The Desperate Hours Study Guide

The Desperate Hours by Joseph Hayes

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BOOKRAGS

Contents

Author Biography

Joseph Hayes was born August 2, 1918, in Indianapolis, Indiana, which is where this play takes place. In 1938, he married Marrijane Johnson, a freelance writer, who has been his frequent collaborator throughout the years. He attended Indiana University from 1938 to 1941, and then worked as an assistant editor for Samuel French Inc. of New York from 1941 to 1943. He authored a series of plays, beginning in 1944: *The Thompsons* (1944); *A Woman's Privilege* (1945); *The Bridegroom Waits* and *Home for Christmas* (both 1946); and *Too Young, Too Old* (1948). In 1949, for the first time, Hayes had a play produced on Broadway: *Leaf and Bough*. He is the solo author of eleven plays and the co-author, with his wife, of another fifteen plays. He has also produced several Broadway plays, as a partner with Erskine and Hayes Productions.

Hayes's first novel was *The Desperate Hours*, published in 1954. It was chosen as a Literary Guild selection. The following year, he adapted the novel for the stage, and it won a Tony Award for best play. Soon after, Hayes adapted *The Desperate Hours* for a Hollywood motion picture, which won him the Edgar Allan Poe Award from the Mystery Writers of America for the best mystery screenplay. He has gone on to publish thirteen novels, most of which are in the mystery or suspense genre. His book *Act of Rage* was published in 1989.

Plot Summary

Act 1

The Desperate Hours begins in the police station. Deputy Sheriff Jesse Bard arrives in the morning and learns from the night shift that there has been an escape from the federal prison in Terre Haute, seventy miles away. The night deputy thinks the story is of minor importance, but Bard recognizes the name of Glenn Griffin, who swore that he would take revenge on Bard. He immediately contacts the state police in order to monitor the search. Harry Carson, an FBI agent, comes to the station because he knows of Bard's history with Glenn.

The action shifts to the Hilliard house. Dan Hilliard leaves for work with his twenty-year-old daughter, Cindy. Ralphie, the Hilliards' young son, runs off to school. Soon after everyone is gone, Eleanor Hilliard answers the front door and is pushed inside by Glenn Griffin, wielding a gun. Glenn, his younger brother Hank, and a ruthless thug named Robish have chosen the Hilliard house to use as a hideout. They hide their stolen car in the garage and search the house, finding Dan's pistol. Glenn explains that they plan to leave by midnight, when a woman accomplice is going to deliver some money.

At the police station, there is news that Glenn's girlfriend, Helen Laski, has been located. The police want to tail her, hoping she will lead them to the escaped convicts, but she leaves her hotel without detection.

Cindy and Dan Hilliard arrive home at the end of the day and find the convicts in their house. When Ralphie comes home, Robish moves to hit him, and Dan stands up to Robish, knowing that the criminals will not risk firing a gun and attracting the neighbors.

At the sheriff's office, it is 7:03. News comes that Helen Laski is headed for Indianapolis. It looks like the police will be able to follow her to Glenn, but she later escapes when a police car in Columbus tries to pull her over for a routine traffic violation.

At the Hilliard home, Ralphie suggests that he could sneak out for help, but Dan refuses to take chances. Cindy receives a phone call from her boyfriend, Chuck; she tries to dissuade him from coming over, but he is adamant. The convicts let her go out, and also send Dan out to fill the car with gasoline and to bring back some liquor.

When Dan comes home, Robish begins drinking. Dan frets to Eleanor about how helpless he feels. Cindy comes home and struggles to keep Chuck from entering the house with her. Robish, drunk, tries to frisk Cindy, but Hank Griffin comes to her aid.

Robish wanders out into the yard, and Glenn follows him. Dan and Cindy manage to wrest the gun from Hank and force him out the door. For a moment, it seems that the criminals have been banished, but Eleanor notices that Ralphie has left the house. With Ralphie as a hostage, the three reenter the house and beat Dan.

Act 2

Eleanor nurses Dan's wounds, while he expresses his anger and fear. Helen Laski calls, and Glenn tells her to mail the money she is bringing. Glenn talks with Hank about why he must stay in Indianapolis and get his revenge on Bard: Bard hit him as he surrendered with his hands in the air.

In the sheriff's office, Bard tells Carson his version of Glenn's surrender: Glenn emptied his gun into a policeman and then surrendered with a grin on his face, so Bard broke his jaw. "If I'd only arrested him . . . or shot him before he gave up . . . he'd probably've forgotten it. But according to *his* warped code, *I* double-crossed *him*," Bard explains.

In the morning, the criminals send Dan and Cindy back to work. Mr. Patterson, the old man who collects the Hilliards' garbage, shows up at the door; while Eleanor is getting a check for him, he notices the mess of the house, and when he is by the garage, he looks in and writes something down. Robish takes Glenn's gun and runs outside, jumping onto Mr. Patterson's truck as it pulls away.

That night, the police discuss finding the murdered body of Mr. Patterson outside of town. A paper in his pocket has the license number of the criminals' stolen car, so they send officers out to investigate the houses Patterson collected checks from that day.

Ralphie's teacher, Miss Swift, comes to the house to ask why he was not in school. She sees the house a wreck, with liquor bottles around. Dan, bringing Robish home, acts belligerent and drunk in order to make her leave without asking any questions. Robish refuses to give Glenn back his gun; Hank will not give up the one they found in the Hilliard house, either.

The police, ready to blanket the neighborhood where Patterson worked that morning, receive an anonymous note from Dan, telling them that his family will be in danger if they try to capture the fugitives. They decide to wait, but are suspicious of Chuck Wright's Jaguar, which is circling around the neighborhood.

Hank, tired of waiting and feeling a sense of respect for the Hilliards, decides to leave on his own. After he is gone, Glenn becomes irrational. His discussion with Hank has stirred up resentment against his own abusive father, so he orders Dan to beat Ralphie for trying to slip a note to Miss Swift. Dan apologizes to his son, then hits him.

At the police station, Chuck Wright describes the Hilliard house. From his description and Eleanor's check, found in Mr. Patterson's pocket, the police deduce that this is the house where the convicts are hiding. News comes that Hank has been killed in a shootout, and Chuck offers to sneak into the house with a gun and shoot both the remaining criminals. The police tell him to go home.

Act 3

Dan receives a phone call from the store where he works, saying the money Helen Laski sent has arrived. Glenn sends him to pick up the money and sends Cindy along to take two thousand dollars of it to meet the assassin he has hired to kill Bard.

The police, in an attic across the street from the Hilliards' house debate whether to rush the house. They hear a report that the assassin has been arrested. Chuck sneaks into back door of the house.

Dan is brought into the attic before he can return home, and he convinces the police to hold off from storming the place. They offer him a gun; he empties it of bullets before putting it in his pocket.

When Dan reenters the house, Glenn frisks him and takes the gun. He goes upstairs to get Eleanor to take as a hostage when they leave, and Chuck sneaks up behind him and knocks him out. On his way downstairs, Chuck is shot by Robish and drops his gun. Robish goes to the door to shout to the police, but Dan runs up behind him and shoves him out, locking the door.

Glenn holds Ralphie with a gun at his head, as Dan enters with Chuck's gun. The police flood the house with a spotlight and call through a bullhorn for Glenn to surrender. Dan tells Ralphie to run away, and when he does, Glenn finds out that the gun he has is empty. Dan tells him to leave. Glenn runs out into the spotlight with his gun in the air, and Bard shoots him down. In the end, Bard expresses his disgust with the human race, but Carson reminds him that the world is full of brave men like Dan Hilliard.

Act 1

Act 1 Summary

The Desperate Hours is a three-act play about the terror inflicted on a suburban Indianapolis family by three escaped convicts. The interpersonal dynamics exhibited by those under pressure is borne along by the classic theme of good versus evil.

As the play begins, a deputy sheriff named Jesse Bard is arriving for his morning shift at the Indianapolis sheriff's department. Everything seems quiet until another deputy named Winston reads a wire report about a jailbreak in nearby Terre Haute. Winston in unmoved by the report, but the name of one of the escapees, Glenn Griffin, strikes fear in Bard, on whom Griffin has sworn revenge.

Bard notifies a man named Fredericks of the Indiana state police, and Fredericks casually takes note of the situation and determines that it is the F.B.I.'s responsibility. Bard ends the call, and Winston removes his coat realizing that there is a long day ahead. An F.B.I. agent named Carson has heard about the jailbreak and arrives at the sheriff's office to help out in the situation. Bard tells Winston about Griffin's vendetta and that Griffin is traveling with his brother, Hank. Winston fills in the name of the third man, Samuel Robish.

The play transitions to the home of Dan and Eleanor Hilliard, who are going about their usual morning routine. One of the Hilliard children, twenty-year-old Cindy, is preparing for her work day at a downtown law firm, and ten-year-old Ralphie, their other child, is getting ready for school. Eleanor feels a sense of relief when her family is out the door on the way to their destinations. She begins her housework.

