility was to take care of his son. In this scene, Charlie comes face to face with the fact that, in spite of his very real flaws, Da was a better father than he'd previously believed him to be.

The return of the sunglasses sculpture reinforces this idea. The fact that Charlie hurts himself on the sculpture, which as we've seen, represents Charlie's old way of seeing his past, suggests that he has damaged himself by looking at his past in that way and that he must learn to look deeper into his memories and accept the truth he finds there.

Charlie's anger is the result of his confusion at making this discovery, as well as his fear and frustration that what he's always believed about his past has just been revealed to be deeply flawed, if not completely wrong. This anger, combined with the fact that Da leaves with Charlie, suggests that although Charlie has made a beginning and has glimpsed both Da's humanity and the truth about Da's feelings for him, he's still got further to go. Da goes with him to help him continue the process of making peace with his past, a necessity that Charlie finally, as the play concludes, grudgingly accepts.

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Characters

Da

See Nick Tynan

Mother

Charlie's adoptive mother appears in his memory scenes with his father In one memory, she tells Drumm that Charlie was adopted, that his birth mother attempted to abort him, and that she herself took him home from the hospital and kept him. In another memory, Da lunges at Mother with his fist but stops himself just before striking her. Charlie later learns that Mother married Da only because her own father wanted her to, although she was in love with someone else. Charlie's mother dies several years before his father.

Oliver

Oliver is Charlie's childhood friend In act 1, Oliver, in his early forties, stops by to see Charlie after Da's funeral. In a flashback to Charlie's teen years, Oliver is with him Just before he attempts to seduce Mary Tate. When Charlie is preparing to leave his parents' home and fly to Belgium for his wedding to Peggy, Oliver accompanies him to the airport

Mrs. Prynn

Da works as a gardener for Mrs. Prynn's family over a span of fifty-four years. Just before she and Mr. Prynn sell their house and move to London, she gives Da twenty-five pounds as a pension for all his years of work. She also gives him a piece of junk art that her grandfather found III the street Charlie is disdainful of his father for being so subservient to Mrs. Prynn.

Mary Tate

Mary Tate is twenty-five and "a loner." As a young man, Charlie makes a pass at Mary Tate, who has a reputation for having sex with any man who asks her to. However, just after Charlie has made a pass at her, Da walks up and begins talking with her. Da knows Mary's family and, as he talks to her, reveals that her father has abandoned her mother, brothers, and sisters. Upon hearing this, Charlie sees Mary as a real person with feelings and can't bring himself to continue seducing her.

Charlie Patrick Tynan

Charlie is the main character of *Da.* As the play opens, he is in his forties, a successful writer, married, and living in London with his wife and children. He has just returned from Da's funeral to the house in which he grew up and is sorting through his father's things. As he does so, Da appears to him in the form of a ghost. In a series of memory scenes, Charlie recalls key incidents in his relationship with Da throughout his childhood, teen years, and adulthood. As a boy, Charlie adores his father, but, by the time he is a teenager, he feels ashamed of Da's ignorance and crude language and disdainful of his subservience toward his employers. As the play ends, Charlie leaves the house to return home to London, attempting to lock the ghost of his father inside. But, as soon as the door is locked, Charlie turns around to see that his Da's ghost is already outside. As Charlie walks away, Da follows behind him, singing an old song. Symbolically, Charlie must accept that the memory of his father will follow him throughout his life and cannot be locked away in the past.

Maggie Tynan

See Mother

Nick Tynan

Nick Tynan is Charlie's adoptive father, whom he calls Da (as in "Dad"). As the play opens, Charlie has just returned from Da's funeral, when Da appears in the form of a ghost. Through a series of memories, Charlie recalls key incidents in his relationship with Da throughout his life Da works as a gardener for a wealthy family from the age of fourteen to sixty-eight, at the end of which the family provides him with a measly pension of only twenty-five pounds and an old piece of junk art. At the end of the play, the ghost of Da follows Charlie out of the house, singing an old song as he goes. Da is essentially a play about Charlie's need to grapple with his relationship with Da, whom he both loved and hated.

Young Charlie

See Charlie Patrick Tynan

Themes

Memory and Identity

Memory and identity are central themes of *Da,* particularly in terms of the ways in which memory affects identity. Charlie recalls his relationship with his father and his father's influence on his life through a series of memory scenes. In some of these memories, Charlie is played by Young Charlie, while the Charlie of the present time, ill his forties, looks on. In other memories, Charlie's character in the present time stands in for his memory of himself at a younger age. At times, the middle-aged Charlie talks and even argues with the young Charlie.

These scenarios express the ways in which memories of the past affect one's sense of identity in the present. In some ways, Charlie at middle-age is still the same person as Charlie at age seven, which is why Charlie at middle-age plays the role of Charlie as a child in his memory. In other ways, Charlie now is so different from who he was at a younger age that he can argue with his earlier self, Young Charlie.

Through the perspective of Young Charlie, middle-aged Charlie gains insight into whom he has become. For instance, Young Charlie at one point tells him that he has lost his zest for life. Through these interactions, Charlie grapples with his sense of self, attempting to reconcile his family background as uneducated, working-class Irish with his present sense of Identity as a successful, intellectual Londoner. Charlie throughout his life is eager to divorce his own identity from that of His father. In particular, Charlie is a social climber, ashamed of his father's ignorance and crudeness. As a successful author living in London, Charlie attempts to deny his continued identification with His father. Yet, Da continually comes back to "haunt" Charlie, in the sense that Charlie's identity is inextricably linked with his relationship to His father. Thus, in throwing out his father's old things, he symbolically attempts to rid himself of the memory of Da and, more so, to rid himself of the elements of Da' s personality, which still cling to his own identity. Through the series of memory scenes in the play,

Charlie, to some extent, reconciles his present identity with his memories of Da. Da's ghost follows him on his way back to London, indicating that the memory of Da and thus the part of himself that was associated with Da will never leave him. Thus, throughout the play, memory plays a significant and unavoidable role in identity.