A knock at the door reveals Griffin acting the part of a farmer stopping for directions to a dairy farm. Eleanor is puzzled because the Hilliard home is not in a rural area, but before she can respond, Griffin pushes Eleanor inside while Hank and Robish enter the house by a side door. The getaway car is hidden in the Hilliards' garage, and the house is searched to determine that Eleanor is the only person at home.

Griffin tells Eleanor that they just need a place to hide out until midnight when they expect to receive money from Glenn's girlfriend to help them with their getaway. Griffin makes Eleanor place a long distance call and then takes the line to deliver a coded message to his girlfriend, Helen Laski.

With roadblocks and other measures in place, the police determine that Helen Laski has been spotted in Pittsburgh, and the authorities hope that she will lead them to the convicts.

After a tense day in the household, the Hilliard family begins to return home. Cindy is the first to come home, dropped off by her young lawyer boyfriend named Chuck.

Quickly sizing up the situation, Cindy thinks about turning around and running, but Griffin stops her with the threat that he will kill Eleanor if Cindy tries to leave.

Not long after, Dan Hilliard arrives home and is suspicious because the family car has been moved out of the garage and replaced by a gray one. Dan bursts into the house and runs into Griffin and his loaded gun. Dan immediately understands the situation, having recognized Griffin from the evening newspaper. Dan warns that any gunshot will alert the neighborhood, and Griffin states that he does not want any problems.

Griffin makes it plain to Cindy and Dan that any false move or attempt to escape or notify the police will result in the criminals killing Eleanor. Griffin repeats that they only need to hide until midnight, and then they will be gone. Dan tries to offer the criminals money to leave, but they are fixed on waiting for the money from Helen so that they can get away to Louisville.

Ralphie is the last one to come home and tries to leave when he sees the situation in the house. Robish grabs the boy, an act that infuriates Dan, who tries to attack Robish with his bare hands. Griffin orders Eleanor and Cindy to the kitchen to fix some food, and Hank blocks Cindy's path and taunts her for a few moments before letting her pass.

Dan is outraged at the advances toward his daughter and warns Griffin that if anyone in his family is touched again, he will go for a gun and use it. Griffin smiles but can hear the conviction in Dan's voice.

News at the sheriff's department is that Helen Laski has been spotted in Columbus, Ohio, and is headed west for Indianapolis toward Griffin and his cohorts.

Griffin makes sure that everything seems normal in the Hilliard household and even positions the family in the living room with the drapes open so that it looks like the family is watching TV. Ralphie implores his father to let him try to escape, but Dan impresses upon the boy the seriousness of the situation and warns him not to try anything foolish. Dan tells Ralphie that it is ok to be scared and that sometimes it's better to be scared than foolish.

A phone call from Chuck invades the tension of the house, and Cindy tries to thwart Chuck's intentions to come over but to no avail. Griffin proposes that Cindy go out with Chuck for normal appearances but warns the young woman that her family will be killed if she should try to notify the authorities.

Griffin also sends Dan out to get gas in the Hilliard car and to pick up some whiskey. Robish, who has been in prison for eighteen years, is furious that Dan brings back only a pint of whiskey. Dan determines that Eleanor and Ralphie are fine upstairs and informs Griffin that he did not tell anyone of the situation at the Hilliard house.

As the convicts settle in to wait for the money, Hank gets melancholy because he will never have a girl like Cindy or live in a nice house like the Hilliards'. Griffin attempts to cheer up Hank by saying that he can take Cindy with him when he leaves and that he will take Eleanor because no one will stop them if they have two women with them.

Dan joins Eleanor in their bedroom and shares with his wife that he is ready to initiate a gunfight so that the bullets will be used up. Eleanor tries to show Dan the insanity of that plan, knowing that the convicts can use other methods to kill the family.

Cindy's arrival home causes more commotion in the house. Chuck demands to come in, but Cindy cannot allow it. The situation is even more complex for Cindy because Chuck has chosen to propose marriage tonight. Finally Cindy is able to convince Chuck to leave, and she enters the house where the drunken Robish begins to make advances toward the young woman. Hank intervenes and lets Cindy go upstairs to her room.

While the action with Cindy diverts the convicts, Ralphie slips down the side stairwell, and Cindy fakes a fainting spell. This allows Ralphie the diversion he needs to run outside. Dan and Cindy are able to get Hank's gun from him and push Hank outside. Just as father and daughter are ready to lock the convict outside and Dan gets the operator on the phone, Eleanor screams from upstairs that Ralphie is not in the house.

Dan replaces the phone on the hook and sends Ralphie upstairs to Eleanor. Griffin has beaten Robish for insolence and then proceeds to beat Dan with his pistol handle before joining Hank in the other room.

Act 1 Analysis

The author does a masterful job of defining the play as a suspense drama almost from the very beginning. The early morning calm is disrupted by the announcement of the jailbreak at the sheriff's office and by Griffin's knock on the front door of the Hilliard residence. From these two incidents, the action is tense and unpredictable.

At the time the play is first produced in 1955, America is settling down to suburban lifestyles just like the one portrayed by the Hilliards. This serene lifestyle is coveted by those in the cities, and even Hank, one of the escapees, feels a sense of melancholy that he will never attain the lifestyle he sees in the Hilliard home. On the other side of the scenario, the author wants to make the point that security is an illusion even in sleepy suburbs of the Midwest.

The author also wants the reader to consider the classic contrasts of good versus evil and the possibility that each man or woman may be faced with impossible choices in that clash without any warning. Each person's code of conduct can be called upon in extreme circumstances, and there are many factors, such as education, environment and fate, which will determine the ultimate course of events.

Act 2

Act 2 Summary

The time is now past midnight, and Cindy watches Ralphie sleep in his room while Eleanor and Dan are in their room. Eleanor tends to Dan's wounds and begs her husband not to try anything risky, but Dan cannot promise that because of the love he has for his family. Helen calls Griffin, and he tells her to mail the money to a specified address and promises to see her in Louisville.

Back at the sheriff's department, Bard explains how he became embroiled with Griffin after Griffin shot a policeman. Griffin exited his hideout with his hands up but with an evil grin on his face, which made Bard hit the crook on the jaw. Carson reminds Bard that that was inappropriate behavior, and Bard just wishes he had killed Griffin when he had the chance.

Morning arrives at the Hilliard house, and Griffin wants Dan and Cindy to go off to work like usual. Ralphie, though, is to stay home from school. Dan warns the criminals about what will happen if his family is hurt and reluctantly leaves the house. Everything is quiet until old Mr. Patterson shows up to collect his monthly check for garbage service. Mr. Patterson takes note of the disarray in the house and makes a note after peeking into the garage. Unbeknownst to Mr. Patterson, Robish jumps on the back of the old man's truck as it leaves the drive.

Back at the sheriff's office, the officers discuss the situation of finding Mr. Patterson's dead body in a wooded area. The men can determine no motive for the killing but find Mr. Patterson's note with the license number of the gray getaway car in the Hilliard garage as well as the checks the old man had collected earlier in the day. The addresses on the checks give the authorities the clues they need to determine who may have been the last to see the old man alive and may also lead them to the location of the gray car.

Eleanor and Ralphie spend the day at home with the criminals, and only later that evening is Ralphie's absence from school questioned by his teacher, Miss Swift, who shows up at the house. Miss Swift is dismayed by the house's disorder and the liquor bottle on the sofa where she sits. Dan arrives home and acts drunk so that Miss Swift will leave without further questions.

Tensions begin to flare as Griffin loses control of his cohorts. Robish will not relinquish his gun to Griffin, and Hank will not hand over Dan's gun, which was found in the house earlier yesterday. Griffin also reveals that the money will now not be available until tomorrow, and Hank is furious at the prospect of a delay. Dan is further outraged that his family will have to endure this nightmare for an extended period of time. Dan also does not want Robish back in the house after he has killed Mr. Patterson, which makes the Hilliards accessories to murder.

The police department has been called in to canvas the neighborhoods where Mr. Patterson had collected checks in the hopes that they can zero in on the location of the escapees. The police have also shared an anonymous letter with Bard declaring that a family will be harmed if any attempts are made to capture the escaped convicts. Bard is incensed that whoever wrote the note is willing to take on these criminals himself. Bard issues orders to stop the police patrols and receives word that Chuck's black Jaguar has been seen cruising in the area.

Hank is ready to snap from the pressure of the visits to the house, and now Chuck's cruising repeatedly up and down the street. Hank tells Griffin that he does not want to be stuck with a murder rap because Robish killed Mr. Patterson, and Griffin cannot persuade his brother to stay one more day. Griffin completely loses his composure after Hank leaves and blames the Hilliards' comfortable life as the impetus for Hank's change of mind. Griffin especially blames Dan, who he likens to his own father with his domineering ways and strict rules.

The authorities have picked up Chuck, who refuses to give up any information about the Hilliards. Before long, Carson calls Bard with the news that Hank has been shot and killed trying to steal a car with a gun registered to Dan Hilliard. This information in addition to the check Eleanor had written to Mr. Patterson gives the authorities all the direction they need to know where the fugitives are.

Act 2 Analysis

More personal dynamics are revealed in this act with the breakdowns of Hank and Griffin. As brothers, they endured an abusive father whom Griffin compares to Dan Hilliard. This accounts for Griffin's especially abusive treatment of Dan. Hank's emotions veer in the opposite direction, and he is sad when he faces the reality that he can never attain the life enjoyed by the Hilliards. It seems as if Hank is still redeemable but has followed Griffin's criminal lifestyle because he looks up to Griffin in lieu of a viable father figure.

The author continues to build the tension of the drama with the escalating emotions of the characters as well as with the physical transitions of the action between the setting of the Hilliard house and the sheriff's office. The stress continues in both locations but for differing reasons, which seems to double the sense of drama.

Act 3

Act 3 Summary

Tensions mount during the night, as Robish taunts Griffin about the possibility that Hank has been apprehended and possibly shot. The anticipated phone call comes from the night watchman at the store where Dan works, telling Dan that a package has arrived. Griffin sends Dan and Cindy to pick up the package, which is the money Helen has sent. Griffin also orders Cindy to take two thousand dollars of the money to a man named Flick in a restaurant called the Lombardi Grill. Flick is the hit man hired by Griffin to kill Bard.

Meanwhile the police have taken up a position in the attic of the house across the street from the Hilliards' home and weigh the issues surrounding taking the house by force. Carson sees Dan and Cindy leave the house, and via the police radio, Winston asks if he should pick them up. Bard knows that Dan is headed to the store to retrieve the money and wants Dan intercepted there.

The police radio now informs the authorities of the call Griffin placed to Flick about assassinating Bard, and Bard issues the order to pick up both Cindy and Flick at the Lombardi Grill. At the same time, Winston, from his perch in the stakeout attic, can see some movement behind the Hilliard house. Bard seems to think that it looks as if someone is stretched out on the ground.

Inside the Hilliards' home, the fugitives sit together and stare out the bedroom window, and Robish can see that someone is moving outside. Robish has to take control now, as Griffin is in a dazed and hopeless state of mind since Hank's whereabouts are unknown. Robish is convinced that someone is moving in on the house, but Griffin feels that the two remaining convicts are safe and will soon be on their way to Helen and Hank, who should be waiting in Louisville. While the convicts argue, Chuck manages to crawl the rest of the way to the Hilliard house, enter using a key Cindy provided earlier and take up a position in Ralphie's room.

The police have watched Chuck's approach and eventual entry into the house and are fearful that Chuck's gun adds another element of danger to an already volatile situation. The only thing the authorities can do is hope that Chuck does not react impulsively and wait for either the police or the convicts to initiate some activity.

The police have managed to intercept Dan and have brought him to the lookout post in the attic across from his own home. Clearly Dan is exhausted and concerned that his letter or something he has done has brought his family closer to danger. Bard assures Dan that none of his actions prompted his being intercepted. It was the discovery of Dan's gun on Hank that alerted the authorities to the fugitives' location.

Dan begins to put all the pieces together in his head when he hears Bard's name and realizes that this is the man whom Griffin wants murdered. He shares that information with the authorities. Dan loses all his self-control when he finds out that the police have picked up Cindy and Flick. He believes the two remaining convicts in the house will kill Eleanor and Ralphie when Dan does not return with the money and when Flick does not phone that he has managed to kill Bard.

Dan convinces the police to let him return to the house with the money because there is no chance that Griffin and Robish will leave without it. The police do not want Dan to put his life in jeopardy again by returning to the house, but Dan cannot sit still and watch his family destroyed. Dan wants all the police officers and the surveillance equipment removed so that he can manage the situation on his own.

Bard also tells Dan that Chuck is now inside the house and has a gun. Finally the police agree to let Dan go back to his home, and they give Dan a gun, which he empties of its bullets before hiding it in his pocket. Carson tells Dan that they will give him ten minutes to deliver the money, and then the police will ring the telephone using the signal Griffin is waiting on from Flick. Then, the authorities will move in.

When Dan arrives at the house, he pretends to not have the money so that one of the convicts will search him, which Robish does. Upon finding Dan's gun, Robish takes the weapon and the envelope of money he has found in Dan's pocket. Griffin taunts Dan for taking such a stupid risk by bringing back a gun.

Three rings from the telephone trick Griffin into believing that Flick has killed Bard, and Griffin begins to ready himself to leave the Hilliard house. Eleanor and Ralphie are still upstairs, and Eleanor spots Chuck hiding in the hallway when she switches on a light. Eleanor locks the bedroom door and waits with her son.

Griffin heads upstairs to collect Eleanor and Ralphie as hostages, and Dan is unable to delay him any longer. When Griffin begins to kick in Ralphie's bedroom door, Chuck springs out from the shadows and hits Griffin on the head, causing the convict to collapse and fall into Ralphie's room.

Buoyed by this success, Chuck begins a descent downstairs, but Robish spots him first and shoots Chuck, whose gun fires randomly. Robish realizes now that the house is bathed in police floodlights. He throws open the front door to reveal that he has shot one of them, thinking that Chuck is a police officer.

Dan runs to the doorway, shoves Robish outside and locks the door. Eleanor, having heard the gunshots, rushes downstairs to see if Dan has been hurt. Ralphie begins to back into his room as Griffin rouses and comes at the boy. The two of them are now also flooded with light from the police spotlights.

Bard wants to give Dan five more minutes because he senses that Dan is the one who shoved Robish out the front door. Carson radios to the police officers on the street that Robish is armed and escaping in the Hilliards' car. Bard begins messages on the

speaker system asking Dan if he needs police intervention. Bard's voice is heard as the stage goes to black.

Back in the house, Dan tells Eleanor to help Chuck get out of the house, and then Ralphie begins calling for his father to help him. Dan takes Chuck's pistol and makes his way to Ralphie. Griffin is still confident that he can get away using Ralphie as a shield and puts his gun to the boy's neck, threatening Ralphie that he will be shot if he moves.

Dan tries to comfort Ralphie by telling him that Griffin cannot hurt him because the gun Griffin now holds has no bullets in it. Griffin thinks that Dan is bluffing, but Dan urges Ralphie to run. Ralphie is able to run down the stairs and out of harm's way as Griffin clicks futilely on the gun's trigger.

Griffin's madness takes over, and he lunges for Dan who is holding a loaded gun. Dan taunts Griffin by telling him that Hank is dead. Realizing that his plans are now doomed, Griffin wants to die and urges Dan to kill him. Soon Bard's voice breaks through on the speaker to inform Dan that both Eleanor and Ralphie are safe. With the relief from this news, Dan hits Griffin in the face and orders him out of his house.

Griffin has lost all will to live now and staggers out the front door while waving his gun. He meets his death from the authorities on the lookout point. Bard has fired the fatal shots, and Carson tries to console his colleague by saying that Griffin asked for his fate. At the moment, Bard feels disgusted with the human race, and Carson challenges him on whether he feels that way about Dan Hilliard. He does not. Carson adds that the world is full of courageous men like Dan and turns to leave.

Act 3 Analysis

In an ultimate act of irony, Bard kills Griffin, who has escaped from prison and returned to Indianapolis to kill Bard. Bard is the sheriff's deputy who broke Griffin's jaw when Griffin surrendered after killing a police officer seven years ago. Griffin interpreted Bard's act as wrong because in Griffin's eyes he was surrendering with his hands up. Meanwhile, Bard interpreted Griffin's attitude as one of nonchalance over the shooting of a policeman.

Griffin is a vicious character and has only two driving forces in his life at the moment, to kill Bard and to protect Hank. Because Griffin is older than Hank, he feels responsible for Hank, and when Griffin learns that Hank has been killed, Griffin loses his will to live and willingly leaves the Hilliard house amid gunfire. The author portrays this side of Griffin to show that people, even hardened criminals, are driven by higher principles than greed or revenge. When Griffin learns that he has lost Hank, all his other vindictive objectives disappear.

Dan unknowingly contributes to Griffin's breakdown because Dan reminds Griffin of his and Hank's father. Several times during the play Griffin refers to Dan as "Pop" and transfers his hatred for his real father onto Dan. Dan's stoic nobility and need to regain control in his own house remind Griffin of his father and the controlling abuse he

suffered as a boy. This fresh reminder of fatherly betrayal combines with Hank's death to finally break Griffin. In the end, Griffin loses touch with reality and yells at Dan that he is leaving and taking Hank so that they cannot be hurt by their father anymore.