Family

Da is a play about family. Charlie's memories center on his relationship to his father and mother and their relationship to each other. Making sense of the nature of his parents' relationship to each other and thus to him is an important element of the series of memories that his father's death sparks. A significant element of the relationship between Charlie and his parents is the fact that he was adopted. His mother readily tells

the story of how his birth mother tried unsuccessfully to abort him and of how she herself brought him home from the hospital. As a result, Charlie spends his childhood both curious about and afraid of his birth mother. His parents tell him a series of lies about who she was and where she lives, while his aunt scares him into thinking that his birth mother will come back to haunt him at night. Furthermore, his mother continually reminds Charlie of her act of charity in raising him and uses this as a means of making him feel guilty. Charlie also discovers, over the course of his young adulthood, the true story of his parents' marriage. He learns that his mother was in love with another man, but that Da appealed to her father to convince her to marry him instead. His mother admits that she married Da because her father told her to. By the end of the play, Charlie has, if nothing else, a clearer vision of the complexities of the relationships that dominated his childhood and made him who he is today.

Style

Setting: Time and Place

The present time of *Da* is set in May, 1968, in Ireland, when Charlie is in his mid-forties. The various memory scenes include flashbacks to the early 1930s, when Charlie is seven; the World War II era of the early-to-mid 1940s, when he is in his teen years; the 1950s, when he is a young man; and the early 1960s, when he is in his thirties. Although Leonard has claimed that he is a writer and not necessarily an *Irish* writer, the setting in Ireland is significant, as Charlie's Da makes reference to such events in Irish history as the potato famine of the 1840s, the struggles for Irish national independence waged by the Irish Republican Army from the 1920s to the 30s, and the events of World War II.

Narrative Structure

Da is structured as a series of memory scenes, which function like flashbacks in a movie. The play opens Just after Charlie has attended Da's funeral, and the entrance of his ghost sparks a series of memories. These memory scenes do not occur in chronological order, rather, they move from memories of Charlie at age seventeen, to age nineteen, to age seven, to age thirty, to age twenty-three, and to his late thirties. In some of these memory scenes, Charlie is played by a younger actor, listed in the credits as Young Charlie, while in other memory scenes, such as the one in which Charlie is seven, he is played by the actor who also plays his middle-aged self in the present of the film. These memories are thus demonstrated to be not simply past experiences but experiences that continue to live with Charlie to this day, following him wherever he goes, an integral part of who he is in the present As S. F. Gallagher has noted in his introduction to *Selected Plays of Hugh Leonard,* "Leonard's cinematic technique facilitates a fluent succession of entrancing vignettes; past and present become the warp and woof of a virtually flawless fabric"

Historical Context

Irish History

Leonard's play makes reference to several key events in the history of Ireland. In act 1, Charlie explains to the ghost of Da that he had told Drumm of Da's grandfather and two uncles "starving in the Famine." Da replies, "Oh, aye. Them was hard times. They died in the ditches." To which Charlie, incredulous, replies, "What ditches? I made it up!"

Charlie is referring to the Irish Potato Famine, also called the Great Potato Famine, or the Great Irish Famine, of 1845-1849. Crop failures caused by a blight resulted in massive starvation among poor Irish, who relied primarily on potatoes for their diet. The British government, however, was negligent in providing aid to the starving Irish The population of Ireland was reduced by about half, either directly or indirectly, as a result of the famine.

In act 2, as Charlie sorts through his father's papers, Da complains, "You kept nothing worth keeping at all. There was more to me than this rubbage. Where's me old IRA service certificate?"

Da is referring to the Irish Republican Army (IRA), established in 1919, an organization with the aim of using military violence in the Irish struggle for national independence from Britain, such as during the Irish War for Independence in 1919-1921. At the end of act 1, Charlie, aged seven, and his father are on their way home from walking the dog one evening. Da points out to him, "That's the Ulverton Road, son, where we frightened the shite out of the Black-and-Tans." Da is referring to the years 19201921, during which the British government hired auxiliary forces, referred to as the Black-and-Tans because of the colors of their makeshift uniforms, to police the activities of the Irish Republican Army. On the notorious Bloody Sunday of November 21, 1920, violent clashes between the IRA and the Black-and- Tans lead to the death of eleven Englishmen and twelve Irish Da takes great pride in his involvement with the IRA, thus exhibiting a strong sense of Irish identity. Charlie, who lives in London and seems to be uninterested in his Irish heritage, is indifferent to this element of Da's life, as he has apparently burned the IRA service certificate.

Also in act 1, Da discusses circumstances of World War II with Drumm. Da displays his ignorance when he asserts that Germany is a friend to the Irish and that Hitler is a great man (clearly a misconception, as Germany mounted air raids against Dublin in 1941) Da concludes, "Sure isn't [Hitler] the greatest man under the sun, himself and De Valera?" Da is referring to Eamon de Valera (18821975), who was an activist in the struggles for Irish independence and later became prime minister and president of Ireland. De Valera was elected president of Sinn Fein, the Irish revolutionary party, in 1918. He held office as prime minister of Ireland from 1932 to 1948, during which he was a primary force in Ireland's 1937 declaration of independence from Britain. De Valera again served as prime minister of Ireland in 1951-1954, as well as in 1957-1959,

and as president of Ireland from 1959 to 1973. Da, while ignorant about international politics, again demonstrates his strong sense of pride in the Irish struggle for independence.

Abbey Theatre

Hugh Leonard has long been associated with The Abbey Theatre in Dublin, where two of his early plays as well as several others were produced and where he worked as literary editor from 1976 to 1977. The Abbey Theatre, established in 1904, has been an important influence in the history of twentieth-century Irish drama. The Abbey Theatre was originally located in an old theater on Abbey Street in Dublin, thanks to the financial contribution of a wealthy Englishwoman. In 1904, it opened with a series of plays by Yeats, Lady Gregory, and John Millington Synge. Synge's controversial satiric work, *The Playboy of the Western World,* first staged at the Abbey in 1907, led to rioting and violent protest by outraged audiences in Dublin, New York, and Philadelphia. After a period of difficulty, the Abbey Theatre became state subsidized in 1924. In the 1950s, the Abbey Theatre was destroyed in a fire and was relocated to the Queen's Theatre until 1966, when a new theater was built at the original location on Abbey Street.