The author makes the strong point that not only inherited characteristics determine a person's fate, but also the environment that molds and guides a person's direction in life. Hank is an especially sad character because he is touched by the familial comforts of the Hilliard household and wishes he had those things for himself. Hank does not want the criminal life and had it not been for his father's abuse and Griffin's influence, Hank would have had an entirely different path.

Dan is clearly the protagonist in the play and rises to the occasion when his family is threatened. The Hilliards lead a quiet suburban life in the Midwest where the situation they endure is not even imaginable. The author shows Dan's thought processes from the first moment that he understands the threats to his family up until the end when Dan has masterfully manipulated his family's security once more.

Dan realizes the significance of Griffin's particular hatred for him, and it is ironic because Dan is the essence of integrity and nobility, far removed from the traits of Griffin's father. Dan's personality is also in stark contrast to the brute Robish who delights in terror and murder.

The author wants to show the aspects of being a real man as exhibited in the contrasting traits of the terrifying convicts versus Dan's quiet strength. In the end, Dan exhibits control by not shooting Griffin when he has the chance, choosing instead to hit Griffin and order him out of his house.

The suspense of the drama is accentuated by the transitions between the sheriff's department office and the Hilliard home. Obviously the main activity occurs as the hostages are held in the home, with a sub-drama of Bard's personal conflict during the ordeal.

The author provides a masterfully crafted piece of work with the classic themes of fear and nobility as the drama and the sub-drama unfold, and the play offers up the age-old dilemma of good versus evil that will always continue to plague and haunt men of all temperaments.

Characters

Jesse Bard

Jesse Bard is a deputy sheriff. He is put in charge of the investigation of the jailbreak because he has special knowledge of Glenn Griffin. Seven years earlier, when Glenn was arrested, Bard was unwilling to see him taken to the safety of a jail cell, after shooting a policeman to death in cold blood, and so he punched Glenn as he surrendered, breaking his jaw. Glenn considered this act a betrayal, and vowed revenge. Glenn has come to Indianapolis to kill Bard. When he first hears that Glenn is coming to town, Bard calls his wife and sends her into hiding, without telling her why. Later, Glenn sends money to a professional assassin named Flick to kill Bard, but the police intercept the money and arrest the killer before he can get to Bard. In the end, it is Bard who shoots Glenn as Glenn leaves the Hilliard house with his gun raised.

Harry Carson

Carson is the Federal Bureau of Investigation agent assigned to Glenn Griffin's jailbreak. He goes to the Indianapolis police station because he knows of Glenn's vow to take his revenge on Deputy Bard. As a result, he is present during much of the investigation, while at other times he calls in information on the radio. Carson serves as a conscience to Bard, reminding him that viciousness like Glenn Griffin's is rare.

Dutch

Dutch is the dispatcher at the police station. He does not appear onstage; his voice is heard over the intercom system, announcing calls from outside.

Lt. Carl Fredericks

Fredericks is a lieutenant with the state police. The search for the escaped convicts is in his jurisdiction. His voice, when it comes across the intercom at the police station, is described as "crisp, middle-aged, cynical." He later appears onstage at the Indianapolis police station as the evidence indicates that the convicts are in town. Later in the play, it is Fredericks who advocates attacking the escaped convicts in the Hilliard house, preferring the chance that some of the Hilliard family will be injured to the idea of what would happen if these ruthless convicts escape into society at large.

Glenn Griffin

Glenn Griffin is considered by the police to be a very dangerous prisoner, a threat of the highest order to society. He is young, not yet twenty-five, and already an infamous

criminal mastermind. Seven years before the play is set, Glenn was involved in a shoot-out with the police. He killed an officer and then, when he had no chance of escape, he surrendered, laughing. Jesse Bard broke his jaw while taking him into custody. Now that he has broken out of jail, Glenn is the leader of the trio of escaped convicts, the one with the brains and the nerve to control the operation.

Glenn is motivated by two things in this play. One is his urge to take revenge on Bard, which has been his driving passion for the years that he has been in prison; it forces him to keep his gang in Indianapolis when it seems that they might have a better chance to elude capture if they kept moving. His other main motive is his protectiveness toward his younger brother, Hank. "Hank, you're all I got," he says at one point. "You know that. It's you'n me against'em all!" This concern turns to a maniacal rage when Hank leaves, in part because of worry about Hank's fate and in part because Glenn feels rejected.

Psychologically, Glenn is at his most dangerous when he equates Dan Hilliard with his father. He looks with scorn at the domestic tranquility of the Hilliard household, contrasting it to the abusive situation in which he grew up and causing Glenn to do what he can to upset the household in ways that are not really necessary for his escape or revenge plans. He calls Dan Hilliard "Pop," and at one point during an argument with Hank, Glenn says, "If Hilliard was our old man, he'd have something coming to him from way back!" Dan Hilliard sees this transference happening, and it drives him to action that he might not otherwise have to take: as he explains to Eleanor, "Griffin hates me. He hated me before he even saw me. I can't explain it. Every hour some new black hole appears in him. He's cracking up, Ellie." In Glenn's final moments, the division between fantasy and reality dissolves completely: he shouts at Dan Hilliard that he is leaving and taking Hank with him, and that the older man can never hurt either of them again, clearly thinking that he is talking to his own father.

Hank Griffin

Hank is Glenn's younger brother. He was in prison for three years before escaping. Because of his youth, and the troubled family life that led him into crime, Hank has had little contact with ordinary, well-adjusted living. During the course of the play, it is clear from the way that he looks around the Hilliard house that he is just beginning to realize what he has missed.

The main aspect about a non-criminal life that Hank seems to regret having missed is love. He looks longingly at Cindy Hilliard, who is about his age, and is protective of her when Glenn or Robish threatens her. He points out to Glenn that he has never had a date in his life, and Glenn tells him that when their escape is successful he will be able to date all the women he wants. The women that would be available to him, though, would be like Glenn's girlfriend, Helen Laski, whom Hank rejects because "she's a tramp." Eventually, Hank decides to leave the hostage situation and strike out on his own; as he explains that he will not be caught, he calls Dan "Mr. Hilliard," showing a

degree of respect that infuriates Glenn. News comes later that Hank died in a gun battle with the police soon after leaving.

Cindy Hilliard

Cindy is nineteen years old and works for a law firm, Swisshelm and Edwards. She is dating Chuck Wright, an attorney with the firm, of whom her father disapproves. Much is made of the fact that Cindy's hair is red: Glenn often calls her "redhead," so that, when her boyfriend calls her by that name, Cindy recoils in horror.

Cindy has a strong disposition; she is willing to talk back to the convicts, telling them how much she despises them. She is also clever enough to trick them, feigning illness in order to take advantage of Hank Griffin's concern about her. Because she is a young woman and they are brutal men, the play hints that she might be abused by them at any moment when she is present. She is often gone from the situation, however; during the two days when the ordeal takes place, she goes off to work during the day, and in the evenings, she goes out with Chuck.

Dan Hilliard

Dan Hilliard is the play's main character, the protagonist. He is an executive with a department store and lives a stable family life. He has been married to the same woman for over twenty years and has a cheerful, easy rapport with his children. The events that occur in his house drive him to the verge of animalistic violence that he has never used before in his life. As Dan explains to Glenn, he finds that he has it within him to murder the convicts if any harm comes to his family.

When he is first faced with the fact that his home has been overtaken, Dan is cautious, willing to give the intruders whatever they want with the hope that they will go away. His son urges him to resist, but he tries to convince him that cooperation would be the better course of action. As the play develops, however, Dan sees the danger his family faces. He worries about the threat that Robish poses to Cindy's virtue; he realizes that the kidnappers will want to take his wife and daughter as hostages when they leave; and he recognizes Glenn Griffin's growing hatred of him as a father figure. After being beaten by them at the end of the first act, he decides that he can disable the convicts by making them empty their gun's bullets into him, and he is ready to give up his life in this way until his wife, Eleanor, points out that the other family members will still be in danger.

At the end of the play, Dan faces Glenn with a loaded gun, and the criminal taunts him, telling him to shoot. Dan realizes that he cannot; despite all that has happened, he really is not a killer, and he thanks God for it. Rather than resorting to murder, Dan asserts mastery of his domain by slapping the powerless Glenn and ordering him out of his house.

Eleanor Hilliard

Eleanor is the mother of the Hilliard household. Whenever the other members of her family think of ways in which they can fight against the convicts who have taken over their home, Eleanor finds herself in a position of begging them to keep calm and to give the intruders whatever they want, in order to ensure peace. In particular, she makes a concerted effort to stop her husband from provoking the criminals' violence, telling him that he is the "hub" of the family and reminding him of the grave danger that she and the children would face, if anything should happen to him.