Critical Overview

Hugh Leonard is one of the most celebrated Irish playwrights in the second half of the twentieth century and a prominent dramatist on the international scene. *Da* was first performed at the Olympia Theatre in Dublin, for the Dublin Theatre Festival, in 1973, and was soon met with both Critical acclaim and popular success. In 1978, Leonard received several awards for *Da,* including the Antoinette Perry ("Tony") Award for best play, the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award for best play, the Drama Desk Award for outstanding new play, and the Outer Critics Circle Award for outstanding play. Nearly thirty years after its initial production, *Da* is still considered to be Leonard's masterpiece.

S. F. Gallagher, in an introduction to *Selected Plays of Hugh Leonard,* observes that *Da* is "a cornucopia of comedy," winch, with "the controlled pathos of several scenes," is "exquisitely moving but. . . never mawkish." *Da* includes incidents from Leonard's childhood later described in his autobiographical books, *Home Before Night* (1979) and *Out After Dark* (1989), which Gallagher describes as "works fully worthy of the superlatives heaped upon them by enthusiastic reviewers"

Two central criticisms which have been made about Leonard's works are that they fail to address issues of Irish politics and that they are trivial in content. Leonard has often defended the charge that he does not address Irish politics, explaining, "Ireland is my subject matter, but only to the degree in which I can use it as a microcosm; this involves choosing themes which are free of Catholicism and politics, both of winch I detest, and which deprive one's work of applicability outside Ireland" (quoted in *Contemporary Dramatists,* 1999). Leonard has further explained that he considers himself" An Irish person who writes plays. . . not a person who writes Irish plays" (quoted in the *International Dictionary of Theatre,* 1993). Critics often concur that his works are successful for their universal, international appeal; with its flashback structure, *Da,* in particular, evokes the emotional tenor of personal memory and the pathos of family history.

Leonard's prolific output of stage plays, including both original works and adaptations, has been produced at the Dublin Theatre Festival at a rate of about one per year since 1960. He has also written numerous original plays and adaptations of classic works for British television, as well as screenplays, autobIOgraphical works, essay collections, and novels

Criticism

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

Critical Essay #1

Brent has a Ph.D. in American culture, specializing in film studies, from the University of Michigan. She is a freelance writer and teaches courses in the history of American cinema In the following essay, Brent discusses references to classic Hollywood movies in Leonard's play.

References to movies, movie stars, and going to the movie theater (known as the Picture House) are an important element of several of the key memory scenes in *Da.* The implication, which runs throughout the play, is that Hollywood movies exerted a strong influence on the ways in which Charlie and the people who populated His youth experienced and expressed their fantasies, anxieties, and self-images. The frequent mentions of old movies and classic movie stars throughout the play also add to the element of nostalgia, whereby Charlie recalls the mood and atmosphere of days gone by.

In the opening scene of act 1, Charlie's childhood friend Oliver stops by after Da's funeral. In an effort to make conversation, which remains awkward between the two, Oliver mentions that he "finally got the theme music from *King's Row,"* a 1941 film, starring Ronald Reagan and Robert Cummings, about two men who discover the dark underbelly beneath the placid surface of their hometown. Oliver reminds Charlie that, although it was a "good fillum" (film), he got in trouble for missing his elocution class in order to see it with Charlie. Oliver clearly enjoys the soundtrack from this film in part because of his sense of nostalgia for his youth, especially his friendship with Charlie. Although this effort to make a connection with Charlie by mentioning this film experience fails, it indicates the strong ties demonstrated throughout the play between old Hollywood movies and memories of the past.

Memories of important incidents in Charlie's life throughout the play are often associated, either directly or indirectly, with going to or talking about movies. In a memory in which Charlie recalls the time his father almost punched his mother, discussion of going to the Picture House reflects his mother's state of mind. In this memory, Charlie is seventeen, and he and Da are waiting for Mother to return home from going to the movies. Da notes that Mother's moods are directly related to how much she enjoys the film she has seen, commenting, "if the picture in the Picture House was a washout. . . she'll come home ready to eat us." When she finally returns, much later than usual, Da asks her, "Was the picture any good itself?" to which she responds, "It was an old love thing, all divorces and codology. A body couldn't make head or tail of it."

The mention of "divorce" in this comment reflects Mother's emotional state of independence from Da that evening. It also indicates that the incident that follows, in which Da almost punches her, is a low paint in their marriage.

In another memory, Charlie crosses the street to avoid Drumm, his boss at the time, after which Drumm, who had previously treated him as somewhat of a son, turns a cold

shoulder to Charlie. Charlie explains that he avoided Drumm that evening because, "I was in a hurry somewhere-to meet a girl, go to a film: I don't know." Although the film itself, if that is indeed where Charlie was headed, is not important, it represents an activity that drew Charlie in the direction of his own desires, away from the overbearing control of Drumm, and indicates an act of independence from this father-figure.

During a memory scene in act 2, Young Charlie is preparing to leave for the airport on his way to his wedding. As he is walking out the door, his arms full of luggage, his father steps forward to shake his hand. Refusing to let go of Charlie's hand, Da asks if he has remembered his airplane tickets, then if he has his passport. The older Charlie, watching this scene, comments sarcastically, "It's the Beast with Five Fingers." *The Beast with Five Fingers* is a horror-suspense film from 1947, in which an old castle is (apparently) haunted by the disembodied hand of a deceased one-handed piano player. The hand appears in a white glove, playing classical music on the piano and strangling people in the night. Charlie refers to his father's hand as "The Beast with Five Fingers" because Da continues to shake Young Charlie's hand as if Da's hand were some kind of beast with a death grip on Charlie's life. And, like the hand in *The Beast with Five Fingers,* Da returns from the dead to haunt the living.

Movie stars of the 1930s and 1940s, perhaps even more so than the movies themselves, are im portant to Charlie and the people around him, both in terms of their fantasies about sex and romance and in terms of their own images of themselves as men and women. Early in act 1, Charlie and Oliver, in their mid-forties, reminisce about their youth together. Charlie recalls that all the girls were crazy about Oliver, while he himself had bad luck with dating. Charlie comments that Oliver "modeled" himself on Tyrone Power, while he "favoured Gary Cooper, but somehow. . . always came across as Akim Tamiroff." Tyrone Power (1914-1958) was an American movie star whose great-grandfather had been an Irish stage actor. Power starred in many films of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s and was best known for his roles as an action-adventure hero.

Gary Cooper (1901-1961) was a top box office attraction of the 1930s-1950s who became known for his roles as a romantic lead and a man-of-the-people who reluctantly found himself in situations that called for heroic action. Some of Cooper's best known roles were Westerns, such as *The Virginian* (1929) and *High Noon* (1952). In identifying with and modeling themselves after these film stars, both Charlie and Oliver wish to 1magine themselves as masculine, romantic heroes. Charlie, however, finds himself more closely resembling Akim Tamiroff, a Russian-born character actor of the Hollywood screen who tended to play unattractive, oddball, villainous characters. Thus, Charlie's self-image as a man-whether it be a romantic fantasy of himself as handsome and heroic or a negative perception of himself as unattractive and generally unappealing-is drawn from his experience of Hollywood movies.

Charlie's father, Da, also makes reference to Charlie's self-image in terms of popular movie stars, thus unintentionally reflecting his own fantasies about ideal1zed masculinity. In a memory scene that takes place when Charlie 1S seventeen, Da mimics his youthful attitudes, "slouching around . . . playing cowboys," although the middle-aged Charlie points out that, "I hadn't played cowboys in five years." Da mentions

several actors famous for their numerous cowboy roles in Hollywood Westerns of the 1920s-1940s, such as Buck Jones, Hoot Gibson (1892-1962)-whom Da refers to as "Hootshaggin' Gibson"-Tini McCoy (1891-1978), Randolph Scott (1898-1987), and Gene Autry (1907-1998). Autry became known for his many roles as a singing cowboy in mus1cal Westerns, which were also referred to as "horse operas." In Leonard's play, Da intends to mock his son for attempting to emulate these cowboy heroes, but it is Da h1mself, a grown man dancing around the room in "a grotesque 1mitation of a boy leaping about," who comes across as immaturely absorbed in the fantasy world of the Hollywood movie hero.

During a conversation with his mother, when Charlie is seventeen, he asks her about Ernie Moore, whom she dated before marrying Da. After Mother explains that Ernie Moore worked on boats at the time, Charlie teasingly refers to him as "Popeye the Sailor." Popeye began as a comic strip in 1929 and was eventually made into a series of animated cartoons that played before the main feature at movie theaters during the 1940s. Charlie's mother defensively explains to him that she married Da because her father told her to and because it was important to her to find a man who could support and provide for her. Charlie indirectly protests this justification by singing the theme tune to "Popeye the Sailorman" "under his breath in derisive counterpoint." After a disagreement With his mother, Charlie "storms out, loudly singing 'Popeye the Sailorman,'" letting out "a last mocking 'Boopboop" as he vanishes." For Charlie, the cartoon hero Popeye represents a fantasy-image of the ideal man his mother passed up in settling for Da, whom Charlie regards as anything but an ideal man.

Later in act 1, during a memory scene, Charlie explains his attempt, as a young man, to make a pass at Mary Tate, a young woman with a reputation for having sex with any man who asks her. The middle-aged Charlie describes his dilemma in cons1dering the poss1b1lity of making a pass at Mary. He comments that he, like the other young men, proclaimed "fine words of settling for nothing less than the unattainable movie star Veronica Lake," while harboring a "beggerman's lust" for the very attainable Mary Tate. Veronica Lake (1919-1973) was an extremely popular movie star of the 1940s. Her image boasted long blonde hair seductively covering one eye in what became known as the "peek-a-boo" style. Her best films include *This Gun for Hire* (1942) and *The Blue Dahlia* (1946), in which she co-starred with romantic lead Alan Ladd. In Leonard's play, Charlie explains, "[w]e always kept our sexual sights impossibly high: it preserved us from the stigma of attempt and failure on the one hand, and success and mortal sin on the other."

In the memory that follows, Charlie sits outside with Oliver, who is telling him about Maria Montez in the film *Cobra Woman.* Montez (1918-1951), dubbed the Queen of Technicolor, was an untalented but popular film star of the 1940s, known for her exotic beauty and her singing and dancing. *Cobra Woman* is a 1944 film in which Montez plays twin sisters, one good and one evil. Charlie, however, is not listening, distracted by the sight of Mary Tate. While Charlie observes Mary, a real young woman, Oliver is caught up in the fantasy of the movie star, commenting, "Now there's a fine figure of a "Oliver's preoccupation with Montez in this film expresses his anxiety about women as both sexually desirable and potentially dangerous.

Oliver's anxiety about the potentially dangerous consequences of pursuing women is further expressed when Charlie mentions the possibility of making a pass at Mary. Oliver responds that Charlie should take caution, because Mary once complained to the authorities about a man who had made a pass at her in a movie theater. When Charlie asks when this event occurred, Oliver replies, "I think it was Bette Davis." Oliver means that it was during a Bette Davis (1908-1989) movie, referring to the top box office star of the 1930s and 1940s, known for her film roles as a strong-willed, assertive, independent female character. The indirect association of Mary Tate with Bette Davis suggests that she may not be as compliant or easily seduced as her reputation suggests, and that, like Davis, she may not be as "easy" as he thinks; that she may, in fact, be a force to be reckoned with.