Ralphie Hilliard

Ralphie is eleven years old and has an independent streak, as exemplified by the way he reminds his father that his name is really "Ralph." When he realizes that the family is being held by criminals, he concocts a plan to sneak out of an upstairs window and run for help; his father talks him out of it, but Ralphie is not clearly convinced that his father is not a coward. He escapes from the house at the end of act 1, but it just happens to be the time when the criminals have been forced outside, and Ralphie is taken captive. Later, he decides to act on his own by slipping a note into his essay for his teacher, which Dan intercepts before she can see it.

In one of the play's most poignant moments, Glenn Griffin forces Dan to beat Ralphie, as punishment for the note to his teacher. Readers cannot see what effect this beating has on the relationship between father and son until the end of the play, when Glenn has a gun at Ralphie's head and Ralphie has complete trust in Dan, who convinces Ralphie that if he runs away he will not be harmed.

Helen Laski

Helen does not appear on stage, but is only discussed. She is Glenn Griffin's girlfriend, and is going to bring money to him. As soon as he escapes from prison in Terre Haute, the police find her in Pittsburgh, but she manages to lose them. They pick up her trail again, but a routine traffic stop in Columbus makes her nervous, and she goes into hiding, eventually just mailing the money she was bringing to Glenn, and arranging to meet him in Louisville.

Claude Patterson

Patterson is the trash collector at the Hilliards' house. He is sixty-three years old and arthritic. When he comes to the door for payment, he notices that the house is in disarray, and later the convicts watch him look through the garage window at their car, hidden there, and write down its license plate number. Robish runs out to Patterson's truck, climbs in it, forces the old man to drive out of town, and shoots him.

Samuel Robish

Robish escaped from the federal penitentiary, along with the Griffin brothers. Of the three convicts, he is possibly the most dangerous because he is the most brutal. Still, he is not very intelligent, and knows he will have to rely on Glenn's brains if the jailbreak is going to be successful.

Early in the play, when Robish is drunk and threatening Cindy, Hank Griffin hits him on the head to knock him out, and he realizes that he is the most expendable member of the gang. When Robish is sent out after Mr. Patterson, he gets his hands on a gun, and for a large section in the middle of the play, Robish feels he is in a position to give commands to the other convicts. In the end, he panics, running out to the policemen who are waiting outside.

Miss Swift

Miss Swift is Ralphie's teacher. When Ralphie does not come to school, she goes to the house, worried because he is otherwise such a fine student. She sees the disruption caused by the convicts, including empty liquor bottles around the house, and becomes suspicious that the Hilliard household might be dysfunctional. Dan Hilliard, in order to get her out of the house without suspecting the presence of the convicts, plays an abusive drunk, encouraging her bad opinion.

Tom Winston

Winston is a deputy sheriff. At the beginning of the play, he is finishing a night shift, during which time he has taken the information that Glenn Griffin and his associates escaped from jail, but he does not understand the significance of the news.

Chuck Wright

Chuck is a young lawyer in the firm where Cindy Hilliard works. He is in love with Cindy and asks her to marry him, but she is hesitant because she knows that her father objects to the idea. Throughout the play, he is frustrated because Cindy is cold to him; he does not realize that she is being cold in order to keep him away from the deadly drama in her house.

When Chuck realizes that the escaped criminals who have been reported on the radio are in the Hilliard house, he offers to sneak into the house with a gun. The police tell him that such a plan would be foolish, but he goes ahead with it anyway. In the house, Chuck is shot by Robish. His effort is not wasted, though; Robish is subsequently shot by the police, and Dan uses Chuck's gun in a face-off against Glenn Griffin. Injured, Chuck is able to walk out of the house with Eleanor's help, indicating that he will be all right.

Themes

Code of Honor

Glenn Griffin, the leader of the trio of escaped convicts, is, in his own way, a man of honor. His main motivation is not a desire for freedom, as would be expected of a man who is fleeing from the jail that has held him for years; rather, he is willing to risk everything he has in order to avenge an insult visited upon him. He feels he was betrayed when he surrendered to the authorities; he came out with his hands in the air, and a sheriff's deputy, Jesse Bard, hit him and broke his jaw. To Glenn, the idea that a lawman would strike a man while he is making himself vulnerable, holding his hands in the air and putting his faith in the legal system, is the worst betrayal imaginable, and so he is focused on killing Bard.

Bard's view of the story of Glenn's surrender contains the same facts, but with a different focus. In the way he tells it, Glenn killed a policeman who was Bard's friend, a policeman who was already out of bullets anyway. Glenn did not come out with his hands up to admit he was wrong, but only to save his own life. The fact that he was smiling indicated he thought the authorities would be forced to treat him kindly, even though he had no remorse about what he did.

As Bard tells the details about the surrender to Carson, the FBI agent, he explains that Glenn, a sadistic killer, would have just forgotten the man he shot down if Bard had not hit him, and how, according to his "warped code," Glenn had felt that being hit, with his hands in the air, was an act of betrayal. It is not entirely clear, though, that the playwright thinks that Bard is correct, as Carson notes quietly that hitting Glenn not only broke Glenn's code, but "[u]nder the circumstances . . . police code, too." He explains that Bard is required to follow the rules of society, and had no right to hit Glenn. "[C]ivilized men can't let the slime on *them* drag *us* back down," Carson says. "If we don't live by the rules, the rules will soon disappear."

Oedipus Complex

The theory of the Oedipus complex, formulated by psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, proposes two related aspects for describing some human behaviors. Freud speculated that children were sexually attracted to parents of the opposite sex, and, in dealing with this attraction, subconsciously longed to kill the parent of the same sex, in order to take that parent's place in the relationship. He named his theory after the Greek drama *Oedipus Rex*, in which a man unwittingly kills the father he does not know and marries that man's wife, who turns out to be his mother.

In *The Desperate Hours*, it is clear that Glenn Griffin is driven by a psychological need to show his control over the powerful and abusive father who raised him to be the criminal he is. He associates Dan Hilliard with his father. From early in the play, Dan

notices that Glenn has an irrational hatred for him, sensing that their relationship is based on more than just their acquaintance of a few hours. When his brother Hank calls Dan "Mr. Hilliard," Glenn is at his most direct about his association of the two, telling Hank, out of the blue, "You're talkin' like Hilliard was our old man." At the end, when he is beaten, Glenn calls out to his father, defiantly saying that he is escaping with Hank (whom he has just been told is dead). There is no evidence that the Oedipal complex applies here in the strictest Freudian sense, regarding Glenn Griffin's relationship with his mother. It is, though, very clear that he feels the need to work out the conflicts of his childhood by defeating his father and taking the power that the older man had.

Domesticity

The Hilliard household is presented in this play as the essence of order and domestic bliss. It is, in fact, chosen as a hideout by the escaped convicts because Ralphie's bicycle on the lawn indicates to them that this home has a child, and therefore has a stake in maintaining stability. Before their home is invaded, the greatest conflict in the Hilliard household is that Dan Hilliard does not think his twenty-year-old daughter is old enough to become serious about the boy she is dating, while Eleanor supports the girl. When outsiders force their way into the Hilliard home, these criminals create a personal violation more terrifying than if this situation had occurred in a public place. At the end of the first act, the situation seems momentarily settled, when the criminals are outside of the house and the family is inside.

The scene in which the school teacher visits presents a new kind of trauma for the family; not only are they in mortal danger from armed criminals, but someone else from the community is viewing their house in disarray. For Dan Hilliard to pretend he is drunk in order to convince Miss Swift to leave is a huge indignity.

It is significant that the words that Dan Hilliard uses at the end, when he has defeated Glenn Griffin, are "Get out of my house," indicating that it is the household, more than the individual members within it, that is being defended.

Manliness

This play reflects several differing aspects of masculinity. One is brute force, represented by Robish, who is big and crass, almost gleeful about killing, and not inclined toward thought. Robish is not taken seriously, though, because he is easy to trick. Hank Griffin represents another kind of manliness, but he is almost too vulnerable to thought, allowing himself to show human concern for Cindy puts him in a position where Dan and Cindy take his gun from him. In the end, Hank is too aware of the innocence of the Hilliards to continue terrifying them, so he chooses to leave. Glenn Griffin represents a dangerous kind of manliness; he is cunning enough to spin a plan of revenge against his enemy Bard, but he is also impulsive enough to possibly kill someone without a second thought. He is willing to use people, especially women, and he promises his younger brother all kinds of easy thrills with anonymous relationships.

The invasion of his home and the peril in which his family is placed make Dan Hilliard question his own manliness. When he is powerless against the men who have taken over his house, his self-esteem is crushed. He is opposed to taking orders, but he is practical enough to recognize the danger they present. At the beginning of act 2, Dan even expresses his willingness to die, but Eleanor talks him out of rash action and gets him to agree not to do anything dangerous.