When Charlie eventually attempts to make a pass at Mary Tate, she is sitting on a bench flipping through *Modern Screen,* a fan magazine of the classic film era. While Charlie awkwardly "clamps his arm heavily around Mary," she ignores this move, commenting, "Wouldn't Edward G. Robinson put you in mind of a monkey? . . . One of them baboons." Edward G. Robinson (1893-1973) was a Hollywood actor originally made famous by his starring role in the classic 1930 gangster film *Little Caesar* Robinson, while highly successful, became known as a character actor, not considered attractive enough to play romantic lead roles. Mary's comment suggests that, although Charlie is attempting to behave as suavely as a romantic movie star, he is actually behaving like a "baboon," unattractive and foolish in his awkward attempts to seduce her.

Da is a play about memory and nostalgia. Charlie's memories of his youth and young adulthood are suffused with nostalgic references to classic Hollywood movies, highlighting the ways in which movies, movie stars, and going to the Picture House were a significant influence on the fantasies, self-Image, and anxieties felt by Charlie and the people around him, as well as an integral element of the historical era of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, in which his memories take place.

Source: Liz Brent, Critical Essay on *Da,* in *Drama for Students,* The Gale Group, 2001.

Critical Essay #2

Petruso is a freelance writer and scripted from Texas. In the following essay, she compares and contrasts the stage version of Leonard's play with the 1988 film version of the same name.

Irish playwright Hugh Leonard wrote both the original stage play and the screenplay for the film version of his hit *Da.* Both versions of the story share many of the same core characteristics, including themes, scenes, and even lines. As Mel Gussow wrote in a review of the play in *New York Times,* "Hugh Leonard's *Da* is a beguiling play about a son's need to come to terms with his father-and with himself." However, there are several distinctions between the movie and the play, both minor and important. By necessity of their respective genres, there are differences. The play is more physically restricted because of the imitations of the stage, while the movie can go anywhere and does Such differences affect how the stories are told, which in turn changes the tenor of the core story: that is, the relationship between Da and Charlie.

A primary difference between the play and the movie comes in the nature of Charlie. In the stage version, Charlie is an Irishman who moves to Lon don to work as a playwright after leaving his clerkship with Drumm. In the film version, Charlie is played by American actor Martin Sheen (Sheen also was a producer of the movie.) Sheen's Charlie moves to New York City instead of London and has an American accent without a trace of Irish in It for most of the movie. While he is still a playwright, Sheen's Charlie has basically the same lines and Irish phrases as the play's Irish-English Charlie. Sheen's attempted Irish accent and delivery ring false because of the underlying presence of His American accent The young version of Charlie has a rather thick accent before he leaves for America. While Sheen's accent shows the distance Charlie has tried to put between himself and his past, It does not seem possible that an adult would lose an accent so thoroughly.

The only point at which Sheen's Charlie employs an Irish accent is during act I of the play. At this moment, the older Charlie briefly acts like a much younger version of himself It is not the Young Charlie, but the mature Charlie interacting with his father as a small child. In the play, the pair has a conversation about where they live and Charlie's birth mother, among other things, while looking at the view of the sea. In the movie, the pair is literally near the sea when they have essentially the same conversation. Tins moving moment makes more sense with the accent.

Another aspect of Charlie that differs from the play to the movie is how his life is depicted. The play opens and takes place primarily in his parents' home in Ireland. The audience sees nothing of Charlie's wife and child, only his family and people like Oliver and Drumm from his past life in Ireland.

The sense of time is also not very distinct, though obviously limited. The play is much more focused on Charlie and his past, rather than on Charlie and His present as in the movie.

In the movie, Charlie's life is depicted with greater depth. The movie opens in Charlie's New York City home. The audience sees his wife and daughter and the kind of life he leads. Charlie has some pressures not present in the play-a stage play of his is opening soon, and at least one of the actors is proving to be a problem. When he gets a call obviously about his father's death-he immediately goes to Ireland with his wife and daughter for a few days. He has to drop everything, including the upcoming opening of his play, to go. After the funeral, it is clearly defined that Charlie has part of one day to deal with his father's affairs. His wife and daughter have their own plans and arrange to meet him in the early evening at the airport. It is during this afternoon that the bulk of the movie takes place. Almost none of this additional information adds much to Charlie's character that was not already present in the play; rather it serves to distract, not enhance, the primary story.

One addition to the movie that adds depth to Charlie and his relationship with His father is a sequence about Blackie the family dog In the play, Blackie is only mentioned in passing after the aforementioned scene in which the mature Charlie temporarily interacts as a child with his Da. In the movie, Blackie is physically present and given character. The dog dislikes priests, among other things, and has been deemed a menace by the authorities. A police officer stops by and informs Charlie's mother that the dog must be destroyed.

The young Charlie, a small child rather than a teenager or young adult in this scene, is upset by the idea that Blackie might be killed. Despite his pleas, Da goes out in the rain that night and attempts to drown the dog in the sea by weighing him down. Young Charlie follows in his pajamas and jumps in after the dog. Da has to save Charlie, who saves the dog. All three go home, where Charlie's mother is happy to see them. Tins sequence shows the depth of Charlie and Da's relationship by depicting a real, physical sacrifice on the part of the old man. Da nearly drowns himself to rescue the boy.

Another character who is used differently in the movie than in the play is Charlie's childhood friend Oliver. The play opens with Oliver's visit to Charlie as he attends to closing his father's home. In the play, Oliver provides a contrast to Charlie, showing how much the latter has changed since he left Ireland. Oliver is still rather immature, laughing when Charlie uses the word "tit." Oliver's visit is not merely to pay his respects. Oliver also wants Da's home, telling Charlie that he and his family need it. He asks Charlie to put a word in for him with the corporation that rents the house, but Charlie will not. He sees Oliver as a "vulture" for the request. The interaction between Charlie and Oliver establishes many facts about Charlie and his relationship with his Da and his place of origin.

In the movie, Oliver plays a much less important role. HIS first appearance is in one of the flashbacks with Young Charlie, where they watch the woman they call the "Yellow Peril," Mary Tate. When Oliver interacts with Sheen's mature Charlie, it is on the street in the town. Charlie barely recognizes his friend. This Oliver is rather dim and pathetic. He is nearly hit by a car several times in the course of the conversation. There is no mention of a wife or family. He makes his living wearing an advertising sandwich board and walking on the streets. Leaving Oliver out of the movie like this makes the movie

Charlie seem less connected to the community. Though there are other scenes (namely the gathering after the funeral) where Charlie interacts with people from the town, Oliver is Charlie's true contemporary and adds a dimension to his character as only a real friend can.

Though Oliver plays a key role in the play, it is only after he leaves that Da appears. Da and Charlie's problematic relationship forms the core of the play and the movie. Writing on the stage play, Walter Kerr of the *New York Times* argued that Charlie "has come home. . . not simply to bury the foster-father who has Just died but to exorcise him. . . . And you realize, just as quickly, that it can't be done." When Charlie leaves at the end, he locks Da in his home. Da walks through the fourth wall and follows Charlie, singing. Charlie asks Da to "leave me alone" but seems resigned to his unhappy fate with Da.

In the film, Charlie also leaves while angry at his father. Da does not follow him, at least not right away. The movie shows Charlie walking away in the rain and then sitting in the plane back to New York City with his wife and daughter. Charlie then drives home in the rain. Da does not appear until Charlie is settled at home in New York City. Charlie's wife is trying to calm him down as he dresses for the opening of his new play. As Charlie looks at himself in the mirror, he sees Da in the room. The film ends with Da looking around the home and talking nonstop about the roses in the room, among other things. This Charlie seems rather happy to see Da, half-smiling at his appearance. The film-Charlie welcomes the ghost of Da in his head, while the play-Charlie seems to resent it

In both the play and the movie, Charlie cannot escape who he is, who his (adoptive) father was, or what his early life was like. The play shows tills life and relationships to be a bit more harsh and unyielding. From Oliver to Da to other characters, Charlie has a much harder time in the play than he does in the movie. Da is more oppressive, more powerful in the play. In the film, Charlie seems to have a better sense of himself. While understanding who the difficult Da was is still very important to Charlie and the audience, the film gives Charlie his own life, too. Though the film can be faulted for some questionable choices, especially Sheen's accent and changing Charlie's home from a believable London to an unrealistic New York City, it gives a more balanced look to the characters, albeit one slightly tinted by rose-colored glasses.

Source: A. Petruso, Critical Essay on *Do,* in *Drama for Students,* The Gale Group, 2001.

Critical Essay #3

Aubrey holds a Ph.D. in English and has published many articles about twentieth-century literature. In this essay, he describes the conflict between father and son in Leonard's play in *terms of a three-part structure of adulation, estrangement, and either partial reconciliation or continued distance.*

Conflict between father and son is one of storytelling's oldest themes, from Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* to the battle between Luke Skywalker and Darth Vader in the *Star Wars* trilogy Leonard's memory play *Da* exploits this familiar theme in an original, often touching, but ultimately extremely sad manner.

There are of course as many types of father-son relationships as there are fathers and sons, but a familiar pattern possesses a three-part structure. As a child, the son regards his father as a hero, the lord of his world, the model he seeks to emulate. But during adolescence, as the boy begins to seek his own values and discover his own talents and ambitions, the image of the father may pall. The teen rebel who rejects everything the father stands for (another familiar theme in literature and film) is born. A conservative background may be rejected in favor of a more radical lifestyle, for example, or the son may resist going into the same line of work as the father.

There may be an estrangement between the two, in which father and son find it difficult to talk to each other. Often this stage lasts only a short while, and father and son soon resume their former warm relations. But sometimes the estrangement goes much deeper and has consequences that are felt throughout the lives of both father and son. In such a case there is often a third stage in the relationship, occurring later in life. It can take one of two forms. When the son is a mature adult and the father an old man, there may be a softening of mutual attitudes and breakthroughs in communication and the ability to understand and forgive. On the other hand, the mutual incomprehension may continue, either giving rise to anger or settling into a distant politeness, with neither man knowing bow to break through the barriers created over a lifetime. Any affection that may still exist is buried deep and cannot be expressed in a natural way. The latter is the case in *Da.*

In the play, the audience is only given a brief insight into the first stage in this three-part structure, but it is a telling one. Structurally, this insight occurs after the play has established for the audience the antagonistic relationship between father and son. Tins antagonism exists in the present, even after Da's death, and stretches far back to Charlie's adolescence. It is all the more poignant, then, to discover that it was not always so. When Charlie was seven, he idolized his Da. He loved all the silly phrases that Da would come up with, the jingles they would sing together, and the wild stories that Da would invent. All these become irritants to the later Charlie, but as a child they were part of the enchanted world he shared with his father. The father as benevolent force in the child's life is demonstrated with a striking visual image. Da helps young Charlie climb up a step to a higher level of the stage, even though Charlie protests that he cannot manage it. Da assures him that he can, offers him a helping hand, and then

shows him the spectacular view at the top of Dalkey Hill, which he calls a mountain. As a metaphor for the boy's life, this ideal image suggests that for the young boy, nothing is unattainable, the way ahead is vast and wide, full of possibility, and his Da can help him see it and realize it.

How different this is to the contrasting scene from Charlie's adolescence played out immediately prior, winch shows the darker, more restrictive aspect of the father-son relationship. Instead of offering a helping hand, the father now unwittingly obstructs the son's growing maturity. The incident is when the teenage Charlie is making clumsy headway in his first attempt at the seduction of a local girl, Mary Tate, who is known around town as the Yellow Peril. As they sit together on a public bench, Da walks by on his way home. Da immediately strikes up a conversation with Mary and soon discovers that he knows all her relatives. She responds with a tragic story of how her father abandoned her, and Da, after listening sympathetically, comforts her. Then, as he leaves, he barks out some instructions to Charlie as if the boy were still a child. Deflated, Charlie loses His nerve, and His promising seduction of Mary is at an end.

The fact that the scene is hilarious and that Da seems blithely unaware of the significance of what has taken place should not distract from its serious implications. Freud believed that the root of the father-son conflict lay in sexual jealousy and envy, and there are echoes of his theory in this scene. The father, with his greater knowledge and maturity, is able to quickly establish a relationship with the girl as a human being, something that the awkward Charlie has neither the skill nor the will to do. No longer is the father the watchful protector of Charlie's childhood; he has turned into a frustrating and even menacing figure who prevents the boy from asserting his own masculine power and potency. Even though Da meant no harm, the incident affects Charlie so deeply that even at the age of forty he has not forgotten it.