When he has Glenn Griffin at gunpoint, Dan asserts his masculinity (which he has repressed throughout the play) by slapping Glenn's face, a belittling gesture of masculine dominance in many cultures. Bard, disgusted with himself and the human race in general, is reminded of heroic, triumphant men like Dan Hilliard, indicating that his type of careful masculinity and his willingness to temporarily be emasculated are the characteristics of true heroism.

Style

Protagonist and Antagonist

Every literary work has a protagonist, or leading character. In some cases, this character might not be a human but an abstraction, such as an entire community or an inanimate object that is given a human personality. In *The Desperate Hours*, there can be some confusion about who is the protagonist. The most obvious candidate is Dan Hilliard; he is given the most dramatic choices in the play and is most involved in the action. On the other hand, the first scene begins with Jesse Bard responding to the news of the prison break, and ends with Bard having his sense of the basic goodness of humankind restored. Bard's story is secondary, though, to the main action, so Hilliard should be considered the play's protagonist.

There is no such ambiguity about who the play's antagonist might be. The antagonist is the character who has the opposite qualities of the protagonist. In drama, the function of the antagonist is often to create trouble for the protagonist, in order to show aspects of the protagonist's personality that might otherwise stay hidden. There are three criminals, but it is clearly Glenn Griffin who is making the decisions. Also, it is Glenn who has a personal relationship with both Bard (against whom he wants revenge) and Dan Hilliard (whom he sees as a surrogate father). With a less motivated antagonist in this play, neither Hilliard nor Bard would be as clearly drawn.

Denouement

The denouement of a literary piece is the part that comes after the climax. The word comes from the French, for "unraveling." In this play, the climactic moment comes when Dan Hilliard slaps Glenn Griffin and tells him to leave the house; no matter what happens after that, the story is settled, because Dan has reestablished his dominance over the household and is no longer held under the convict's threat. What does happen next□Glenn runs into the police spotlight with his empty gun brandished and is shot down□is part of the denouement, the falling action that is the necessary result of the climax.

Another part of the play's denouement comes in the dialog between Bard and Carson, after the Hilliard family has been reunited. They talk about how the events of the play have affected Bard, creating in him a great cynicism about humanity but also a small degree of optimism. These comments are drawn from the play, but are after the play's main action ends, and are thus considered part of the unraveling.

Suspense

It hardly needs to be stated that *The Desperate Hours* is a suspense play. Every moment, from the first mention of the prison break on the second page until the last

prisoner is killed at the end, is calculated to make audiences wonder what is going to happen next. The play uses two obvious techniques to do this. First, it centers on a hostage situation with hostile parties forced together, so that at any given time one side or the other can be seen as winning. Second, Hayes give both Glenn Griffin and Dan Hilliard a degree of unpredictability, so that audiences cannot rely on either of them to behave rationally, in their own best interest. The situation might fall apart at any moment; readers have to pay close attention so that they do not miss something important.

Historical Context

Suburbia

The 1950s saw the rise of suburban living in America. After World War II ended in 1945, millions of soldiers returned from military service to enter civilian life. They soon married and started families. Eager to raise their children away from the clutter and dangers of cities, and able□often for the first time in their lives□to afford their own homes (the war had been preceded by the Great Depression, which had lasted more than a decade), they accepted jobs in cities, but bought homes in the towns surrounding the cities, creating a boom in suburban housing.

A milestone in suburban housing came in 1950, when William J. Levitt and his sons began a trend by building cheap, identical houses in a fabricated community called Levittown, on Long Island. The homes were functional and unimaginative, and sold so quickly that new Levittowns sprang up outside Philadelphia and in New Jersey. Developers followed Levitt's lead, and began bulldozing acres of farmland in areas on the outskirts of cities, building whole communities of thousands of homes at a time. Throughout the 1950s, houses were built at a rate of 1.4 million per year, mostly in the suburbs.

The lack of individuality that marked these homes, thrown together as they were under such industrial conditions, was mirrored in the sameness of the suburban residents. The overwhelming majority of suburban families were white and middle class, with two parents and a few children. Conformity was encouraged, and those who deviated from the norm were ostracized from the community. The racial segregation of the suburbs reflected society at large during the decade marked by struggle for integration in cities□in particular in northern cities, where social customs and not explicit laws kept whites and blacks separated. In addition, the suburbs also experienced gender segregation; though most households had both a male and a female, they separated by day, with the men driving off to their jobs in the city, leaving the suburban neighborhoods populated by wives and children.

Social Anxiety

Compared to the 1940s, which witnessed the last World War, and the 1960s, which were marked by riots, the 1950s are remembered as a peaceful and prosperous time. These nostalgic memories, however, ignore the tensions underlying the basic social facts.

The 1950s were, in fact, a period of unprecedented economic growth in America. Japan and most of the European economies had to suffer the burden of rebuilding after the war ended in 1945, having lost much manufacturing capability during the fighting. The United States, as the only powerful nation that had not been the scene of combat, had

actually grown financially during the war, producing munitions and food that the other nations needed but could not provide. By the 1950s, America was an industrial and military superpower, rivaled only by the Soviet Union.

The rivalry with the Soviet Union, dubbed the "Cold War" (to distinguish it from a "hot" war that would have actual fighting with causalities), colored the political atmosphere of the 1950s with fear. Soviet spies were suspected to have infiltrated the government, and then the suspicion grew, so that other industries such as manufacturing and entertainment were examined with an eye for Soviet influence. The mere accusation of involvement with communists destroyed many careers, and the fear of being accused drove many law-abiding citizens to do whatever they could to avoid social attention.

It was not, however, only political pressure that caused people to do what they could to blend into their environment. Conformity was the mood of the country. As early as 1950, this trend was documented by David Reisman, who in his book *The Lonely Crowd* describes how Americans had become "other-directed," drawing their self-image from the opinions of others, rather than being "inner-directed." Other writers of the decade, such as William Whyte (*The Organization Man*, 1956) and Vance Packard (*The Status Seekers*, 1959) examine conformity in the business world and the ways that middle-class families strove to be accepted as financially prosperous in their communities, but otherwise tried to remain invisible.

Critical Overview

When it opened on Broadway, *The Desperate Hours* was clearly a beneficiary of what is now known as "marketing synergy." Within one year, Joseph Hayes's story was released as a novel, as a theatrical production, and as a motion picture. To some degree, the fact that it was in so many places at once must have helped it gain audience attention. This would not, however, account for the fact that the play was awarded the Tony Award for best play of 1955. More relevant, in fact, is that *The Desperate Hours*, in whatever form, tells a compelling (if familiar) story, and tells it in a powerful, focused way. As C. V. Terry explains in a 1954 review of the novel for the *New York Times*, "The story-line is a familiar one. . . . So, inevitably, are most plot patterns in novels of this genre: it is the treatment, not the ingredients, that really matters. Mr. Hayes has milked the last drop of horror from his macabre situation. As a Hitchcock-type nightmare, *The Desperate Hours* is a strictly Grade-A job."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2

Critical Essay #1

Kelly is an instructor of creative writing and literature at two colleges in Illinois. In this essay, Kelly examines the different variations on the idea of family that are used in the play.

It is not at all difficult for audiences to pick up on the differences between the world of Joseph Hayes's drama *The Desperate Hours*, written half a century ago, and the modern world. The striking difference is not, as one might expect, the observable cultural distinctions, because the play is confined for the most part, to the personal space of the Hilliard family house, which has been invaded by a gang of escaped convicts. The lack of outside influence is in fact one of the play's key points, and so there are few opportunities for dated material to prove a distraction for modern audiences. The only real notable indicators that this play takes place in an earlier time are the trash collector coming to the door to be paid and the letter that is mailed in Ohio one night and delivered in Indianapolis the following evening. These twists could easily be updated for a contemporary production, or left as reminders that this play takes place in a simpler time. Even the police procedure, which accounts for a significant amount of the play, is not notably out of keeping with how audiences might expect the police to respond to a similar situation today.

The element of the play that shows its age most is the one that the playwright gives the most focus: the sanctity of the nuclear family. Hayes proves determined to show that the Hilliard family is strong enough to weather the ordeal that he puts them through and to come out united in the end. This is not entirely convincing, in large part because the play gives audiences very little reason to ever doubt the security of the Hilliards' commitment to each other, even though Hayes does try to stir up rumbles of discontent here and there. On the other hand, the play functions quite well as an examination of a successful family because it brings in other family models that can be compared to the Hilliards, as examples of the types of failure that they manage to avoid.

The other families presented or hinted at in the play are all partial families, incomplete in one way or another. One example of this, though admittedly a sketchy example, is the marriage of Deputy Jesse Bard and his wife. Since Mrs. Bard never appears onstage, there is no way of really knowing the depth of their relationship. What one does know, however, is that there is concern, but not much in the way of communication. When Bard realizes that Glenn Griffin, the convict who swore revenge against him, is on the loose, he understands that Glenn's hatred might extend to harming his wife. He calls her and tells her to move to a safe place, his mother's house, but does not trust her enough to tell her why she should do so. Katie Bard is mentioned just once more in the play□through the police receptionist; Katie conveys the message that Bard's mother is boring her, and Bard jokingly dismisses her, still not telling her why she must stay away from home. This total dominance of the male, as Bard makes decisions for his wife's well being and relegates her to the boring safety of the older woman's domain, may have been unremarkable in the 1950s, but it stands out today as smug and patronizing. It resembles the Hilliard family in the way that the man is the decision maker, but the

distance between the Bards, connected only by the telephone wire (and with Dutch the receptionist as intermediary), makes their relationship even more lopsided than the Hilliards.'

The family unit that is held up most closely to the Hilliards is the gang of escapees. This is a family only in the abstract; one could easily say that any social unit constitutes some sort of family, or one could just leave it to stand as its own different type of social unit. The reason that the gang can be considered a family is that two-thirds of its members are related.

There is no question that Glenn Griffin is the father figure of this family unit, at least in a 1950s sense, with fatherhood equated with leadership. Of the three convicts, Glenn at least has a plan. If his plan were solely for the well-being of his "boys," then he might even be considered a decent parent, but it is tainted by his own personal lust for revenge. The other two convicts really are boys by comparison. Hank Griffin is an adolescent who behaves as if he has just discovered girls, in the Hilliards' daughter Cindy; throughout the play he goes through adolescent rebellion, rejecting the values that Glenn has taught him, and striking out on his own. Robish is, of course, an infant: all id, fixated on drinking and eating, turning violent when he is angry. Robish lacks the intelligence to be in command of his own fate.

As a parental figure, Glenn is quite a miserable failure. Both of the boys turn against him because he tries to handle them on his own terms, not their own, smacking Robish on the head to discipline him and offering Hank the sort of fast, loose-moraled women that he has come, through his contact with the Hilliards, to deplore. Glenn's only understanding of the family dynamic comes from the brutality of his own father, which still haunts him. Without a female presence to balance him (his counterpart is Helen Laski who, like Katie Bard, is just a voice on the phone), he has no better response to adversity than violence and self-interest. As a lone desperado, these impulses serve him well, but Glenn's unchecked machismo loses its effect the minute he does not have a gun in his hand.

It is balance that makes the Hilliard family triumphant in this ordeal. Dan Hilliard is clearly the leader of the family, but he makes decisions with his family members in mind. He tries to reason with his son Ralphie, who imperils the family twice when he is caught acting against the criminals (sneaking outside, writing a note to his teacher). Dan even allows his wife Eleanor to talk him out of being heroic, yielding to her sensible explanation that the family would be in just as much jeopardy if he were to be shot with the last remaining bullets. If he were the sort of unilateral decision maker that Bard and Glenn are, Dan would leave his family open to destruction.

The structure of this play seems designed to imply that Dan has to learn, through the course of this dangerous situation, to be open minded with his family. The last moments, before the curtain falls, show the Hilliard family gathered together, as if there had been some question throughout that they would end up going their separate ways. That image of family unity indicates a triumph over discord. This discord is hinted at throughout the play, most pointedly in the beginning of act 2, in which Dan, recovering

from a pummeling at the hands of Glenn Griffin and resigned to being unable to stop the hostage crisis, looks back on his weaknesses as a father. He regrets not having told Eleanor he loves her often enough and that he did not appreciate his son's childish attempts at humor. "I'm feeling along a blank wall," he tells his wife. He soon continues, "There's light behind that wall, Ellie. I never knew how much. There was light there once and there's got to be light again!" This sudden outburst of emotion implies that Dan's relationship with his family has been static, aloof, and mechanical, and that the hostage crisis has made him realize that.

Dan's dramatic revelation does not work as drama, though, because the emotional distance that he has recognized is not presented onstage at the beginning of the play. The Hilliards are an intact and happy family from the beginning. In the breakfast scene at the beginning of the play, the family's quarrels are so minor as to include Dan's impatience with Cindy being late every morning, Ralphie's desire to be addressed by the more mature name "Ralph," and Dan and Eleanor's disagreement about whether Cindy should be dating. Undoubtedly, Dan's realization that he has taken his family for granted is a realization that many a career-oriented man could make when faced with death, but it simply does not apply to the specific family dynamic shown in this play.

The end of the play gives audiences a different realization, though, one that is just as related to the fixation with family and just as quixotic as Dan's realization. The last spoken exchange is between Jesse Bard and FBI agent Carson. Bard, who has just shot Glenn Griffin, pronounces himself "disgusted with the human race," but Carson tempers his disgust by reminding him that there are men like Dan Hilliard in the world. Unfortunately, nothing is said about what particular attributes qualify Dan to be humanity's redemption. The fact that he has beaten Glenn does not seem particularly noble, since it is a matter of survival, so Bard's emphasis must be on *how* Dan triumphed: i.e., with the love and respect of his family intact. This makes sense out of the heartwarming scene of the Hilliards gathered together at the end; audiences who have never seen them at odds with each other might wonder what is so remarkable about their unity, but a man who lacks family connection, like Bard does, would find them a wonder. And the greatest wonder appears not to be that the mother and children stay together, but that the man can find it in himself to face down violence and still fit in with his wife and children.

The Desperate Hours is a play about guns and terror, but the thread that holds it together is family. It relies on dated ideas of the family, with the assumption that the father must lead and his wife and children serve best when they follow and encourage him. Still, it also introduces modern ideas in the different views of family that it offers. The alternate families presented in the play are without children and women, and are therefore too heavily weighted toward the masculine perspective. The result is that the criminal "family" ends with everyone dead, and Bard, the isolated husband, is left to gaze on in awe and admiration.

Source: David Kelly, Critical Essay on *The Desperate Hours*, in *Drama for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2005.

Critical Essay #2

Covintree is a graduate student and expository writing instructor in the Writing, Literature, and Publishing department at Emerson College. In this essay, she examines the idea of safety within the nuclear family as shown in Hayes's suspenseful drama.

In *The Desperate Hours*, the Hilliards have neither a fallout shelter nor a machine gun in their home, but they do have a loaded gun that is kept in the parents' bedroom. This gun is a critical prop. It becomes the second gun for the convicts, the weapon used to murder the garbage man, and the object that leads the police to the criminals. Dan Hilliard hides the fact that he owns this gun from his son, Ralphie. When Glenn asks if there is a gun in the house, the audience knows the criminals already possess it. Still, it is Ralphie who says "no . . . we don't." As the stage direction makes clear, this admission is made "too quickly." Through this and other scenes, Hayes shows that the nuclear family is partially held together by the idea of anticipating tragedy, while they are really unprepared for such a real event.

The Hilliard family's preparation with the gun in the bedroom does little to arm or protect them. As McConachie writes, "the business class pictured the nuclear family as a fortress protecting the family members from urban blight, teenage crime, and racial Others." Hayes exacerbates this idea within his suspenseful drama. The Hilliards are literally trapped inside their own home once outside forces, or Others, enter uninvited. What is especially harrowing about this play is that a family is being threatened in their own home. In the first scene with the Hilliard family, Hayes shows how safe and comfortable the members of the family feel within the house. Although it appears to stifle them on occasion, it is a loving home where much care is taken. This is a space where they are supposed to have control, and the criminals take this safety away from them completely.

Before the criminals arrive, the mother, Eleanor, voluntarily stays in her home. Like many mothers in 1950s American suburbia, Eleanor takes care of matters of the house. When the audience first meets her she is sending everyone else in the family off to school and work, making a shopping list, and making a bed. There is the possibility that she will leave her house, because a car is at her disposal, but it is also likely that the majority of her time will be spent inside the home. Her behavior is a given and is established as part of the norm for the Hilliard family. When Eleanor has the opportunity to be aware of the outside world by listening to the news report, Hayes shows her miss critical information about the escaped convicts as she walks out of the room and then returns to change the radio station to music. Eleanor would rather remain in the presumed safety of her own home, oblivious to any danger. It is clear that the world outside of her home is removed from her. As it does not directly concern her, it is therefore unnecessary. For Eleanor, as with other members of her family, her house is her haven.

This nuclear family, however, is no longer safe from harm. Their ignorance about the world makes the Hilliard family somewhat more susceptible to the world and its

dangers. When faced with a real situation concerning life and death, their coping skills and resources shift. Dan Hilliard has no gun and he appears almost ineffectual at the beginning of the play, but he grows steadily fiercer as the play progresses. On more than one occasion, Glenn chides Dan by telling him that he too has a brutish side. It is this side that Eleanor reminds him to keep from their son. The behavior of the Hilliard children is also affected. The daughter, Cindy, pulls away from a man who wants to marry her. Ralphie attempts to escape, but this action only prolongs the hostage situation.