The adolescent Charlie's task as he now sees it is to grow beyond the restrictive hold of the father. He must reject his father if he is ever to become fully himself, being true to his own gifts and talents. The need for severance from his father (and his mother too, whom he seems to hold in no higher regard) is in part accounted for by the fact that Charlie has literary talents and ambitions that his adoptive parents cannot understand. Tins is amusingly conveyed in the scorn his mother shows at the reference to Charles Dickens' character Mr. Micawber that Charlie inserts into a letter notifying his parents' friends that he has succeeded in finding a job. His mother makes him rewrite the letter, and when he produces a parody of a letter that an ignorant person might write, she finds it, to Charlie's amazement, perfectly acceptable.

Much of the conflict between father and son during Charlie's adolescence will be familiar to anyone who has a father. There can barely be a teenager alive who does not at some point feel misunderstood by his or her parents, who typically cannot keep up with the trends in popular culture to which most teenagers are so acutely tuned. This is amusingly captured when Da upbraids young Charlie for "playing cowboys" and names some movie stars of yesteryear; the adult Charlie wryly comments, "You were always behind the times. I hadn't played cowboys in five years."

But Charlie and Da's troubles run far deeper than a few years of predictable generational conflict. Over the years they continue to grow apart, and Charlie's hostility to his Da deepens into contempt and incomprehension:

All those years you sat and looked into the fire, what went through your head? What did you think of? What thoughts? I never knew you to have a hope or a dream or say a half-wise thing.

Charlie's problem is as much with his feelings about himself as with his troublesome memories of his father. He hates himself for having wasted so many years working in a humble clerical position, and the playwright's clever device of having adult Charlie and young Charlie address each other directly further brings out the impression that Charlie is a man divided against himself. The two Charlies seem to have nothing but contempt for each other. Young Charlie is appalled at what he has grown up to be, and adult Charlie views his younger version with distaste, criticizing him for never standing up to his parents. (Interestingly, Hollywood utilized the same Idea of having an unhappy adult encounter himself as a child in Disney's 2000 movie *The Kid* starring Bruce Willis; although, the Willis character's eventual sentimental embrace of his younger self has no parallel in Leonard's more hardnosed play.)

Charlie's self-loathing contributes to the badly splintered life he leads. Although he has established himself as a successful writer in London, he has failed to come to terms with his humble origins, which continue to torment him even in the most unlikely situations In an upscale restaurant in London, for example, he is enjoying showing off his *savoir-faire,* until into his mind pops an image of Da from his past.

I felt a sudden tug as if I was on a dog-lead I looked, and there you were at the other end of it paring your corns. . . and sprinkling sugar on my bread when Ma's back was turned.

As an adolescent, Charlie was ashamed of his father, and he remains so as an adult, even after his father's death. This creates a rift in his heart. He is unable to forget and unable to forgive. As long as this situation is unresolved, the natural love between father and son is unable to flow, like water in a dammed up river. This situation also means that Charlie is a man haunted by memories who must carry the ghost of his father around with him indefinitely. Burning all the mementos his father left behind, as Charlie does in an attempt to eradicate him, accomplishes nothing.

The playwright presents these ideas with great skill; they are, for example, embedded in the play's structure, in which past and present are seamlessly interwoven. There is also psychological truth in how the playwright presents the memories that so vex Charlie. When people remember those nearest to them, It is often the insignificant things that come to mind first-the repeated, habitual action or the often repeated remark or gesture. So it is with Charlie. His very first memory of Da in the play is of the absurd ritual that Da would go through with the teapot, which always drove Charlie to distraction. The scene shows that above all, people are creatures of habit and respond in a limited number of usually predictable ways to what goes on around them. Charlie's mother is

the same, with her oft-repeated story of how she adopted Charlie, which is a thinly veiled play for sympathy and admiration.

The damaged relationship between father and son finds a ready symbol in the twisted wires of the thirty pairs of spectacle-frames fused together by fire following the San Francisco earthquake of 1906. They are presented to Da as a souvenir by his employer, and he cherishes them as a valuable heirloom. Those useless spectacles, once used to enhance vision, are like the twisted, obscure pathways, ruined by almost a lifetime of misunderstanding and neglect, that Da and Charlie must use to communicate with each other. They have drifted a long way from the days when the innocent seven-year-old Charlie said simply, "I love you," to his Da Those words, in their trust and openness, can never be uttered again between them.

In this final stage in their relationship, the obligations of love have been transformed into a kind of transaction in which the son tries to payoff a debt and the father seeks to avoid incurring one. The aim in each case is to make void the emotional connection between them, although this proves to be impossible.

The distortion of love into a wrangle over monetary gifts is the focus of the play's *denouement* (the events following the climax), when Charlie discovers that the money his Da has left him in his will is the very same money that he, Charlie, gave him. Charlie admits that the reason he kept giving Da money was so that he would no longer be in debt to him for the occasional handouts his father had given him earlier in his life. But Da refused to spend the money, for precisely the same reason; he did not want to be indebted to his son for anything. For Da, tins last perverse act-giving back to his son the son's own money-allowed him to salvage some self-respect; he did not die a pauper and managed to pass something on.

But on both sides, the actions taken are sorry apologies for a love that, if it exists at all, travels along subterranean pathways impossible to track. In act 1, Charlie observed of his parents' life together, "It was a long time before I realized that love turned upside down is love for all of that," but he does not seem willing to extend that observation to his relationship With his Da. They have sailed their long life voyage together from intimacy to estrangement, and in that estrangement they remain locked together, unable to break their bond, unable to transform it into the love that once was theirs.

Source: Bryan Aubrey, Critical Essay on *Da,* in *Drama for Students,* The Gale Group, 2001.