The suburban community falls apart with the entrance of the criminals. Initially it appears that the Hilliard home and suburbia are a part of the same insular world. When Others, like Robish and the Griffin brothers, come into the home, all of this changes. As McConachie writes, "most American families [during the cold war] tried to ignore [realities of the nuclear age] and relied on friendships [and] neighbors." For the Hilliards, this outlet is no longer available to them. Since their friends and neighbors do not live directly in their home, they are not actually a part of the family, and cannot know the turmoil of the family's situation. Community, for the Hilliards, has shrunk to the members of their immediate family. They are trapped and alone.

The audience learns that suburbia cannot protect the family from the dangers of the world. When members of the community like Cindy's boyfriend, Chuck, and Ralphie's school teacher, Miss Swift, arrive at the scene, they cause more harm than good. Their ignorance of the family's situation only brings more harm to themselves or the family. Mr. Patterson is murdered for looking into the garage. Whatever knowledge or concern these friends and neighbors show only puts them in harm's way. Unfortunately, as these people are not immediate members of the household, those inside the Hilliard family cannot defend them, and will not risk their own lives for them in the same way they do for each other.

Although Chuck Wright intends to marry Cindy, in her father's house she is a daughter before she is a bride. As they are not yet engaged or married, Chuck is still separate from the family unit. He does not yet have the right or responsibility to take on the role of a family member. Still, his intimate care for one of the members of the family stretches the line of community involvement. It is as if the only true and stable community is the one within the fortress of a family's four walls. Hayes shows the audience that at a community's most crucial moments, it is really every family for itself. Oddly, this is the expected behavior for the nuclear family.

Family, however, is shown in two extremes. Not only are the Hilliards a family, the criminals are also a family. Glenn and Hank are brothers, and their familial tie is a major reason that they are together. Glenn looks out for his younger brother, and it appears that Glenn was largely responsible for Hank's upbringing. Hayes shows these two brothers as ones who grew up in a family starkly different from the Hilliards. This becomes extremely clear at the end of the play when Glenn breaks into a childlike state and talks to Dan as though Dan were his own father, "You hit me for the last godd□ time . . . . You ain't ever gonna hit Hank or me again. . . . I'm takin' Hank along and you ain't gonna see either one of us ever again!" Their abusive father clearly made Glenn and

Hank's childhood home dangerous and volatile. This is just the type of home life they inflict on the Hilliards.

The stability of the Hilliard family has an effect on the brothers. Hank questions his role in the hostage situation because of the life Dan has made for his family. It is this ideal of "nuclear family" that breaks him from his criminal intent and separates him from his brother. Glenn's good intentions of helping his brother escape their abusive father cannot replace the family life they missed having. Hank wants more than his family can provide. Hank is a tragic character, regretting his decision to leave once he sees the potential for a family and a suburban life that he has surely sacrificed. Hank wants to change, but Hayes shows such change would be difficult, especially after Hank is caught trying to steal a car. Once again removed from a home life situation, Hank reverts to criminal ways to expedite change.

Hayes demonstrates that the only successful family is the nuclear family, and despite its simplicity and, as Cindy sees it before the incident "a pretty dull life," the stability it provides keeps this family safe. All of them seem to take their simple lives for granted. It is only with the intrusion of Glenn, Hank, and Robish, that they see what they already possess. The Hilliards are lucky and fortunate to live in a home that values life and family over selfish interests.

Source: Kate Covintree, Critical Essay on *The Desperate Hours*, in *Drama for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2005.

Adaptations

In 1955, the year for which *The Desperate Hours* won a Tony Award, it was adapted as a movie starring Fredric March and Humphrey Bogart. Hayes wrote the screenplay, and it was directed by William Wyler. It is available on VHS and DVD from Paramount Home Pictures.

Director Michael Cimino directed another film version in 1990, with different character names and a modernized plot line. This movie also credits Hayes as a writer along with Lawrence Konner and Mark Rosenthal. It stars Mickey Rourke and Anthony Hopkins and is available on MGM/UA video.

Topics for Further Study

Research how many escapes there have been from United States prisons in the past year, and write a report on the most common methods used to break out of prison in the twenty-first century.

In *The Desperate Hours*, Dan Hilliard loses his son's respect by refusing to resist the criminals, then wins it back by facing down an armed convict. Write an essay about someone you know who you first found unimpressive and then later came to see as brave.

Watch both the 1955 film version of *The Desperate Hours*, which stars Humphrey Bogart as Glenn Griffin, and the 1990 film version, which stars Mickey Rourke as Glenn Griffin. How do the two film versions differ from each other and from the play version? Why do you think the director of the 1990 version chose to alter the character names and the plot line? Do you think it is more or less effective than the 1955 version? Explain your answer.

In this play, the criminals receive sketchy news reports from the radio, and the police receive sporadic reports from the FBI. Research and write a paper on current law-enforcement methods used to track criminals. How are hostage situations typically handled by law enforcement in the twenty-first century? In what ways do you think the hostage situation in the play *The Desperate Hours* would have been altered by twenty-first century access to the Internet and to twenty-four-hour news reports?

Compare and Contrast

1950s: During the cold war, Americans are afraid of infiltration by Communists. In Congress, the House Un-American Activities Committee holds hearings to find out if foreign elements have penetrated our nation's security.

Today: After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Americans are once again wary of the country being infiltrated by hostile outsiders. The Department of Homeland Security is a newly-formed agency assigned the task of preventing attacks within the United States.

1950s: A young woman like Cindy Hilliard, working in a law office, is most likely to be, as Cindy is, a secretary.

Today: A young woman working in a law office is just as likely to be a lawyer or a paralegal.

1950s: Police are able to search for Glenn Griffin's girlfriend by monitoring all calls going from Columbus, Ohio, to Indianapolis over a four-hour period.

Today: With wireless communication and messages routed through various Internet providers, such a task as that mentioned above is impossible.

1950s: Like most stores, gas stations close in the evening and open in the morning. The criminals in *The Desperate Hours*, who plan to flee in the night, have to send someone out for gasoline before the stations close.

Today: Except for the most rural reaches of the country, it is not difficult to find a gas station that is open all night.

1950s: A teacher like Miss Swift in the play might stop by the home of a student who has called in ill.

Today: Schools have social workers on their support staffs to handle any suspicions or concerns about a student's home life, but it is rare for a teacher to visit a student's home in person.

What Do I Read Next?

Hayes has divided his writing career between writing for the stage and writing fiction. Most of his novels operate with the same sort of tension seen in *The Desperate Hours*. The novel upon which the play was based was published in 1954 and was reprinted in 1985 by Carroll & Graf.

Readers impressed by Hayes's suspense writing can see another side of his stagecraft in his 1977 play *Impolite Comedy: A Comedy in Three Acts*. It is published by Hayes's longtime publisher, Samuel French, Inc.

In 1936, Robert Sherwood wrote *The Petrified Forest*, a play about a vicious gangster and his mob holding innocent people hostage in a diner. The role of Duke Mantee, the gang leader, was Humphrey Bogart's first main gangster role in film (Glenn Griffin in *The Desperate Hours* was his last). *The Petrified Forest* is available from Dramatist's Play Service.

Ariel Dorfman's play *Death and the Maiden* (1991) uses some of the plot conventions that Hayes uses, but with much more weight. Like Glenn Griffin, Dorfman's Paulina takes a hostage, with revenge on her mind. Her revenge, though, is for a more intimate crime; she suspects that the man she kidnaps is the man who raped and tortured her while she was being held as a political prisoner fifteen years earlier. She has doubts, however, about whether she is holding the right man. This play is available from Penguin USA.

Further Study

Adler, Thomas P., *American Drama, 1940—1960: A Critical History*, Twayne Publishers, 1994.

Adler provides a background of the theatrical scene at the time when *The Desperate Hours* appeared.

Heilman, Robert Bechtold, *Tragedy and Melodrama: Versions of Experience*, University of Washington Press, 1968.

A famous drama critic examines the art and skill involved in writing a play in a generic form, studying the artistic precedents that go back to antiquity.

Nathan, George Gene, *The Theatre of the Fifties*, Alfred A. Knopf, 1953.

Written at about the same time that Hayes was working in New York theatre and writing this play, Nathan gives an impressionistic sense of what life was like at the time.

Rosen, Carol, *Plays of Impasse: Contemporary Drama Set in Confining Situations*, Princeton University Press, 1983.

Rosen does not specifically look at *The Desperate Hours*, but her book does examine the category of plays that this one falls into.

Bibliography

Reisman, David, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character*, rev. ed., Yale University Press, 2001.

Terry, C. V., "Nightmare at the Hilliards," in *New York Times Review of Books*, February 28, 1954, p. 5.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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