Adaptations

Leonard wrote a screenplay adaptation of *Da* for a 1988 production directed by Matt Clark, starring Martin Sheen as Charlie and Barnard Hughes as Da Mick Martin and Marsha Porter, in *Video Movie Guide 2000,* remark of *Da,* "this special film benefits from a performance of a lifetime by Hughes, and one of nearly equal merit by Sheen."

Topics for Further Study

Many of the flashbacks in *Da* take place during the World War II era. Learn more about World War II and the role of the United Kingdom in the war. Reference is also made to Winston Churchill, the prime minister of Great Britain during World War II. Learn more about Churchill and his role in the war effort. Write a short story about what it might have been like as a teenager listening to Churchill on the radio, reporting the progression of the war as it neared the British shores.

Da is set in Ireland between the 1930s and the 1960s and makes reference to several key incidents in Irish history. Learn more about the history of Ireland, such as the Potato Famine of the 1840s, the role of Ireland in World War II, or the struggles of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) during the twentieth century. Write a short research paper on anyone of these topics.

Many references are made throughout *Da* to Hollywood films and film stars during the classic film era. These movies and movie stars clearly made a significant impact on Leonard's childhood learn more about one of these stars and her or his key films and film roles. Pick one of the following, which are mentioned in the play: Tyrone Power, Gary Cooper, Gene Autry, Randolph Scott, Veronica Lake, Bette Davis, or Edward G. Robinson. Watch one of this actor's films and discuss its central themes.

Da is a memory play, meaning that the story line is structured around a series of memory scenes. Write your own memory scene based on a significant incident in your own life.

Plays are written to be performed. Pick a memory scene from *Da* to act out. How does performing this scene help to illuminate its meaning?

Compare and Contrast

1919-1921: The Irish Republican Army is established in 1919, replacing the Irish Volunteers (which was founded in 1913) as a militant organization fighting for Irish national independence from British rule. The Irish War for Independence (1919-1921) results in the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, which designates Southern Ireland as the Irish Free State, a Member of the British Commonwealth. Northern Ireland, however, remains entirely under British rule.

1937: A new constitution changes the name of the Irish Free State to Ireland, or Eire.

1970s: The Irish Republican Army is revived as a guerilla organization fighting for the reunification of Northern Ireland with Southern Ireland, free from British rule. In response, British forces move into Northern Ireland and impose martial law. During the peak years of violence in Northern Ireland, from 1971-1976, an average of 275 people per year are killed in the conflict. It is during this period of revival in Irish nationalism that *Da* is first performed on stage.

1990s: A number of attempts are made to settle the conflict between the IRA, the Ulster Unionists (an organization of Protestants in favor of maintaining Northern Ireland as part of Britain), and the British government in regard to the status of Northern Ireland. In 1993, Ireland and Britain sign the Downing Street Declaration, designed to facilitate negotiations over the status of Northern Ireland. A cease-fire is declared in 1994; but in 1996 the cease-fire fails, as violence once again erupts. In 1998, however, negotiations resume, resulting in the creation of the Northern Ireland Assembly, armed at resolving the conflict in Northern Ireland.

1939-1945: World War II is fought between the Allied forces (including Britain, Russia, and the United States) and the Axis forces (including Nazi Germany, Italy, and Japan). However, Ireland maintains strict neutrality in the war, even after Germany launches a bombing raid on Dublin in 1941.

1957-1958: The European Economic Community is established to facilitate peaceful trade relations between nations of Europe, some of which had been adversaries during World War II. The original nations of the European Economic Community include Belgium, France, West Germany, Italy, Luxemburg, and The Netherlands.

1973: In the same year that *Da* is first performed on stage, Ireland, along with Britain, joins the European Economic Community (which in 1967 had been renamed the European Communities and in the 19808 is renamed the European Community).

1990s: In 1991, The Treaty on European Union, also called the Maastricht Treaty, is completed, changing the name European Community to European Union. In a referendum held in 1992, Irish voters approve the Maastricht Treaty by a large majority. During six months in 1996, Ireland serves as president of the European Union.

What Do I Read Next?

Home Before Night (1979) is Leonard's autobiography, which recounts some of the same incidents that appear in *Da.*

The Poker Session (1963) is a play by Leonard in which a family, brought together for a poker game after the release of one of its members from an insane asylum, reveals its hidden insanities.

Dancing at Lughnasa (1990), by Brian Friel, is an autobiographical story by one of the foremost contemporary Irish playwrights about a boyhood spent among five aunts in rural Ireland.

Dubliners (1914), by James Joyce, the great modernist Irish writer, is a collection of short stories about Dublin. Leonard adapted *Dubliners* to the stage in a play entitled *Dublin One* (1963).

The Politics of Irish Drama: Plays in Context from Boucicault to Friel (1999), by Nicholas Grene, includes critical discussion of the historical and political significance of major Irish playwrights.

Further Study

Albee, Edward, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf,* Atheneum, 1962.

This is a play to which Leonard's *Summer* has been compared.

Joyce, James, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man,* Viking, 1916.

The semi-autobiographical novel by the great modern Irish writer was adapted by Leonard for the stage in a 1962 production entitled *Stephen D.*

Leonard, Hugh, *Parnell and the Englishwoman,* Andre Deutsch, 1989.

This is Leonard's first novel.

Miller, Arthur, *Death of a Salesman,* Viking, 1949.

This is a memory play to which *Da* has been favorably compared.

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Gallagher, S. F., *Selected Plays of Hugh Leonard,* Cohn Smythe, 1992, pp 1,2,4, 8,9.

Gussow, Mel, *"Da,"* IU *New York Times,* May 2, 1978, p 46.

Kerr, Walter, "Stage View' A Rousing *Ain't Misbehavin'* and a Masterful *Da,"* in *New York Times,* May 14, 1978, Sect II, p 7.

Martin, Mick, and Marsha Porter, eds , *Video Movie Guide, 2000,* Ballantine Books, 1999, p 1995

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

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

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

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

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

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

Selection Criteria

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

How Each Entry Is Organized

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

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

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

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

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

Other Features

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

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

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

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

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

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

We Welcome Your Suggestions

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

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